



FANTASTIC FIVE

What is number recognition? Number recognition is the ability to tell *how many* objects are in a small set without counting them (given all the time they need to observe the group of objects). We distinguish this skill from subitizing (defined below) because children recognize how many are in a small set but may not do so quickly.

What is subitizing? Subitizing is the ability to tell how many objects are in a group *quickly* without counting them.

Infants and toddlers can recognize small groups of up to three objects. For example, children may say “one mommy,” “two cars,” or “three crackers.” **By three years old**, they may put their toys or objects into groups of up to three. This is called **perceptual subitizing**.

Preschoolers, after learning perceptual subitizing up to and beyond 4, can begin to see parts of multiple small sets of objects and can quickly put together the total number of objects without counting. For example, a child might say, “I knew there was 6 because I saw 4 here and 2 there.” This is called **conceptual subitizing**.

Try this activity one-on-one, with small groups, or even the whole group to help children recognize numbers and then subitize them.

FANTASTIC FIVE

- Place counting items such as small cubes under three to five different containers. Show children the items and announce how many there are before you hide each group.
- Move the containers around to mix them up.
- Ask the children to find a specific number of items. For example, say “Find the fantastic five!” (or wonderful one, tricky two, thrilling three, foxy four) and have the children guess which container holds that number.
- After the children guess, look under the container. Ask them to name the number they see.
- If they select the right container and name the number correctly, say “There’s the fantastic five!!” If their chosen container does not have the number you named, ask them to name the number that is in the container. Confirm, or simply tell them, “That’s not five, that is four! Try again.”
- Repeat and move to higher numbers as children are able.



More resources, including activities for whole and small group instruction, can be found at <https://www.learningtrajectories.org/>.