Counting games

Teachers know that playing games is one of the best ways for children to build math skills. Extend the fun to home with these two counting games.

Stop and go
1. Ask your youngster to make a sign with “Stop” on one side and “Go” on the other. Choose a number to count to (say, 25), and give one player the sign to hold. Begin counting, one number per person.

2. At any time, the sign-holder can flash “Stop” to halt the counting. Then, she flips the sign to “Go” and chooses someone to start counting where the last person left off. Say the wrong number, and you’re out. Play until one person is left or you reach the target number.

Idea:
Begin with a different number like 7, 19, or 81. Skip count by 2s, 3s, 5s, or 10s. Or add a U-turn sign—hold it up, and players switch to counting backward.

Rockets in the sky
1. Have each player draw a picture of the solar system.

2. Roll two dice, count the dots, and draw that number of rockets in your picture (roll 6, and draw 6 rockets). Record the numbers as you go. After five rounds, add the numbers, and count your rockets to check. The person with the most is the winner.

Idea: Change the game board to match your child’s interests. For instance, draw a beach scene and add starfish for each number rolled.

Mom’s eyes, Dad’s nose

Is your child used to being told, “You look just like your dad”? Help him understand why he looks like his parents with this activity.

First, let him draw a picture of you. Encourage him to include details like hair color, eye color, curly or straight hair, freckles, dimples, and attached or detached earlobes. Then, he can look in a mirror and draw a self-portrait, paying attention to those same features.

Which ones are the same? You can explain that those are traits he inherited from you—they were passed from you to him!

Tip: Suggest that he draw pictures of other family members. Which trait is shared by the most people?
Creating glyphs

Here’s a clever way for your youngster to gather and represent data: He and his friends can make glyphs. (Note: Glyphs are a way to display information with a picture.)

Start by thinking of an object to draw, perhaps a house. Then, brainstorm a list of questions, and make up directions for the answers. For instance:

- How many arms are in your family? Put that number of windows on your house (4 family members = 8 arms = 8 windows).
- How many digits are in your address? Add that number of trees to your yard (3-digit address = 3 trees).

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Then, come up with a new object (scarecrow, football field), and start another round of data collection and glyph-making. 

Idea: Look for glyphs in real life. For example, your youngster’s dentist may mark baby teeth or cavities on a picture of teeth.

At back-to-school night, our son’s teacher gave us lots of good ideas for working on math and science at home. We’ve tried several of her suggestions. So far our favorite one was making our own play dough.

Mixing up the recipe let Jason work on measuring ingredients. And then, like Mrs. Wilson suggested, I had him think about “cause and effect” by adding more or less of an ingredient to see what would happen. After a few batches, he decided on his “best recipe.”

Here it is: Mix together 2 cups flour, 2 cups warm water, 1 cup salt, 2 tbsp. vegetable oil, 1 tbsp. cream of tartar, and a few drops of food coloring. Stir over low heat until thick. Cool. (If it’s too sticky, just cook longer.)