

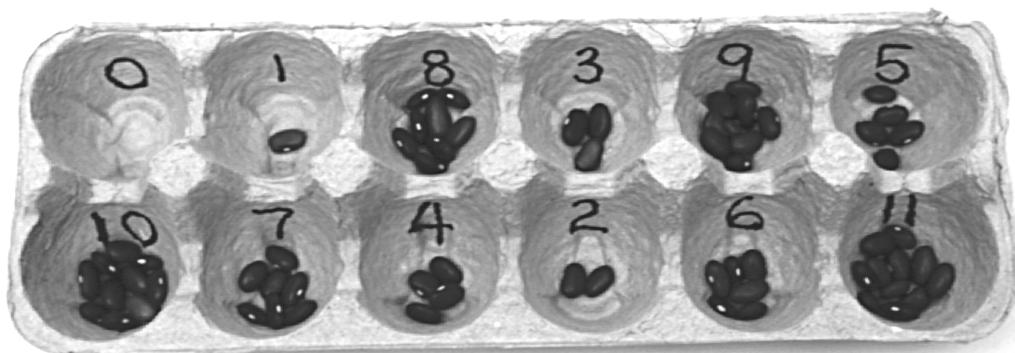
What Is Number Sense?



Number sense in mathematics is much more than just knowing how to count and write numbers. It is a general understanding and intuitive “feel” for numbers. It is seeing the various ways we can use numbers. It also is having the ability to use this understanding to solve problems. Number sense develops gradually over time, through many different experiences exploring and working with numbers.

Children begin acquiring number sense long before they begin school because they do, in fact, use numbers in their play and day-to-day activities. When we talk about young children and number sense, we are typically referring to their sense of the relative “size” of numbers, what certain numbers of objects look like, the different ways numbers of objects might be arranged, combined and taken apart, and how numbers relate to measurements (for example, *What does 5 pounds feel like?*). All of these understandings lead to a sense of the “threeness of 3” or the “ten-ness of ten.”

The kinds of *Everyday Mathematics* activities that help young children develop number sense involve ordering numbers, matching quantities of objects (such as pennies) to written numbers, making up number stories, matching physical actions to numbers, identifying “more–less–the same” relationships, finding equivalent names for numbers, working with part-whole relationships, exploring “special numbers” (such as 2, 5, and 10), and measuring things with different units.



The entire *Everyday Mathematics* program emphasizes developing children’s number sense, and, in fact, gives this goal the highest priority of the program. Why? When people have number sense, they can think flexibly, they use estimation and mental mathematics, and they believe that numbers and mathematics are useful. People with good number sense use mathematics to help them make judgments and to solve problems—a long-term goal most parents have for their children.