EYFS Maths Skills Progression: Subitising

Progression of Skills	Possible Misconceptions	Pedagogical Guidance
Instantly recognises groups of two, or possibly three, without the need to count. May not be able to say the number name.	When asked to identify a group of two or three, children may point at random to groups that do not contain the specified amount.	This form of subitising is referred to as 'perceptual subitising', instantly recognising the number of objects or items in a group without needing to count them. In everyday situations, model identifying two or three objects in a group without counting, e.g. "Oh look, I see two biscuits." Ask the children to point to or choose groups of two or three objects. For example, at snack time you could ask children to choose the bowl with two strawberries in it.
Makes a small collection of up to three objects to match another collection of objects.	Children may match a group of objects based upon colour, type, size but not by the number.	Provide plenty of opportunities to play matching games. Make a collection of two or three of the same small objects (such as buttons or cubes) for children to copy. Progress to using different objects so the children understand they are matching quantities rather than the objects themselves.
Begins connecting small quantities to number words, without the need to count.	Children may count the number of objects in a small group to find the total.	Ask children what they can see when looking at small groups of up to three. Encourage talk around the groups of objects, exploring what they can see. Model being able to see the number of objects without the need to count.
Can select objects from a larger group by subitising, such as groups of two.	Children take one object at a time and count it, giving each a number name.	Play a grabbing game with the children using a collection of the same object, such as counters, cubes or beads. When you say a smaller number, the children can grab that number of objects from the larger group without counting. Children do not need to be asked to check by counting.
When shown a quantity of up to three objects, is able to identify if the group does or does not contain that amount.	Children may check whether a group does or does not contain a said amount by counting them.	Model this skill and language in everyday situations. For example, when playing with small world animals that are in small groups at a farm, say "I am looking for three. Is this three? No, this is not three." Play a game with fingers where children identify when you are showing a specified number. Hold up your fingers for children to say if you are showing that number or not.

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Fast recognition of up to three objects and can name the quantity, without having to count them individually.	Children can name the quantity but need to check they are correct by counting.	Encourage children's perceptual subitising by quickly showing up to three dots or objects, before hiding them again. By only showing the group quickly, children will have less opportunity to count and will develop their perceptual subitising skills.
Can show a number of fingers to five 'all at once', without counting.	Children may lift one finger at a time until they reach the specified amount, counting aloud or in their head as they do so.	Play games with fingers, where children are asked to show a small number of fingers all at once, such as "Show me three fingers." Children can begin to explore composition, by looking at how a number can be shown in different ways across two hands. How many ways can they show three or four? Did everyone show the number in the same way?
Can recognise small quantities in familiar patterns (e.g. up to six for a dice pattern) without counting.		Play games where children are asked to quickly point to a group of objects that contains the number you say. You could spread cards, showing regular dotty patterns to five or six, on the floor. As you say a number, children can swat it with a fly swatter.
Can say the number name for small quantities in familiar patterns (e.g. up to six for a dice pattern and five for other regular patterns) without counting.	Children may not recognise the familiar pattern and will need to count then say the number name.	Encourage the skill of perceptual subitising to five or six by playing games that involve one dice, such as snakes and ladders. Encourage children to say the number shown on the dice, without counting.
Subitises two or more parts within a random arrangement of up to five objects, but does not see the whole without counting.		Drop up to five objects on a table top in order to explore the random pattern they land in. Encourage children to talk about what they see. What can they tell you about the way the objects have landed? Can they subitise small groups within the whole?

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Subitises up to five, including regular and random arrangements of up to five objects, by seeing the parts and quickly knowing the whole.	Children may be able to subitise the different parts but will need to count to find the whole.	Children will be beginning to develop their skill of 'conceptual subitising', meaning they recognise how many there are in a larger group by quickly subitising smaller parts and then combining these parts to know the whole. Provide opportunities for children to explore groups of up to five objects in different random arrangements. Encourage children to talk about what they can see and what they can tell you about the parts and the whole.
Subitises two or more parts within an arrangement of more than five objects but does not see the whole.		Play games with fingers, where children are asked to show a small number of fingers all at once, such as "Show me three fingers." Children can begin to explore composition by looking at how a number can be shown in different ways across two hands. How many ways can they show three or four? Did everyone show the number in the same way?
Subitises two or more parts within an arrangement of more than five objects. Is beginning to combine parts but does not see the whole.		When working with a group of seven objects, children may see groups of two, two, three. They may know the two groups of two can be combined to make four but are not yet able to combine all three parts to work out the whole number. Provide plenty of opportunities, such as during snack time, to explore groups of more than five objects and model your thought process as you subitise parts and combine them to find the whole.
Subitises two or more parts within a larger group and instantly knows the total.	Children will subitise parts and begin to combine parts but may then need to count all to find the whole.	Arrange objects in a way that draws attention to smaller groups within the whole. Children will begin to use their knowledge of number facts to instantly combine the parts and identify the whole. For example, when shown a group of seven buttons arranged in a five pattern and a two, children will quickly subitise the five and the two and know there are seven. You may like to use a ten-frame to arrange the objects.
Subitises a quantity, perceptually or conceptually, and describes a change, such as 'more' or 'less'.	Children may be able to subitise an amount but struggle to describe a quantity change.	Show children a group of objects that they can subitise, either perceptually or conceptually. Ask children to close their eyes and either remove or add one object. Can they immediately identify how the group has changed and describe with the language 'more' or 'less'?