

EYFS · PRE-K / RECEPTION / K

Subitising Cards 1–10

See it without counting

What subitising is and why it matters

Subitising (pronounced SOO-bit-iz-ing) is the ability to recognise the number of objects in a small group WITHOUT counting them. You see 3 dots and immediately know it's 3 — you don't go 'one, two, three.' Research (Clements, Sarama and others) consistently identifies subitising as a foundation skill for early number. Children who develop subitising early do better in arithmetic later because they have INSTANT, AUTOMATIC number recognition that frees up cognitive load for actual problem-solving. Most adults can subitise up to about 4-5. Practising different arrangements teaches children that the same number can look different ways.

Cards 1-3 (basic — start here)

Number	Arrangements
1	● — single dot, single object, single picture
2	●● horizontal, ●● vertical, ● ● spaced, two pictures
3	●●● line, ▲ triangle, ● ●● spread, dice-3

Cards 4-5 (next stage)

Number	Arrangements
4	Square (4 corners), 2+2 dots, dice-4 pattern, line of 4, 1+3
5	Dice-5 (corners + middle), 4+1, line of 5, 2+3, hand showing 5



Cards 6-10 (extending — for those ready)

Number	Arrangements
6	Two rows of 3, dice-6, 5+1, ten-frame with 6
7	5+2, dice-6 plus one, three rows (3+3+1), ten-frame with 7
8	Two rows of 4, ten-frame with 8, 5+3, dice double
9	Three rows of 3, ten-frame with 9, 5+4, 8+1
10	Two rows of 5, ten-frame full, 5+5, 10 fingers, hand-pair

How to use the cards

Quick flash Show a card for half a second. Hide it. 'How many?' Children say number without counting. Build confidence with 1-3 first.	Talk about how you saw it After children answer, ask 'how did you know it was 4?' 'I saw two and two.' This builds part-whole thinking.
Match cards Children match cards showing the same number in different arrangements. Builds the idea that 5 is 5 regardless of how it's arranged.	Subitise game Hide cards in the room. Find one. Subitise it. Tell a friend. Find another.
Ten-frame focus Once children are confident with 1-5, use ten-frames extensively for 6-10. The ten-frame is one of the most powerful subitising tools — it helps children see numbers as 5+something.	

What you should NOT see

If a child is COUNTING when shown a card briefly, they're not subitising. That's normal at first — keep practising with smaller quantities. If a child is RANDOMLY GUESSING — they need more time on quantities they can subitise reliably. Don't push to 5+ before 1-3 is automatic. If a child is FRUSTRATED — slow down. Subitising builds gradually. Children who get pushed beyond their current capability often develop number anxiety that lasts years.

Build a print-ready set



Print the example arrangements onto card stock. Laminate. Cut into individual cards (about credit-card sized). Store in a small bag. Use for 5 minutes a day. Daily. By the end of Reception, most children can subitise to 5 confidently and many can subitise to 10 using the ten-frame.

