

Ten Frames Explained: Why This Picture Helps Every Sum to 10

Key points

- A ten frame is a simple grid of 10 squares that helps children see and count numbers clearly.
- It shows how numbers group together and how many more you need to make 10—this is called a number bond.
- By seeing the same picture over and over, children build a strong mental picture of each number and how it relates to 10.
- Ten frames are used throughout Reception and Year 1 to help children understand number and simple addition.
- It's just a visual tool to help thinking—if you didn't learn with ten frames at school, that's perfectly normal.

Things to try at home

- Use an egg box (which has exactly 10 spaces) as a ready-made ten frame—pop in dried pasta, buttons or small stones, and count together.
- Draw 10 squares on paper in two rows of 5, then let your child fill them with anything small (Lego bricks, coins, peas) and ask 'how many empty spaces are left?'
- An ice cube tray is another natural ten frame; your child can fill it with sand, water or dried rice while you chat about the numbers.
- Play a simple game with any ten frame: show a number of objects in it, then ask 'how many more do we need to make 10?'—just curious, no pressure.

Find out more

- Your child's teacher—ask how ten frames are used in class and whether they have simple activities you can try together at home.
- The Department for Education's Early Learning Goals and Foundation Stage guidance explains why visual tools like ten frames help children's number sense develop.
- Your school's website or handbook often has information about the methods and tools used in Reception and Year 1.