Finding a Third: Extending Fractions Beyond Halves and Quarters in Year 2 Maths

A gentle guide to helping your child in Year 2 (children aged 6-7) understand thirds, moving beyond halves and quarters to explore how to split things into three equal parts.

What are thirds?

In Year 2, children learn about fractions, which is just a way of talking about parts of a whole. Your child has likely already learned about halves (two equal parts) and quarters (four equal parts). Now, they are moving on to thirds. A third is what you get when you split one whole object, a length, or a group of things into three parts that are exactly the same size. The key is that every part must be equal; if one piece is bigger than the others, it isn't a true third.

How children learn this at school

Finding a third can be trickier than halves or quarters because you cannot simply fold a piece of paper in half and then half again. Instead, teachers use practical activities to show how to share. Children might use counters (small coloured discs) or blocks, sharing them one by one into three different hoops or bowls. They also practice drawing lines to split shapes or using ribbons to understand length. By physically moving objects, children see that 'one third' means one of three equal shares.

What this means for your child

Your child is learning to recognise and name a third as part of the National Curriculum (the official guide for what is taught in English schools). They are moving from simply seeing a picture to actively 'finding' a third of a quantity. Some children find this a bit more challenging than quarters because the visual split is less intuitive. This is completely normal. They are developing their mathematical thinking by checking for 'fairness'—ensuring each of the three groups has the exact same amount.

Playful ways to help at home

You can explore thirds through everyday moments without any pressure. Try sharing a snack, like a handful of grapes or crackers, by placing three plates on the table and dealing them out one by one: 'one for you, one for me, and one for the teddy.' You could also use a piece of string or a ribbon and try to fold it into three equal lengths together. Keep it light and playful; the goal is simply to notice how things can be split into three equal groups.

Common questions

Parents often ask if their child needs to do difficult sums to find a third. At this stage in Year 2, it is more about the practical concept of sharing and grouping than complex calculations. You might also wonder if your child should be using a ruler for perfect accuracy; usually, the focus is on the idea of equality rather than precision. If you are unsure how your child's specific teacher is introducing thirds, a quick chat with the teacher or a look at the school's newsletter is the best way to stay aligned.

Sources

- Department for Education, National Curriculum in England: Mathematics programmes of study