Sharing a Pizza Fairly: Introducing Halves and Quarters Through Food in Year 1

A gentle guide to helping your Year 1 child understand halves and quarters using everyday food, focusing on the idea of fair and equal sharing.

What are halves and quarters?

In Year 1 (the first year of primary school for children aged 5 to 6), children begin to learn about fractions. Fractions are simply a way of describing parts of a whole. At this stage, the focus is on 'halves' and 'quarters'. A half is when one whole thing is split into two equal parts. A quarter is when it is split into four equal parts. The most important rule is that for it to be a true fraction, every piece must be the same size. If one piece is bigger than the others, it is not a fair share.

How this is taught

Children learn these maths concepts by using real objects they can see and touch. Using food, such as a pizza or a sandwich, makes an abstract idea feel concrete. Pupils might use a worksheet to draw lines where they would cut a piece of food to share it. They then check if the pieces are equal. This helps them understand that while shapes might look different, the amount of food in each piece must be the same for it to be a fair share. This hands-on approach helps children move from simply 'splitting' something to understanding the mathematical meaning of a fraction.

What this means for your child

Your child is learning to recognise and name parts of a whole. They are developing the ability to look at an object and imagine how it can be divided. For children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) or those learning English as an additional language, using physical food is a wonderful way to learn because it relies on sight and touch rather than just words. Your child will be learning to use words like 'equal', 'fair', and 'unfair' to describe whether a shape has been split correctly into halves or quarters.

Simple ways to help at home

You do not need any special equipment to help your child; you can use your everyday meals. When serving a sandwich or a piece of fruit, you could ask, 'Can you help me split this into two equal halves?' or 'How could we share this apple between four people?'. Keep it playful and light. You might intentionally cut a piece of toast 'unfairly' and ask them if it is a true half. This encourages them to spot the difference between a random split and a mathematical fraction without any pressure or drilling.

Common questions

Parents often ask if children need to write fractions as numbers (like 1/2 or 1/4) in Year 1. While some children may encounter these symbols, the main goal is understanding the concept of equal parts. You may also wonder if the shapes must be perfect circles or squares; the official guidance focuses on the pieces being equal in size, regardless of the shape. If you are unsure what your child is currently focusing on in class, your child's class teacher or headteacher (the person in charge of the school) will be happy to give you more detail.

Sources

- Department for Education, National curriculum in England: mathematics programmes of study