Sharing or Grouping? The Two Faces of Division in Year 2 Maths

In Year 2, children learn division through two connected practical methods: sharing a collection equally between groups, and grouping objects into sets of a given size. Both methods give the same answer but feel different to a child. Understanding both helps them see division as the opposite of multiplication and prepares them for written methods later.

What it is

Division is one of the four basic maths operations, alongside addition, subtraction and multiplication. In Year 2, children meet division for the first time through doing rather than formal written sums.

There are two equally important models. Sharing means dividing objects into a known number of equal groups – 'share 12 sweets between 3 friends'. Grouping means putting objects into sets of a known size – 'how many groups of 2 can you make from 10?'

Both reach the same answer, but they describe the problem differently. A child sharing toys between friends is solving a different problem from a child counting how many pairs they can make from the same toys. The National Curriculum requires children to understand division through both approaches, because each one builds thinking they'll need later.

What happens in Year 2 lessons

Children work with physical objects – counters, cubes, toys – to explore division practically. A teacher might ask: 'We have 12 biscuits and 3 plates. Can we put the same number on each plate?' Children count out biscuits and place them one at a time until each plate has 4. That's sharing.

Then the same 12 biscuits might be arranged into pairs (grouping): 'How many pairs can we make?' Again, 6 pairs. Both answers are linked to the multiplication fact $3 \times 4 = 12$, which the child may already know. Teachers often use arrays – objects arranged in rows and columns – to show how sharing, grouping and multiplication all connect. This helps children see division as 'undoing' a times-table fact rather than a completely separate skill.

What it means for your child

Your child is learning that division is a real, practical idea, not just rules to follow. By using objects they can touch and move, they build a strong mental picture of what division actually means.

Leaning both models prevents confusion later. If a child only sees sharing, a test question about grouping ('How many 5p coins in 20p?') can feel like a new problem altogether. If they understand both, they recognise the division straight away.

This concrete, practical stage is essential. Children aren't expected to write division sums down yet; they're building the thinking that makes written division make sense. A child who can explain division with objects will find the symbols and formal methods far easier when they meet them in Year 3 and beyond.

How you can help at home

Look for everyday opportunities to play with sharing and grouping. When setting the table, ask: 'We have 8 forks and 4 places – how many does each person get?' When sorting socks, ask: 'Can you make pairs from these 10 socks?' or 'We have 15 buttons – can we sew 3 onto each of 5 vests?'

Snacks are brilliant. 'Share these 9 grapes equally between us three' or 'How many groups of 2 can you make from these 12 raisins?'

Keep it playful – these are games, not drills. Let your child use their fingers, move objects about, or draw pictures. There's no rush. The goal isn't speed; it's building the idea that division is about splitting or grouping things fairly, and understanding that both ways are useful.

Questions parents often ask

'Why teach it two ways? Won't that confuse my child?' Both methods are linked to the same facts: 3 × 4 = 12 means 12 ÷ 3 = 4 and 12 ÷ 4 = 3. Learning both models helps your child see the full picture. Different real-life problems need different thinking.

'My child gets one method but not the other.' That's completely normal. Children's minds develop at different paces. Keep playing with both, and the second will click in time. A few weeks of everyday games usually does it.

'The worksheet only shows sharing. Should I teach grouping too?' Yes. Worksheets vary; schools cover both in class. Playing grouping games at home ensures your child meets both approaches and feels confident with each one when tests or different questions arrive.

Sources

- Department for Education: National Curriculum in England – Mathematics programmes of study for Key Stage 1 (https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum/mathematics)
- Department for Education: Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage and guidance on Key Stage 1 teaching