Teen Numbers on a Ten Frame: Why 'Ten and a Bit More' Matters in Year 1

This guide explains how to use a 'ten frame' to help Year 1 children understand teen numbers. It addresses common confusion between numbers like 14 and 41 by showing that teen numbers are made of one full group of ten plus extra ones. Simple, playful activities using household items are suggested to support learning at home.

What it is

A ten frame is a simple visual tool, usually a grid of ten boxes, used to help children see numbers clearly. In Year 1 maths, it helps pupils understand that teen numbers are not just two random digits, but a group of ten plus some extra ones. For example, the number 14 is one full ten frame and four loose counters. This visual approach supports the National Curriculum's focus on place value, helping children move from counting single items to grouping them in tens. It is a foundational concept for future maths learning.

What happens

During the autumn term, many Year 1 classes focus on place value. Children often confuse teen numbers, such as mixing up 14 and 41, because they see them as two separate digits rather than a ten and some ones. Teachers use ten frames to show that the first digit represents a full group of ten, while the second digit represents the extra ones. This visual demonstration helps correct the misconception that the order of digits does not matter. By seeing the ten frame filled completely, children begin to grasp the structure of numbers between 10 and 20.

What it means for your child

Understanding teen numbers as 'ten and a bit more' is crucial for your child's confidence in maths. If they struggle with this concept, they may find later topics like addition and subtraction more difficult. Using ten frames helps children develop a strong mental picture of numbers, which supports quick recall and accurate calculation. This understanding is part of the Year 1 curriculum and helps prepare them for Year 2. It is normal for some children to need more time to grasp this idea, and visual aids can make the learning process clearer and less stressful.

How you can help at home

You can support your child's learning with simple, playful activities using everyday items. Draw a grid of ten boxes on paper or use a printed ten frame. Collect ten buttons, coins, or pasta pieces. Place ten items in the frame to show 'one ten', then add extra items outside the frame to show the 'ones'. Ask your child to build numbers like 13 or 17. Keep sessions short and fun, perhaps during breakfast or after school. This reinforces the idea that teen numbers are made of a ten and some ones, without the pressure of formal drills.

Questions parents often ask

Parents often ask if they need special equipment. You do not; paper, pens, and household items like buttons or coins work perfectly. Another common question is how long to practise. Short, frequent

sessions of five to ten minutes are more effective than long, intense ones. If your child seems frustrated, stop and try again another day. Some parents worry if their child is behind. Remember that every child learns at their own pace. If you have concerns about your child's progress, speak with their teacher, who can offer specific advice tailored to your child's needs.

Sources

- Department for Education: National Curriculum in England: Mathematics programmes of study
- GOV.UK: Teaching maths in primary school