Tens and Ones: Using a Bead String at Home with Year 1

Key points

- Understanding that numbers are made of tens and ones is a big step in Year 1 maths, and a bead string shows your child exactly how this works.
- A bead string gives children something real to hold, move and count, helping them see how numbers are built from tens and ones.
- When your child groups beads in tens, they start to spot patterns and can count faster—ten, twenty, thirty instead of counting every single bead.
- This activity builds directly on ten frames and counting activities your child has already done, so it feels familiar and less like a test.
- Moving beads helps children who prefer learning by doing, seeing and touching—every child's brain works differently.
- A bead string bridges the gap between things your child can hold and the abstract numbers they see in maths.

Things to try at home

- Thread pasta shapes, large beads or buttons on string and group them: count one group of ten together, then count the tens (ten, twenty, thirty) and add the leftover ones.
- Play 'make this number'—say a number like 24 and let your child use the beads to show it, then ask: 'How many tens? How many ones?'
- Move along a bead string or necklace slowly, counting the groups: 'One ten, two tens, three tens... and four more makes 34.'
- Draw circles on paper in groups of ten as your child moves beads—they'll start to see the pattern.
- Use the beads in play—'I need 23 beads for my shop'—so it feels like a game, not a test.

Find out more

- Ask your child's teacher how they use bead strings or similar tools in class, and what words they use.
- Department for Education: National Curriculum for Key Stage 1 Maths—the official place value goals for Year 1 (GOV.UK).
- Your school's maths lead or early years resources—many schools recommend specific tools and approaches to match their teaching.