

Whole, Half and Quarter Turns: Making Sense of Turning in Year 1

A gentle guide to help your child understand how things turn, covering whole, half and quarter turns, and the difference between clockwise and anticlockwise movements in Year 1.

What is turning in Year 1?

In Year 1 (the first year of primary school for children aged 5 to 6), children learn about position and direction as part of their maths lessons. A big part of this is learning about 'turns'. While we use words like 'turn' every day, in maths, they have a very specific meaning. Your child will learn how to describe a movement that happens around a central point, rather than moving from one place to another. This helps them understand how shapes move and how to describe the world around them more accurately.

What your child is learning

Children learn to identify and make different types of turns. A 'whole turn' means spinning all the way around to face the same way they started. A 'half turn' is turning halfway around to face the opposite direction. A 'quarter turn' is a smaller move, like turning from facing a wall to facing a side door. They also learn about direction: 'clockwise' (the way the hands of a clock move) and 'anticlockwise' (the opposite way). Because these ideas can be abstract, teachers often use physical objects or the children's own bodies to show how these turns work.

What this means for your child

It is very common for children to confuse 'turning' with 'moving'. For example, they might walk a quarter of the way across the room instead of spinning a quarter turn on the spot. This is a natural part of learning. Your child is building a bridge from the simple direction language they used in EYFS (the Early Years Foundation Stage, which covers nursery and Reception) to more precise mathematical language. Every child learns at their own pace, and some may find these spatial concepts trickier than counting or adding.

Simple ways to help at home

You don't need any special equipment to practice this. Try making it a game! Ask your child to 'do a half turn' while brushing their teeth, or see if they can make a 'quarter turn clockwise' to find a toy. You can use a clock on the wall as a visual guide, or use a toy that spins. Keep it light and playful; short bursts of activity are much more effective than long lessons. If you are unsure how your child is being taught, your child's teacher can share the specific words they use in class.

Common questions

Parents often ask why 'clockwise' is important. It provides a universal way to describe direction that is used in everything from maps to machinery. Another common question is whether children need to know the degrees of a turn (like 90 or 180 degrees). In Year 1, the focus is on the names of the turns (half, quarter, whole) rather than the numbers. If your child is struggling, remember that using their whole body to feel the movement is usually the best way to help them understand.

Sources



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