Why 'Teen' Numbers Are Tricky: Spotting 13 and 30 by Ear

Some number words sound confusingly alike when we say them out loud - especially pairs like thirteen and thirty, or fourteen and forty. This free video and worksheet helps Year 1 and Year 2 children (that's the first two years of primary school for five- to seven-year-olds in England) learn to listen carefully to the end of these number words, so they can tell them apart and match them to the right digits.

What it is

This is a short video with a matching worksheet, designed for children in Year 1 and Year 2 (ages five to seven). It focuses on a very specific muddle: number words that sound alike but mean very different things, such as thirteen and thirty, or fourteen and forty. The video is about listening and speaking - spotting the difference between the 'teen' ending and the 'ty' ending - rather than about how numbers are built from tens and ones (sometimes called place value). Many children can count confidently and still mix up these word pairs when they hear them spoken or try to write them down, so this resource gives them a quick, friendly way to tell them apart. It's meant to be a light-touch, stand-alone activity rather than a big new topic to learn.

What happens

In the video, children are guided to listen carefully to how number words end. Words like thirteen, fourteen and fifteen end with a 'teen' sound, while words like thirty, forty and fifty end with a 'ty' sound. The video encourages children to say the words aloud and notice the difference in how long or short that ending sounds. It then links each spoken word to the correct written numeral (for example, matching the word 'fourteen' to the number 14, and 'forty' to the number 40). Finally, it offers a simple, memorable trick children can use to check which number is meant when they're not sure - something they can quietly use for themselves rather than having to ask an adult every time. The worksheet gives a few short practice examples to try afterwards.

What it means for your child

This kind of mix-up is very common and tends to be quietly persistent - it can carry on well after a child has become a confident counter, simply because the words themselves sound similar when spoken quickly. It isn't a sign that your child is behind or struggling with maths more broadly; it's a narrow, specific listening habit that many children need a bit of extra practice with. Because it's about sound rather than understanding, it often responds well to a short, targeted bit of noticing rather than repeated explanation. If your child muddles these particular words, this video is designed to give them a quick way to catch themselves, rather than something to worry about.

How you can help at home

You don't need any special materials or sit-down practice for this - everyday moments work just as well. When numbers come up naturally, try saying two similar-sounding ones and asking your child which one you said, for example 'Did I say thirteen or thirty?' You could use ages, bus numbers, house numbers, prices, or scores in a game. Keep it playful and brief - a few seconds here and there is plenty, and it's fine to stop if your child loses interest. Avoid turning it into a test or drilling it repeatedly, as the aim is just

gentle, repeated noticing over time, not mastery in one sitting. Praising a good guess, even if it's wrong, keeps it light and encourages them to keep listening out for the difference.

Questions parents often ask

Is this the same as learning tens and units? No - this video is purely about listening to and saying the words correctly; understanding how numbers are made up of tens and ones is a separate, related skill that your child will meet elsewhere in their maths learning. Should I be worried if my child keeps mixing these up? Not especially - it's a common and normal confusion at this age, and this resource is designed as a quick, low-pressure fix rather than a response to a bigger problem. Will my child's school teach this in the same way? Schools and teachers can use different words, examples or tricks to help with this, so if you're unsure how it fits with what's happening in class, it's worth a quick chat with your child's teacher.

Sources

- Department for Education (GOV.UK) - 'National curriculum in England: mathematics programmes of study' (statutory guidance), Key Stage 1: Year 1 'count, read and write numbers to 100 in numerals'; Year 2 'read and write numbers to at least 100 in numerals and words'