Count Around

**Goal:** Learn about your surroundings by counting what’s around you

**Before beginning**

Choose a question for children to explore in an area in which they can wander freely.

**Easy.** Up to 12 easy to count items: *How many computers are in the room?*

**Medium.** Up to 25 items: *How many chairs are in the children’s room?*

**Hard.** Up to 25 items, requiring reasoning about what to include in the count: *How many different types of media (CD’s, tapes...) are in the library?*

Write the question on a piece of paper and put it where everyone will be able to reach it. Leave out post-it notes and pencils.
1 **Count!**
Children record what they find on a post-it note and stick it below the question.

2

Did everyone come up with the same answer?
Ask children to review what’s posted so far.

*Talk About…*
Why do you think answers could differ even if everyone counted correctly?

**Variations**

**Count in one place (easier).** Pose a question about objects that are in one small area, for instance, “How many trucks in the toy bin?”

**Count in the neighborhood (harder).** Ask about something children can count in the neighborhood, or by looking out the window, such as “How many schools in our city?”, “How many signs with words can you see out the back window?” or, “How many trees border the parking lot?”
Deciding what counts and how to count it

Does this double light switch count as “1” or “2”? What about the triple light switch? I can’t remember—have I counted the switch by the door yet?

In this activity, children grapple with two counting issues: what to count and how to keep track of their counts accurately.

Deciding what to count

Sometimes children may need to make decisions about what counts. Does a rag doll count as a stuffed animal? What about a stuffed cartoon character? Does a double light switch count as one or two?

Encourage children to decide what makes sense to count. Once they’ve counted, ask them to review other answers.

Why do you think some people got “7” for an answer and others got “11”? What do you think they counted in each case?

This helps children learn to word questions carefully so that everyone knows how to answer.

Keeping track of what’s been counted and what’s left to count

What are some ways you can make sure you count all the toy cars so you don’t miss one or count one twice?

For young children, counting and keeping track of several items can be a challenge. Encourage them to take a methodical approach. They could move objects from one pile to another as they count. Or, they could turn a stuffed animal around to face backwards once they’ve counted it.
Older children can come up with and then share their own ways of keeping track.

*How did you remember which light switches you’ve already counted? Did you ever end up counting twice and getting a different answer each time? What did you do to figure out which was right?*

---

**Grades**
K-6+

**Minimum number of participants**
4

**Suggested grouping**
any

**Time**
10 minutes or less

**Math**
analyzing data; counting

**Materials**
letter size or larger piece of paper
small post-it notes
pencils

**Prerequisites**
ability to write numbers to 12

**Books about counting**