4

Taking turns

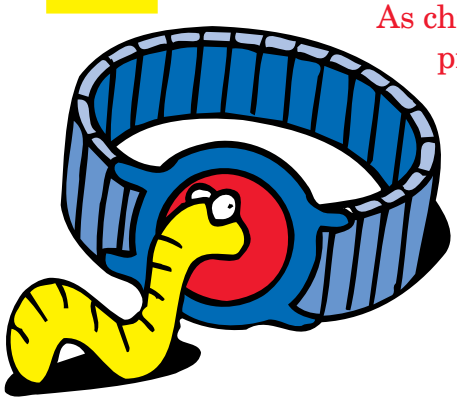
Materials

Clock or watch that displays minutes

"When will it be my turn to see that magazine? You said we could each take 10-minute turns!"

Taking turns is a big part of family life. Even if there's only one child in the family, adults sometimes need to take turns, too.

As children figure out when their turn begins, they get lots of practice with addition and time sense. They also have something to do when it's not their turn. You can do this activity just about anywhere—in the kitchen, waiting at the doctor's office, or on the bus.



Before you begin

Decide how long turns will be. Here are some ideas for children of different ages.

For ages 5–7

- take 1- to 3-minute turns, or
- take 10-minute turns and start turns on a multiple of 10 minutes (10:10 or 7:30).

For ages 7–9

- take turns of any number up to 10 minutes, or
- take turns of any multiple of 5 minutes (15, 20, 35).

For ages 9–11

- take turns that are not multiples of 5 or 10 minutes. Try turns of 13 minutes, 19 minutes, or 37 minutes.

1. Talk through the turn taking

Make sure your children know

- how long each turn is,
- what order they'll take turns in, and
- what time turn taking begins

"You all want to use stencils to make your pictures, but we can only find one stencil. So, each of you gets a 5-minute turn with it. Let's go around the table—Malique, you start. Tania's next, then Camille. Tania, keep an eye on the clock. It's 2:19 now—let us know when it's time for your turn!"

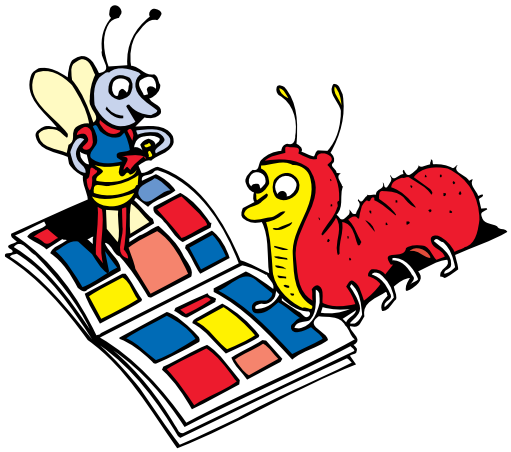
2. Figure out when the next turn begins

If your children need help, work with them in one of these ways:

Count up the minutes. One minute after 2:19 is 2:20, 2 minutes after is 2:21, … 5 minutes after is 2:24.

Round to a "familiar" time, then adjust. The last turn began at 2:19, so you can round up to 2:20. The next turn would begin 5 minutes later, at 2:25. Since the turn really began 1 minute earlier—at 2:19, the next turn begins 1 minute earlier, too—at 2:24.

Talk through your own solution. Children who aren't sure what to do, but know their turns are approaching fast, may not be eager to work out the math themselves. Explain how you know when the next turn begins. Even if your children can't



understand everything, they'll appreciate that you're doing math to find out something important to them. Next time, try a turn length that you think will be easier. You can even make it "too easy," to give a feeling of success so children will be ready to try more challenge another time.

When you repeat this activity

Vary the turn length and starting time. Try turns of a few minutes and turns of a half hour or more. Try starting the first turn on the hour, at half-past, and at any old time. As you learn what your children can figure out easily, choose times that offer just a little challenge.

Variations

How long until our turn? (ages 7–11)

Waiting in line can be unpredictable. When we're in a check-out line, at the bank, or at the post office, we don't know how long each person's turn with the cashier or clerk will be. Try this to pass the time when you're waiting.

If you have a watch, time the turns of three or four people ahead of you and find an average. Or, just estimate the length of an average turn. Then, use this average to predict how long until your turn.

Exploring patterns (ages 5–11)

Write down when each person's turn will start, continuing for at least 12 or 15 turns. (It's OK if no one really gets that many turns.) Then, look for patterns in the numbers.

For example, suppose the starting time is 4:12 and you have 5-minute turns.

4:12	4:37	5:02
4:17	4:42	5:07
4:22	4:47	5:12
4:27	4:52	5:17
4:32	4:57	

Some patterns: the "ones" digits in the minutes are all 2 and 7; the "tens" digits appear twice and then increase by 1.

Here's another example: the starting time is 1:00, with 3-minute turns.

1:00	1:15	1:30
1:03	1:18	1:33
1:06	1:21	1:36
1:09	1:24	1:39
1:12	1:27	

Some patterns: the minutes are multiples of 3; they alternate even and odd; the "ones" digit repeats every 10th number.