1st Grade Math: Ways to Subtract

In 1st grade, students learn different **ways to subtract** numbers. Subtraction means taking away or finding the difference between two numbers. Here are some of the common methods taught for subtraction:

1. **Counting Back**

- **Definition**: Start with the larger number and count backward by the smaller number.

Example:

- 7 - 3 = ?
- Start at 7 and count back 3 numbers: 6, 5, 4.
- **Answer**: 4

This is a simple way to subtract, especially for small numbers.

2. **Using a Number Line**

- **Definition**: A number line helps students visualize subtraction by jumping backward.

Example:

- 9 - 4 = ?
- Start at 9 on the number line, then make 4 jumps backward: 8, 7, 6, 5.
- **Answer**: 5

Number lines are useful for showing the movement in subtraction.

3. **Taking Away with Objects or Pictures**

- **Definition**: Use objects (like blocks or counters) or drawings to represent the total, then remove the amount to subtract.

Example:

- 5 - 2 = ?

- Start with 5 blocks and take away 2. Count what's left: 1, 2, 3.
- **Answer**: 3

This hands-on method helps students understand subtraction by physically removing items.

4. **Counting Up (Finding the Difference)**

- **Definition**: Instead of counting back, count up from the smaller number to the larger number to find the difference.

Example:

- 8 - 6 = ?
- Start at 6 and count up to 8: 7, 8 (2 jumps).
- **Answer**: 2

This method helps students understand subtraction as finding the distance between two numbers.

5. **Breaking Apart Numbers (Decomposing)**

- **Definition**: Break the larger number into smaller parts to make subtraction easier.

Example:

- 12 - 5 = ?
- Break 12 into 10 and 2.
- First, subtract 5 from 10: 10 - 5 = 5.
- Then add back the 2: 5 + 2 = 7.
- **Answer**: 7

Decomposing numbers helps with mental math and makes larger subtraction problems simpler.

6. **Using Fact Families**

- **Definition**: Fact families show the relationship between addition and subtraction.

Example:

- If you know that 3 + 4 = 7, you also know that 7 - 4 = 3 and 7 - 3 = 4.
- **Fact Family**: 3 + 4 = 7, 4 + 3 = 7, 7 - 4 = 3, 7 - 3 = 4.

Fact families help students see how subtraction "undoes" addition.

7. **Subtracting Zero**

- **Definition**: When you subtract zero from a number, the number stays the same.

Example:

- 6 - 0 = 6

This rule is simple but important for students to understand.

8. **Subtracting All**

- **Definition**: When you subtract a number from itself, the answer is always zero.

Example:

- 5 - 5 = 0

This concept shows that when you take away everything, nothing is left.

Practice Example:

- What is 8 - 3?
    - You can count back from 8: **7, 6, 5**.
    - You can use a number line to make 3 jumps back from 8.
    - You can use counters to show 8, then take 3 away, and count what remains.

Conclusion:

Learning different **ways to subtract** gives 1st-grade students multiple strategies for solving subtraction problems. With practice, these methods help build confidence and flexibility, preparing students for more advanced math.