

## Helping Your Child Learn Math

**Everyone struggles with math, whether learning the multiplication tables or trying to figure out how to stretch the monthly income to pay bills. Some find mathematics easier than others, just as some find spelling easier. Everyone, though, uses mathematics daily, and limited math proficiency leads to limited success with the daily challenges of our society.**

### **How can parents help?**

Research shows that the level of parent involvement in a child's education is strongly related to the degree of success in school.

Families play a vital role in educating children. What families do is more important to student success than whether they are rich or poor, whether parents have finished high school or not, or whether children are in primary, high school, or college.

### **Set the example**

One of the most important ways parents can help a child in math is by exhibiting attitudes and values supportive of learning. Following are some suggestions parents can imbibe:

*Accept the struggle* as a normal part of doing math, just as you accept the struggle to become better in sports. Help uncover difficulties, and offer suggestions for overcoming them.

*Encourage mastery.* Just as it is important to repeat fundamentals again and again in sports until performed automatically, it is important to see practice in mathematics as developing mastery, not a chore or form of punishment.

*Look beyond the grade.* Math grades are often calculated on correct answers but they may not reflect understanding that has developed over the course of a grading period. Help focus on understanding and being able to identify specific difficulties.

*Discover the textbook.* Help your child learn how to "read" the math textbook, see the underlying structure, and learn from the examples provided.

### **Help children see the math around them**

Help children recognize the use of math around them in daily life, and engage them in games and activities that foster familiarity with numbers and mathematical thinking. A guide, "Helping Your Child Learn Math," is available online at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/Math/index.html>. Here are some ideas that the guide offers:

Wrong answers can help! Be patient, incorrect answers tell you that you need to look further, ask questions, and figure out what you do not understand.

Sometimes a wrong answer is the result of misunderstanding the question. Ask your child to explain how they solved a problem; responses may clarify whether help is needed with a procedure, the "facts" are wrong, or a crucial concept is not understood.

Help your children become risk takers. Help them examine wrong answers, and assure them that right answers come with understanding.

Problems can be solved in different ways. Though a problem may have only one correct solution, there are often many ways to get the right answer.

Doing math in your head is important. Increased use of calculators and computers makes it increasingly important that people be able to determine whether an answer is reasonable.

### **Help with homework**

Teachers assign homework for a variety of reasons: to help students review what has been learned; to help them prepare for the next class session; to extend student exploration of topics more fully than class time permits; or to help students gain skill in self-directed learning and using resources such as libraries and reference materials. Parents can help children get the most out of homework by:

Encouraging them to take notes about their homework when it is given.

Limiting after-school activities to allow time for homework and family activities.

Planning a homework schedule with each child that allows some free time when assignments are completed.

Monitoring television viewing and other potential distractions.

Doing some problems or questions together with a child when he or she asks for help.

Staying nearby-reading, writing, studying or catching up on paperwork.

Checking completed assignments, and reviewing homework that has been marked and returned.

The entire family needs to cooperate to help students develop good study habits. Encourage students to rest before concentrating on homework. Help the child avoid rushing to finish homework before a deadline such as dinner or bedtime. Try to schedule study time so it doesn't conflict with a favourite activity or necessary function.

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