



Tips for Parents: Math

Math is no mystery

Is that 16oz. can of tomatoes a better bargain than the 12oz. can? You make dozens of calculations in your daily life, from balancing a checkbook to figuring how long it will take to drive to a cross-town soccer game. That's math at work.

As a parent, you can help your child be a whiz at math, even if it wasn't your best subject. Here's how:

Be positive about math. Express confidence in your child's ability to do math. Don't stress either your own fear of math or how difficult math is or how much you admire anyone who can do math. Remember, everyone can and does use math all the time.

Show you kids math at work in their world. Get your kids used to math by thinking out loud when making calculations. Then, let your children work out some real-life puzzles themselves.

For example:

- Let them measure when you bake.
- Ask them to figure out how long of a hose you need to reach from the faucet on the side of the house to the garden.
- Let your child figure out how many miles you'll be driving on your next trip by using the information on a map.
- Sort silverware by knives, forks, and spoons. Sort cards by suit or numbers.

Make math a game

Math games are fun and inexpensive. They are a wonderful way to get your kids to enjoy working with numbers, as well as improve their number skills. Here are a few suggestions:

- Many games that we take for granted are excellent math lessons. "Go Fish" teaches counting and grouping in sets. Games that use play money teach how to make change. Board games that use dice teach addition and counting. Backgammon teaches addition, subtraction, and strategy.
- Beans, stones, or marbles can be used to play number games. Let your child develop his or her own games by sorting beans into different sizes or types, setting up the rules for a counting game, or using different types of pasta to make a picture.
- Give your children a geometry lesson by letting them create a collage of circles, squares, and triangles. Challenge them to come up with as many different shapes as they can using only triangles.
- Play store with the items in your cupboard.
- A pan of water and some jars or cups of different sizes will amuse a child for hours while teaching capacity and volume.

Beyond 1, 2, 3, 4...

Encourage creative problem-solving. Problem-solving is the basis of good mathematical thinking, and the problems don't have to involve numbers.

- "How many different ways are there to walk to school?"
- "What's another way to arrange the furniture in this room?"
- "How many different ways can I measure flour to get half a cup?"

Try to come up with more than one solution for everyday problems.

Choose gifts that develop problem-solving skills. Blocks, building sets, geometric tile sets, puzzles, board games, weather stations, maps, puzzle books, calculators, strategy games, scales, and origami are just a few of the gifts that will give your child pleasure and knowledge at the same time.

Get involved at school

Talk to teachers. Teachers have materials that you can copy and ideas that you can use at home. They also have access to books, kits, and professional organizations that can enlarge both your own at-home math lessons and the math program at your school.

Volunteer in your child's class. By being in the classroom during math, you can see how concepts are taught and follow through with the lessons at home. This has two advantages. First, it reinforces the classroom lessons. Secondly, you are more at ease with math and with the concepts your child is learning.

For more information:

"Helping your Child with Math" from the US Department of Education:
www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/math/math.pdf

<http://mathforum.org/parents.citizens.html>

"Making Math Meaningful: Tips for Parents"

"Math & Reading: There IS a Connection"

"How Do You Spell Parallel? Visiting Middle School Math"

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