

How do I help my child with mathematics?

First and foremost, make mathematics part of your child's life. Count knives and forks as you set the table, and match them up one by one. Notice patterns on a sweater or the tiles on a floor. Play games that involve numbers or strategy. Notice times when mental math could be used: When you're reading, wonder how many pages are left in the book. On a road trip, when you see a mileage sign, guess what the odometer will read when you get to your destination. Let them help estimate the amount spend on groceries or make a budget for a pizza party. Notice numbers and statistics in the media, and help make sense of them.

Your attitude is critical. Be positive about math, be interested in what your child is doing in math, be excited when a tough problem is solved.

Help your child by asking good questions: What do you know about this problem? Would using some materials or drawing a picture help you get started? Why have you decided to try this strategy? Does your answer make sense? What else could you try? Can you explain this step to me? See the back of this page for other suggestions for "good questions."

Sometimes, allowing your child grapple with a problem is hard! Be part of the conversation, not the one with all the answers. Try to listen much more that you speak! Provide a nudge if needed: "I wonder if drawing a chart would help with this one?" If your child knows you will ultimately rescue him and show him what to do, you risk making him dependent on you. We want our children to develop mathematical power - confidence, flexibility, fluency, perseverance.

If your child is practicing basic facts, focus on the strategies she is using rather than how fast she can do them. Your most powerful question is "How do you know that's the right answer?"

If your child is practicing computations, help him focus on the meaning of the numbers first by asking, "What will this answer be close to?" Let him check the answer to each question as soon as he finishes it, and if there was an error, encourage him to look back at what he did to see if he can discover where the error occurred.

Celebrate success.

Provide encouragement.

Join the conversation!

Good Questions are the Key!

- What do you need to know, and why?
- What do you think about that?
- What do you notice about this problem?
- How are these two problems alike? How are they different?
- What if...?
- Do you see any patterns?
- How do you know you're right?
- How does this diagram help you?
- Could the strategy you used yesterday help you here?
- How did you find this solution?
- Why do you think that happens?
- What are you going to do next?
- What made you think of that?
- Can you help me understand this part?
- What would happen if you started here instead?
- Is there another way you could do that?
- Why didn't this work?
- Does your answer make sense?
- Which part of this problem did you find the most challenging?
- Could you make a problem of your own that's like this one?
- Would drawing a picture make this easier to understand?
- Why did you choose to do it this way?