
INSIGHTS

FOR FAMILIES

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Helping your children succeed in math

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❖ **INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES** is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Adapted by Judy McDaniel, communications consultant, from information provided by the U.S. Department of Education.

Your children will develop more confidence in their math ability if they understand the following points:

- ❖ 1. Problems can be solved in different ways.
Although most math problems have only one answer, there may be many ways to get to that answer. Learning math is more than finding the correct answer; it's also a process of solving problems and applying what is learned to new problems.
- ❖ 2. Wrong answers sometimes can be useful.
Accuracy is always important in math. However, sometimes you can use a wrong answer to help your children figure out why they made mistakes. Analyzing wrong answers can help children understand the concepts underlying a problem and apply reasoning skills to arrive at the correct answer.
Ask your children to explain how they solved math problems. Their explanations might help you discover if they need help with number skills, such as addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, or with the concepts involved in solving the problem.
- ❖ 3. Take risks.
Help your children to be risk takers. Help them see the value of trying to solve a problem, even if it's difficult. Give your children time to explore different approaches to solving a difficult problem. As they work, encourage them to talk about what they are thinking. This will help them strengthen math skills and become independent thinkers and problem solvers.
- ❖ 4. Being able to do mathematics in one's head is important.
Mathematics isn't restricted to pencil and paper activities. Doing math "in your head" (mental math) is a valuable skill that comes in handy as we make quick calculations of costs in stores, restaurants or gas stations. Let your children know that by using mental math, their math skills will become stronger.
- ❖ 5. It's sometimes okay to use a calculator to solve mathematics problems.
Calculators are widely used today, and knowing how to use them correctly is important. Let your children know that to use calculators correctly and most efficiently, they will need a strong grounding in math operations— otherwise, how will they know whether the answers they see displayed are reasonable.

Here are some other things that you can do to help your children be successful mathematics students:

- ❖ Visit your children's schools. Meet with their teachers and ask how they approach mathematics. Do they enjoy it? Do they

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participate actively? Do they understand assignments and complete them accurately? If teachers indicate that your children have problems with math, ask for specific things that you can do to help them.

- ❖ Check math homework and other assignments. It's usually a good idea to check to see that young children have finished their math homework assignments. If older children are having trouble finishing assignments, check their work, too. After your children's teachers return math homework, have your children bring it home so that you can read the comments to see if they have done the assignment satisfactorily. However, do not do homework for your child. Limit your assistance to seeing that your children understand the assignments and that they have the necessary supplies to do them. Too much parent involvement in homework can make children dependent and takes away from the value of homework as a way for children to become independent and responsible.
- ❖ Find out if your children's schools have Web sites and, if so, get the addresses. School Web sites can provide ready access to all kinds of information, including homework assignments, class schedules, lesson plans and dates for school district and state tests.
- ❖ Help your children see that the mathematics they are learning is very much a part of everyday life. From statistics in sports to the sale price of clothing to the amount of gas needed to travel from one city to another, mathematics is important to us every day. Help your children link their "school" math to practical events.
- ❖ Point out that many jobs require mathematical skills. Your children may recognize that many people must have good math skills to do their jobs—scientists, doctors, computer technicians, accountants and bankers, for example. However, they may not realize that many other jobs also require math. Point out that math is used in jobs such as running a business; being a plumber, carpenter, electrician or mechanic; being a salesperson or clerk, and designing clothes—or buildings. Let children know that having strong math skills will open up many great career opportunities.
- ❖ Show your children that you like mathematics. Letting your children see that you use math—and that you aren't afraid of it—will go much further to building positive attitudes than just telling them that they should learn it.