

## For Families



## Help Your Kids Learn 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. Insights is produced by Marcia Latta, communications consultant.

Educators often emphasize the need to help kids learn. After they learn to read, they use reading skills to learn throughout the remainder of their education. Parents are encouraged to help their children learn to read.

Math is equally important, but many parents don't focus on math help at home beyond basic counting and arithmetic. Math instruction may be unfamiliar to parents, or their math skills may be rusty. Some people may also mistakenly believe that we are born with math skills — or not. This is not true. Anyone can be “mathy” with practice and confidence.

Your children will develop confidence in their math ability and build their math skills with these messages:

1. Problems can be solved in different ways.

It is essential to learn problem-solving processes. Although most math problems have only one answer, there may be many ways to get that answer. Learning math is about learning the processes of solving problems and applying them to new problems.

2. Wrong answers can be useful.

Accuracy is important in math, but understanding why and answer is wrong can help build math skills. Learning from mistakes is a helpful lesson for any subject.

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 math — arithmetic — in your head is important.

Mathematics isn't restricted to pencil and paper activities. Doing mental math is a valuable skill for making 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 OK to use a calculator to solve math problems.

Calculators are a standard learning tool, and they are widely used in classrooms. Let your children know that calculators can support math exercises, but they should also understand math operations in order to know whether the answer is reasonable.

### **Strategies for building math skills**

Parents can help their children build math skills by regularly practicing math. The Northwest Evaluation Association ([www.NWEA.org](http://www.NWEA.org)) has a list of parent strategies for improving math skills, including activities for general math; computation; geometry; measurement; statistics, probability, graphing; problem-solving, and algebraic concepts. They suggest choosing two or three strategies to use throughout the year to help increase children's understanding of math skills and develop math confidence.

### **General math improvement strategies include activities that relate math to daily life:**

- Talk about how many bowls to put out for dinner.
- Have your child count similar items as you put away groceries.
- Have your child help measure ingredients for recipes.
- Give your child change to count out to pay for purchases at the store; have older children calculate the change.
- Ask your child to compare prices of items by asking which item costs more.
- Allow your child to weigh fresh produce; have older children calculate the price by multiplying the price per pound by the number of pounds.
- Read the days and dates on a calendar, talk about the number of days in the month, the number of days remaining until a special event, etc.
- When traveling, write numbers on a grid and have your child color in the box as they see the numbers on signs or license plates.

### **Computation activities include:**

- Count by twos, fives, or tens.
- Do connect-the-dot pictures.
- Count and pair objects found around the house and determine whether there's an odd or even number of items.
- Review math facts at home, in the car, waiting in line, or during other downtime.
- Practice multiplication tables. Make it a game by setting a timer. Offer a prize for the best time.
- Provide your child with verbal math problems. "Take the number five; add six; multiply by three; subtract three; divide by five. What's your answer?" Speak slowly until your child gets better at solving these mental problems.
- Help your child identify percentages in signs, newspapers, and magazines.
- Encourage your child to read nutrition labels. Have them calculate the percent of a specific nutrient in each item.

Find more strategies on the NWEA website: <https://bit.ly/3BHrb8W>.