



HELPING YOUR
CHILDREN
LEARN AND ENJOY
MATHEMATICS

GIVING YOUR CHILDREN A GOOD START IN MATH

As a parent, it may be tempting to think you don't need to worry about helping your children learn mathematics until elementary school, but the seeds of many important math concepts are planted when children are very young. Young children begin learning math before they take their first steps. When toddlers hold up two fingers and say they are "this many years old," they are already doing math and are ready to learn more. In fact, early experiences can determine how your children look at math for the rest of their lives. It's never too early to start learning—and liking—math!

MATH ADVICE FOR PARENTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

■ HAVE HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR YOUR CHILDREN

Be confident that your children can and will learn math. Make sure you tell them they can do math, encourage them to always do their very best, and actively praise their efforts when they do. Always encourage your children to tackle problems they come across and solve them in creative ways.

■ TALK ABOUT MATH IN POSITIVE WAYS

Be positive when you talk about math in front of your children. Never tell your children that math is too hard or that you hated it when you were in school. Let your children know that math is important and point out how you use math in your everyday life. Actively seek out opportunities to explore math together. Make math fun and enjoy it WITH your children!

■ MAKE MATH PART OF YOUR FAMILY EVERYDAY

We all do a lot of math every day without even thinking about it. When you look around with "math" in mind, it's amazing how many activities you will find that involve math that you can do with your children. Find opportunities at home, in the kitchen, in their bedrooms, at bath time, during play time, inside the house, and outside the house. Spend time with your children on simple board games, picture puzzles, and building blocks. Involve your children in shopping, cooking, or home projects to show them that math is practical and useful. Let your children see you do math every day.



Photo by Paul Giganti, Jr.

■ FIND A REGULAR TIME TO DO MATH WITH YOUR CHILDREN

Children's days are as busy as adults' days. If you don't make time to do math with your children on a regular basis, the opportunities will slip away. Make it a personal goal to do at least ten minutes of math with your children every day. Find a regular time each day when you are normally with your children and not rushed; those are the best times to do a bit of math together. Just as you find time to read to your children at night, also find time to do math! Some families like to do a little math at the dinner table when everyone is together. Some parents do "bedtime math" right after reading a book. Pose a problem, solve it together, then call it a day!

■ POINT OUT MATH TO YOUR CHILDREN EVERYWHERE

You can help your children see how useful math is by pointing it out wherever you see it—not just in your home, but everywhere you go. Tell your children about the math you do in your job and why it's important. When you are outside your home, look for ways to point out math: "What shape does that tree look like?" "How many steps did we go up?" "How many seconds until the elevator arrives?" "How many pennies did we get in change today?" If you start looking for math in the world, you will find it everywhere—and so will your children.

■ "TALK MATH" TO YOUR CHILDREN

Find opportunities to use size, location, and number words in all sorts of situations—on a walk, taking a bath, reading a book together, and, of course, while playing with your children. Use math words—big/small, more/less, heavy/light, in/out, on/under, top/bottom, up/down, over/around, behind/next to, near/far, inside/outside, first/second, and last/next—in simple sentences as often as you can, such as, "Sit here next to me." Or, "I'm giving you more blocks; now I have less. Give me three back!" Make sure your children "talk math" too; when they solve a problem, ask them to explain how they did it.

■ IF YOUR CHILDREN GO TO DAY-CARE OR PRESCHOOL . . .

Ask about the school's math program and what math materials are available. Preschools and day-care centers often have wonderful reading and language programs, but many are just becoming aware that mathematics is also important in young children's days. Make a point of looking at the math materials that will be available to your children. Does the school or center have a "math-rich" environment? Are there lots of building blocks of all different kinds? Are there lots of things to count, sort, and put together and take apart? Ask the teachers about their math program and make sure there is learning time set aside for math EVERY day!



Photo by Nikki Easterday

Permission is granted to reproduce and share this article for instructional use by parents, guardians, teachers, and families provided it is duplicated with full credit given to the author and the California Mathematics Council. Any other use of this article is a violation of the copyright.