

Are some students destined to succeed in mathematics because they're inherently "good at math?" According to the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and Sylvan Learning Center, the answer is not all educators believe everyone can succeed at math.

The Power of Parents

To support your child's math learning, parents must believe that everyone can learn mathematics, and that learning math is essential to lifelong success. Experts agree that parents can encourage a positive attitude towards mathematics by boosting a child's confidence and competence. Studies indicate that people who have experienced long-term difficulty with a subject tend to give up quicker than those who have met with success. Therefore, it is important for parents to intervene as soon as a child exhibit signs that he is struggling with a concept.

Parents can dispel the notion that math is difficult by believing in their child's ability to master challenging material. Attitudes are contagious. Therefore, encourage your child by saying, "You did a great job on your homework assignment last night!" Making mathematics a part of a young child's daily routine, and continuing that process throughout high school, can help create excitement and a willingness to learn new, complex concepts.

Parents can make math matter outside of school by creatively unlocking the math problems hidden within everyday situations. Keeping track of batting averages provides a natural introduction to statistics, but mathematics can also be explored in less obvious activities. Rearranging a teenager's room can turn into a geometry lesson by talking about the room's square footage versus the space taken up by the child's furniture or how the room's shape determines interior design - the placement of objects.

By "mathematizing" daily activities such as shopping, parents can inspire confidence in their math abilities. Parents might offer to give children a percentage of the grocery money saved by clipping coupons, or ask them to figure out the

savings on a sweater marked down 25 percent. Parents can also casually "talk mathematics" with their children and teenagers while highlighting the types of math needed in their chosen, "cool" careers, such as, interior decorator, football coach and party planner.

The key is to encourage young people to use math to manage the world around them.

The Road to Achievement

Many students admit that they are reluctant to ask for academic assistance because they feel alone in their struggles. Children need someone who is very patient to help them better understand math – either a parent, teacher, friend or a tutor. But, only parents can encourage their children to speak up and acknowledge, "I still do not understand that concept. Can you please explain it to me again?"

Students who are unsure of their academic knowledge require assurance to ask for help. In order to ensure a student is secure in her abilities, parents must be nurturing and inspire confidence by helping the child develop self-confidence. By working together as a family and following the suggestions below, you can ensure math success.

- Model the process of making mistakes and calmly learning from them.
- Review previously learned math concepts before each new homework assignment.
- Start each new session with math concepts that are familiar, and gradually move into new and more difficult areas.
- Use hands-on objects from around the house to introduce new math concepts.
- Help your child focus on the reasoning behind procedures rather than rely on memorization alone.
- Take turns working on problems and explaining how you arrived at your solutions.
- Solve problems in a variety of ways and allow your child to use his or her imagination and favorite method.

- Encourage your child to skip difficult problems temporarily and return to them later in the session.
- Watch for signs that your child needs the assistance of a professional tutor. If your child is becoming rebellious and will not allow you to help, a non-family member may be needed to engage the student.

Tackling Testing

The first step is helping your child learn how to complete math homework. The second step is alleviating the fear associated with tests. This requires adequate preparation, familiarity with test formats and sufficient practice. As detailed above, parents should work with their child to ensure he or she has mastered the content and then encourage working on sample test questions in a non-threatening environment. Although theories abound on ways to help students test more effectively, educators advise parents that the real trick to doing well on math tests is to read every problem VERY carefully, particularly word problems, and always study the night before the exam.

Experts suggest that parents plan a study schedule for each test, create several short practice tests and allow their nervous student to prepare at well-spaced intervals. Rather than grading practice tests, parents are advised to write out step-by-step solutions to each problem and allow their child to correct his or her own answers. A practice test should be given each day until a perfect score is attained and confidence is at an all-time high.

Before each math test, parents are encouraged to review relaxation techniques and test-taking skills with their child while emphasizing the importance of answering the easiest questions first and coming back to complete the more difficult problems. The most important thing parents can do to help, according to students with a history of “math anxiety,” is to demonstrate their total confidence in their son or daughter’s ability to perform well on the test.

For additional educational resources for children in grades pre-K through 12, please visit <http://tutoring.sylvanlearning.com/learning-for-parents/index.cfm> or call 1-800-31-SUCCESS.

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