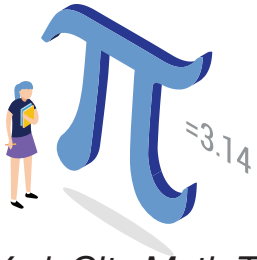
Department of Education

***New York City Math Team's* Tips on Helping Your Child with Math**



How can I help my child with math?



Here are some tips and suggestions that have worked for the *New York City Math Team*:

Do More of...

Do let them know you believe in them even though math can be hard sometimes.

Do let them know that everyone struggles sometimes, and that struggle is the way we learn.

Do ensure that your child has a designated space to do their work. A defined work space can be a crucial part of establishing a remote learning routine. This will help your child separate home and school life and focus on remote learning.



Do provide your child with headphones while working on the computer. It can help block out distractions and also provide them with privacy.

Do talk to your child about the math that they are working on. Ask questions like "How did you figure that out?" and "How do you know if your answer makes sense?"



Do encourage your child to take time with mathematics and explain how they thought about the problem. Talking through their thinking with you can help your child develop mathematical understanding.



Avoid Doing...

Avoid saying "I wasn't good at math either" when your child struggles, or "I'm not a math person either." This may seem comforting to our children, but it can also send the message that it is okay to give up or that you think that your child isn't capable of doing well in math.

Avoid having your child use their bed as a workspace. As tempting and as comfortable as it might seem to do math while lying in one's bed, this can actually make it more difficult for children to concentrate and remain awake during instruction. It also can make it harder for them to sleep at night.

Avoid environmental distractions (such as having the TV on) while your child is doing math. Mathematics requires a lot of concentration.

Avoid telling your child how to answer math questions or giving them steps to follow. Children learn best when they have the opportunity to think about what they are doing rather than memorize procedures that they may not understand.

Avoid solely focusing on right and wrong answers. Getting the answer is important, but it is not the only thing that matters. Children must take time to understand why their answers make sense.

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Do More of...

Do be patient with your child while doing math. This can be difficult when your child is struggling, you are busy trying to do other things, and their homework is due. When you remain calm, you can help your child persevere through the challenge.



Do try to provide materials for your child to use to help with math. You can purchase them or even create them with materials at home. Some basic materials could be counters, color tiles, Unifix cubes, etc.

One place to find homemade math materials is: https://www.theoldschoolhouse.com/5-simple-homemade-math-manipulatives/

You can also encourage your child to use virtual manipulatives.



Do search online for videos to refresh your own math understanding.

Khan Academy is a great resource to remind you of the math procedures that you learned when you were in school.

Do try to understand the way the teacher is asking your child to do the math even if you have an "easier" way of doing it. The teacher may be building toward a concept and a shortcut can interfere with that process.

Do help and encourage your child to write down a question for their teacher when they are confused about something. This practice provides two benefits: 1) The more specific the question, the better your child's teacher will be able to understand and address the specific issue; 2) Knowing what to ask is a math skill and is often more useful in the long run than the answer itself.



Avoid Doing...

Avoid showing agitation or frustration when your child is working on mathematics. Experiencing anxiety when kids don't understand is inevitable, but rarely leads to a breakthrough. It can be better to take a short break than to increase the stress of the moment.

Avoid giving your child the message that using physical objects to understand math is a crutch or only for young children. Acting out the mathematics and using your hands to learn is a crucial part of learning, and even professional mathematicians use objects when working out a new idea.

Avoid imposing your way of doing math on your child. The teacher may be asking for your child to learn different ways of doing math that will help support their understanding of math rather than just getting the answer.

Avoid giving your child the answer. It can make it difficult for your child's teacher to give them the support they need.

NYC Department of Education

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