



Research reveals effective ways to help kids learn math

It's no surprise that students who don't practice math don't do well in class. But sometimes even when students do the work they may struggle. That's why it's important to use study techniques that work.

One meta-analysis (a study of many studies) looked at how to help students learn math. It found that the most effective strategy is *distributed practice*. Instead of studying for one hour once a week, your child should break up that time into shorter chunks distributed throughout the week.

Math must be practiced every day. It's a subject that builds on what students already know. Solving today's problems will involve previously learned concepts.

There are many ways that students can practice math without even realizing they are reviewing. Here are three:

- 1. Play games with dice.** Take turns rolling the dice and quickly adding up the sum of two numbers. Later, add subtraction, multiplication, and division to the challenge.
- 2. Have fun with coins.** Say, "I have three coins. Together, they are worth 60 cents. What are they?" Then, let your child challenge you.
- 3. Pretend your calculator is broken.** Say, "Imagine our calculator has no number 8. What are some other ways to represent that number?" It could be $10-2$ or $4 + 4$ or $24/3$.

These activities are easy to fit into spare moments throughout the week. Playing games is an enjoyable way to give your child a chance to practice math facts.

Source: G.M. Donoghue and J. Hattie, "A Meta-Analysis of Ten Learning Techniques," *Frontiers in Education*, Frontiers Media S.A.

All families can be involved in education



If English is not your first language, you may hesitate to get involved at school. But don't let

that stop you! There are many ways to be involved in your child's education—no matter what language you speak. Here are just a few:

- **Attend conferences** and other events for families. Don't be afraid to request an interpreter or translated documents. Or, ask a friend who speaks your language and English to come with you.
- **Ask the teacher** what you can do to help. The most important things you can do to support your child can be done in every language: Ask your child about school. Schedule a regular homework time. Encourage your child to read every day.
- **Connect with other families.** Form a group to share ideas and opportunities for better communication. Discuss ways you can partner with the school to help school staff meet the needs of all students and their families.

Demonstrate the importance of reading to your child



People read for many reasons, from gaining information to enjoying a great story. Show your child how important

reading is in everyday life. You can:

- **Explain to your child** how you read for information. Say, “I’m trying to figure out how to use a new computer program for work. This article explains how it works.”
- **Read for a purpose.** Do you take the bus in the morning? Show your child how you read the bus schedule to decide when to leave the house. Are you looking for a new recipe for dinner? Demonstrate how you search online or through cookbooks.
- **Read for pleasure.** Let your child see you reading just to relax. Mention that reading isn’t just for school or work.

- **Share something you’re reading.** If you see an interesting news article, read some of it aloud. Print or cut out an article you think your child will enjoy and pass it along. Your child will see that reading is something that is fun to share.
- **Take your child with you** when you go to the library. Show how rewarding it can be to browse titles and discover a great book.
- **Bring something to read** with you everywhere you go. Your child will see that reading is a constructive way to pass the time.

“If you are going to get anywhere in life you have to read a lot of books.”

—Roald Dahl

Celebrate Geography Awareness Week with learning activities



You probably remember filling in the locations of countries and continents on blank maps when you were in school. But geography is about much more than maps. It’s about how places shape people and how people shape places.

Help your child celebrate Geography Awareness Week (November 11-17) with these learning activities:

- **Look it up.** When you and your child hear a news story about an unfamiliar place, locate it on a map. Then, challenge each other to learn a few facts about the location and the people who live there.
 - **Go on a virtual trip.** Search online for information about a country you and your child would like to visit.
- Together, research fun things to do on your “trip.”
- **Explore your community.** Help your child discover why your town is located where it is. Who first settled there? How are you and your child connected to the rest of the world (roads, airports, rivers, etc.)?
 - **Make a map.** Challenge your child to draw a map of how to get from your home to school, a store or a friend’s. Then, follow the map.
 - **Share family history.** Tell your child where your ancestors came from. Find these places on a map. What did they do there? Was the environment similar to where you and your child live now? Where do your relatives live now? Again, check the map.

Are you teaching and practicing listening skills?



The most important part of communication isn’t talking—it’s *listening*. And listening skills are crucial for students’

success in school.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are showing your child how to become a good listener:

___ 1. **Do you try to give** your undivided attention when your child is talking?

If you’re busy, tell your child when you can listen attentively, and then do so.

___ 2. **Are you patient** when you listen? Sometimes, it may take a while for kids to actually say what they want to say.

___ 3. **Do you avoid interrupting** your child? Ask your child not to interrupt you, either.

___ 4. **Do you “listen”** to your child’s behavior? A child who is acting up is communicating a need.

___ 5. **Do you avoid chiming in** with the “right” answer? Instead, listen as your child thinks through what to do.

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you’re teaching your child how to listen. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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Encouragement is key when discussing grades with your child



If your child's grades are lower than you expected, it's only natural to be disappointed—especially if you know your child has much more potential.

The most important thing to remember is to keep your emotions in check. Getting angry or showing your disappointment won't help. Instead, look for ways to encourage your child's best effort. Here's how:

- **Have an open discussion** about grades. Ask your child questions such as: *Do you think your grades are an accurate reflection of your work? What do you think is going on? Are you turning in assignments on time? Do you understand the lessons? Do you think there is anything you could do differently?*

- **Talk with the teacher.** Is your child having any issues at school? Discuss ways you can work together to boost your child's performance. Are there additional resources available to help?
- **Enforce a regular study time.** During that time, the TV should be off and digital devices should be used only for studying. Set a timer for 20 minutes, then let your child take a short break before getting back to work.
- **Offer support.** Provide help when necessary, but don't just give your child the answers. Instead, act as a coach and show your child how to find the answers independently. Reinforce that it is your child who is responsible for completing work.

Family meetings promote communication and closeness



Family meetings can play a crucial role in supporting learning by creating a structured time for productive communication. Family members can connect, address concerns and have some fun.

For successful meetings:

- **Meet regularly** at a convenient time. For instance, Tuesdays after dinner.
- **Keep meetings short**—about 30 minutes or less. (But if the family is having fun, don't stop!)
- **Have adults lead meetings.** You should make sure rules are followed and have the final say on big decisions.
- **Designate someone to take notes** at each meeting. This will help everyone remember what was discussed or decided.
- **Discuss family news,** concerns, goals and successes. Reward accomplishments.
- **Give everyone** a chance to speak. No one interrupts anyone else. Each person's opinion deserves respect.
- **Don't use meetings** as a time to criticize. Discipline problems should be handled separately.
- **Include a fun activity.** Play a short game, sing a song or learn a tongue twister.
- **Brainstorm** ways to improve your meetings. Ask family members how they think the meeting went and see if they have any suggestions for improvement.

Q: My seven-year-old is quite overweight. I have talked with the pediatrician, and we are working on improving our diet at home. But meanwhile, my child has almost no friends and has lost interest in school. What can I do to help my child?

Questions & Answers

A: Your child is not alone. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than one-third of children under the age of 18 are overweight.

Studies show that overweight kids often do poorly in school and are often the target of bullying. Many don't speak up in class because they are afraid the other kids will make fun of them.

Children who are overweight are also more likely to spend time by themselves. And when kids are alone, they tend to be less active.

To support your child and turn things around:

- **Help your child focus** on health—not the number on the scale. Concentrate on establishing habits that help your child feel healthy and strong.
- **Make fitness a family priority.** Plan frequent family walks. Look for active things you can do on the weekends. Go to a park and kick a ball around.
- **Follow the guidelines** your pediatrician sets for diet. But don't turn yourself into the "food police." Instead, make healthy changes for the whole family, like drinking more water instead of soda or juice.
- **Talk with the teacher** about what your elementary schooler is going through. The teacher can watch for teasing and may have ideas about other ways to help your child.

It Matters: Positive Discipline

Positive discipline methods yield positive results



Using effective discipline strategies at home can increase your child's likelihood of succeeding in school. Experts agree that the best discipline methods are positive, not harsh. Studies have shown that physical punishments may actually increase children's risk for mental health problems.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that families:

- **Develop loving**, supportive relationships with their kids. This gives children a strong foundation and motivates them to behave well. When kids feel loved and respected by their parents, they are more likely to cooperate at home and at school.
- **Focus on desired behavior.** Compliment what your child does right—and be specific. "You started your project without my reminding you. Great job!"
- **Use time-outs** and other non-physical consequences when needed. A child who speaks disrespectfully may need some time alone in a room. A child who puts off schoolwork may miss other fun activities.
- **Let natural consequences** do the work. If your child forgets to complete schoolwork *again*, don't make excuses. Instead, allow your child to get a zero. Your child will be more likely to remember next time!

Source: A. Heilmann and others, "Physical punishment and child outcomes: a narrative review of prospective studies," *The Lancet*, Elsevier.

Predict, prepare and practice to prevent behavior problems

When it comes to discipline, families often wait until *after* a problem arises to take action. Preventing problems in the first place is much more effective.

Follow these three steps:

1. **Predict.** Think about a behavior you would like to change. Perhaps your child gets up so late that mornings are hectic.
2. **Prepare.** Since you can predict the behavior, you can also think about ways to prevent it. Instead of waiting until your child straggles down to the breakfast table, think of ways to avoid the late start. Is your child tired in the morning from staying up too late at night? An earlier bedtime could change that. Is your child rushing around trying to get organized for school? Spending time the night before could save precious minutes in the morning.



3. **Practice.** Help your child practice the prevention strategies until they become habits. If you predict, prepare and practice, you can also prevent many behavior problems from recurring.

Make discipline easier with a short set of house rules



Kids who are expected to follow rules at home are much more likely to follow rules at school. And when students follow the rules, there is more time for learning!

To make rules memorable, create a short list of house rules and consequences that govern the things that are your biggest concerns. In one family, it might be behavior toward siblings. In another, it might be helping out around the house.

Come up with a catchy phrase that sums up both the rule and the consequence. For example:

- **Play nice or think twice.** Fighting siblings will have to take a time out to think about their actions.
- **If you partake, you take part.** Every family member is responsible for meal time—from setting the table to clearing the dishes.
- **Pick up or pay up.** If your child does not put toys away, place them in a closet. Your child can earn them back by completing a small chore.