



Maths homework: How can parents help?

How can I help my child with their maths homework?

This is a question many parents ask, but may not be sure how to answer, particularly if they didn't enjoy maths when they were at school.

At those times when words fail you and the children mutter "I still don't get it", parents should stay relaxed and keep the homework session stress free.

Get involved

Department of Education and the Arts Assistant Director-General (Curriculum) Lesley Englert says it is important that parents set a positive tone and talk with their children about the value of homework.

"Children should try to do the work themselves, but are encouraged to ask parents for assistance if they have a problem.

"They should not spend long periods struggling with their maths homework. If there is still no headway after asking their parents for help, leave that part of the homework and move on.

"When difficulties are experienced, parents or children should write down the questions they have and talk to the teacher the next day.

"Parents should also ask to meet with the teacher to talk through any queries about homework and the best way to help."

Use practical examples

Brisbane Independent School Principal Jenny Mansfield recommends that parents use practical examples as well as drawing and role-play when helping with maths homework.

Ms Mansfield suggests parents ask the teacher for advice to support the discussion of maths in the home and have some counters, buttons or ice-cream sticks handy to use for counting and bundling.

"Seeing a maths problem illustrated or demonstrated in front of them is often all a child needs to make sense of it, and this interaction helps enormously with mathematical thought and language development," she says.

Think mathematically

There are many simple ways to help your child and develop their confidence with mathematics. For example, you can increase your child's appreciation of the importance of numeracy by showing them how maths skills apply in daily situations.

Judy Hartnett, Education Officer Mathematics for Brisbane Catholic Education, says it is important to encourage children to think mathematically every day rather than simply focusing on getting the right answer.

“By showing children where maths exists in the real world — for example, how many extra sausages to add to the barbecue when there are guests coming for dinner — parents can encourage their children to think mathematically,” Ms Hartnett says.

“If parents feel out of touch with how maths is done nowadays, talk to the teacher about current maths teaching practices or ask the child to show them how they work out mathematical problems — this is a great form of learning for both parent and child.”

Value of informal activities

The University of Queensland (UQ) recently conducted research that reinforced the importance of partnerships between home, school and community for improving children's maths learning.

UQ Associate Professor of Education, Merrilyn Goos, says the Australia-wide survey shows that both formal and informal programs are valuable in developing children's numeracy.

“Informal activities are fantastic opportunities for numeracy learning — there is much value in parents and carers involving their children in everyday maths, for example, measuring ingredients for cooking or estimating how many metres to kick a football to score a goal,” she says.

Tips for parents

- Get involved — be proactive about your child's numeracy
- Be positive — avoid imparting your fear of maths onto your children
- Show your child how mathematics applies to real-life situations
- Encourage children to take part in activities that use their maths skills like grocery shopping within a budget or measuring materials for craft activities
- Get a list or poster of multiplication tables at home
- Remain calm when helping with homework — play some classical music in the background if it helps your child and take a break when it gets frustrating for both parent and child
- Talk to the teacher to clarify teaching methods if your child says “we don't do it this way in class”
- Use maths on the weekend — if you are planning a visit to a number of theme parks, ask your child to work out which is better value for money
- Refresh your own maths skills — enrol in a course designed to help parents to assist their children, such as Primary Maths Guide, Years 1–7 at the Open Learning Institute of TAFE. Visit www.oli.tafe.qld.gov.au or call 1800 657 387

Online assistance

- Education Queensland's Curriculum Exchange recommends a number of maths sites covering brainteasers to number puzzles. Visit www.education.qld.gov.au/tal/curriculum_exchange/students/primary/
- The State Library of Queensland has compiled a list of maths sites as part of their Homework Help initiative. Visit <http://netlinks.slq.qld.gov.au/hw.htm>

