

Seven Things Every Parent Can Do To Improve Their Child's Success In Math

by Dr. Linda Rodgers



If you were to single out the one subject that discourages children AND also sets the stage for their success for years to come, what curricular subject comes to your mind? So many of our children today are discouraged by that four-letter “m word” – *MATH!* According to PF Kanter (1994), The United States is the only advanced industrial nation where people are quick to admit that “I am not good at math.”

Life is all about attitude. Instilling a positive attitude in our children in all areas of their lives is critical to their developmental success. Having a good attitude means having more fun - so let's make math more fun and accessible to our children. Albert Schweitzer tells us that we should teach by example. Educational research also shows us that children learn best by imitation, games and by example. With these ideas in mind, here are seven things you can do to improve your child's success in math.

1. Music Lessons/Exposure to Music



Brain research is now telling us that early exposure and stimulation are the most critical factors in a child's future learning potential. Studies have shown a positive effect between early musical training and a child's brain development. It has been suggested that it can have a positive effect on a child's academic achievement, especially in the area of mathematics.

Good mental stimulation in the first few years of life can increase a child's IQ by up to 20 points (Beck, 1996). Research has found that the corpus callosum was significantly larger in musicians who trained from an early age than non-musicians (Shreeve, 1996).



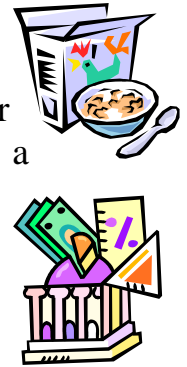
The positive effects of early musical training are also showing themselves in the College Entrance Examination Board test. Students who had music appreciation classes and music performance classes scored on an average of 56 points higher on the verbal portion and 43 points higher on the math portion than students with no musical experience (Mahlmann, 1996).



Music also fosters creativity, imagination, cooperation, flexible ways of thinking, discipline, better concentration and self-confidence; all of which are invaluable to college entrants, no matter what their intended course of study. Music should be thought of as an investment in a child's future and a required integral part of every child's education – not an extra curricular activity for the chosen few.

2. Recognizing Math Vocabulary in Everyday Events

Take time to point out math situations and especially math vocabulary in print in your everyday lives. Start with the breakfast cereal box and read the ounces and servings on the box. Open a bank account for your child and teach them how to make deposits, count money, balance a checkbook, sort and classify. While at the grocery store talk about what you see on package labels and point out the abbreviations for ounce, pint, quart, gallon and pound. There are endless teaching opportunities throughout the course of a day to reinforce math vocabulary and skills.



3. Form a Close Relationship With Your Child's Teacher(s)

Let teachers know you support them. Volunteer to help out on a weekly basis, if possible. If this is not feasible, then sign up to go on a fieldtrip with your child's class or ask the teacher if there is anything you can help out with at home – like cutting out art materials. Also, ask the teacher for activity suggestions for you and your child to do at home to help improve and reinforce your child's understanding of schoolwork. Parents and teachers should work together to benefit students.



4. See What's In Your Local Teachers Store

Teachers stores are not just for teachers. They are a great resource for parents, as well. They carry many supplemental materials/games for home to help reinforce what is being taught in the classroom. Look in your phonebook under "School Supplies" or check the Internet for local listings. Take your child with you. Both of you will have a wonderful time exploring fun activities that you can do together.



5. Cooking

Cooking is all about math - and what a great way to spend some quality time with your child. Make chocolate chip cookies together. Have your child help you with dinner, all while throwing in a pinch of math. Here are some examples:



Have your child help read the recipe – In step 7 of this article you will read about the importance of math vocabulary exposure. This is a perfect opportunity.

- Divide your recipe in half or double it, and have your child help you figure out the correct measurements and proportions.
- Talk about how many cups in a pint, how many pints in a quart, etc...
- Have them set the table. Use multiplication to figure out how many utensils will be on the table. Example: If each of the four people at the table have a knife, fork and spoon, how many utensils are on the table? ($4 \times 3 = 12$)
- If you put 7 dinner rolls on the table and each person has one, how many will be left over?

Math mastery is all about being able to apply it to everyday life. Cooking is one of the best opportunities to achieve that mastery.

6. Always Have a Positive Math Attitude

Never say things like, “Our family is just not good at math.” Children are like sponges and will also adopt that attitude. In her writing, *Math: Facing an American Phobia*, Marilyn Burns says, “Math is a phobia right up there with snakes, public speaking and heights.”



Massachusetts and Washington published a study about parents helping their children with their math homework. Here are some of the results:

Question: Do you personally find it easier, harder or about the same to help your children with math homework as with other subjects? (38% of parents in Massachusetts and 41% of Washington parents said they found it more difficult to help their children with math homework than with other subjects.)

Question: What kept you from helping in math? (The number one response was, “I was never very good in math.” 42% of Massachusetts parents and 32% of Washington parents chose this answer.) (Mass Insight Education and Research Institute, More Math Please, April 2004)

7. Vocabulary Flashcards /Exposure to Math Vocabulary in Print

Math tends to be a subject where we focus more on the numbers, as opposed to the written word. Computation and appropriate sequencing of steps is often emphasized, instead.



Second graders actually encounter such extremely difficult vocabulary words as *oblique line segment*, *commutative property*, *Venn Diagram* and *multiplication*. Most of us would be thrilled if our second graders knew what each of these concepts mean, much less be able to proficiently read such difficult vocabulary language at the young age of seven.

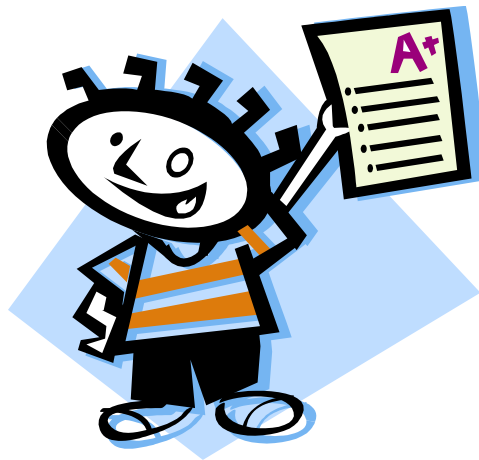
When a new math concept is introduced in the classroom, a superb teacher will write some of the new vocabulary on the board. Excellent – now the child has seen the word in print one time. Not nearly enough – children need to be exposed to words and skills multiple times – repetition, repetition, repetition! Five months later, on standardized testing day, your child is not going to remember that one time he/she saw *commutative property* on the chalkboard. Chances are extremely high, that they will miss many questions on the standardized test because they are not able to read such difficult vocabulary words. Oh yes, they have definitely mastered commutative property ($4 + 3 = 7$ or $3 + 4 = 7$). What a shame they may not be able to fully demonstrate what they know on the exam *because* of lack of exposure to such difficult vocabulary words and phrases.

Having difficult math vocabulary words and phrases exposed to them in print is **key** to their math and standardized testing success, including word problem mastery. Vocabulary cards may be used for other reading skills such as alphabetizing, clapping syllables, usage in a sentence and drawing a picture of the vocabulary word – anything for added exposure to the written math vocabulary words.

Today, great emphasis is being placed on our children's standardized test scores. The pressure is felt by the classroom teachers, students and parents. Application of math skills and exposure to difficult math vocabulary words and phrases is **key** to their math and standardized testing success.



Math affects all aspects of our daily lives. Try to make it more fun than just standing over your child's shoulder while he/she completes their math homework. Then, everyone is a winner.



The King Joe Series is the first-ever *comprehensive* educational storybook series connecting reading and math. It is designed to introduce, explain and reinforce an all inclusive list of nearly 800 math words and phrases from 13 popular textbooks and teaching tools used nationwide. The complete King Joe Series consists of 6 math storybook and flashcard units and is closely matched to the National Math Standards.

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