

Math with Your First Grader

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You are your child's first and most important teacher. You can help your child be successful by talking about math in your daily life, helping with homework, and choosing activities like games and puzzles that help children practice basic skills. When talking about math, make sure your child can tell that you think math is useful, important, accessible, and interesting.

Math in Family Life

By the end of first grade, children should be reading and writing numbers to 120; counting by 1, 2, 5, and 10; naming and describing 2-D and 3-D shapes; telling time to the half hour; and finding the value of collections of mixed coins. By the end of the year, they should also know addition facts to $5 + 5$ and subtraction facts to $10 - 10$ and have strategies for facts with larger numbers. The examples below might give you some ideas about how to practice these and other important skills with your first grader as you go about your daily life.

At Home

- Use the calendar to count up to or back from a special day, like a birthday or holiday. (*Your birthday is on the 17th of April. Today is the 23rd of March. How many days until your birthday?*)
- When counting large numbers of things, help your child group and count by 2's (2, 4, 6, ...), 5's (5, 10, 15 ...), or 10's (10, 20, 30...).
- Ask your child to read the clock, especially one with hands. (*We need to leave at 2. What time is it now?*)

At the Store

- Ask your child to help find the coins you need to pay.
- Ask your child to add with objects. (*I picked out 4 oranges and you picked out 7 oranges. How many do we have altogether?*)
- Ask your child to subtract with objects. (*We have 10 apples. I think that's too many. If we put 3 back, how many will we have left?* or *We have 9 apples. We need 14 altogether. How many more do we need?*)

On the Go

- Have your child watch for your bus or train. (*Tell me when you see the bus with a 63 on it.*)
- Count backwards with your child to count down, for example, to give passengers a time limit for putting on their seatbelts before starting the car. (*Five, 4, 3, 2, 1, seatbelts on! or Ten, 8, 6, 4, 2, 0, seatbelts on!*)
- Talk about the time it takes to get somewhere or the times on bus or train schedules. (*It's 3:05. The bus is supposed to come at 3:23. How many minutes will we have to wait?*)
- Ask your child to help make change for the bus, train, or subway. (*You need \$1.65 for the bus. You have \$1.25 so far. How much more money do you need? Which coins would make that much money?*)

Math Materials to Have at Home

Keep these items in your home and help your child use them.

- ruler
- measuring cups
- measuring tape
- measuring spoons
- blocks
- real money: coins and bills
- calendar
- clock with hands

Games That Use Math

Playing games together is a relaxed and effective way to improve students' basic skills. The following games are appropriate for first graders.

- Sorry!
- Chutes & Ladders
- UNO
- checkers
- Connect Four
- Battleship

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Helping with Homework

You show your child that math and school are important when you help with homework. You can also see what your child is learning and make sure that your child is mastering the skills you think are important. The following ideas can help make homework time enjoyable and productive for you and your child.

Attitude

- Approach homework with an open, can-do attitude. Try to show your child that you find math interesting, enjoyable, and do-able.
- Express confidence in your child's and your own ability to do math. Even if you found math frustrating when you were in school, try to avoid saying things like, "Math is so hard." Instead, you could say, "Sometimes I get stuck when I'm doing math, but if I take a break and try again, I might get a new idea."
- Keep interactions about math relaxed and enjoyable. Don't drill your child on facts over dinner.
- Praise persistence and creativity in problem solving, as well as finding the correct answer.

Solving Difficult Problems

- If your child is confused, take time to listen before offering help. You'll need to know what is confusing to your child before you can be helpful, and it is important for your child to learn how to identify and describe what is confusing and why.
- If you both get stumped on a problem, take a break and come back to it in a few minutes.
- If you and your child both get stuck, focus on writing a clear question or explanation of what is confusing. Have your child show it to the teacher to get more help. This helps your child take some responsibility for his or her own learning and develop a good relationship with the teacher.

Helpful Problem Solving Strategies

- Have your child solve a similar problem with smaller, easier numbers first.
- Have your child use objects like dried beans, pieces of pasta, or coins to solve a problem.
- Act out the problem or draw a picture of the problem with your child.
- After you have finished the problem, check the answer together by working the problem backwards. (For example, if you subtracted to find the answer, add to check it.)
- Talk about how you solve problems: your thinking processes and methods may be useful to your child.

If Your Child Struggles

Talk to your child's teacher if he or she struggles with homework. The teacher can suggest or provide games or worksheets for use at home. Set specific goals with the teacher so that you can keep track of progress and ensure that practice at home is focused and productive.

If Your Child Excels

Talk to your child's teacher to see if he or she can recommend games or activities that would challenge and engage your child. Young students who are talented at math often enjoy learning to play chess and other games that require them to strategize and think ahead.

For more information about helping your first grader with math, including suggestions about library books related to math and online practice games, go to www.mathlearningcenter.org/resources/materials/parents1.asp.