

Go Beyond Grades

Questions to Ask Your Child's Teacher About Math



FOR
K-8

Math skills are essential for life – including daily tasks, problem-solving, creativity, career options and more. Here are questions to ask your child's teacher as well as tips and resources to support math at home.

Is my child at grade level in math?

- > Report card grades are only part of the story. Ask about other measures such as 'benchmark' tests (MAP Growth, Mclass, I-ready, etc.) that together give you a full picture of grade-level progress. You want to hear how the school is finding out what your child knows and how they will build from there.
- > If your child isn't at grade level, ask: how are they being supported with skills from past grade levels (known as remediation) while also focusing on grade-level skills (known as [acceleration](#)).
- > Find out what they need to learn to get them on track for grade level. For example, just as phonological awareness is critical to learn to read, developing a strong '[number sense](#)' is critical for math.
- > Ask for grade-level math examples like classwork so that you know what it looks like.

Can you tell me how our school teaches math? Does our school use an evidence-based curriculum?

- > Once you know the name of the curriculum or instructional program your school uses, check [EdReports](#) to see reviews and whether it receives high marks.
- > If the program is rated highly, ask if it includes parent resources you can access at home. It's best to start with these before moving to outside sources. If you have questions about how they work, ask the school for help.
- > If the program is rated poorly, ask the principal or district leaders how the curriculum was chosen, how long ago, and if and when it might be updated. Learn more on how to advocate for high-quality curriculum [here](#).

What else should I be looking out for as my child does math homework and classwork?

- > "[Today's math](#)" might look different to parents but it's intended to set kids up for the real world. Look for how your child shows they really understand the math skills being taught and are able to use (apply) them.
- > Math anxiety can be real, but you can help your child build confidence to not only succeed in math but love it, too! For example, you can support your child's math learning by 1) Reminding them that making mistakes is how we learn 2) Working with your child and their teacher to set and track goals 3) Celebrating progress and success! Zearn offers [free resources](#) to help families create a positive mindset around math (including embracing positive struggle).

Try this free [Readiness Check](#) to get a gut check on how your child is progressing with key grade-level skills. Get activities and videos to support those skills at home. Khan Academy's [Get Ready courses](#) help prepare students for their next grade level. PBS Learning Media has [free videos](#) sorted by grade level and subject.

How to Support Math at Home

1 Support the building blocks of math

Early math skills will help fill your child's **toolbox** for more advanced math. For example, being able to identify how many items are in a group without needing to count each one. Practice with younger children by putting up fingers for 2-3 seconds and asking them how many they saw. Try passing a ball back and forth as you count by threes or fives. **Make it more interesting** by starting to count from a different number, like counting by threes from 133. Or, count backward starting from different numbers and walk backward at the same time!

2 Discover the fun...together!

Playful activities can help your child see the fun in math. Use dice to practice addition, subtraction, and multiplication (and get in some physical activity!). Roll the dice and call out whether your child should add, subtract, or multiply the two numbers, and then jump up and down that number of times.

3 Find math everywhere

Show your child how math surrounds them every day. **Discover the math** in cooking – compare measurements of ingredients; halve or double a recipe; and identify numbers by setting timers and temperatures. Explore the **practical ways** math will help kids in the future by creating weekly budgets; use shapes and measurement to design structures as an architect would; or play store and determine the sum of items at checkout as well as percentage discounts.

4 Get a head start on algebra

The **building blocks of algebra** include basic things like recognizing patterns and exploring relationships between two or more things. Practice patterns using blocks and beads, or clap and stomp out patterns. Engage kids in solving **real-world problems** like figuring out how much food to make for a party based on the number of guests, figuring out how many chocolate chips are needed if X number of cookies each has 6 chocolate chips, or how many books you can buy if they each cost X and you have Y dollars. Developing a “math mindset” early on with activities like these will prime children's minds for algebra and more challenging math skills as they grow.

5 Make math relatable

Math is everywhere – including interests and hobbies! Weave math into conversations about **sports** by comparing game scores or calculating batting averages. Boost counting and pattern recognition skills by writing a song or even choreographing a short **dance** together. Talking and thinking about math in ways kids can relate to will get them excited about all of the ways they can use math.

Go Beyond Grades

Questions to Ask Your Child's Teacher About Reading



FOR
K-8

Being a strong reader is key to success in school and beyond. Here are questions to ask your child's teacher as well as tips and resources to support reading at home.

Is my child reading at grade level?

- > Beyond your child's classroom grades, it's important to ask if they are reading at grade level (meeting learning expectations for the year for text difficulty).
- > If they aren't, find out why. Ask how they are doing with [foundational skills](#), including phonological awareness (oral sounds), phonics (how letters make sounds), and fluency (reading accurately, smoothly, and with expression). Ask about their vocabulary and overall comprehension. With this information you can find the right support.

Does my child need support with foundational skills?

- > If your child is having trouble, find out which specific skills they need more help with, including asking about phonics or sound-spelling patterns (e.g., short vowels). Let tutors or after school program leaders know so they can provide additional practice. There are [online video resources](#) and [games](#) to help with these skills too.
- > Help your child to use what they know about [letters and sounds](#) when reading. They can tackle new words by breaking them down into smaller parts (this is called 'chunking words' or 'sounding them out'). Especially in the early grades, if you cannot get a list of sound-spelling patterns your child was taught or your child is being encouraged to guess or identify words by using pictures or what's happening in the book, this is a flag about the quality of reading instruction.

How can I help my child with vocabulary and comprehension?

- > Words become meaningful when kids can [practice vocabulary](#) through reading, writing, and talking about new topics and issues they care about (not just memorizing word lists).
- > Building background knowledge and vocabulary supports comprehension and makes stronger readers. Your child should be learning about specific topics in each grade (example 3rd grade topics include: insects; weather; historical figures; habitats; folktales from around the world). Ask your child's teacher which topics have been covered so that you can help your child build on that knowledge. It's also important for children to [read, write about, and discuss](#) what they are learning and understanding from informational text (social studies, science, art, music, etc.).

What do I need to know about choosing books?

- > The most crucial thing is that your child is reading a wide range of things over time and gets access to grade-level books. Some widely used reading programs use a "reading level" (usually a number or letter) to match students to books. Make sure your child isn't limited to reading books at any particular level – especially if they are books below grade level. [Research shows](#) that once your child is past the "learning to read" stage (2nd grade), they benefit from choosing their books and stretching their ability with more challenging texts. This builds reading skill as well as confidence and motivation.
- > Early readers should also practice the sound-spelling patterns they are learning in [decodable texts](#) (texts that contain lots of words with the sound-spelling patterns they were taught). Ask if you can get access to decodable texts that match what your child is working on this year.

Can you tell me how our school teaches reading? Does our school use an evidence-based curriculum?

- > For K-3 or older readers who need support with decoding, you want to find out if your school is using a foundational skills reading program that is "systematic and explicit." For example, if the school says phonics is weaved in throughout but it's not a main focus, that's a sign to get more information.
- > All students should also be learning about topics through reading grade-level texts (or through books read aloud in the early grades), and building literacy skills by writing about and discussing what they are learning.
- > Unfortunately, many schools are still using curriculum or approaches that aren't backed by the science of how kids learn to read. If you want to learn more, check out this helpful advocacy guide: [Is my child's school getting reading right: What to ask, What to look for](#) and this helpful article: [What to do if your child's school isn't teaching reading right](#).

How You Can Support Your Child in Everyday Ways

1 Read, Read, Read...and Write Too!

Your child should read for at least 20 minutes every day. You can read to them, have them read to you, talk about what they are reading on their own, have siblings read to each other, and read in native home languages. Encourage them to write daily too! For example: writing about what they read but also journaling, lyrics, short stories, grocery lists, and notes. In K-2nd grade, they can use “inventive spelling”-- using what they know about letters and sounds to spell out words, even if it’s not the correct spelling.

2 Play, Sing, Talk!

Have fun building language with your child. For early readers, play sound and word games like listening for the first/middle/last sound of words, clapping out syllables, or playing rhyming games. For example: ask your child to think of words that rhyme with cat to make up a silly sentence: “The cat sat on my hat instead of the mat!” For older students, you might try word challenges like brainstorming words that have similar or opposite meanings, identifying words with multiple meanings, or coming up with as many words as you can that contain common word parts (e.g., un-, re-, pre- at the beginning of a word or -ful, -ly, or -less at the end).

3 Support the Building Blocks of Reading.

To help with reading the words on the page, use chunking it out (no guessing based on pictures or just the first letter). Breaking down words into smaller chunks of natural sound patterns is a good strategy. For example: reading “family” can be chunked as fam- i- ly. At any age, work on smooth, fluent reading by selecting a poem, song lyrics, newspaper article, or short story to reread several times before performing for your family or neighbors.

4 Boost Vocabulary.

Encourage your child to use new words learned from reading and conversation as part of your everyday life. Words take on their meaning in stories, nonfiction books, and in full sentences as we talk about our lives and the world around us.

5 Follow Interests to Grow Knowledge.

Explore topics that interest your child and learn about them through reading, talking, and doing. Visit museums, cultural centers, and libraries. Listen to podcasts or watch informative videos online. Pick a new activity to try or a neighborhood location to explore. This will help them feel the joy of reading by learning about issues, events, and hobbies that matter to them and help them find their passions and purpose.