ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

October 2026

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Prince William County Schools

Use frequent and fun activities to help your child master math

Math is a subject that builds on what students already know. To solve today's problems, your child must be able to remember and apply previously-learned concepts.

Research shows that one effective technique for long-term learning is *distributed practice*. This means that instead of practicing math for one hour once a week, your child should practice the same material in shorter chunks of time every day.

There are many fun ways to help your elementary schooler practice math. Here are three to try together:

1. **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.
2. **Play games with dice or cards.** Take turns rolling two dice or flipping over two cards and quickly adding up the sum of the two numbers. Later, include subtraction, multiplication and division in the challenge.
3. **Combine coins.** Put an array of coins on a table. Keep a few in your hand that your child can't see. Then, say something like, "I have three coins in my hand. Together, they are worth 60 cents. What are they?" Your child can use the table coins to solve the problem. Then, trade places.

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

Questions are welcome at conferences

A parent-teacher conference provides valuable one-on-one time with the teacher to learn about your child's academic progress, behavior and well-being. You can also find out more about what to expect in the year ahead.

Preparing specific questions in advance will help you make the most of your time with the teacher. Ask questions like:

- **Are my child's reading** and math skills at the level you would expect for this time in this grade?
- **Is my child in different** groups for different subjects?
- **What topics will you cover** in class this year?
- **What are your expectations** for work and reading at home?
- **What are my child's** strengths and areas for improvement?
- **How well does my child** get along with other students?
- **Does my child qualify** for any special programs?
- **How can I support** my child's learning at home?

Dive deeper into reading

Strong readers can understand the meaning, context and details in a text. To develop reading comprehension skills, encourage your child to:

- **Summarize the** chain of events in a story out loud. Why did things turn out that way?
- **Discuss ways** the text relates to things your child has learned or experienced.
- **Take a character's** place. Would your child make the same choices?
- **Consider what point** the author was trying to get across.

Source: "Reading Comprehension and Higher Order Thinking Skills," K-12 Reader.

Learning thrives on respect

Respectful behavior helps create the positive school environment students need to learn. To teach your child what it involves:

- **Discuss respect.** How does it feel to be treated with respect or disrespect?
- **Demonstrate.** Treat your child and others with respect.
- **Notice and praise** respectful behavior.

Reinforce responsibilities

Learning in school is your child's job, and it comes with responsibilities. Remind your child that fulfilling them means:

- **Being prepared** for class with pencils, paper and a positive attitude.
- **Participating** in class discussions.
- **Organizing,** so your child can find schoolwork and supplies when needed.
- **Persisting** when work is challenging.

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Q&A Gaming is taking over my child's life. What can I do?

Q: My child loves to play games online, and often rushes through schoolwork in order to play them. I'm worried about the effects on my child's schoolwork and mental well-being. What should I do?

A: Some games—such as those on educational topics or that promote exercise—can be beneficial. However you are right that too much time on the wrong activities can negatively affect health and learning. Game designers know how to create games that keep players hooked. And some games include "gambling" and reward elements that increase the risk that players will become online gamblers.

To keep gaming from interfering with schoolwork, healthy activities and time with friends and family:

- **Set boundaries.** Review game content. Allow only educational games, and only in your presence. Then, establish screen-free times of day, such as schoolwork time, reading time, mealtime, family time and bedtime.
- **Emphasize** that learning matters more than leveling up in a game.
- **Offer enjoyable screen-free alternatives.** Plan fun activities such as reading aloud, playing outdoors and playing board games.

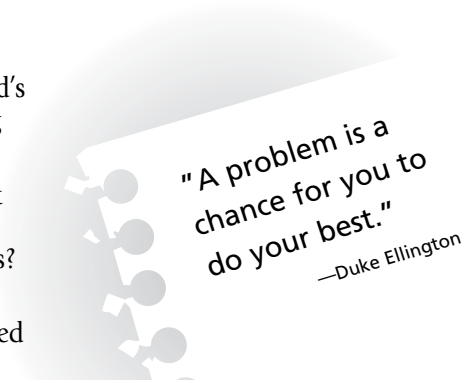
Parent Quiz: Are you teaching problem-solving skills?

All children face obstacles. To overcome them, they must identify and act on solutions. Are you helping your child learn to think through problems and decide what to do? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you provide** your child with lots of opportunities to practice making decisions?
2. **Do you ask** your child to think through problems with you? Do you ask questions rather than jumping in with solutions?
3. **Do you talk** about your child's strengths and suggest applying them to challenges?
4. **Do you tell** your child about strategies you use to find solutions when you have problems?
5. **Do you remind** your child about times your child managed problems well in the past?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are helping your child tackle problems head-on. For each* no, *try that idea.*



Teach the value of honesty

Honesty is a fundamental value in school as well as life. However, around third grade, when grades and tests take on more importance, cheating sometimes follows. Stress the importance of honesty with your child. Make it clear that:

- **Working hard** at learning and being honest are more important than getting a high grade.
- **Cheating is never OK,** even to help a friend. Together, role-play ways to say *no*.
- **A grade or test score** will never change your love for your child.

Encourage recall practice

Research shows that recalling information is a learning activity that helps students retain material better. To help your child put this study strategy to use:

- **Suggest inviting** a friend over to study. The children can quiz one another. Or, you can call out questions.
- **Create practice tests.** Help your child look over notes, reading and handouts and create questions the teacher might ask. Then your child can answer them.

Source: P.K. Agarwal and others, "Retrieval Practice Consistently Benefits Student Learning," *Educational Psychology Review.*

Chores teach skills & more

Assigning chores may sound old-fashioned. But children who do a few age-appropriate chores at home learn lessons they can apply in school. Chores can help children:

- **Invest** in making their surroundings or family life better.
- **Learn** life skills.
- **Develop** self-discipline.
- **Learn** to take pride in their work.
- **Practice** working with others.

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