How parents can help in the teaching of Mathematics at home

School is not the only place where children learn mathematics concepts and skills. Mathematics can be fun and young children enjoy solving problems. They begin solving mathematical situations long before they start school. They use real objects that can be manipulated to develop understanding of numbers as they learn to add, subtract, multiply and divide.

Family members play an important role in their children’s attitude towards mathematics. While parents usually read a story to their children, they usually do not give importance to instill a love and appreciation for Mathematics. Like all other subjects, mathematics is important to a child success- both at school and in everyday life.

“Just as with reading, the math knowledge children bring to school at an early age, is linked with their performance in later grades.” (U.S. Secretary of Education - Margaret Spellings)

Parents’ attitudes towards mathematics have an impact on their children’s attitudes. Children whose parents show an interest in and enthusiasm in Mathematics around the home will be more likely to develop their enthusiasm themselves. There are many methods that parents can utilize to become involved in their children’s mathematics education. There are several resources which can provide parents with games and activities in order to engage children in mathematical thinking and problem solving and to build their self confidence and appreciation for mathematics. The book Helping Your Child at Home (U.S. Secretary of Education) contains several activities which parents can carry out at home with their children. These activities are based on the kinds of Mathematics that children experience at home, at the grocery and while travelling. This book is available online www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/parents/math.pdf

As with reading, it is important that children see mathematics as fun as possible. It is also important to show how we use mathematical skills in everyday life and to involve children in this. Helping our children feel comfortable with math concepts will enable them to be more successful and confident in school. In our technological society, it is important that children have strong mathematical skills.

Knowing how to do mathematics makes our life easier. It enables us to manage time and money, solve problems, and explain how to solve a problem and the decision taken. Children learn best by exploring and experimenting. Parents can include their children in
everyday activities that involve math—making purchases, measuring ingredients, counting out plates and cutlery for dinner. Playing games and doing puzzles with children help them focusing on directions or time, sorting and reasoning. Counting toys and kitchen utensils are useful tips in teaching mathematics. Parents can help children counting by moving objects as saying each number loud. Household items can be used to practice addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Learning how to solve a problem is very important in Mathematics. They learn that there is more than one method to solve a problem. In doing so, they also learn to express themselves clearly as they explain their solutions.

Reading stories to children like The Three Little Pigs and singing songs with children such as Ten Little Indians help children in the learning to count, thus making it fun for children. According to Silverman, Strawser, Strohauer and Monzano (2001): “Children’s literature offers a context for teaching and learning mathematics, especially in the elementary grades”. These authors provided a number of strategies to support children’s learning of Mathematics. Whether the purpose of such activities is to encourage academic achievement or language development, the combination of literature and mathematics is not only enjoyed by children, but is an effective way to support children’s learning development.

Teaching numbers to children can be thought in a fun way too. Together with children, parents can spot numbers at home, on clocks, on the microwave, on the T.V remote control and spotting numbers on books, articles and newspapers. Playing games using dice such as Snakes and Ladders is fun for children too.

Parents can help children point out the different shapes to be found around home. Children can accompany parents shopping and talk about the quantities of anything bought. Parents can handle money to children and work out how much things cost. On the way home, parents and children can look together for numbers on street signs and car number plates.

Another important math skill for students is related to the use of charts and graphs. Parents can easily create activities which allow their children to participate in collecting information, comparing data and analyzing what is shown on the chart or graph. One idea would be making a chart that might depict the amount of fruit and vegetables eaten by the family in one month.

To understand measurement, children can measure items found in the home. They can find objects which are shorter or longer than a shoe or a string or a ruler. To understand
capacity children can fill different containers in a bath to check which containers hold more or hold less. Take cereal boxes or cans and allow the child to check which is the tallest and which is the smallest.

Mathematics is a great subject area that parents can reinforce by combining practice with everyday occurrences that may happen in a family’s life. Whenever parents help their children understand why mathematics is important and how they will use it as adults, a positive attitude towards learning will occur.

Parents can help their children build their self confidence through praising their efforts and reassuring them when they make mistakes. As parents we should avoid stereotypes about mathematics abilities or the difficulty of mathematics. Math can be challenging. But, like a puzzle, mathematics is fun when you discover solutions.

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