Parents’ help at home

Most parents still think that Mathematics is not relevant to everyday life. Here are some tips for parents to help their child to enjoy Maths:

Suggested activities:

- Pointing out the different shapes to be found around your home;
- Taking your child shopping and talking about the quantities of things you buy;
- Looking for numbers around you on street signs, car registration plates, newspapers, books, etc;
- Sorting things out and putting things away e.g. shopping, toys, cutlery, clothes;
- Matching pairs of socks, shoes, gloves, etc;
- Ordering and sequencing when doing an everyday activity like getting dressed, going to the shops, having a bath etc.
- Comparing objects according to size, weight or capacity;
- Matching and counting when setting the table, preparing food, sharing out food, etc;
- Counting, weighing, measuring capacity and timing when cooking;
- Talking about time, referring to the clock at different times throughout the day and setting times for certain events;
- Handling small amounts of money when shopping and counting small totals;
- Talking about directions when walking around or playing with toys;
- Making models with boxes, Lego etc and talk about shape and position, counting the number of similar shapes etc;
- Playing games involving matching, recognising numbers and shapes or counting such as dice games, dominoes, etc;
- Counting particular things on journeys, e.g. white cars, motorcycles, etc;
- Reading stories with the children and recounting the story by talking about the order of events, position and shape of things in the pictures, etc;
- Playing specialised computer games designed for using and developing Maths;
- Stimulating their thinking with mental activities such as ‘What’s 35 + 20’? or ‘The answer’s 10, what’s the question?’ and asking the method used to work the sum;
- Pinpointing the letters in your child’s name which are symmetrical;
- Keeping track of how your child spends time in a 24-hour period;
- Point out their own activities that involve Mathematics, such as, having a budget, compiling a shopping list, etc;
- Browsing through sites specifically designed for parents to help their children learn Maths.

Nevertheless, many parents find it confusing when they are asked to help their kids with their homework because they are not familiar with the new methods of learning this subject. This is because many years ago, the focus was on memorising the facts and methods for solving Mathematical problems. Today, pupils are still learning the same Mathematical skills but they learn them with understanding.
“No matter how well your child can do calculations, this ability is not very useful if he or she doesn’t understand them or know how or when to use particular math skills.”

In fact, parents find it weird that their child may be bringing home problems related to real life situations, such as making comparisons or mental activities. Parents are more used to worksheets filled with problems to simply recall the facts learnt at school. Parents have to keep in mind that:

“The goal of mathematics education today is to develop a lifelong understanding that is useful both at home and in the workplace. Whatever your child chooses to do in life, having a strong understanding of mathematics will open doors to a productive future.”

Thus, in order to support their kids in doing their homework, parents can:

- Change their negative attitude about Mathematics;
- Try to make Maths as much fun as possible;
- Try to keep calm;
- Praise their child’s efforts in trying to solve the problem;
- Help their child realise that mathematics is a significant part of everyday life;
- Think of themselves as more of a guide rather than their child’s teacher;
- Relate mathematics learning to other activities that require hard work and persistence, such as playing a sport;
- Facilitate their child’s homework by asking questions and listening to their child’s explanation;
- Encourage their child to show all the calculations or a description of the thinking process on paper;
- Never do their child’s homework as they are encouraging him/her to easily give up;
- Identify the problem and try to work out the solution together;
- If the child is definitely bored, change the subject by telling a joke or go out;
- Check for the new methods the children are learning mathematical concepts such as multiplying, adding etc.

All of the above can provide the foundation for mathematical understanding and development and so children can ultimately realise that Mathematics is fun!

References:
- Mary Ruddle – Maths help for key stage 2 – www.mad4maths.com/math_help
- How to help with primary reading, maths, homework – www.bbc.co.uk
- Archived: Helping Your Child Learn Math: Activities-Math in the Home