

GENERAL HOMEWORK TIPS

Getting Organized

1. Provide a study place. If possible, have the following materials readily available: graph paper and notebook paper, ruler with both metric and standard units calculator, (graphing calculator is preferred), dictionary
2. Many children need assistance in organizing and maintaining a notebook. Help them develop a system for organizing and maintaining notebook and notes. In CMP student texts there are few worked examples for students (or parent/guardians) to use as templates for solving similar problems. Student notebooks are an invaluable record of successful strategies and reflective summaries. Your child's teacher may have specific tips on keeping and organizing a notebook. This is a crucial part of your child's mathematical education, and an important aid to parents and guardians as well.
3. Help your children develop a system for writing down assignments, as well as keeping track of progress. Some schools provide student planners or assignment sheets, but that does not mean children use them consistently. Check to make sure that they are being used consistently and appropriately.
4. Help your children develop a system for taking meaningful notes. Frequently, note taking is taught during class, so it may just be a matter of seeing if your children are taking and using notes.
5. Encourage your children to identify study buddies or another math student they can call to work with on assignments, get clarification, find out about makeup work, etc. Some parents have established study teams and times, so that students have planned opportunities to study together after school. Check with your school to see if they have extra help available.
6. Encourage and expect children to get work done on time, to stay caught up, to get help in a timely manner, and to correct errors in work. You may want to help children go over incorrect or incomplete work and talk about how the work could be improved.
7. It is generally expected that middle school students know the basic addition, subtraction, multiplication and division facts as well as whole number computation. If your children are not proficient with these skills, help them master the needed skills.

Suggestions for Homework Help

In helping children learn, one goal is to assist children in figuring out as much as they can for themselves (e.g., constructing meaning). You can help by asking questions that guide, without telling what to do.

Good questions and good listening will help children make sense of mathematics, build self-confidence, and encourage mathematical thinking and communication. A good question opens up a problem and supports different ways of thinking about it. Here are some questions you might try; notice that none of them can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." By using these questions, and by referring to the notebook that students create and use in class, you will be building on in-class experiences and contributing to your child's success.

Solving a Problem

- Getting Started
 - What do you need to find out?
 - What do you need to know?
 - How can you get the information?
 - Where can you begin?
 - What terms do you understand or not understand?
 - Have you solved similar problems that would help? Let's look at your notebook.
- While Working
 - How can you organize the information?
 - Can you make a drawing (model) to explain your thinking?
 - Are there other possibilities?
 - What would happen if...?
 - Can you describe an approach (strategy) you can use to solve this?
 - What do you need to do next?
 - Do you see any patterns or relationships that will help solve this?

- How does this relate to...?
- Can you make a prediction?
- What did you...?
- What assumptions are you making?
- Reflecting about the solution
 - How do you know your solution (conclusion) is reasonable?
 - How did you arrive at your answer?
 - How can you convince me your answer makes sense?
 - What did you try that did not work?
 - Has the question been answered?
 - Can the explanation be made clearer?
- Responding (helping your children clarify and extend their thinking)
 - Can you explain it in a different way?
 - Is there another possibility or strategy that would work?
 - Help me understand this part...
 - How does the math in this problem relate to the mathematics in this unit? in previous units?
 - Is there anything you want to add to your notebook?
 - Are there any questions you want to ask your teacher?

Doing More Math at Home

Two important goals for all students are that 1) they learn to value mathematics and 2) they become confident in their ability to do mathematics. Parents can help children develop a "can do" disposition toward math, by nurturing their children's natural curiosity and providing support and encouragement. The following ideas were taken from the Administrative Notebook for Middle School Mathematics, Plano Independent School District, Plano, Texas.

1. Math is everywhere, yet many children don't see it. Look for ways to point out and reinforce math skills at home. For example:
 - talk about how you use math at work or in the home
 - involve children in tasks that require computing, measuring, estimating, building, following directions, problem solving and reasoning
 - look for activities that require children to use their math skills such as building scale models, cooking, planning trips, and playing logic games
2. Look for games and activities that teach and/or reinforce math and thinking. For example, look for games that:
 - require and develop skill with mental computation and estimation
 - require players to use their math skills
 - involve the development of strategies
 - require players to think about the probability of certain events occurring
 - require the use of spatial visualization skills
 - require logical thinking
3. When you see articles that have data that might interest your children (e.g., sports statistics, data on teenage smoking, facts about natural disasters), share them and talk about what the numbers mean.
4. Share your problem-solving strategies and techniques, mental computation strategies, and estimation strategies. Have your children teach you some. Work on the same problem, then compare strategies as well as answers.
5. Invite your children to explain what was learned in math class or have them teach it to you. It provides and opportunity for children to help clarify their thinking, to practice new skills, and to practice communicating mathematically.
6. If your children have access to a computer, look for software that reinforces and teaches math concepts. Help your children learn to use math utilities such as spreadsheets and graphing programs.