

## HOW TO HELP YOUR KIDS LOVE MATH - EVEN IF YOU DON'T

A few simple tricks can brighten the path for even the most reluctant traveler

by Melanie Bowden

Math is everywhere. It's a part of life. Unfortunately, knowing this doesn't seem to make us any more comfortable with all those numbers and symbols. But math can be fun--really! As a math educator for more than ten years, I've picked up a trick or two you can use to convince your kids. Just watch out. You might learn to like math yourself.

### PRESCHOOL ACTIVITIES

#### Math Walks

Go on a color walk and see how many items you can spot of a particular color. Afterward, ask your child to name the biggest, smallest, and roundest things of that color you saw.

#### Sorting

Sorting and grouping encourage critical thinking skills. When you are doing the laundry, have your child help you sort by color or by clothing item. You can also ask your child how he would sort his toys, his artwork, or the food on a shelf by color, shape, type, or other factors.

### ELEMENTARY GRADE ACTIVITIES

#### Partner Numbers

In the early grades, students begin practicing addition. To help with this skill, teach your child about "partner numbers", a term coined by Lucy Scribner, author of *The Complete Guide to Starting and Operating a Home Tutoring Business*. Partner numbers are pairs of numbers that add to 10. There are five pairs: one plus nine, two plus eight, three plus seven, four plus six and five plus five. Practice the combinations with your child: "I say nine, you say...?" With practice, your child will answer, "One."

You can also use partner numbers for subtraction drills. Whenever you have 10 and subtract a number, the answer is the partner number. Ten minus six is four; six and four are partner numbers.

When you're practicing addition or subtraction flash cards with your child, just call out "Partner Numbers!" whenever one of these situations occurs.

#### Moved to Memorize

Rote memorization can be boring. To liven things up, add movement. A lot of my students can't seem to remember that four times eight equals 32, so I have them jump up and down or run around a table while chanting, "Four times eight is 32," until it's stuck in their brains. Kids can skip, hop, or dance while they chant if that's what works for them.

### The 9's Hand Trick

Here's a trick to use when you multiply by nine. Hold your hands in front of you, palms facing you. Now imagine that your fingers are numbered one to 10 going from left to right (your left thumb would be number one, your left index finger would be number two and so on across both hands.) When multiplying a number by nine, bend down the finger of that number. The answer is the number of fingers to the left of the finger you bent down, next to the number of fingers to the right.

To multiply six times nine, bend your number six finger, the pinkie of your right hand. There are five fingers to the left (all the fingers of your left hand), and four fingers to the right. The two numbers side-by-side are five-four or 54. Nine times six is 54!

### Vampire Division

When students start learning long division, here's a way to help them remember the order of the four steps of Divide, Multiply, Subtract, then Bring down. When you take the first letter of each step you have DMSB, which are also the first letters in the saying, "Dracula's Mother Sucks Blood." Gross, but they'll remember it!

### ALL AGES

#### M&M Math Fun

It's well worth buying a few bags of M&M's to sharpen math skills.

- Preschoolers can sort the candies by color and count how many there are of each color.
- First through third graders can practice estimating before you even open the bag. Ask them, "How many green ones do you think there will be? Which color do you think there will be the most of? How many M&M's total?" Then rip the bag open and find out.
- Fourth through sixth graders can figure out what fraction each color makes up of the total bag. Or, if they are learning percentages, have them find what percent of the bag are brown, for example. The outside of the bag also has tons of math information--percent of daily value of calcium, number of calories, grams of sugar. Let your child think up their own M&M math questions from this information and then find the answers together.

## EVERYDAY MATH OPPORTUNITIES

Cooking, shopping, gardening, playing music, planning a trip--all of these involve math skills. Start including a little math in the day-to-day activities you share with your child. Don't announce, "Time to do math!" We don't want to scare them. Just jump right in while your child assists you.

When you are measuring cooking ingredients, explain what one-half a cup means. Show your child how to use a map to find a town your family will be traveling to. Let your kids count your change from a purchase. These experiences and others will instill confidence in your child that they can work with numbers and be a math success.

"There are lots of natural places to incorporate math," says Grace Coates, Director of Family Math at UC Berkeley. "Have your child count the number of yellow street signs on the way to preschool. Play games like Monopoly and Dominoes. When you grocery shop, ask your child how many tomatoes they think will make a pound. It can be challenging, but fun, and everyone is capable of helping their children with their math skills."

## SIDEBAR

### Family Math Resources

- 1) Check the Web sites: [www.figurethis.org](http://www.figurethis.org) and [www.mathsurf.com/parent/](http://www.mathsurf.com/parent/)
- 2) For more information on the UC Berkeley Family Math program, a six to eight week course where children and parents learn math together, call Helen Raymond at (510) 643-6525, or visit the Web site: <http://www.lhs.berkeley.edu/equal/FMnetwork.htm>
- 3) *The M&M's Counting Book* by Barbara Barbieri McGrath (Charlesbridge Publishing, 1994)

Melanie Bowden is a freelance writer, former math teacher, and mother of two. Visit her blog for new moms: [motherhood.booklocker.com](http://motherhood.booklocker.com).