

How Parents and Teachers Can Work Together to Improve Math Skills

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By the end of the school year, many educators and parents debated the potential learning loss resulting from pandemic with no knowledge of how the coronavirus would affect school openings in the fall. While it's still too early to tell the whole impact the pandemic has wrought upon the nation's school children, some preliminary [data](#) shows that students have slowed students' overall gains in math.

Thinking about it, the study makes sense; for many students, even those who have ample resources available to them, learning math is difficult. All children learn differently, and some struggle even with the help of parents, teachers, and extra support they may be offered in a physical classroom.

And now, as the first semester has just come to a close, and the grades of online students show a big dip compared to those in years past, many educators and parents are asking yet again how to improve math skills when many classes are still online.

While there is no one easy answer, there is at least one recourse we can all take: to work together.

When kids are at home, but the teacher is at school, the only answer is for both schools and families to join forces to help children recoup some of what they've lost and to continue growing as they move forward. Join us as we take a deep dive into what it is that is holding some families back, and what teachers and parents can do to improve learning outcomes for the youngest children.

Keeping Math Skills Sharp During Online Learning

Trying to determine the exact impact that the pandemic has had on learning is a lot like trying to piece together a puzzle. For one thing, studies have limited information to pull, with many of the most underserved students not accounted for due to the lack of technology. If there's anything we know for sure it's that students are not getting the exact same school experience that they are used to, and they along with their families and teachers have had to adapt.

What makes things even more difficult when it comes to math is that the way kids learn it is vastly different than what parents experienced back when they were in school. Today, it's common to find many families voicing their frustrations over social media as math instruction has become more about number sense and the conceptual understanding behind the operations rather than memorization of facts. While children still memorize math facts, practice activities are less like the drills of the past and include more complex thought processes using manipulatives and word problems.

So, what are families to do when caregivers are not in sync with the latest in math pedagogy? Luckily communication can go a long way when it comes to managing online classes. Take a look at the tips below, first for teachers, and then for parents as we discover how to navigate the rest of this school year together.

Conquering the Digital Divide: Tips for Teachers

By now, it's probably obvious that many parents don't know the latest methods or best strategies to improve math problem solving skills. After all, best practices have come a long way in just the past couple decades. All considered, keep the following in mind as you interact with parents:

- Communication is key

As a teacher, you already undoubtedly know the importance of keeping regular contact with parents. But when it comes to online classes, clear communication couldn't be more important! While it might seem that instructions and guidelines are clearly given

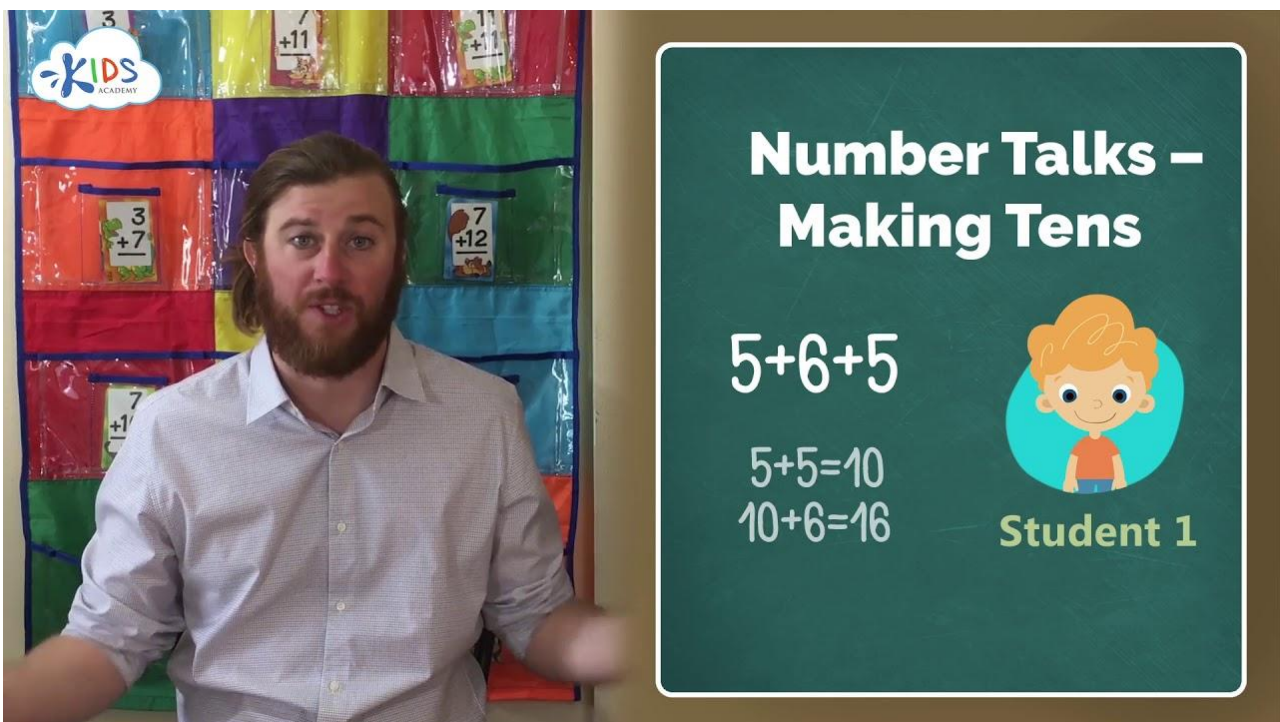
through your learning management system (LMS) or class meetings, it's still critical to encourage parents to contact you to communicate any questions or concerns.

Try holding "office hours" for parents to make yourself available or establish a "parent parking lot" discussion thread in your LMS. Ordinarily teachers contact parents only in the case of a grade concern, but with parents doing a lot of the heavy lifting when it comes to student support, regular communication is a must.

- Utilize positive prompting

One of the key takeaways for families that modern math lessons strive to achieve is the fact that it is driven by a more conceptual understanding of the subject versus the old-school method of memorization and drilling. As such, math problems today are often word problems, and they attempt to relate to the real world as much as possible.

Encourage parents to talk about everyday math with their children, and when the parents themselves don't understand, prompt parents to ask their kids to explain the concept to them. Even if the parent does not know the concept behind the math being taught, the simple task of asking a child to repeat their learning actually cements their knowledge, helping kids to internalize what they have already learned.



The image shows a man with a beard and long hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, standing in front of a colorful grid of math problems. To his right is a green graphic titled "Number Talks - Making Tens" showing the equation $5+6+5$ and its decomposition into $5+5=10$ and $10+6=16$, along with a cartoon boy labeled "Student 1".

Watch on [YouTube](#)

- Think outside the box

Without learning centers and the manipulatives a classroom can provide, it might seem that the only type of classwork left for virtual learners is something like [kindergarten math worksheets](#) filled with word problems. To keep lessons varied and engaging, think

creatively to offer meaningful hands-on activities that children and parents can complete at home. For example, activities for preschoolers might include tasking kids with finding several objects they can use as counters from around the house and to sing a counting song as they use their items.

- Be proactive, not reactive; anticipate potential barriers to success

Many times, we get so wrapped up in our classes and busy schedules that we forget to think about how our audience—the students and their parents—might understand or perceive the lessons, and what potential pitfalls they may experience. When planning lessons, ask yourself if the skill or concept is something in which the parents are unfamiliar. Is this strategy one that was used in the past, or is it vastly different from the methods that were used when the students' parents were young?

Be proactive in planning for any potential pitfalls and provide additional resources that students and their families can use to boost their understanding.

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Making Online Math Lessons Meaningful: A Parent's Guide

If you're a parent of an elementary student, you know that online learning certainly hasn't been easy. Our littlest learners simply aren't independent in their work and must need the support of an adult to be successful. This combined with other worries, such as taking care of work obligations or caretaking for other family members, have parents seriously struggling this school year. If this sounds familiar, see the following:

- Don't worry if kids are struggling

Of course, that's much easier said than done! But something that parents should repeat to themselves during this strange school year is that absolutely nothing is normal about this school year. But take heart: know that students struggling in school, particularly with math, is nothing new.

Even under the most normal of circumstances, many children find math challenging. That said, do know that it is okay to allow students to struggle a little bit, as most

learning takes place by correcting mistakes and building resiliency and stamina. Kids will get frustrated, but they will also learn how to better handle their frustration and cope. Embrace the struggle and communicate with them that it's totally normal and they can overcome it to succeed with hard work and persistence.

- Technology is just one tool of many

Did you know that there are everyday materials and objects that can be transformed into math manipulatives likely all around your own home? It's true! While it might seem that online schooling is only about completing [worksheets for kids](#) and quizzes online, there are objects all around you that can be gainfully employed in your child's home classroom. Look around your house for some common items that students can use as counters, such as paperclips, pom poms, or pipe cleaners. Be creative and find objects that will get kids excited to learn math improve their calculation skills, even in while learning online.

- Math isn't what it used to be: feel free to ask questions

If you're like many parents, you might find yourself feeling silly for not knowing how to complete a seemingly simple word problem from your second grader's math homework. Don't worry, you're not alone! Math instruction has changed drastically over the years and looks much different than it did when you were growing up. Don't feel afraid to reach out to your child's teacher to ask about a specific concept, even if it feels as if you should already know and understand it.

As we embark on yet another semester of online learning, know that parents and teachers should find ways to come together and work as a team to support their students. By opening the lines of communication and perhaps with a little creative thinking, families and schools can build a support system that truly bolsters math skills to remediate for the learning lost since the spring, and to also move forward to prepare for the years to come.

