

How to build your child's reading, writing and maths skills at home

Parents play a key role in building the reading, writing and maths skills of their children. It's not enough just to send your child to school – there is a lot you can do as a family to build these skills at home.

The following tips cover what you can do for children in Grades R to 6.

- **Chat** with your child about school – about friends, activities, teachers and assignments.
- **Set goals** – make sure they are feasible, and focus on achieving them one at a time.
- **Praise** your child for specific achievements – focus on your child's strengths and celebrate progress.
- **Encourage** your child if they fail a test – it's a test, your child is not a failure. With nurture and the right support, they will progress.



Homework – what can parents do?

- **Stay informed** – talk with your child's teacher. Know the purpose of the homework, and the class rules.
- **Show enthusiasm** about school and homework.
- **Help your child with time management** – set aside time each day for homework. Don't leave homework for just before bedtime. Work on big projects over the weekends, especially if they involve getting together with classmates. Break assignments into smaller, more manageable bits. Avoid rushing about in the morning before school – prepare clothes and other items the night before.
- **Provide a quiet study area** – complete with paper, markers, a ruler, pencils and a dictionary.
- **Never do your child's homework!** Check with your child's teacher about correcting homework.

How to support your child in reading and writing

- Let your child read to you every day.
- Let your child see you reading for your work, for pleasure and for study purposes.
- Let your child read for fun in any language she or he prefers.
- Chat to your children about what they are reading – who are the main characters, what happened to them, why, was this good or bad? (This provides a good opportunity to talk about values).
- Cook together – read recipes and labels together, compile a family cookbook.
- Explore books together – ask questions, point out new words and ideas, discuss pictures, discuss characters and their motivation, relate these to your family's life.
- Read nursery rhymes to younger children (pre-school to Grade 3), and sentences from magazines and advertisements. Let your child play with rhyming words.
- Encourage older children (Grades 4 to 6) to read the story, retell the story in their own words then write a few sentences about the story.
- Tell stories together, talk together about your family history, and discuss your memories of your trips together.
- Write with your child – provide lots of writing materials and paper, encourage your child to draw and write on her own. Encourage your child to write thank you notes to grandparents, make to do lists, write signs such as road signs – Beware! etc.
- Visit the library often – encourage your children to get their own library cards, join family book clubs, identify favourite authors and join your child in looking for interesting books.
- Ask your child to show you what they have done every day to practise their reading, writing and maths skills.



How to support your Foundation Phase child in numeracy

The Foundation Phase covers Grades R in pre-primary school and Grades 1 to 3 in primary school.

Homework

- Check that your children receive numeracy (maths) homework every day. Encourage them to do it, because they will only progress if they practise regularly. Speak to the school if this is not happening.

Sort and count

- Let your young child **sort** items in the house and say how they have grouped them, for example, clothing by colour or clothing type. Ask why he or she decided to group items.
- **Count** up to 100 objects; allow your child to group objects and count in 2s, 3s, 4s, 5s, 10s, etc. Partition 2, 3-digit numbers in different ways.
- Encourage your child to **estimate**, for example, tall, long, high, how many macaroni noodles you intend cooking for your macaroni cheese dish, count the macaroni to check.
- Encourage your child to assist you while you cook or bake, for example, ask for $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of flour etc.
- Do halving (start with sharing of sweets **between 2** and **among 3** or more children) and doubling. Let your child cut the sandwich into 2, 3 or 4 **equal** pieces.

Measurement and money

- Encourage your young child to use his or her hand or foot to measure distance etc. Later, use a ruler / tape measure to measure lengths of objects, sides of shapes, circumferences of a ball or potato, etc.
- Allow your child to help sort items in the house, for example, heavy items on the bottom shelf and light items on the top shelf of the grocery cupboard.
- Allow your child to buy and pay for an item at the shop when you buy groceries or clothing. Make him or her check the change. Play shop at home with items you have priced. Let your child arrange the price of the items from the most expensive to the cheapest.

Time

- Ask your child to tell you the time during the day. Start just with 'on the hour' then 'half hours', then 'quarter hours' and lastly the minutes, for example: It is twenty-six past five.
- Make your child aware of the length of time, for example, ask: What takes more time, walking or driving to school or eating supper?

Calculations while travelling

- Make good use of your time while travelling; look at car registration plates. Let your child add the first 2 or last 3 numbers, he or she can subtract the smallest number from the biggest number.

Shapes

- Make your child aware of shapes in and out of the house, for example, squares, circles, rectangles, triangles.
- Encourage your child to find patterns in nature, for example, leaves, flowers, in windblown sand etc.

Games to play

- Encourage your child to play dominoes, snakes and ladders, ludo, card games like 'Happy Families' and Heads and Tails, skipping, hop-scotch and traditional games involving counting.

DON'T do the following (this applies to all children):

- Put your child under pressure. If he or she is battling with a 'sum', rather discuss the problem with his or her teacher.
- Pass on negative feelings you may have about maths e.g. 'I could never do this at school, so you probably won't be able to either.'
- Worry about mistakes; we learn by taking risks and getting things wrong sometimes.
- Rush your child's learning and jump in too quickly with the answer.

DO

- Encourage your child to try a maths problem.
- Praise achievements, however small.
- Remember that asking questions is as important as finding answers.
- Work for short sessions. Stop if your child gets tired.

How to support your Intermediate Phase child in mathematics

The Intermediate Phase covers Grades 4 to 6.

Homework

- Check that your child gets mathematics homework every day.
- Support your child in learning their times tables 'off by heart', for example, say together the seven times tables forwards, then backwards. Ask your child questions, in different ways, such as: nine sevens? How many sevens in 49? Seven times four? Forty-two divided by seven? Three multiplied by seven? Seven times what equals seventy? Children must learn the language of mathematics.
- Support your child in learning number combinations (bonds) 'off by heart' – at least up to twenty e.g. $8 + 7 = 15$, $7 + 8 = 15$, $15 - 8 = 7$, $15 - 7 = 8$

Measurement and money

- Encourage your child to use recipes to assist you in cooking or baking for the family. Let them measure out the quantities and increase or decrease the amounts for more or fewer people.
- Challenge your child to estimate the length of an item, let them use a ruler / tape measure to check their estimate using the units, m, cm, mm with decimal places if possible.
- Take your children shopping with you. Let them find the cheapest brand. Use supermarket advertisements if necessary. Let your child estimate the change and then check the change after you have paid. Let them round off the price in cents to the nearest R1.00, for example R1,60 rounded off is R2,00.
- Older children can work out the amount of money saved when buying an article on a sale, for example, what it mean if you get 25% off?

Time

- Ask your child the time during the day – both analogue (clock with hands) and digital. Let them work out how long they took to eat their supper or to perform a task.
- Ask your child to keep a record of how long he or she watches TV each day of the week. Then ask him/her to do the following:
 - ◆ work out the total watching time for the week
 - ◆ work out the average watching time for a day

Calculations whilst travelling

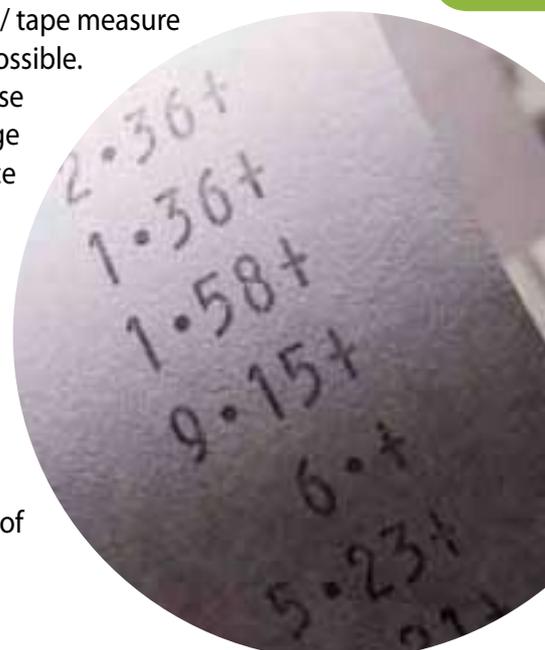
- Use car registration number plates to add all the numbers, multiply them or make the smallest and largest whole numbers, for example, 2357789 and 9877532.

Shapes

- Ask your child to identify shapes and patterns inside and outside the house, and in nature, for example, 'Can you see an object that has the shape of a rectangle? How many sides and angles does each shape have?'

Games to play

- Encourage your child to play draughts, chess, Chinese checkers, 'Mraba raba' and other games played with counters.



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