

Helping My Student with Homework

There will be some topics that your child understands quickly and some concepts that may take longer to master. The big ideas of the course take time to learn. This means that students are not necessarily expected to master a concept when it is first introduced. When a topic is first introduced in the textbook, there will be several problems to do for practice. Succeeding lessons and homework assignments will continue to practice the concept or skill over weeks and months so that *mastery will develop over time*.

Practice and discussion are required to understand mathematics. When your child comes to you with a question about a homework problem, often you may simply need to ask your child to read the problem and then ask what the problem is asking. Reading the problem aloud is often more effective than reading it silently. When you are working problems together, have your child talk about the problems. Then have your child practice on his/her own.

Below is a list of additional questions to use when working with your child. These questions do not refer to any particular concept or topic. Some questions may or may not be appropriate for some problems.

- What have you tried? What steps did you take?
- What didn't work? Why didn't it work?
- What have you been doing in class or during this chapter that might be related to this problem?
- What does this word/phrase tell you?
- What do you know about this part of the problem?
- Explain what you know right now.
- What do you need to know to solve the problem?
- How did the members of your study team explain this problem in class?
- What important examples or ideas were highlighted by your teacher?
- Can you draw a diagram or sketch to help you?
- Which words are most important? Why?
- What is your guess/estimate/prediction?
- Is there a simpler, similar problem we can do first?
- How did you organize your information? Do you have a record of your work?
- Have you tried drawing a diagram, making a list, looking for a pattern, etc.?

If your student has made a start at the problem, try these questions.

- What do you think comes next? Why?
- What is still left to be done?
- Is that the only possible answer?
- Is that answer reasonable?
- How could you check your work and your answer?
- How could your method work for other problems?

If you do not seem to be making any progress, you might try these questions.

- Let's look at your notebook, class notes, and Toolkit. Do you have them?
- Were you listening to your team members and teacher in class? What did they say?
- Did you use the class time working on the assignment? Show me what you did.
- Were the other members of your team having difficulty with this as well?
Can you call your study partner or someone from your study team?

This is certainly not a complete list; you will probably come up with some of your own questions as you work through the problems with your child. Ask any question at all, even if it seems too simple to you.

To be successful in mathematics, students need to develop the ability to reason mathematically. To do so, students need to think about what they already know and then connect this knowledge to the new ideas they are learning. Many students are not used to the idea that what they learned yesterday or last week will be connected to today's lesson. Too often students do not have to do much thinking in school because they are usually just told what to do. When students understand that connecting prior learning to new ideas is a normal part of their education, they will be more successful in this mathematics course (and any other course, for that matter). The student's responsibilities for learning mathematics include the following: