

Playing Dumb

Give your child a chance to answer before you do



Helps with: Building your child's confidence, particularly when doing money calculations.

When you've posed a maths question – for example, 'If this cost eighty-four pence, how much change will there be from a pound?' – the silence that follows can be painful. It can be tempting either to hurry your child along ('Come on, what do you have to add to eighty-four to make a hundred?') or to answer the question yourself. The trouble is that this knocks your child's confidence, so try to resist the temptation always to be the expert who knows the right answer. It can be much more effective to treat a calculation as a collaboration, something you and your child are doing together, rather than a test.

One tactic is to play dumb: to attempt the question you want answered yourself, but get stuck. Start going through your thinking, but then make an error and correct yourself. 'Let's see, eighty-four from ninety is five – is that right? – eighty-four plus five is... no, that's eighty-nine.' This is inviting your child to help you.

If they come up with an answer before you do, and they get it wrong, start by accepting the answer. 'Oh, yes, a hundred

7 take away eighty-four is fourteen. That's right, eighty-four add fourteen is a hundred... Wait a minute, is that right...?'

(All of this can be done mentally, but most children find it helpful to see calculations written down. This is where a graffiti wall can come in very handy – see page 75.)

Oh yes, 100 take away 84 is 14.
That's right, 84 add 14 is 100...
Wait a minute, is that right?



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Saying 'Yet'

The best response to the phrase 'I can't' is the word 'Yet'



Helps with: Building confidence in solving maths problems, realising that finding maths hard is OK.

Sometime in your child's maths career – possibly very early on – they are going to encounter some maths that is hard. Maybe it will be doing short division, or working out how to add fractions. What it leads to is the complaint, 'I can't do it!' And the simple response to that is the word 'yet'. You can't add fractions *yet*, you don't get all your divisions right *yet*. That simple word encourages what teachers like to call a 'growth mindset', in other words maths is something you get better at with practice, rather than something you can either do or not do. A bit like playing the piano.

This tip comes in most handy at homework time, but it applies anywhere and to anything that your child is struggling with – not just maths.

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Teach Me

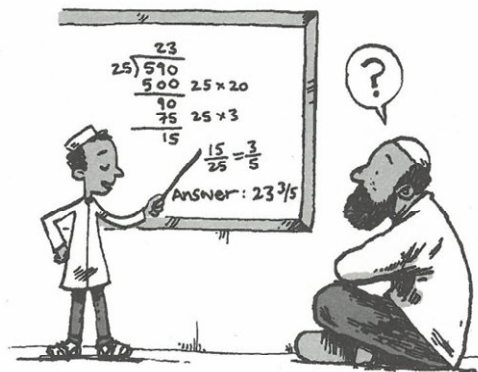
Get your child to teach you how to do maths



Helps with: Your child's confidence and also helps you to understand the maths they are being taught.

Get your child to teach you some of the maths they have recently been taught in school, even if you think you know what they've done. If, for instance, they come home and say they have been doing take-aways, ask them to give you an example of the sort of sum and to explain how they do it.

It's very likely that the methods you learned at school were different from the ones your child is learning. You'll be itching to demonstrate your method, but try to bite your



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tongue – there is a danger that you will only confuse them. If you do want to demonstrate your own method, try it on a different occasion. One method at a time is our advice.

If their explanation starts to go wrong, resist the temptation to 'fix' it – allow them to carry on explaining. This often results in them sorting out the bug in the explanation for themselves. But even if that doesn't happen, it's better simply to acknowledge that something is not quite right and invite them to see if they can sort things out and explain it to you tomorrow.

8 maths on the go