

How can I help my teenager with middle and high school math?

By Tracey Matthews, Knox County Schools Supervisor of Family and Community Engagement

In last year's February issue, we took a general look at how parents can remain involved and engaged in their teenager's middle and high school years. This year, let's take a closer look at one area of high importance: Fear of middle and high School Math! Not our teenagers' fear, but parents.

Middle and High School: Turning Point in Math

"When I was in middle and high school, my parents would get very frustrated when they tried to help me with math, and then they would seem to get mad. I thought they were mad at me for not understanding it right away. I'm sure they were just frustrated because they hadn't taken math for so very long, and I suppose they felt it should have been easier for them."

~Chelsea Craig, University of Tennessee Graduate, Class of 2012

Well said, Chelsea! I think her experience is shared across many coffee tables each evening, but it doesn't have to stay that way. Disclaimer: We are not going to make you a math genius by the end of this article. However, we hope that by the time you are finished reading this you will feel better equipped and somewhat relieved.

Tip #1: It's Never Too Late!

While there is a plethora of websites that can help you help your child with higher math, many assume the user (that's us) has stayed in tune with what our children are learning at every grade level. Unfortunately, many of us have been unable to keep up with the curriculum with busy afterschool schedules, work, etc. Plus, most adults have found it easy to function just fine using basic math skills with a calculator so "practice" hasn't been at the forefront of our "to do" list. Here are some helpful tips to remember:

- Avoid fertilizing your child's "I hate math" seed. However, share the fact that math is a challenge for you, as well, if that is true.
- Assist your child in uncovering how math is important in everyday uses and applications (i.e., sports statistics, and how it will be important in his/her future college major and/or future career choice.
- Solve math puzzles and play math games with your adolescent.
- Encourage your child to take not only the required math courses for graduation, but advanced courses, if they are able, in an effort to leave postsecondary options open.
- Help your child navigate websites or visit the public library for math resources.
- Explore before and afterschool resources that are available to help students with math challenges.

Tip #2: Learn About the Common Core State Standards

One of the best ways to "keep up" with the changes that are taking place with Tennessee's math curriculum is to learn as much as you can about the Common Core State Standards.

Common Core is a set of standards for math and English Language Arts that were developed by state leaders to ensure that every student graduates high school prepared for college or the workforce. The standards are designed to set clear expectations of what students should know in each grade and subject. They reflect rigorous learning benchmarks when compared to countries whose students currently outperform American students on international assessments.

By adopting the Common Core, teachers in Tennessee will be able to better learn from and collaborate with teachers in other states, since all teachers will follow a common set of standards. Common Core State Standards will be phased into English Language Arts and math across all grade levels in the coming academic years, with full implementation scheduled for 2013-14. For more information regarding Common Core, please visit tncore.org.

Remember, it is okay to not fully understand higher math concepts. This expectation is usually self-imposed. However, if you have the time, it is always good to brush up on your own math skills and even have a “friendly competition” of sorts with your child when it comes to solving grade level math problems. Happy Valentine’s Day!

