

number-crunching

One of the most worrying things parents can hear in the early weeks of a child's school life is school is "I hate sums!" It's crucial to enthuse your offspring with a sense of easy enthusiasm for making the numbers add up before childhood dislike becomes teenage refusal and adult inability.

Where to start, though, and how to help without confusing the issue? **Usha Patel**, Learning Difficulties Therapist, shares her top tips on helping infants grasp maths basics – and why growing sunflowers can help.

Parents often ask me about how to get their child interested in maths because 'they just don't get it.' The same parents go searching for a maths tutor to help bridge the ever-growing gap between their child and its peers...

...but what they don't realise is that there is a lot of help that they can give at home. Here's some guidance:

Maths Language

Keep the maths language simple. Use words like 'more' for adding and 'less' for subtraction. Children can be introduced to this concept in any situation eg: more roast potatoes, more carrots, less sprouts! By using the same words over and over and using concrete materials the information slowly gets assimilated.

Establish Logical Thinking

Before an individual can acquire good mathematics skills they must have the ability to think logically. A fun and easy way to introduce logic to young children is through an activity such as baking a cake or growing sunflowers. Both examples are linear processes, in which a child needs to follow the steps in the right order before achieving the desired results. By talking about each step before and after you do it, you're helping establish a logical thought process. This can be easily transferred to other tasks, such as organising their school bag, or what is needed for a sleepover.

Establish Sequential Thought Process

This is very simple. All the parent needs to do, at the end of a day and in a relaxed manner, is go through the events of the day and maybe discuss the likely events of the following day. By talking about daily activities, routines, a young child can see quickly how one thing follows another, an essential skill in understanding numbers implicitly.

Parents tell me this activity can be immensely rewarding because by replaying the events children are also celebrating their day.

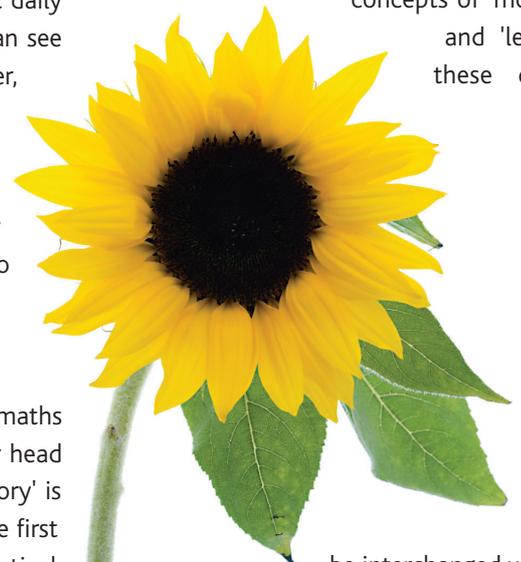
Check Memory

Short term memory is required for maths tasks. If you're doing sums in your head and your 'short term working memory' is poor, you won't be able to retain the first piece of information, the mathematical function, the next piece of information – and work out the answer.

Playing memory games is crucial. A simple game of counting the number of red cars on the way home from school can be very telling. If your child constantly loses count and this is coupled with poor retention of verbal instructions, then there may be a reason to be concerned. Having a poor working memory is one of the biggest problems that can affect maths abilities. By constantly stretching memory capacity and specialist training, however, it can be strengthened.

Maths Talk

The language of mathematics is often a stumbling block, with so many words to describe each mathematical function. When your child understands the basic concepts of 'more' and 'less,' these can



be interchanged with forwards or backwards when counting. Doing this combines logic, sequence and memory. Having the basics in place can also allow you to introduce more words to describe the same function: 'add', 'together' and 'plus', are essentially the same thing.

Finally, learning should be fun. When we are relaxed we absorb what we learn more easily. The funnier the delivery, the more quickly it will stick. Make maths amusing, and half the battle will be won. Believe me, I speak from experience.