

Parent Involvement and Awareness:

Doing Mathematics with Parents: Choosing the RIGHT Activity

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If we are to expect parents to truly understand what we are trying to do in mathematics with their children, we must do some of the same kinds of mathematics activities with parents as we do with their children! For example, it is not nearly as powerful to talk about the importance of manipulatives without also showing parents in a hands-on activity how useful manipulatives are in solving a problem for themselves. Yet we must also be realistic; we usually have very little time with parents. It's rare to have more than an hour once or twice a year to work directly with parents. Given that doing mathematics with parents is necessary and important, we must carefully choose a mathematics activity for parents. This column suggests how to pick the right activity to get the most out of doing mathematics with parents within a limited amount of time. Here are some guidelines:

1. Choose an activity that is guaranteed to give every parent a positive experience. Many parents did not have a positive experience in mathematics; it is counterproductive to pick an activity that may give them yet another negative experience. Choose an activity that most parents will have access to and success with within the allotted time. Simply ask yourself the question, "Will most of my parents be able to complete this activity correctly in X minutes?"
2. Choose an activity that will be interesting and challenging to parents. If we want parents to experience some of what we want for their children, we must provide an activity that is stimulating and gives some satisfaction to adults. If you are working exclusively with parents of primary grade students, by all means show them a typical primary activity, but also let them do another activity that will challenge them at their level.
3. Choose an activity that can be completed in the time you have. Make sure that the activity can be introduced, completed, and given some closure within the time frame of your event.

Not providing enough time to finish can be frustrating for parents. Allow for some time for discussion and to review the mathematics concepts to be understood by their child.

4. Choose an activity that makes a point. Since you have so little time with parents, pick an activity that is not only engaging to do, but also gives you an opportunity to say something powerful about your program. The right activity can give you a perfect lead-in to explain why you're doing that kind of activity with your students. Be careful not to spend all the time doing activities; some time must be devoted to informing parents about your program. For instance, if you want parents to understand why you do work in groups, pick a great group activity that will involve parents working together. Then allow yourself some time to talk a bit about the power and purpose of group work in your classroom.

Here is a sample of a carefully chosen activity (next page) that makes a specific point about the importance of different mathematical "tools" students need to use doing mathematics. The activity, called "Picking the Best Math Tool," comes out of the *Math at Home* booklet. During the parent meeting, be sure to define "mathematical tools," giving examples of the terminology used on the worksheet and relating them to the everyday lives of the parents. For example, share instances where parents might use estimation, such as, "Do I have enough gas to drive the kids to soccer practice?" Also give examples of using mental mathematics. 📦

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PICKING THE BEST MATH TOOL

Read each problem and choose the best mathematical tool to use on each. Then in your group talk about why you chose that tool. Does everyone agree?

1. $78 \overline{) 3256.98}$

- Estimation
- Mental Math
- Calculator
- Paper and Pencil

2.
$$\begin{array}{r} 500 \\ \times 30 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

- Estimation
- Mental Math
- Calculator
- Paper and Pencil

3. Which is closer to 1000?

$$\begin{array}{r} 398 \\ +607 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} 292 \\ +655 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

- Estimation
- Mental Math
- Calculator
- Paper and Pencil

4.
$$\begin{array}{r} 312 \\ \times 7 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

- Estimation
- Mental Math
- Calculator
- Paper and Pencil

