What can you do to give your child the best chance of success in the mathematics classroom? After teaching math in middle and high school for the last twelve years, I have become increasingly appreciative to parents for the role that they play in their children’s education. This role can be both positive and, unfortunately, sometimes negative. So how can a parent help their child?

**Be informed.** Ask your child what they are learning in math and if they understand it. Look over papers they bring home to see what they are studying and their level of performance. If you have older children who do not take their work home or a student who tends to forget or lose homework, it may be necessary to check in with the teacher on their progress.

**Attend parent-teacher conferences.** This is one of the most valuable connections to make because information flows in both directions as you share with the teacher what you observe at home and the teacher shares what they observe in school. It is important to remember that the focus of a parent-teacher conference is the student. I have been disappointed by the number of parents who relive their own or another child’s math highs or lows in a parent-teacher conference. Mathematical ability is not necessarily inherited.

Another way that you can support your children is to **show that you are interested** in what they are studying by asking questions and looking through their papers. These actions communicate that you care about what they are learning and how they are doing. If there are two parents in the home, it is important that both check in occasionally. It can send the wrong message if only one parent asks about homework, attends parent-teacher conferences, etc. For example, if a father does not show interest, it can unintentionally send the message to his sons that math is not for males.

**Support your child in their homework.** Each day ask your child if they have homework and provide a quiet place and time to do it. This tells them without words that you value their work by allowing them to focus and do their best.

**Make sure that younger children know their math facts.** Reinforcing with flash cards can make the difference at school. Mathematics builds on itself. Gaps in basic facts make it difficult for children to progress in their applications of these facts. Imagine the frustration a child would feel trying to learning two-digit addition without having his or her addition facts memorized. It is important to review basic facts from time to time after they have mastered them since students may forget. This is especially true after extended breaks from school and may even be necessary for a middle or high school student.

**Point out to your children when you are using math.** Adults use math daily whether doubling a recipe of cookies, calculating the number of bags of fertilizer to purchase or balancing the budget. Share
with your child what you are doing and how math is used. Students are motivated to learn math when they see the necessity of it.

**Play games with your children.** Games are a great application of math. Chutes and Ladders and Candy Land are great for children who are learning to count. Monopoly and Life give children the opportunity to work with money. Rook and Hearts have many applications for probability. Games can provide the necessity for using math.

**Encourage high school students to take math courses.** Poor math preparation closes career doors that God may want opened. Adelman, (1999) found that one of the best predictors of completing college was the highest high school math course completed.

**Encourage students to keep up.** Slacking off for a chapter will affect the rest of the year due to the sequential arrangement of mathematics. If your child struggles or is in a tough chapter, have them read through each lesson the night before it is taught. Your child will get more out of the lesson the next day and know what questions to ask with the groundwork laid the night before.

**Be careful what you say in the presence of your children.** One caution is the self-fulfilling prophecy. Every year I am amazed at the number of parents at parent-teacher conferences who make statements such as “Johnny has never been good at math” or “None of my kids get math”. What if their son or daughter overheard such statements? Do parents realize the limiting effect these statements can have on their children? Another harmful negative comment occurs when a parent claims they cannot do math. This gives the message that math is not important. The unwritten message is, “I don’t get math and look how I turned out.” Other comments such as “I never use math”, or “You won’t need to know about that to be a ______” are taken very seriously by children. It may be possible that they will not use a concept again, but we do not know what God has in store for our lives. A solid foundation of mathematics prepares students for many unknown opportunities that lie ahead.

Math is a part of the creation. God has left his fingerprint of mathematics throughout creation for us to discover and explore similar to the nematodes in science or harmony in music. Just as you learn about an artist through his art, so we learn about the Creator in mathematics. If your first reaction to mathematics is unpleasant, put on the same brave face of enjoyment that you did the first time you served broccoli or brussel sprouts to your very observant little toddler. Deep down, just like the veggies, you know it is good for them.