

Tips for Math Tutors

Explore: Math tutoring is a wonderful opportunity to explore children's thinking. Pay VERY close attention to what your students say. Yes, we want children to understand math concepts and gain the skill to arrive at "correct" answers. To bring them there, though, we need to find out how they really think. Try to let go of your attachment to "right answers," at least for a while, and follow your child's comments down whatever path they may take. Don't forget: "Distractions might be the sounds of children thinking" (Vivien Paley, 1986).

Observe: Talk as little as possible. Spend most of your time listening and watching. Explain things briefly and give the child lots of time to try out whatever you are explaining.

Diagnostic Teaching: Start with your student's homework or classwork: "Show me what you know about how to do this."

Observe: What do you see? Resist the urge to jump in as soon as the child makes a mistake.

Ask your student to explain his/her work – whether or not it's right or wrong.

"Tell me more about this. How are you thinking about it?"

Focus on what the child knows and is doing right, and build from there.

Example: $79 - 23 = 57$

"Tell me how you got this answer."

"Well, I made it into 70 take away 20 and 9 minus 3, and I got 57."

"Yes! 70 take away 20 is 50. Let's think again about 9 minus 3."

Give your tutee the chance to develop his or her own strategies.

Go to your sessions armed with paper, colorful markers or crayons and "manipulatives," a collection of objects the child can count and classify. Colored paper clips work well, since they are light and amenable to grouping by 10. Commercially made blocks, such as Mathlink Cubes made by Learning Resources are also inexpensive and designed to support math thinking in "base 10."