

CogAT Parent Resource™

How to support your learner at home

The *Cognitive Abilities Test™* (CogAT®) gives us valuable information about learners’ reasoning abilities in three areas: Verbal, Quantitative and Nonverbal. The *Ability Profile™* can help inform the way we support each child’s learning at home by giving us deeper insight into their relative strengths and weaknesses. By encouraging our children to stretch their strengths and providing support for their weaknesses, we can give them tools for success in school and life.

Here are four suggestions for supporting your learner at home:

Tap into **family life**

Here’s some great news: *you are already building your child’s reasoning at home!* There are plentiful opportunities to encourage your child to stretch their strengths and shore up their weaknesses embedded in the things you are already doing – no special resources required. By involving our child in our daily tasks, conversations, and decisions, we can help them grow in their reasoning skills and confidence.

Below are some activities and suggestions for stretching and supporting verbal, quantitative and nonverbal reasoning at home. Selecting activities from an area of relative strength can boost confidence, while selecting activities from an area of relative weakness can help a child grow, all in the security of the home environment.

Verbal

- Dinner conversations (*See the Additional Resources section for ideas to fill a question jar at the family dinner table.*)
- Sharing and retelling family stories (“*Have I told you about the day you were born?*”, “*Do you know that your grandpa also loved to play football?*”, “*Do you remember the time when we. . .?*”)
- Reading aloud to your child (*See book suggestions in the Additional Resources.*)
- Listening to an audio book together in the car



- Asking questions about media (“*What did you think of the ending of that movie?*”, “*Who is your favorite character in the book?*”, “*Can you tell me about what you’re trying to accomplish in that level of your video game?*”)
- Telling jokes or puns
- Asking your child for their advice in age-appropriate situations (“*I need to make a vegetable to go with dinner, should I make a salad or broccoli?*”, “*Your little brother asked if he could watch this show. Since you have seen it, do you think it would be a good show for him?*”, “*Would you rather we go to the park or to the pool as a family this weekend?*”), then following up with a “*Why?*” question to learn the reasoning behind your child’s thoughts.

Nonverbal

- Helping with laundry (*matching socks, sorting lights and darks, folding, distributing the appropriate clothing to family members, sewing buttons*)
- Doing the dishes (*loading and organizing the dishwasher or drying rack, putting away dishes in the proper place*)
- Working outdoors (*planting a garden or flowerbed, mowing the lawn for older children and teens*)
- Rearranging the furniture in a room
- Sorting and organizing toys, clothes or other personal items
- Making a collage of pictures for a loved one
- Cleaning out and organizing the refrigerator or pantry
- Setting the table for a meal
- Working on a puzzle together
- Having your child describe what they see or imagine after reading a story together (*engaging both verbal and nonverbal reasoning*)



Quantitative

- Performing grocery store math (*estimating the total bill at the grocery store, comparing prices on items, giving children a budget for a meal and having them pick ingredients at the store*)
- Cooking together (*measuring ingredients for a recipe, cutting or chopping food into smaller pieces, measuring cooking time*)
- Making an agenda or checklist for the day (“*Here are all the things we need to do today, what order would you like to do them in?*”)
- Serving portions of food at mealtime (“*Can you cut this ice cream sandwich in half for you and your brother?*”, “*We need to divide this spaghetti onto six plates, can you help?*” “*Can you make sure everyone has a serving of chips?*”)

- Setting the table (“How many forks do we need tonight if Aunt Joan is coming with her kids?” “Can you pour each glass of milk $\frac{2}{3}$ full?”)
- Ranking items (“Can you make your birthday list and rank the items so I can be sure to get you something that you want the MOST?”)
- Keeping track of progress (saving money for a new toy, measuring height on a wall, counting down time to a special day or event)
- Planning the family calendar or schedule for the day

Although involving children in our daily tasks requires intentionality, the rewards include a stronger bond and a more confident and competent child.

A note for older learners: Reasoning skills will continue to be bolstered by these and new activities as your children grow into their junior high and high school years. As teens negotiate their developing independence, they are both building and reinforcing verbal reasoning in their interactions with you. Your teen will stretch their quantitative reasoning as they practice budgeting for a larger purchase, such as buying a vehicle or saving for college, or as they take on their first job and practice managing their own time and finances. Navigating public transportation and driving a motor vehicle are both tasks that involve reasoning in multiple domains. It can be hard to turn over the reins to our teens in these areas, but as we do we have the opportunity to help them build the confidence and reasoning skills to transition to adulthood.

Set up the home environment for success

At some point in your child’s school career, they will likely have homework. These assignments will give your child the opportunity to reinforce academic skills outside of school, and for you to gain insight into your child’s learning. As difficult as it can be to find time in family life for homework, there are some simple ways we can set ourselves up for success:

- It is helpful to prepare a space for your child, whether that is a dedicated desk or even a designated seat at the kitchen table, with a few supplies such as paper, writing utensils, scissors, and glue.
- Remove digital distractions such as gaming devices or television from your child’s homework area.
- Depending on the age of your child, your proximity to the place where they are working is also beneficial. Even though your child may not need your assistance with schoolwork, knowing you are working on something else just a few feet away can help them feel supported and stay motivated. Even older children and teens benefit from a dedicated area and the knowledge that you are close by.



After reviewing the [Ability Profile](#), we can be more mindful of how hard a child may be working to overcome an area of relative weakness in the classroom. If your child comes home exhausted at the end of the day, try allowing them to engage in an area of strength first to energize and boost their confidence before diving into their more difficult work. Allowing your child to play creatively and move their bodies as they choose will give them the motivation they need to attend to more challenging tasks later.

A note for younger children: One of the most common homework tasks in early elementary is the review of math facts. For students of all levels of quantitative ability, having math facts memorized fluently will free up a child's working memory to solve more complex problems in class. This principle also applies to the study of sight words for developing readers. Supporting your child in these memorization tasks at home can give them a much-needed boost in their learning at school. Since you are at home, you have the flexibility to think outside the box on these tasks! Can we study math facts in the minivan? Spelling words on the swing? Sight words while we splash in the tub? Vocabulary while we vacuum? The answer is yes! When it comes to family life, there isn't just one "right" way to do things. Find a rhythm or routine that works for your family's schedule, communicate it with your child, and then stick to it as much as possible. When children know what to expect, they are more likely to be compliant with our requests.

Build habits of motivation

If you feel that your child is underperforming in school based on their Ability Profile, you can help your child at home to build strategies and work habits that they can carry into the school environment. You may want to ask your child:

- *"When you have schoolwork that you don't want to do, what's your plan to get it done?"*
- *"When a problem is hard at school, how do you see it through?"*

Having an open conversation with your child about motivation can give you insight into how they accomplish tasks. It is normal for children to have some favorite subjects in school and others where they have a hard time getting motivated. Preferences are a natural part of being human. How do you get work done – especially tasks you feel less inclined to do? Our children are more likely to imitate what they see us do than what we say, so we can model motivation strategies from our own life to support our child. Some examples to support motivation:

- *"I need to respond to these work emails, so I'll sit here with you while you finish your math assignment, and we'll work at the same time."*
- *"After you finish two more paragraphs in this essay, let's go shoot a few hoops outside. We'll both be ready for a break!!"*
- *"I'll wash these dishes while you fill out your vocabulary sheet. I'm right here if you need me."*
- *"I'll pop some popcorn while we review these math facts and then we'll have a snack together when we're done."*



If your child gets discouraged in persisting through problems, you can help them work through their challenges with thoughtful questions:

- “Could you try something new?”
- “Have you thought about _____?”
- “Do you need a break before you come back to that problem?”

Praising your child’s persistence when they work through a challenging task will reinforce these good habits. “*You did it! You can be proud of the way you saw that problem through,*” or “*I know you didn’t feel like doing that essay, but you finished it. I’m proud of the way you’re growing!*” Small habits of motivation and persistence in learning can add up to large gains in academic success over time.

Have fun and play

One of the best things we can provide for our children is the opportunity for creative play at home. Open-ended resources such as empty boxes, tape, and markers have endless possibilities in a child’s mind. Simple toys such as a large scarf, blocks, building bricks, dolls, or small cars provide hours of play opportunity. And don’t forget nature’s free toys. . . rocks, sticks and leaves! The beauty in creative play is that providing fewer resources actually leads to more creative play, so try not to feel overwhelmed with how much or little you feel you are able to provide. Simply providing a block of time, space to explore, and gentle direction toward play is often enough. Allow children time to play alone as well as with others and resist the urge to intervene too often. Playing alone allows children to explore the world on their own terms, while working out creative play with peers or siblings builds problem-solving skills. Both types of play build confidence that can carry over to the classroom.

As we age, it can be hard to engage in creative play with the same enthusiasm as young children. However, we can still have fun! Board games are a wonderful tool to create family memories, grow in our relationships, practice sportsmanship, and develop reasoning skills in each of the core areas. Family classics such as Apples to Apples Jr. can be used to stretch or support verbal reasoning skills, while fun games like *Quirkle* emphasize nonverbal reasoning. Quantitative reasoning comes into play in games such as *Penguins on Ice* or *Sumoku*. Games are an engaging way to help children stretch their skills, or even to model our own “stretching” in areas where we may have a relative weakness. Games also allow children to shine in their strengths, enrich reasoning, and develop confidence, especially when they can teach (or maybe even beat) an adult. In the *Additional Resources* section below, you will find a list of fun games that can be used to stretch or support all three areas of reasoning evaluated on the *CogAT*.



We hope you find these strategies and resources helpful in supporting your learner at home.



Additional resources

Games

[Charleston County School District CogAT-Aligned Game List](#)

Additional family games for upper elementary through high school:

Nonverbal: SET, Blokus, Jenga

Quantitative: Krypto, Wits and Wagers (Family Edition), Yahtzee

Verbal: Just One, Say Anything (Family Edition), It's in The Bag

Dinner conversation starters

[Family Conversation Jar \(from the Strengthening Families Foundation\)](#)

[The Family Dinner Project](#)

Reading aloud

Jim Trelease's Read-Aloud Handbook

Jim Trelease and Cyndi Giorgis

2019 | ISBN 978-0143133797

Common Sense Media's [50 Books All Kids Should Read Before They're 12](#)

[13 Read-Alouds to Help You Connect with Your Middle Schooler](#) by Kari Ness Riedel

Additional ideas for family conversations

The Secrets of Happy Families: *Improve Your Mornings, Tell Your Family History, Fight Smarter, Go Out and Play, and Much More*

Bruce Feiler

2013 | ISBN 978-0061778742