

## Re: How to save an 8-year-old for lifelong mathphobia?

---

*Source:* <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.math/2007-04/msg00116.html>

---

- *From:* "T.H. Ray" <[thray123@xxxxxxx](mailto:thray123@xxxxxxx)>
  - *Date:* Sun, 01 Apr 2007 15:40:19 EDT
- 

I have no children, but I do have a whole bunch of nephews and nieces. To my chagrin, all of them have turned out mathphobic, with the possible exception of the youngest one, who is 8. (Mind you, the only reason I still have some hope for him as far as math goes is based on the uneducated assumption that "mathphobia" is something that becomes established at a particular developmental stage. Anyway, I found reading Slate's Emily Yoffe's "The Math Moron", at <http://www.slate.com/id/2152480/?nav=navoa>, downright \*depressing\*, and would hate see my nephew go the same way.)

Unfortunately, I live a couple of timezones away from my nephew, and I see him only once or twice a year, which greatly limits what I can do about all this. His mother (my sister) would like him not to be mathphobic (as she is) but at this point she is happy if he gets passable grades. His father is a great guy but, unfortunately, not only is he mathphobic and totally uninterested in anything that is remotely academic, he has no problem with the prospect of raising an equally mathphobic son.

Anyway, bottom line: I rack my brains on how to

Re: How to save an 8-year-old for lifelong mathphobia?

kindle a love for  
math in my nephew...

Any advice would be welcome. In particular, I would like to find books (or websites) of mathematical puzzles suitable for his age. I'm looking for stuff that is just difficult enough to challenge him, but not so difficult that he would quickly regard as beyond him (he tends to get discouraged quickly when it comes to academic stuff, which I think may be his dad's legacy).

Also, does anyone know of a good internet forum to post this question to? I'm a bit leary of going to one of the K-12 forums one can find online, because I fear that they are populated by the same misguided minds that have ruined math education in the US. (See, e.g., the NYT article that Yoffe cites in hers.)

TIA!

kj

--

NOTE: In my address everything before the first period is backwards; and the last period, and everything after it, should be discarded.

Does he have an interest in mechanical or electronic things? I am of an older generation, before it became so common to use-and-discard virtually everything, and building/repairing for one's own consumption was a pleasure. At any rate, I mention this because my father (he died before I was three) was a radio technician who left behind a number of books on circuitry and ham radio. By the age of 11 or so, I had taught myself quite a bit of algebra by the sheer necessity to understand, e.g., the relationship between current and voltage. There are other hobbies -- telescope building, or rocketry, e.g. -- where math is applied to predict outcomes and to measure results. Even if such engineering-type math as used here does not develop into a full blown

Re: How to save an 8-year-old for lifelong mathphobia?

Re: How to save an 8-year-old for lifelong mathphobia?

love for abstraction, it should at least ward off  
"mathphobia," and it should result in many pleasurable  
hours of discovery. As all learning should.

Tom

.