



# How DreamBox Works



## A Parent's Guide to Understanding & Coaching Student Progress in DreamBox Learning

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## Introduction

DreamBox Learning is an adaptive learning program, which means it analyzes children’s unique input and uses it to provide custom-tailored curriculum paths. These paths are based on the skills children already have, the strategies and methods they use, and the skills they still need to learn. By understanding what your child already knows, what he or she needs to know, and the methods to which he or she responds best, DreamBox Learning presents your child with the best lessons to help him or her move forward.

For the most part, DreamBox Learning provides this assistance naturally, as children use it. However, you may run into some situations where it seems as if the difficulty level is incorrect (too easy or too hard), or your child doesn’t seem to be getting a whole lot of lessons. This guide can help you understand how to get your child back on track.

### 1. Basic Tips for Success in DreamBox Learning

Here are some tips for making sure DreamBox Learning always adjusts to your child’s instructional level swiftly and accurately:

- 1) **Make sure your child is using DreamBox Learning often enough.** Our research shows that students should spend a minimum of 60 minutes per week using DreamBox Learning (second grade and higher should be using it 90 minutes per week). Think of this as a 20 to 30 minute session every couple of days. Using DreamBox Learning this frequently ensures that our software can accurately keep pace with your child’s ever-expanding instructional level.
- 2) **Make sure your child is using his or her time wisely.** Students using the Primary Environment should spend most of their time in the “Adventure Park” section of DreamBox Learning, doing the lessons with yellow borders. If your child uses the Intermediate Environment, make sure he or she understands that most of his or her time should be spent doing the lessons marked with gold coins. These are the lessons DreamBox Learning is specifically recommending to your child, and they will be the most instrumental in making sure your child’s progress is adjusted swiftly and accurately.
- 3) **Make sure your child fully completes the lessons he or she starts.** DreamBox analyzes a student's input on a click-by-click basis, and uses this input to assign the most appropriate follow-up lessons. However, if a student does not complete a lesson (e.g., clicks the “Stop” button, closes the browser window mid-lesson, etc.), DreamBox does not use the assessment data it has collected from the lesson, because it assumes the student must leave for a nonacademic reason, such as eating dinner or going to bed. We feel that it’s not fair to give students bad grades if they have to stop a lesson, so DreamBox chooses instead to ignore the results of the lesson entirely.
- 4) **Help your child understand that mistakes are OK.** In many cases, students exit lessons because they are apprehensive about getting answers wrong. However, DreamBox analyzes a student’s incorrect answers, and uses the data to offer the most appropriate follow-up lessons. Therefore, it is important that students do not shy away from incorrect answers—wrong answers are part of the educational experience, and this is doubly true in DreamBox Learning.

## 2. How Can I Help My Child With His or Her DreamBox Learning Lessons?

Sometimes, in order to help our children progress past difficult questions, we want to intervene directly. This is perfectly natural—after all, what parent doesn't want to help his or her child succeed? This approach makes us feel like we're an active part of our children's education process, and it makes our children happy because they feel the success of getting the answer right.

However, in DreamBox Learning, this approach can have a negative effect on your child's progress. Our GuideRight™ technology adapts to each child by using his or her unique answers to questions. Ideally, the questions DreamBox asks are just challenging enough that your child will occasionally provide an incorrect answer, thus providing information DreamBox can use to fully understand the boundaries of your child's instructional level. We may even give the child a series of questions that might be a little too difficult for him or her. If the child does well, we move him or her on to something that might rely upon the understanding he or she just demonstrated. If the child doesn't do so well, we provide the comprehensive set of lessons he or she likely needs to develop that understanding.

So with DreamBox, if you provide too much overt assistance, answer for your child, or let a sibling or friend play on your child's account, the system could temporarily attribute levels of understanding—or misunderstanding—that do not accurately reflect that of your child. In other words, the help you provide is actually giving DreamBox Learning inaccurate information about your child's instructional level.

Naturally, your child may still want some help, even if you can't provide it directly. Here are some tips you can use to provide this help, without giving him or her the answers or skewing the adaptation data:

- Encourage your child to make his or her best guess. Remind him or her that it's OK to make some mistakes. We learn a lot from the types of mistakes your child makes and will respond accordingly.
- Answer a question with a question (e.g., "What do you think?").
- Encourage your child to use the "Help" button in the upper right corner of the DreamBox activity window. On the first click, the system repeats the instructions. A second click plays more detailed instructions, often accompanied by an animated tutorial.
- Ask your child to explain the game to you. Sometimes talking it through like this will give him or her the answer.
- If all that doesn't work, perhaps it's time for a snack or a break.
- Finally, remember that playing DreamBox is meant to be fun. If your child is still having trouble with one or more lessons, don't hesitate to click the feedback button and let us know.

### 3. What if the Lessons Get Too Hard?

The important thing to note is that DreamBox Learning makes calculated curriculum adjustments based on students' unique input and demonstrated proficiencies. If students are hesitant about providing this information, then DreamBox Learning does not make these required adjustments.

For this reason, if students make a habit of exiting lessons by using the "Stop" button, instead of completing the lessons, then DreamBox won't assign them new, easier to understand lessons in a timely fashion. In worst-case scenarios, where a student keeps exiting the same lesson repeatedly and doesn't try doing any other lessons, DreamBox can stop offering other lessons entirely!

If your child is saying that his or her lessons are too hard, then watch him or her use DreamBox for a while, to see if he or she is using the "Stop" button when frustrated. If he or she is, coach him or her on when it is and is not appropriate to use "Stop" mid-lesson. Then encourage your child to push through every lesson, even if it is a little difficult or he or she has to guess or make mistakes, and you should see more appropriate lessons being offered. Remember, too, that the "Help" button is always available—one click repeats the lesson instructions, while a second click gives more detailed instructions. Used in this manner, the "Help" button can help a child who is stuck on a difficult activity, and will not have a negative impact on the child's score for the lesson.

### 4. What if the Lessons Are Too Easy?

DreamBox Learning usually needs some time to adjust to students' instructional levels when they first start. When students begin using DreamBox Learning for the first time, they start at a level one grade prior to their current grade. For this reason, it's actually common for a student's first experience with DreamBox Learning to be "too easy."

Keep in mind, though, that this is by design—DreamBox is, as always, testing children to see what they already know! So, if your child thinks the lessons are too easy, then the best thing he or she can do is complete the lessons as quickly as possible, and to the best of his or her ability. By doing so, DreamBox Learning will determine that your child finds this material too easy, and will adjust his or her pacing and lesson placement accordingly. For best results, encourage your child to seek out the yellow-bordered lessons marked with gold stars (in the Primary Environment) or the lessons marked with gold coins (in the Intermediate Environment). These lessons give students the best and fastest opportunity to prove their existing knowledge, and thus they can move forward more quickly.

## 5. What if My Child is Getting Only One or Two New Lessons?

Sometimes this happens because your child has reached a point in the curriculum that has fewer options. The best way to address this is to simply have your child work through the area as best as he or she can.

In other cases this happens when a child is avoiding a particular lesson. Specific points in the DreamBox Learning curriculum require children to demonstrate that they are fluent in a specific skill before they are allowed to move forward. If they are fluent, then DreamBox issues them more complex lessons that use this new knowledge. If they are not fluent, then DreamBox Learning can give them lessons that will help them learn the skill. However, if your child does not confirm his or her level of fluency by completing a required lesson, then DreamBox is unable to determine what lesson should be offered next. Eventually, as your child completes all other lesson paths, the lesson or lessons that your child has been avoiding become the only option available.

If this happens to your child, encourage him or her to complete the lesson to the best of his or her ability, even if he or she has to guess or make mistakes. Completing the lesson gives DreamBox Learning the data it needs to issue the most appropriate follow-up lessons and keep your child moving forward!

## 6. Can I Adjust My Child's Difficulty Level or Assign Specific Lessons?

DreamBox Learning bases children's custom-tailored curriculum paths on their own unique input. Children are assessed with every mouse click, to ensure that they are receiving the very best lessons to build on their existing knowledge. For this reason, we do not provide any tools to manually change children's curriculum placement or the lessons DreamBox gives them.

While our Client Care Team does have the ability to adjust children's placement, we strongly advise against requesting this adjustment, except as a last resort. Coarse manual adjustments usually don't address the specific issues children may be experiencing, and these changes have negative side effects, which include destroying all prior assessment data, altering parent reporting, and resetting lesson counters and Carnival progress to zero. The best way to ensure that your child always gets the help he or she needs is to coach him or her on the importance of completing every lesson he or she starts.