

How we feel about maths



Family Maths
Toolkit

Information for parents & carers

However you feel about maths, you're not alone.

Some parents and carers try to avoid maths in their daily lives. For some, the thought of helping children with maths homework fills them with dread. Adults often experience worry, stress or fear around numbers.

If you feel this way about maths, it is not unusual. You can still support your children with their maths learning – but you may find it more comfortable to do so if you overcome your fears. And these feelings can be overcome.

Why is it common to feel anxiety around maths?

There are lots of reasons why someone could feel anxious about maths:

- Bad experiences at school
- Feeling under pressure
- Fear of failure
- Being told they're not a maths person
- Lack of support

These reasons are often beyond our own control. They do not truly reflect our abilities.

If you feel anxious about maths, it doesn't mean that you are unable to learn.

Tips for feeling differently about maths

- **Talk about your feelings about maths.** Finding a supportive person to talk to about your feelings and worries can often help overcome anxiety. You might learn that lots of people feel the same. But be sure to have these conversations away from children – always try to be positive about maths around them.
- **Challenge your own beliefs.** Think about why you don't feel good about maths. Are those reasons fair? For example, does finding maths hard at school mean that you'll always be bad at it?
- **Try not to compare yourself to others.** Maybe you find maths harder than some others do, or feel that other people have better maths skills than you. Learning is not about being better than others, but about improving on your own skills and confidence.
- **Reduce pressure.** You don't have to rush and you don't have to show anyone else what you're doing. Other people knowing if we are getting things wrong can sometimes make us panic. It's ok to learn at your own pace – maths is not a race! You can learn without pressure by using resources like the National Numeracy Challenge: www.nnchallenge.org.uk/fmt
- **Set realistic goals.** Don't expect yourself to become a maths professor overnight. A little bit of learning on a regular basis can help you improve at a steady pace.

Pointing out maths in the real world



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We all use numbers every day, whether we think about it or not. Maths is not just for the classroom.

Spotting maths in the real world helps children understand this. It helps them see why it's useful to learn maths. And it's something you can do to support your child's maths learning outside of school.

There are all sorts of ways to bring number skills into things you already do with your child.

For younger children

There are lots of places to find maths in day-to-day life.

Here are a few you could try.

Around the house

Cooking: try recipes, measure ingredients and set the timer together.

Time: talk about how long it takes to get to school, what time we need to be there, what time we need to leave the house.

Size and shape: use plasticine or building bricks to make different shapes; order them by size.

In the newspaper: look for where numbers are used in news articles, adverts, weather forecasts, job adverts. Talk about how numbers are used in money, percentages, probability, graphs and charts.

Out and about

Number hunt: find as many numbers as you can on signs, in shops, on doors or buses, etc.

Counting: count the things you can see – how many people are in the queue? How many red cars can you spot?

Plan journeys: talk about distance, time and directions.

Estimate: talk about the local area and estimate how many houses are on the street, how many people live in the town, or how far away the nearest town is.

Games

Card games: lots of card games involve numbers. Try playing matching games or snap, or draw cards and aim to get as close to 21 as possible without going 'bust'.

Building blocks: talk about the size and shape of the blocks and make patterns.

I Spy: play the game by spying numbers and shapes.

Board games: try games like Connect 4, Snakes & Ladders, Monopoly or any games that involve throwing dice to move around the board.

Hobbies

Sports: talk about the numbers in your child's favourite sports. How many goals or points are needed to win or to get promoted? Talk about time, distance, shapes on the pitch, etc.

Dance: count the beats in the music and point out the shapes, patterns and symmetry dancing makes.

Television: look out for numbers in popular TV shows. Point out how contestants measure ingredients on baking shows. Add up the scores on dancing shows.

Where else could you look for numbers in everyday life?

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For older children

Beyond school, adults use maths in lots of ways. Talking about this can help older children see the value of learning maths.

Here are a few examples.

Careers

All jobs: everyday maths skills are needed for things like arriving on time, understanding payslips, working with schedules and using budgets.

Healthcare: maths is needed for making drug calculations, understanding patient data and taking readings.

Construction: workers need number skills for taking measurements, understanding scale and proportion, and following plans.

Design (graphics, fashion, interiors, etc): using shapes, recognising patterns, understanding measurements and units, scale and proportion, and following plans are all needed in design work.

Money and finances

Budgeting: understanding your income and expenses, knowing what you can afford, and making choices about what to do with your money is important for everyone.

Credit and savings: maths skills are useful for understanding interest rates and other terms and conditions on credit cards, loans and saving accounts.

Taxes: self-employed people or people who own businesses need number skills to fill in a tax return, and even employed people need maths to understand the rate of tax they should be paying.

University

Study: students on every course will need to use number skills in some way – whether it's making calculations, understanding research and statistics, conducting studies and analysing results, or simply managing time, word counts and mark schemes for assessments.

Budgeting: students living away from home will need to understand their income and outgoings to manage loans and grants, rent, tuition fees and living expenses.

Where do you use maths in your work or daily life? What does your child want to do after they leave school? What number skills will they need for that?

Talking positively about maths



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It's important to be positive about maths around children. The way we talk about maths makes a big difference to how they see it.

Saying things like "I can't do maths" or "I hated maths at school" might make your child start to think like that too. And sometimes we say things that give the wrong idea without realising.

Here are some things people sometimes say and ideas for what we could try instead:

What people sometimes say	What children hear from this	What we could try instead
<p>"I can't do maths and I get on just fine."</p> <p>Or</p> <p>"I was never any good at maths at school either."</p>	<p>"Maths isn't important and you can get by without it. It's just a school subject and it won't be useful in real life."</p> <p>These beliefs may lead to children not engaging with maths at all.</p>	<p>"I found maths hard too, but if we keep working at it we can get it."</p>
<p>"It's ok, you're more of a creative person than a maths person."</p>	<p>"Only some people are good at maths and you're not that sort of person, so there's no point trying to get better at it."</p> <p>This can make children believe that their ability is fixed and that skills cannot be learnt. It doesn't encourage them to keep trying.</p>	<p>"We can all be good at maths if we keep trying with it."</p> <p>"It's ok to find it hard - that doesn't mean you're bad at maths. Let's keep working at it."</p>

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What people sometimes say	What children hear from this	What we could try instead
<p>“This is easy, you should be able to get this one right.”</p>	<p>“If you find this difficult, you must be stupid.”</p> <p>Putting pressure on children to get things right first time can make them worry about maths and get scared by it. It’s good for children to know that making a mistake is not a bad thing. Mistakes can help us learn.</p>	
<p>“Well done for getting that right. You’re so clever.”</p>	<p>“Clever people always get things right. If you don’t get things right then you’re not clever.”</p> <p>Praising a child for being clever or having a talent can make them think that maths learning comes from a natural ability rather than through hard work. If getting it right makes you clever, then children might start to think that making a mistake means they’re not clever – and this can stop them trying in case they get it wrong.</p>	<p>“I think we have got this part of the problem right, let’s have another go at getting to the answer.”</p> <p>“That was a tricky one, well done for sticking with it.”</p>

Whatever our own feelings about maths, being positive about maths can make a real difference to children’s progress.

Improving your own skills and confidence



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However you feel about maths yourself, you can still help your child be positive about maths. Whatever your number skills are like, you can still support your child's maths learning.

But some people feel more comfortable about doing that by working on their own number confidence too. And this doesn't have to mean going back to the classroom!

The National Numeracy Challenge is an online learning tool for adults who have low confidence in their maths skills: www.nnchallenge.org.uk/fmt

You can register for free: all you need is an email address and a password. When you have signed up, you can take a quick check of your skills. This usually takes around 10 minutes.

The quick check isn't a test – it's just to help the Challenge find the best resources and support for you. In the quick check:

- The questions focus on everyday maths – the skills you use in real life
- There are no time limits on any questions or the quick check as a whole
- Everything is kept confidential, so you don't have the pressure of other people knowing how you answer
- You only get asked enough questions to find the support you need – if you're finding it difficult, the questions won't get harder
- You can save your progress as you go, so you don't have to complete it all in one go.

After doing the quick check, you will see some online resources. These resources:

- Are based on the questions you got wrong in your quick check – helping you focus on the areas you need to improve
- Are at the level you're working towards, so they will be challenging but not overwhelming
- Offer lots of choice: everyone learns in different ways, so if you don't like the first one, you can choose another one that suits you better.

When you have used some resources and feel ready, you can have another go at the quick check. This will give you more resources and help you see if you've improved.

Remember – you don't have to be a maths genius to help your children with maths! But becoming more confident with numbers can only be a good thing. Even if you find things difficult, you are showing your child that everyone can learn and get better at maths – and finding things hard is a normal part of the learning process, for both adults and children.