

What to do if your child has a real problem with maths at school

Maths anxiety is a well-documented phenomenon characterised by feelings of tension, apprehension, or fear that interfere with maths performance. Research has shown that it can negatively impact students' academic achievements and influence their career choices¹.

If you suspect your child has maths anxiety, proving it can be tricky because it's not always formally diagnosed. However, you can gather evidence by observing patterns in their behaviour and sharing this with teachers or specialists. Here's how:

1 - Look for the Signs

Maths anxiety isn't just about struggling with numbers—it's about a fear response. Keep a log of these behaviours:

Before maths: Do they complain of headaches, stomach aches, or suddenly need a break?

During maths: Do they freeze, get upset, or try to avoid the work (fidgeting, chatting, sharpening pencils)?

After maths: Do they have meltdowns, express frustration, or say they're "just bad at maths"?

2 - Compare Maths to Other Subjects

- Do they struggle with all subjects, or is it just maths?
- Are they happy to attempt a challenge in reading or science but shut down in maths?

¹ Here is some research on the issue of Maths Anxiety:

Research from the University of Sussex indicates that maths anxiety leads to disengagement and poses significant barriers to learning among students.

[University of Sussex](#)

A report by the University of Cambridge found that factors such as teaching methods, parental attitudes, and transitions between educational stages can contribute to the development of maths anxiety. The study also noted that girls tend to be more affected than boys.

[University of Cambridge](#)

3 - Notice the Emotional Responses

Maths anxiety is an emotional reaction, not just difficulty with numbers.

- Do they panic when put on the spot?
- Do they avoid eye contact or rush through work just to get it over with?
- Do they get angry or tearful over mistakes?

4 - Gather Feedback from Others

- Teachers – Ask if they notice avoidance, anxiety, or sudden disengagement during maths.
- Tutors/SENCOs – They may have strategies to assess anxiety-driven learning blocks.
- Your Child – Sometimes, they’ll tell you outright: *“I hate maths,” “I just can’t do it,”* or *“I feel stupid.”*

5 - Use a Maths Anxiety Questionnaire

There are informal maths anxiety scales you can find online (EG:

<https://www.psytoolkit.org/survey-library/math-anxiety-amas.html>). You could also ask simple questions:

- ? How does maths make you feel? (Happy, okay, worried, frustrated?)
- ? If I gave you a tricky maths question, what would you do first?
- ? If you could choose, would you rather do a maths puzzle or a reading challenge?

6 - Rule Out Other Learning Barriers

Could there be an underlying difficulty like dyscalculia, working memory issues, or processing speed challenges? If maths anxiety is extreme, a specialist assessment might help.

Once you’ve gathered evidence, you can advocate for support—whether that’s adjustments in school, different teaching approaches, or strategies to rebuild their confidence. For additional support and resources on addressing maths anxiety, check out MARG established by Derby University: [MARG](#)



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Good luck,
Charlotte x