

National Numeracy Day

Tips for talking to adults about maths

Acknowledge anxieties and let people talk about it

It is very common to feel anxious about maths. Some people describe experiencing fear and terror when faced with maths. If a member of staff feels this way, give them space to talk about why they feel that way. Even by having anxieties acknowledged and by feeling supported, learners' anxieties can ease.

Challenge fears about learning as an adult being just like at school

Many people's negative association with maths stems from their school experience. When we learn as an adult we can make choices and take different approaches. We can learn online confidentially, work at our own pace and not face the fear of other people judging how we are getting on.

Talk about maths in the real world

It's helpful to distinguish between the maths that's really needed and the maths that people may associate with their school memories like algebra and trigonometry. It's often the more complex schools style maths that people fear. Get talking about how numbers are really used at work for example managing time, handling money and dealing with measurements.

Avoid talking about tests

Feeling like we're being tested can create pressure and pressure often generates maths anxiety. Making sure people know they're being supported and not tested makes those with low confidence more likely to have a go. The questions on the National Numeracy Challenge are only there to get people to the right learning resources for them, the score doesn't matter and it's not a competition.

Normalise struggle

It can be useful for people who don't feel confident with numbers to know that lots of people struggle with maths. Often people think if they struggle that they are "stupid" or "bad at maths." Remind them that we all find things difficult sometimes and it's ok to make mistakes. Maths is like any other skill where making mistakes is part of the learning process.

Encourage a growth mindset

Growth mindset is knowing that whatever you're starting point, you can improve at something. It is vital for success with maths. Emphasize that everyone can improve, even if they've struggled in the past. The reasons some of us struggle are to do with our experiences and not any kind of natural ability. If someone hasn't had good support or had a bad experience in school, it doesn't mean they "can't do maths."

Find out how to boost your skills by visiting the National Numeracy Challenge. You can find your unique link to the Challenge in any of the emails we've sent you.