

# Fear of maths: the causes, the signs by age, and the twelve-week plan that reverses it

## The four causes

| Cause               | What it does                                                                                                  |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Timed tests, early  | Teaches that maths is speed and that the child is slow; speed anxiety blocks working memory                   |
| Public mistakes     | One wrong answer in front of the class at 8 can decide the relationship with maths for years                  |
| A parent's own fear | 'I was never good at maths either' is heard as permission to give up; anxiety transfers through homework help |
| A gap nobody filled | Fractions missed in Year 4; everything after is built on sand; every new topic fails a little                 |

## The signs: tick what you see

| Age      | Signs                                                                                                                                   | Seen |
|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| About 7  | Counts on fingers under the table; freezes on 'quick, what is $6 + 7$ '; cries over worksheets; 'I'm bad at maths' already              | [ ]  |
| About 10 | Homework takes an hour for twenty minutes' work; avoids starting; guesses rather than works; stomach aches on test days; 'I hate maths' | [ ]  |
| About 13 | Fine at home, blank in tests; copies working without understanding; drops to the lower set; says 'I'm not a maths person' as a fact     | [ ]  |

## The words to listen for

| The child says                         | It usually means                                                 |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 'I'm just bad at maths'                | The belief has set, after public mistakes or a parent's 'me too' |
| 'I hate maths'                         | Fear wearing anger; a specific topic behind it                   |
| 'I can do it at home but not in tests' | Speed anxiety                                                    |
| 'I don't get it' (everything)          | A gap from an earlier year                                       |
| Stomach aches, tears, stalling         | Physical anxiety; not pretending                                 |

## The twelve-week plan

| Weeks    | Do                                                                                                                                                                        | Done |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| 1        | Find the gap: a one-to-one diagnostic going backwards until the child is confident, then forwards one step. Stop every timer, at home and (ask) at school                 | [ ]  |
| 2 to 5   | Teach the gap, twenty minutes a day, one adult who does not react to mistakes; a whiteboard where a wrong answer is rubbed out without comment; small private wins        | [ ]  |
| 6 to 9   | The current school topic, now that its foundation is in place; maths in ordinary life out loud (the bill, the score, the recipe); praise the method and the checking only | [ ]  |
| 10 to 12 | Untimed practice sets, then lightly timed ones the child sets the time for; a test-style set at home; the error notebook reviewed                                         | [ ]  |

### Weekly log

| Week | Topic worked on | Minutes/day | Tears or stalling? | One win |
|------|-----------------|-------------|--------------------|---------|
| 1    |                 |             |                    |         |
| 2    |                 |             |                    |         |
| 3    |                 |             |                    |         |
| 4    |                 |             |                    |         |
| 5    |                 |             |                    |         |
| 6    |                 |             |                    |         |
| 7    |                 |             |                    |         |
| 8    |                 |             |                    |         |
| 9    |                 |             |                    |         |
| 10   |                 |             |                    |         |
| 11   |                 |             |                    |         |
| 12   |                 |             |                    |         |

### Why 'practise more' makes it worse, and when it is more than fear

More of the same practice is more of the same failure; the gap must be taught first. If after twelve weeks of genuine daily work the arithmetic facts still will not stick, or number sense (which of two numbers is bigger) is missing at 9 or 10, ask the school for an evaluation: dyscalculia needs a specialist, and these methods still help alongside.

From [sciencewithshobha.com/blog/math-anxiety-in-kids-what-it-is-what-causes-it-and-how-to-fix-it/](https://sciencewithshobha.com/blog/math-anxiety-in-kids-what-it-is-what-causes-it-and-how-to-fix-it/)