

Talking positively about maths



Family Maths Toolkit

Information for parents & carers

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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<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.