



# How do you feel about maths?

Age range: 25+

 **BARCLAYS** | LifeSkills



# Module overview

This module will encourage learners to explore how they think and feel about maths. As some people may be feeling anxious about the activity itself, explain to your learner that there will be no actual maths involved.

It is estimated that 20% of adults in Great Britain have felt anxious when confronted with a mathematical problem<sup>1</sup> and it is important that people can discuss their feelings about maths to begin to recognise and overcome those feelings.

The aim of this module is to give learners space to speak about their experience, to ease anxieties and to deconstruct their pre-conceived notions about their own maths ability.

Time	Key learning outcomes	Which will lead to
30 mins	By the end of this module, learners will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore how they think and feel about maths</li> <li>Know how to talk openly about their feelings towards maths</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved maths capability and awareness of gaps in their knowledge and how to overcome them</li> </ul>



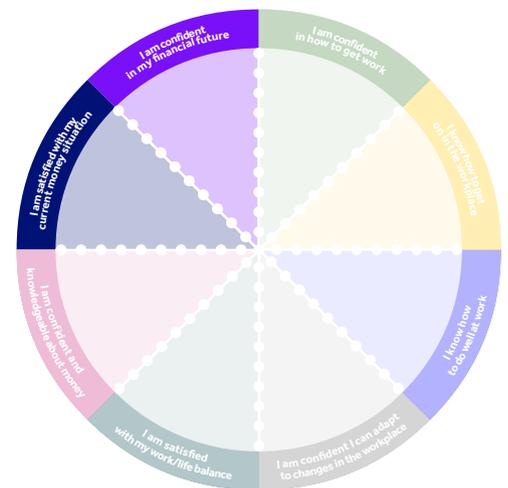
This module has been created in collaboration with National Numeracy, the independent charity that works to improve how people understand and work with numbers in everyday life, sparking better opportunities and brighter futures. [nationalnumeracy.org.uk](http://nationalnumeracy.org.uk)

<sup>1</sup> [learnus.co.uk/Maths%20Anxiety%20Summit%202018%20Report%20Final%202018-08-29.pdf](http://learnus.co.uk/Maths%20Anxiety%20Summit%202018%20Report%20Final%202018-08-29.pdf)

## Important

Introduce the activity and theme and remind your learner of the coaching-based approach. Agree the desired outcome of the session with your learner.

Throughout the activity, we have included 'do now', 'do soon' and 'do later' actions which may help your learner to think about the next steps they could take. Alternatively, you could use the 'do now', 'do soon' and 'do later' headings to help your learner come up with their own actions.



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# Core activity one

## Reflection

Time	Educator guidance	Expected outcome
⌚ 20 mins	<p>Start by asking your learner: "How do you feel about maths?"</p> <p><b>Prompt them with questions such as:</b></p> <p><b>Think of a time where they've been faced with maths, how did they feel?</b></p> <p><b>How would they feel if they were suddenly asked to do a calculation in front of a group?</b></p> <p><b>Are there times where they feel more confident than others?</b></p> <p>Hand your learner a copy of the <b>Reflections handout</b> and invite them to write down their answers.</p> <p><b>Ask your learner to:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Choose one word they would use to describe this emotion</b></li> <li><b>Discuss their chosen word, why have they chosen it?</b></li> <li><b>Discuss where this feeling may have come from?</b></li> </ol> <p>Your learner may use words such as anxious, nervous, stressed, panicked or similarly negative emotions around maths. Explain to them that this is important to recognise and that this is not unusual.</p> <p><b>Ask your learner:</b></p> <p><b>Are there instances where they have had a positive experience with maths?</b></p> <p><b>Reflect on these instances and think about what made them positive</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learners will be able to vocalise how they feel about maths</li> <li>Learners will be able to better understand where their feelings towards maths come from to identify how they might help themselves</li> </ul>

# Core activity one

## Reflection (cont'd)

Time	Educator guidance	Expected outcome
⌚ 20 mins	<p><b>As your learner shares their experiences, respond by linking their stories to these key messages:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no 'maths gene' – our abilities come from nurture not nature. This includes our school experiences, parental engagement and cultural factors</li> <li>• Ability is not fixed; everyone can improve</li> <li>• The maths we use in the real world is different from the maths we learned at school</li> <li>• Not having a maths GCSE doesn't mean you are bad at it</li> <li>• We still use maths after school and our school performance is not an accurate reflection of our ability. Even if we were in the bottom set at school or were told we couldn't do maths, we are disproving that every day as we use numbers in our day-to-day life</li> <li>• It's not uncommon to feel anxious, stressed or exposed when faced with maths – if people are feeling that way, they are not alone</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to vocalise how they feel about maths</li> <li>• Learners will be able to better understand where their feelings towards maths come from to identify how they might help themselves</li> </ul>
⌚ 5 mins	<p>Following the conversation about how learners feel about maths, share these positive tips for overcoming maths anxiety</p> <p><b>Talk about your feelings about maths.</b> It's important for learners to recognise that it's not uncommon to feel anxious and opening up about their feelings can lessen the anxiety</p> <p><b>Challenge your own beliefs.</b> Are learners being fair on themselves in the way they think about maths?</p> <p><b>Try not to compare yourself to others.</b></p> <p><b>Reduce pressure.</b> Can learners practise their maths in a quieter environment or give themselves more time?</p> <p><b>Set realistic goals.</b> Aim to learn in bitesized chunks and set smaller targets to help boost confidence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners will be able to recall tips for overcoming maths anxiety</li> </ul>

# Core activity one

## Reflection (cont'd)

Time	Educator guidance	Expected outcome
 3-5 mins	<p>Ask your learner to identify what knowledge they think they are missing based on what they have right now and what they will need moving forward.</p> <p><b>You may wish to suggest your learner maps out their action plan as:</b></p> <p><b>Do now:</b> Think back and list out a few scenarios involving maths where you would like to have felt more confident</p> <p><b>Do soon:</b> Consider and write down tips on what would make you feel more confident, reflecting your previous positive experiences and considering other opportunities that would help (such as finding a course, discussing with a friend or support group)</p> <p><b>Do later:</b> Find an opportunity to practice one of your scenarios utilising the tips or support you previously identified</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learners should be able to identify what knowledge gaps they have and what they need to do to close these gaps</li> </ul>

# Wrap up

Time	Educator guidance	Expected outcome
⌚ 3-5 mins	<p><b>Ask your learner:</b></p> <p><b>Think about what you have covered in this session, what steps can you take next to move forward in this area?</b></p> <p><b>Agree an action or next step that your learner can take to consolidate what has been covered in the session, for example:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set aside time to think about how they can change how they feel about maths</li> <li>• Are there groups, online or in person courses available to support them?</li> </ul> <p><b>You may also wish to refer your learner to further information and guidance on improving maths skills and financial wellbeing via the following organisations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="https://nationalnumeracy.org.uk/what-numeracy/how-improve-your-maths">nationalnumeracy.org.uk/what-numeracy/how-improve-your-maths</a></li> <li>• <a href="https://bbc.co.uk/teach/skillswise/maths/zfdymfr">bbc.co.uk/teach/skillswise/maths/zfdymfr</a></li> <li>• <a href="https://maps.org.uk">maps.org.uk</a></li> </ul> <p>Refer your learner back to the LifeSkills wheel and check if they are closer to achieving their desired score.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners should leave feeling more confident about their existing knowledge and how to fill any gaps</li> </ul>

# Optional extension

Time	Educator guidance	Expected outcome
	<p><b>Start by asking your learner:</b></p> <p><b>Are there any maths statements they've been told that they have doubted?</b></p> <p><b>Are there long-held beliefs they have about maths from childhood?</b></p> <p>Hand your learner the <b>Myths about maths handout</b>. Explain to your learner that you will discuss a number of statements to do with maths and money. The statements are things that people commonly think about maths, some of which are myths.</p> <p><b>Ask your learner to think about whether the statement is true or is a myth.</b></p> <p><b>Why do they think this? Are they surprised by the real answer?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learners will understand that some statements they may have heard about maths are not always true</li> <li>Learners will understand that no matter where they are starting from, they can continue to build their confidence with maths</li> </ul>

# How do you feel about maths?

## Reflection

In this activity, we discussed "How do you feel about maths?"

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**Make a note of your own feelings, including the one word you used to describe these feelings. Think about where these feelings might have come from.**

# How do you feel about maths?

## Myths about maths

### **Statement 1:**

Maths skills are not important when it comes to managing money.

### **Statement 2:**

Some people are maths people; others are not.

### **Statement 3:**

Spreadsheets, calculators and other support like budgeting tools mean people don't need maths to manage their money anymore.

### **Statement 4:**

Everyone can improve their maths with effort.

### **Statement 5:**

Some people experience such a level of maths anxiety that it stops them from even trying to manage their money.

# How do you feel about maths?

## Myths about maths: answers

### **Statement 1: Maths skills are not important when it comes to managing money. (MYTH)**

Without basic number sense, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to manage our personal finances. Key activities including budgeting, understanding our income/payslips, getting the best deals and monitoring expenses require number skills. Having good number skills alone, doesn't mean someone has good money management skills, but it's true that without good number skills, it is hard to have good money management skills.

### **Statement 2: Some people are maths people; others are not. (MYTH)**

It's true that people reach adulthood with varying levels of ability, but this is not because they were born with or without the ability to do maths. The true reasons for differing abilities and feelings are environmental. Often this relates back to school and childhood: people with bad school experiences may have been discouraged from engaging with maths, while those who had good teachers and/or strong parental input were encouraged to practise more and so improved.

It's also true that some people do have preferences for some skill sets over others – but this is also usually due to experiences that have led them to engage more with some things than others. The more they've practised the skill, the more highly skilled they've become.

### **Statement 3: Spreadsheets, calculators and other support like budgeting tools mean people don't need maths to manage their money anymore. (MYTH)**

Lots of people think that these tools are a way of avoiding numeracy. But there is more to maths than mental arithmetic. These tools all help and can take the pressure off. But to be able to use them effectively, you still need basic maths skills and, perhaps more importantly, the confidence to avoid shying away from tackling numbers.

Without some numeracy skills, it is hard to know what to key into your calculator or what functions to use. You need to know how to translate your real-world problem into something that the calculator/spreadsheet can understand.

The skill of estimation is also critical in checking that the answer given is the correct one. It's easy to get a decimal point in the wrong place, add an extra zero or press the wrong button so estimating helps you identify if there's been an error.

### **Statement 4: Everyone can improve their maths with effort. (TRUE)**

Ability is not fixed and there is no specific gene for maths ability. Not everyone will become a maths expert, but everyone can get better than they are now.

When we acknowledge that ability isn't fixed and that anyone can improve, it's important to recognise we are also saying 'I can improve.' It's often more difficult to apply this to ourselves than to accept the idea that everyone can improve. But even if someone feels anxious or has found maths difficult in the past, it's true that everyone can improve, and everyone includes 'you.'

This supports the idea of a growth mindset, which is the stance that our ability is not fixed – we can learn and improve at anything we put our minds to. This is the opposite of having a fixed mindset, which is the belief that our talents are innate. Those with a growth mindset tend to achieve more because they focus their energy on learning, valuing mistakes and believing they can improve.

### **Statement 5: Some people experience such a level of maths anxiety that it stops them from even trying to manage their money. (TRUE)**

Maths anxiety is common and sometimes it is severe enough to result in people avoiding any maths they might face – including looking at their money. They also may avoid finding support for financial difficulties due to worries about needing to work out the numbers and looking silly or being judged if they can't.

At the end of this module, remind learners that if they feel anxious about using maths, they are not alone. Many people feel the same way and it's important to keep talking openly and asking questions so that our confidence grows.