

Ways to Reduce Mathematics Anxiety

- Promote self-talk in which students verbalize what they are doing with statements such as “First I am going to . . .” in order to focus their attention and help them believe that they do know what to do. This is sometimes called *anchoring*.
- Build confidence by helping students recognize what they *can* do. Use questions such as “What do you know about this?” Keep samples of their work so that they can see their improvement over time.
- Keep number lines and calculators available so that students can use these devices to ensure accuracy.
- Use multiple sources of assessment and de-emphasize high-stakes testing. Understandably, teachers are under much pressure from all of the attention given to mandated tests. It is important not to share this pressure with the students. Test anxiety correlates highly to mathematics anxiety and vice versa.
- Have students keep a journal where they can record their feelings about mathematics, responding to prompts such as *When we start a new topic in math I feel . . .* , *When I am asked to explain my thinking in math I feel . . .* , and *When I am asked to come to the board in math class I feel . . .* Teachers and students must be aware of these feelings to help students reduce them.
- Limit activities that are timed. Time is one more pressure that can greatly add to anxiety.
- Choose partners carefully. Some students may be most comfortable in a group that works at a slower pace. Others may need to work with the same partner throughout a unit.
- Let students set personal goals. When students set their own objectives, it gives them a greater sense of control, which in turn lessens anxiety.
- Integrate mathematics with other subject areas. Some students feel more comfortable performing mathematical tasks when the tasks are related to an area of strength or interest. A student interested in ancient Mediterranean civilizations may enjoy constructing a time line of that period, while a student whose favorite subject is science may be interested in collecting and analyzing data related to an experiment. Students also tend to develop more positive attitudes toward mathematics when they perceive it as connected to their world.