

A head for figures

- A** 'I've always been rubbish at maths.' How often have you heard statements like this? You might even have made them yourself. According to many teachers and educationalists, maths anxiety is a longstanding problem which is preventing many children and adults from fulfilling their potential.
- B** 'The "I can't do maths" attitude is alarmingly widespread,' claims Martin Trigg, a secondary school maths teacher from Manchester. 'The trouble is that once you start believing you can't cope with numbers, that's exactly what happens. Anxiety seriously impairs your capacity to hold information in your head and solve problems. When you get the answer wrong, this confirms your fears.'
- C** Maths anxiety may affect up to two million children in the UK, but the issue doesn't disappear when they leave school. 'If we don't tackle these insecurities early, they will probably affect people into middle age and beyond,' says Trigg. 'I see it in parents all the time. For instance, I recently met a woman at a party, and when I told her what my job was, she looked absolutely horrified. She then proceeded to tell me – in front of her teenage daughter – how irrelevant algebra was to the real world. It's an unfortunate message to give your children if you want them to succeed academically.'
- D** Why, then, does this attitude have such a firm grip on our society? 'Saying that you can't do maths has become socially acceptable,' observes Trigg. 'Curiously, people don't admit to struggling with reading and writing in the same way. No one wants to be thought of as illiterate, but people seem to take pride in being bad at maths. It's almost become a badge of honour.' According to Margaret Lester, an adult education instructor from South London, an underlying belief in a 'maths gene' may be partly responsible. 'People make this assumption without realizing it,' she says. 'There's an idea that some people are naturally able to do maths, and others aren't. Blaming biology for your inadequacies implies that there is nothing you can do to change them. It encourages laziness.' Adam Miller of the educational charity Numeracy Counts agrees. 'The existence of a maths gene remains to be established, but growing evidence suggests that practice is a major factor in achievement. In some parts of the world, children are brought up to believe that anyone can succeed at maths with enough effort. Unsurprisingly, they often get better results.'
- E** Trigg is optimistic that steps can be taken to combat maths anxiety. 'Attitudes don't change overnight, but I think we can help pupils understand the feelings they are experiencing a bit better. As teachers, it is our responsibility to ensure that the emotional aspects of learning aren't neglected.'

Are these questions TRUE, FALSE or NOT GIVEN? Justify the answer by copying the part of the text.

1. Maths anxiety can prevent adults from reaching their full potential in life.
(and children)
2. Martin Triggs believes that a negative attitude might make your anxiety worse.
3. Maths anxiety affects approximately two million children in the UK.
4. Margaret Lester argues that people may assume they are not naturally good at maths without even realizing it.
5. Adam Miller believes that practice plays only a small role in improving maths skills.
6. Trigg thinks that focusing on pupils' emotional responses to maths should be avoided in schools.

Answers

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A 'I've always been rubbish at maths.' How often have you heard statements like this? You might even have made them yourself. According to many teachers and educationalists, maths anxiety is a longstanding problem which is preventing many children and adults from fulfilling their potential.

1

B 'The "I can't do maths" attitude is alarmingly widespread,' claims Martin Trigg, a secondary school maths teacher from Manchester. 'The trouble is that once you start believing you can't cope with numbers, that's exactly what happens. Anxiety seriously impairs your capacity to hold information in your head and solve problems. When you get the answer wrong, this confirms your fears.'

2

C Maths anxiety may affect up to two million children in the UK, but the issue doesn't disappear when they leave school. 'If we don't tackle these insecurities early, they will probably affect people into middle age and beyond,' says Trigg. 'I see it in parents all the time. For instance, I recently met a woman at a party, and when I told her what my job was, she looked absolutely horrified. She then proceeded to tell me – in front of her teenage daughter – how irrelevant algebra was to the real world. It's an unfortunate message to give your children if you want them to succeed academically.'

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1. True
2. True
3. True
4. True
5. False
6. Not given

Justifications are highlighted on the text!! 😊