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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from Math Therapy™.

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Let x = Math Trauma

Remember, Math Therapy is a holistic process that brings together mindfulness-based tools and techniques that practitioners have been using in fields like counseling, self-help, and every possible genre of coaching for decades—and applies them to *math education*. I know it might seem like mindset is all we talk about these days, but the idea of actually incorporating any sort of thought-work into education is relatively new and a massively untapped resource.

Our collective goal when employing Math Therapy is to *empower students to build a better relationship with math, and in doing so, with themselves!*

I want you to pause and really let that sink in.

Note that the goal is *not* to propel every one of our students into a math-related career or to get them to be A students in math or to get their parents off our backs (JK!) or even to dazzle them all so mind-blowingly with the wonders and joys of mathematics that they become forever enamored with the subject. Our goal here is all about relationship-building. As I mentioned in the Preface, it is often through our relationship with math that we begin to develop a sense of worth. I recently interviewed math educator and mindfulness coach Deborah Peart for my podcast (Vakharia, 2023a), and I will never forget an anecdote she shared. She told me that, as part of a math intervention she conducted at an elementary school, she asked students to answer the prompt “Math makes me feel _____” on a piece of paper. Upon opening up all of the responses, she saw what one child had written:

Math makes me feel *like I am a good kid, when I do good at math.*

This student had articulated what many kids feel: that being “good” at math defines their worth as a student and as a *person*.



HOT TIP

Pay special attention the next time one of your students says they’re not “good” at math. Ask them what they mean when they say that, and make sure it’s clear that while math is for everyone, the way they feel about their math skills *now* is transient and will change, but more importantly: Our math ability is just one small, teeny part of our entire personalities—it’s not everything, in the scheme of things!

The immediate goal of Math Therapy is to unpack math trauma as the starting point to healing one's relationship with math. As I mentioned when I shared the 5 M's of Math Therapy earlier in this chapter, it is unpacking that trauma that serves as a jumping-off point to helping us understand our math stories, and subsequently, it is those math stories that allow us to take a deeper look into what we believe about what we are worthy and capable of. Once we help our students face their math trauma, we open the gateway to be able to do several things:

- Empower students to learn to embrace the struggle necessary to solve math problems *in* the classroom—and to solve problems *outside* the classroom
- Equip students to take risks *in* math class—and *in* real life
- Encourage students to develop a creative approach to problem-solving *in* the classroom—and *outside* the classroom
- Energize students to believe they are capable of exceeding their expectations both *in* our classrooms—and *in* the pursuit of their wildest dreams



IN THE MOMENT

The goal of Math Therapy is to empower students to build a better relationship with math, and ultimately with themselves!

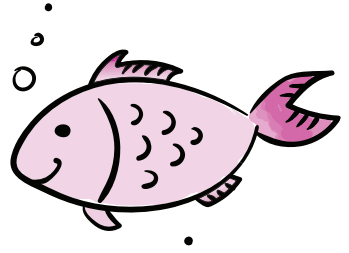
Speak it into being. Write it down somewhere you can see it every time you pick up this book to keep learning or set out to put Math Therapy into action in your own life. Keep this goal in your mind's eye every time you practice Math Therapy.

I know I am being really extra about this, but honestly, the importance of keeping goals in mind is kind of like that old saying about a fish climbing a tree or whatever. Do you know what I'm talking about? I just looked it up, and it's widely attributed to Einstein (but it probably wasn't him!).

Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.

—Probably not Albert Einstein

The point is that if you judge the effectiveness of Math Therapy by whether or not your students all end up nailing a 4.0 in your class, you're going to be sorely disappointed. BUT if you judge its effectiveness by measuring the incremental improvement in your students' relationship with math, then you're likely to be pleasantly surprised, even perhaps low-key ecstatic. For real.



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