



BREAKING THE MATHS MONSTER: A JOURNEY OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

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**"Thank you, Ms Shilpa, I scored 75% on my maths test",
was the first message I read on my phone on a Monday morning.
My Monday could not have started better!**

This message was from my ninth grade student, who is diagnosed with dyslexia, struggles with weak working memory and weak retention skills; worst of all, she struggled with the **fear of math**. Does that sound familiar to you?



It's not uncommon to fear the "maths monster".

I have come across kids, who have no learning difficulty and who are unable to perform at grade level, being in fear of math.

Numbers are an integral part of our everyday life as much as the language is. We use four basic maths operations all the time without even realising it. Even your average shopkeeper or café owner, are quick and accurate with calculations when it comes to their money matters.

What does it signify? When we realise that the application of any knowledge is beneficial to us, we try to learn it and apply it. The realisation is the key.

At DAS International I have taught maths and literacy to students from various curricula and with different abilities over a period of eleven years. Some have a confirmed diagnosis while some don't, but their struggle is real! **Our overall goal at DAS is to teach them strategies to overcome this struggle and adapt to the curriculum.**



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Some of my students pleasantly surprise me at times by their 'out of the box' thinking ability despite their learning difficulty. This justifies why we use the term '**learn differently**'.

However, there are moments when I observe an unexpected learning gap, especially in older students attending middle school or high school. For them, maths becomes abstract to a certain extent by the time they enter higher grades, and they find it difficult to connect these concepts to real world situations. They also may have forgotten some previously learnt concepts in earlier years and this may cause a hurdle now. It's an uncomfortable feeling for the student.

For example, in order to solve a complex algebraic fraction, students need to apply the knowledge of basic operations of fractions learnt in primary or elementary grades. In a classroom full of peers, it can be an embarrassing moment for the student to admit forgetfulness. The teacher may be aware of his/her learning difficulty and may be empathetic but that does not alleviate the low self-esteem caused by such incidents. The **low self-esteem will impact the academic performance** as the student may get lose confidence in their ability to give 100%. This in turn may trigger a vicious cycle of weak performance, low self-esteem, and exclusion.



As a specialist teacher who is trained in dyslexia and loves maths,

I always focus on breaking this vicious cycle and encouraging inclusion. The objective is to help the student to overcome the fear of the subject without being judged. All I want is to let the learner know that **maths is not a monster**; it is a wonderful subject which is doable when approached with a positive mindset and of course, with the right support!

The student whose message inspired me to write this blog, has crossed many hurdles so far. Initially, she did not even want to talk about maths and treated her lessons like a chore. However, **there has been a gradual positive change in her approach, and she is able to analyse her errors. That is a major step towards achieving results.** There may be more challenges along the way, but she is prepared to take them on with my help and we both look forward to enjoying our maths journey together. The path is looking clearer than before.



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