

## Math Anxiety vs. Dyscalculia: Comparing the Signs

By The Understood Team  
**At a Glance**

- **Both dyscalculia and math anxiety can impact kids' performance in math.**

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- **They can show up in similar ways, and a child can struggle with both.**

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- **Understanding the difference can help you respond best to your child's challenges.**

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Dyscalculia is a learning issue that impacts math. And the challenges show up everywhere—with homework, classwork and tests and everyday tasks.

Kids with dyscalculia have weaknesses in skills related to math. They may have trouble learning to count and recalling math facts. They may also have poor number sense and not understand math concepts like “greater than” and “less than.” And they may struggle with remembering phone numbers or keeping track of scores when they're playing sports.

Sometimes, these challenges can make kids with dyscalculia feel anxious about having to do math-related tasks. But dyscalculia is not the same as math anxiety.

Math anxiety can make kids question their abilities in math, even if they have strong skills. And although it's not a learning issue, it can certainly get in the way of learning math.

When kids feel pressure to show what they know or worry they're going to fail, they can become so anxious that they actually do poorly. This is particularly true on tests, because performance translates into grades. In some cases, their anxiety can build and spill over into other areas of life. Watch as an expert explains more about the difference in this video.

## Dyscalculia vs. Math Anxiety



Dyscalculia and math anxiety are different, but the signs and struggles can overlap. And it's possible for a child have both. This chart may help you better understand what you're seeing in your child.

<b>Signs of Math Anxiety</b>	<b>Signs of Dyscalculia</b>
<p>Your child worries he'll do poorly on a math test, even though he understands the material and has studied.</p>	<p>Your child expects to do poorly on a math test because he doesn't understand the material, even after studying.</p>
<p>Your child does poorly on math tests, even after preparing for them, because anxiety gets in the way.</p>	<p>Your child does poorly on math tests, even after preparing for them, because he doesn't understand the material.</p>
<p>Your child can get through homework fairly easily and answers most problems correctly. But he may feel anxious about doing it.</p> <p>He may even make errors because anxiety makes it hard to focus on some details. It may also make him focus too much on other details.</p>	<p>Your child spends a long time doing homework and gets many of the answers wrong.</p>
<p>Your child tries to avoid going to math class when there's a quiz or test.</p>	<p>Your child tries to avoid going to math class, <i>especially</i> when there's a quiz or test, because he's sure he'll fail.</p>

Signs of Math Anxiety	Signs of Dyscalculia
Your child gets good grades on math homework and classwork, but not on tests.	Your child gets poor grades on math homework, classwork and tests.

It can be easy to think of dyscalculia and math anxiety as one and the same—especially because the signs can look similar. It might be helpful to think of it this way:

Doing math with dyscalculia is like hiking with a sprained ankle. Doing math with math anxiety is like being a physically able hiker who worries about what might happen if he tries to climb the peak. Self-doubt gets in the way of success.

Knowing what's behind your child's difficulty with math lets you respond in the best way. Find out what to do if you're concerned your child might have dyscalculia. Read how a college student manages anxiety from her dyscalculia. And get tips on how to help your child manage test anxiety.

Learn how to spot the signs of chronic anxiety. If you have concerns, don't hesitate to reach out to your child's doctor.

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## Key Takeaways

- **Dyscalculia is a learning issue that affects math skills like counting, recalling math facts and understanding math concepts.**
- **Math anxiety is an emotional issue involving self-doubt and fear of failing.**
- **Both can create test anxiety and lead kids to try to avoid going to math classes.**

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## About the Author



**The Understood Team** is composed of writers, editors and community moderators, many of whom have children with learning and attention issues.

## Reviewed by



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