

## *How do you deal with student anxiety while taking a Sprint?*

Anxiety normally stems from lacking confidence and/or fearing failure. Teachers can minimize or eliminate Sprint anxiety by considering the following:

Begin every school year by carefully selecting the first ten Sprints that will be delivered. Make sure that the Sprint topics are well below grade level. This will go far to helping all students (especially those who have previously struggled with mathematics) develop a “success association” with Sprints. When harder Sprints are introduced later in the school year, struggling students are more likely to enter the activity with a positive mindset and thus persevere if the problems seem challenging.

NEVER deliver a Sprint in which the slowest processing student cannot answer one problem every four to five seconds, and NEVER underestimate the power of a teacher/student relationship in relieving anxiety. Students who feel safe in their classroom and loved by their teacher are usually happy to participate in class activities. Find a time during the day to meet with children one-on-one. Tell the struggling student: *“You’ve been working very hard and I deeply want to see you succeed. Don’t worry about finishing the Sprint or being the fastest in the class. Keep trying your best and you’ll continue to improve.”* Hand the child the next day’s Sprint. Tell them: *“I’m going to deliver this tomorrow. If you want, take it home and practice.”* This simple gesture shows the child that their teacher is recognizing their efforts and invested in their education and happiness. That, in itself, goes far to reducing anxiety. As Dr. Sagher said: *The very worst thing that can happen in such an exchange is that the child goes home and memorizes 88 problems.*

Allowing students to not participate in the Sprint routine creates a less stressful environment. By keeping the activity optional, the psychological implications of the activity shifts. Those who want to have fun and/or improve, participate. Those who are uninterested in the latter can do nothing. Over the past nine years, I’ve distributed approximately 100,000 sprint worksheets (2,000 routines times 25 students times 2 worksheets). Of these, 99,000 were presented to middle school students, an age group notorious for being jaded and resistant. Less than 20 sheets were handed back to me. The suggestion could, of course, backfire. If a significant number of students choose not to

participate, the classroom energy would suffer and so would enthusiasm. I never required my students to take Sprints, but I only made them aware of this option once several months of the school year had passed. After strong relationships and classroom routines were established, I told my students that they were free to opt out. If you find that a student opts out too frequently, remind them that Sprints are good practice, even if it isn't their favorite activity.