



Strong Foundations, Not Quick Fixes: The Real Reason Maths Feels Hard

A short guide to how real Maths confidence actually gets built, not just talked about.

“Good at algebra, hopeless at geometry.”

“Fine with the basics, but vectors just don't click.”

Almost every family says some version of one of these at some point, and almost every time, it isn't quite true. Maths isn't a collection of separate skills; it's a chain, each concept linked to the ones before it. Here's what that actually means in practice, and what tends to fix it.

1. The chain rarely breaks where you think it does

When a student gets stuck on a specific topic, the real cause is very rarely that topic itself. It's usually one small link further back: a fraction concept never fully covered in primary school, a place value gap from a week of illness, a decimal-to-percentage conversion rushed at the end of a term because the curriculum had to move on. One missing link doesn't just weaken the chain; it breaks it entirely, and everything built on top of it wobbles.

2. Students are often the least reliable judge of where the gap actually is

“I'm fine with the basics, I just get confused with trigonometry” is one of the most common things I hear, and more often than not, it isn't accurate. The “basics” are rarely as solid as assumed; they've just gone untested for long enough that the gap stopped feeling like a gap. Real progress starts with slowing down and properly diagnosing where the actual break is, not where it seems to be.

3. Fix the foundation, and everything above it gets stronger, not just possible

You can't build several storeys on a wobbly foundation, however impressive the design. Fix the foundation first, and what you build on top of it can genuinely withstand pressure. In practice, this often means one step back before three steps forward: going back further than a student expects, sometimes all the way to primary school concepts, before the harder topic finally makes sense.

4. Break the scary thing into pieces, and it stops being scary

A complicated question can look impossible as a whole, the same way a large jigsaw puzzle does before you've started. The trick is the same in both: start with the frame, find the easy, obvious pieces first, and build momentum. A quarter of the way through without noticing, then half, then the finish line is suddenly close. What looked frightening at the start was never actually one impossible thing; it was several manageable ones.

5. Real confidence is a blueprint, not a pep talk

Confidence that's genuinely earned, by working through something that once felt impossible and coming out the other side, works completely differently from confidence that's just been told to someone. Once a student has done it once, they carry the method with them: the same approach to breaking things down, the same patience with foundations, applies to the next topic, the next subject, and often well beyond Maths itself.

What this means in practice

Every student I work with starts with a proper diagnosis, not an assumption: where are the real gaps, and how far back do they go? Until those links are found and fixed, practising the "harder" topic alone won't make it click. Once they are, it usually clicks faster than anyone expected.

Recognise this in your child?

Tutoring at Erurete always starts with finding the real gap, not just practising the topic currently causing trouble.

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