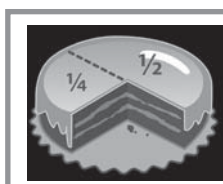


From Fear to Career

Betsy Alvelo



Tangible (adj)

something
you can touch,
something real

BEFORE YOU READ: What are some ways you can make math problems tangible?

When I was a little girl, I was so excited for math. I couldn't wait to attend class! This changed when I started 7th grade. I felt discouraged at every math class. There was no more playing with building blocks or counting with Popsicle sticks. Now it was all worksheets. But I didn't give up. I studied, asked questions, and stayed after school for help.

Then came high school. There were so many students, and the building was HUGE. In math class, I felt anxious because I was so afraid to be called on in front of 31 other students. I was so embarrassed if I didn't know the answer. The teacher moved fast, and I struggled to understand the material. When I didn't understand some-

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thing, the next topic was even harder because all the topics built on each other.

In 11th grade, I decided I was done with school. Each year after that, I thought about going back to school, but I had two children and no one to watch them. With all the struggles of being a mother, I worried that I wasn't capable of doing the work necessary to get my GED.

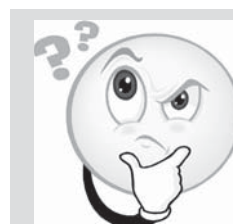
In 2017, I started my studies at Helping Our Mothers through Education (HOME). I approached math differently than the way I used to. Instead of trying to memorize the information in the textbooks, I worked on the problems in a different way. For example, if a problem was about

fractions, I would picture a pizza or an apple pie, and I would imagine how I would slice it to serve some number of people. Or I would think about coins and how they represent fractions of a dollar: one quarter is 25 cents (one quarter of a dollar), and two quarters is 50 cents (half a dollar). Giving myself a way to visualize the math problem and make it more tangible, changed my thought process. I started to feel confident again. Also, I found two teachers who believed in me. They showed me that math is a puzzle that can always be solved.

It doesn't matter if it takes me more than one try to pass the GED math test. I won't give up. I am looking to the future and have already contacted a college to start classes for Registered Nursing in the fall. To anyone who has felt anxiety about math, you are not alone! You can do it. Be patient and try different methods that work for YOU. You'd be surprised what you can achieve.

AFTER YOU READ: Name two things that helped shift Betsy's relationship to math.

Betsy Alvelo is a student at the HOME program in Hartford, CT, where she receives free babysitting for her son and gets one-on-one class time with her teacher. Since writing this article, she has passed the math portion of the GED test. She is looking forward to the future. She is no longer afraid of math!



**Math
Strategy:**

Visualize it! Make it
tangible!