**Tips for helping students with anxiety in the classroom**

**Anxiety is the most common mental health concern for children and teens. Fear and anxiety are normal parts of everyday life, yet for many, persistent, chronic, unrelenting fear, nervousness, worry, and extreme shyness are not temporary but can be a sign of an anxiety disorder. Children with anxiety may be quiet and compliant, or may require a great deal of attention in the classroom. These tips provide some simple, practical approaches to working with and supporting children in school.**

* Encourage participation in class
* Reduce stressful activities
* Incorporate relaxation techniques into your classroom
* Provide positive successful experiences
* Be consistent
* Teach students to identify their anxiety triggers
* Expose students to fearful situation
* Discourage avoidance of activities, people and objects
* Set realistic expectations
* Address school refusal

Be sensitive to a student’s feelings

“It’s normal to feel anxious before a test or speaking in front of the class”

“You are feeling yucky right now, are you worried about something?”

Do not reassure an anxious child

“You will be fine” or “You always do well on a test” or “You don’t have anything to worry about” are not helpful statements

Provide positive feedback

“I am proud of you for finishing your work even though you were feeling anxious”

“You did a great job staying in school today even though you missed your \_\_\_\_\_”

“I really appreciate how hard you must have worked to not ask me questions all day even though you might have been worried about your work”

Help children learn to tolerate their anxiety

“I know you’re feeling pretty bad right now but can you sit in your seat and I will check in with you in a few minutes”

**Tips for managing test anxiety**

**Share these tips to help with anxiety about an upcoming test.**

* **Be prepared.** Develop good study habits. Study at least a week or two before the exam, in smaller increments of time and over a few days (instead of pulling an "all-nighter"). Try to simulate exam conditions by working through a practice test, following the same time constraints.
* **Develop good test-taking skills.** Read the directions carefully, answer questions you know first and then return to the more difficult ones. Outline essays before you begin to write.
* **Maintain a positive attitude.** Remember that your self-worth should not be dependent on or defined by a test grade. Creating a system of rewards and reasonable expectations for studying can help to produce effective studying habits. There is no benefit to negative thinking.
* **Stay focused.** Concentrate on the test, not other students during your exams. Try not to talk to other students about the subject material before taking an exam.
* **Practice relaxation techniques.** If you feel stressed during the exam, take deep, slow breaths and consciously relax your muscles, one at a time. This can invigorate your body and will allow you to better focus on the exam.
* **Stay healthy.** Get enough sleep, eat healthfully, exercise and allow for personal time. If you are exhausted—physically or emotionally—it will be more difficult for you to handle stress and anxiety.
* **Visit the counseling center.** Schools are aware of the toll exams can take on students. They have offices or programs specifically dedicated to helping you and providing additional educational support so that you can be successful.

**Tips for Parents**

**Keep in mind that your child’s anxiety disorder is not a sign of poor parenting. It is also not a phase your child is going through. It may add stress to your family life. It is helpful to build a support network of relatives and friends who understand your child’s specific condition.**

* Pay attention to your child’s feelings.
* Stay calm when your child becomes anxious about a situation or event.
* Recognize and praise small accomplishments.
* Don’t punish mistakes or lack of progress.
* Be flexible and consistent; try to maintain a routine.
* Modify expectations during stressful periods.
* Plan for transitions (For example, allow extra time in the morning if getting to school is difficult).
* Talk with your child about feelings and fears, which helps reduce them.
* Expose children to school and other places and situations in small degrees, increasing exposure slowly over time. Eventually this will help them realize there is nothing to fear.
* Emphasize the positive aspects of going to school: being with friends, learning a favorite subject, and playing at recess.
* Arrange an informal meeting with your child’s teacher away from the classroom.
* Meet with the school guidance counselor for extra support and direction.
* Try self-help methods with your child. In addition to a therapist’s recommendations, a good self-help book will provide relaxation techniques. Be open to new ideas so that your child is, too.
* Encourage hobbies and interests. Fun is relaxation, and hobbies are good distractions that help build self-confidence.
* Help your child establish a support system. A variety of people should be in your child’s life—other children as well as family members or teachers who are willing to talk with your child should the occasion arise.
* Learn about your child’s anxiety disorder and [treatment options.](http://www.adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/children/treatment)
* Seek treatment when self-help does not improve the situation.