



Is your child experiencing stress related to test-taking? Do you wonder if he/she has “test anxiety?” If so, please use this resource as a reference for ideas to help your child when stress levels soar during the testing season.

STRONG START AT HOME

There are many things you can do at home to help support your child and set the stage for a positive test-taking experience:

- Set parameters for a good night's rest several night's prior
 - Mayo Clinic Recommends the following hours of sleep based on age:
 - 3-5 Years - 10 to 13 Hours/Night
 - 6-13 Years - 9 to 11 Hours/Night
 - 14-17 Years - 8 to 10 Hours/Night
 - Adults - 7 to 9 Hours/Night
- Offer a Healthy Breakfast (Packed with Protein)
- Offer Encouragement (Tell your child you believe in them and you know they will do the best they can)
- Keep things calm at home, especially the morning of a test. Kids carry stress from home to school, even after an argument hours before. Hold off on things that may stress your child out. Remember, your child already may be in a heightened state of stress if they are worried about a test, so seemingly 'little things' may have a big reaction.

TEST OR PERFORMANCE STRESS

Feeling nervous or anxious is a common experience and can actually serve a positive purpose if it helps push us to perform at our best; however, there are times when stress/anxiety can tip the scale and cause problems with functioning and performance. This can occur for tests in the classroom, and may also be seen in other areas of performance and evaluation, such as athletic competitions or public speaking. Often times, we see anxiety-related behaviors in schools, especially during test, because this is when performance demands are made.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

“Test anxiety” is a common term we hear to explain stress related to performance or test taking. About 30% of students have “test anxiety.” A central feature to anxiety in general includes worry, which can be thought of as repetitive thoughts related to the chance of potential negative outcomes. This is escalated when the thoughts become irrational and students feel something terrible will happen that is outside of their control. At its most severe, “test anxiety” can cause students to underperform, and generalize to other areas of functioning. Children rarely self-refer for emotional concerns and anxiety is typically manifests internally (as opposed to external, overt behaviors), so it is difficult to identify, which can leave your child to go through it alone and underperform. Therefore, knowing what to look for and having some ideas of how to help is key for support and success. Anxiety can manifest in three ways: (1) Behaviorally, (2) Cognitively & (3)

Physiologically. Often times, behaviors we see are the student's attempt to control the feelings. Here are some signs that may suggest a student *may* have "test anxiety" or need to use stress reducing methods.

- Performance on test [grossly] underrepresents their ability, especially when compared to other class work
- Lowered Self-Esteem
- At times, perceived as Lazy (work avoidance)
- Cognitive Characteristics:
 - Worrying
 - Difficulty focusing
 - Difficulty remembering information (mind went blank)
 - Overly sensitive
 - Difficulty with critical thinking (problem-solving)
- Behavioral Characteristics:
 - Work Avoidance
 - Restless
 - Fidgety
 - Rapid Speech
 - Irritable
 - Withdrawal
 - Wanting everything "perfect"
 - Failure to complete tasks
 - Reduced effort
 - Preferring easy over challenging tasks
- Physiological Characteristics:
 - Aches and pains
 - Rapid heart rate
 - Flushing of skin
 - Vomiting
 - Nausea
 - Difficulty sleeping
 - Perspiration

HOW TO HELP: WHAT HELPS REDUCE STRESS RELATED TO TEST-TAKING?

- Since anxiety can be caused by feeling out of control, it is best to **empower your child** and let them know they have control in that they have studied, teachers have prepared them and they are capable of doing their best.
- Provide positive and encouraging words and actions
- Monitor the amount of pressure your child is under (eliminate other stressors until your child can cope more effectively-everyone's tolerance is different)
- Engage in relaxation techniques (muscle relaxation, meditation, prayer, etc.)
- Leave a positive, encouraging note in their bag or on their chromebook the day of a test
- Avoid criticism, sarcasm or punishment for performance problems
- Emphasize success (over failure)
- Praise and reinforce effort in the learning process
- Maintain realistic expectations, while still stretching to be the best you can. Avoid communicating (either verbally or nonverbally) that perfection is expected
- Be patient
- Do not blow off feelings of anxiety or act like it is silly or ridiculous to feel that way. The feeling is real for the child. Instead, teach them or remind them of strategies they can use (relaxation techniques, positive talk, review material, especially study guides, prayer, meditation, etc.)
- Practice solid test taking strategies:
 - Pre-task rehearsal (practice/give/review/preview what test will cover; study guide)
 - Review material before administering the test to "prime" the material and keep it fresh in their minds
 - Provide or encourage use of tools to help with recall, such as mnemonic phrases

- Encourage your child to use cognitive scripts or positive self-messages for to say to themselves before or during a test
- Let your child know if they miss something, it is still a learning opportunity if they review what they have missed. No one is expected to do everything equally well or get perfect scores all of the time.
- Stay organized, especially with study materials
- Set aside study time each day (do not cram-review work and notes each night)
- Help your child access the purpose of the assessment and how they will attack the test; Give them a game plan

STILL HAVE CONCERNS?

If you think your child has performance or “test anxiety” that is impacting their functioning, reach out to the teacher to discuss simple strategies to help implement across home and school to support your student. If your child is experiencing somatic (physical) complaints, your family may want to consider discussing this with your primary care physician to rule out any other potential health concerns. If you think your child is experiencing anxiety in other areas/nervous across all situations and it is impacting his/ her functioning, it is important to explore different methods of help because it can lead to significant emotional concerns and develop into other concerns. Please reach out to your counseling office, school psychologist or YSB Specialist if you have significant concerns. Your school may access additional resources to assist your child or can make you aware of additional resources in the community you may want to explore.

NOTE

This resource is not meant to replace interventions or psychological services. Rather, this is a general resource meant to provide ideas of support for a student who may be experiencing stress related to test-taking.

REFERENCES

Huberty, T. J. (n.d.). Anxiety and Anxiety Disorders in Children: Information for Parents. Retrieved from <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/mental-health/mental-health-disorders/anxiety-and-anxiety-disorders-in-children-information-for-parents>

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