

Managing Test Anxiety

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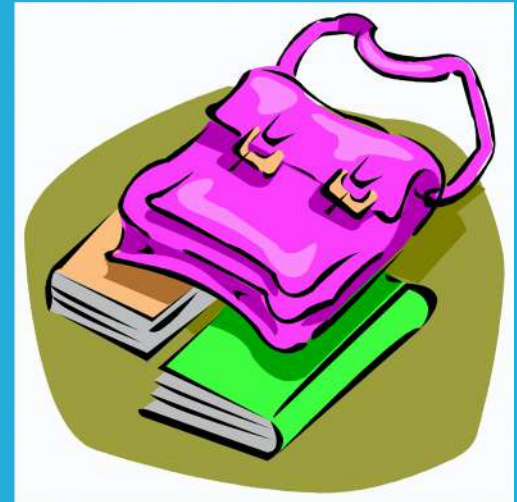
Understanding Anxiety

- Anxiety is intense feelings of being afraid, nervous, tense or worried
 - Too strong for the situation,
 - Go on too long
 - Get in the way of life.
- Being afraid is normal for survival in situations of real danger
- Sometimes the feelings are transferred to situations that are not actually dangerous.
- Can be associated with avoidance behaviors, physiological symptoms, and unpleasant emotions.



Understanding Test Anxiety

- Test Anxiety is the tendency to exhibit a disproportionate emotional response in academic assessment situations
 - Fear of negative outcomes
 - Fear of poor performance
- What does it look like?
 - Excessive worries about tests, grades, school
 - Clammy hands & butterflies
 - Nausea
 - Headaches
 - Fainting
 - Crying
 - Wanting to leave the room or not take the test
 - Feelings of anger, sadness, hopelessness



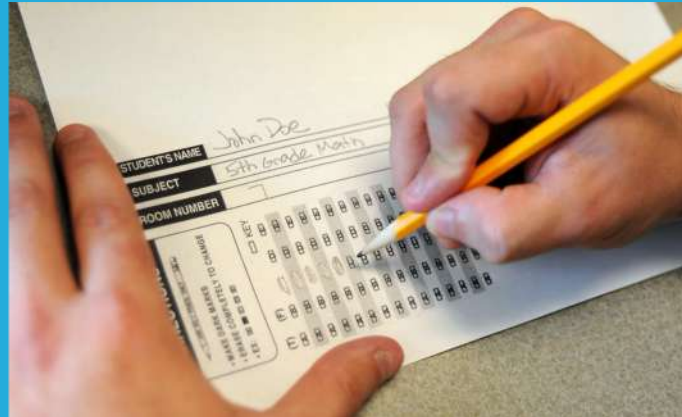
Phases of Test Anxiety

- 1- Worry and dread about what might go wrong, or about failing.
- 2- Physiological symptoms
- 3- Impairment- mind goes blank, child freezes.



Prevalence of Test Anxiety

- 16-20% of children suffer from high test anxiety, 18% suffer from moderately high test anxiety (American Test Anxieties Association)
- Higher prevalence in girls- similar to general anxiety rates
- Has increased over time & become more common at younger ages, due to increased testing



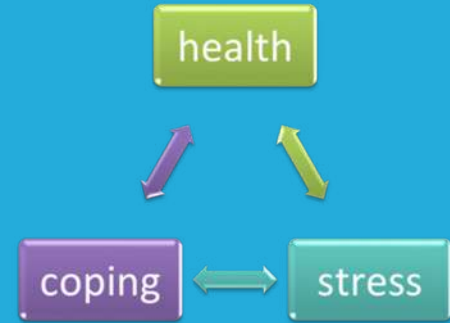
Anxiety in Our Current State

- An overculture of anxiety
- Changes in routine
- Loss of access to external resources
- Limited access to social support systems
- Uncertainty: None of us know what will happen next.
- Burnout & prolonged trauma of pandemic



Creating an Environment of Coping

- A calm environment
- Communication
- Social support
- Routine / Consistency
- A safe place to make mistakes or ask questions
- Access to primary resources/needs (food, shelter, medicine, ect.)
- Coping skills modeled and taught by adults



Strengthening Caregiver Coping Skills

- MUST come first
- Parents, caregivers, and those in “caring” professions (health care, mental health, teaching) tend to set other’s needs first and struggle with self care.
- **You are your child’s first line of defense against anxiety, fear, and stress**
 - Visual Cliff Study
 - Coping Skills are learned through modeling
 - Avoidance behaviors and other anxiety symptoms are also learned through modeling
- **Also, you deserve it, for your own benefit.**



Avoiding Passing Anxiety Onto Children

- Don't blame yourself or beat yourself up
- Practice your own coping and stress management skills (stay tuned for more on this)
- Have a support system
- Know when to disengage
- Explain and LABEL your worries, anxiety, anger
 - “Earlier when I did ____, I was feeling ____, and I coped by ____. This was a (good/bad) way to cope with my feelings. Next time I could try ____”



Family Togetherness

- Families spending time together can reduce anxiety & stress
- Have family meals
- Make time for play
- Share household responsibilities and chores
- Work on creative and enjoyable projects together
- Have routines & rituals



Responding to a Child's Emotions

- Stay Calm & Neutral
- Use labels for feelings
- VALIDATE
- Be present & available
- Talk about your feelings
- Reassure them that they are safe
- Teach strategies that they can use



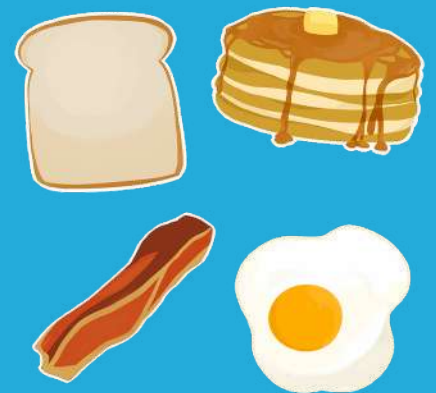
Taking the Pressure Off

- Avoid using punishment related to academic performance
- Try to reinforce effort instead of performance & achievement
- Teach them to value and prioritize things other than school
- Have a “worry time”



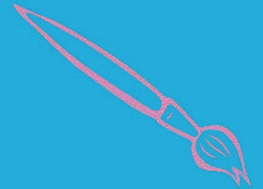
Practical Steps

- Make sure your child is eating balanced meals, especially breakfast
- Make sure they are getting enough sleep
 - Have a regular bedtime routine & schedule
- Make sure they have a safe & quiet space to study & do homework
 - Make sure they are consistently doing homework and completing regular assignments
- Work on organizational skills with your child



Developing a Preparation Schedule

- The best way to combat test anxiety is to be prepared!
- Work collaboratively with your child to develop a plan before each test
 - Allow them to develop a plan as much as they are able, and assist appropriately
- Create small amounts of study or homework time during the week, assist if needed
- Start preparing about two weeks prior
- Use visual cues to help stick to a schedule
- Make the goal *preparation* for the test, not a particular grade or outcome



Mindfulness

- **Mindfulness** means maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment, through a gentle, nurturing lens.
- When we practice mindfulness, we focus on the present moment and release worries about the future & outcomes



Teaching Mindfulness to Kids

- Deep breathing
 - Breathe in, think of what you're worried about, release
 - Figure 8 breathing
 - Breathe in & out mantras
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
 - Demonstration
- Headspace Kids
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N32dOgiTqQA>
- Cosmic Kids Yoga



In the Moment Test Anxiety Skills

- Practicing deep breathing
- Have a drink of water before the test is handed out
- Repeat positive mantras
- Stretch
- Try to sit away from other children



When to Seek Professional Help

- Constant & intense anxiety
- Child is unable to begin or finish tests
- Anxiety shows in other areas
- Academic performance suffers
- Child expresses negative self-image and self-talk
- Child is showing school avoidance behaviors



Discussion & Questions

