

TEST ANXIETY: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS

Although some test anxiety can act as a positive motivator for effect achievement, excessive amounts can disrupt a student's ability to perform well and can cause high levels of stress, low self-esteem, poor grades, and negative views of school. Teachers should consider the following recommendations for addressing student test anxiety.

To Help Prevent Test Anxiety:

1. Teach or review effective study and organizational skills (what to study and how to study), such as the following:

- **SQ3R** study technique
 - Survey the material
 - **Q**uestion what you see
 - **R**ead the material with questions in mind
 - **R**eview the information acquired while reading
 - **R**ecite the information
- **Note taking skills**
 - Outlining
 - Graphic organizers (e.g. mapping)
 - REST
 - **R**ecord what was read or heard
 - **E**dit- condense notes by deleting irrelevant information
 - **S**ynthesize- note information that was stressed
 - **T**hink about the notes while studying the information
- **Time management skills**
 - Students manage and self-monitor their study time
 - Examples include: setting goals for themselves and estimating the time it will take to complete each goal, scheduling study time at their best time for learning, and monitoring their attention to the task.

2. Provide or encourage sufficient time to study for the test. For example:

- Implement study sessions during class time
- Provide ample review
- Promote peer support by assigning study partners
- Encourage studying outside of class

3. Consider requiring students to complete study logs. These logs should be used to document time spent studying for an upcoming test and be brought in daily for teacher review.

4. Assign readings in small amounts. Review readings immediately after they are assigned to ensure comprehension of material.

5. Meet with the student's parents to request that they monitor student study skills at home.

6. Teach students successful test-taking strategies:

- Read or listen to all directions and questions carefully
- Understanding test time limits and the importance of pacing
 - Do not spend too much time on any one question
 - Skip difficult questions until all other questions have been answered
- Different test formats (multiple choice, essay, fill in the blank)

7. Encourage students to seek clarification or additional help, when needed, from the instructor or others.

8. Give students practice tests under simulated conditions and discuss the experience afterwards along with any concerns they have.

9. Be proactive and notice test anxiety before it becomes a problem. Look for warning signs in students during testing sessions such as carelessly hurrying through tests, excessive time spent on a few difficult questions, frequent complaints of physical problems before a test, poor performance on incomplete tests, etc.

10. Model low levels of anxiety in front of your students. Research shows a correlation between degrees of tension and uneasiness displayed by teachers and levels of anxiety experienced by students in the classroom.

11. De-emphasize or refrain from time limits on tests for the class as a whole.

12. Attempt to stagger testing schedules as much as possible when students attend classes taught by multiple teachers so that students may focus on fewer subjects at once.

13. Examine the results of tests beyond recording grades. Use tests as tools to focus on areas in which weaker students are less confident, and focus on these areas with the students. Increased confidence is the key to lessened anxiety.

To Help Students Cope with Test Anxiety:

1. Consult with a school psychologist or counselor on the use of cognitive behavioral intervention, including those that follow. These interventions can be applied in the context of counseling from a mental health specialist or be provided from teachers in the classroom.

2. Encourage students to use positive self-talk as an alternative to negative thoughts about their perceived ability and performance prior to and during testing situations. Teach ways of replacing negative self-thought (“I am not smart enough to do this right”) with positive self-thought (“I studied hard and am doing the best I can”).

3. Teach older students relaxation techniques. Students may be encouraged to listen to relaxation audiotapes during study sessions, etc. Teachers may also consider allowing students to listen to approved relaxation tapes with headphones during testing sessions.

4. Encourage students to view some anxiety as healthy and helpful. Moderate amounts of anxiety can actually facilitate performance.

5. Recommend family counseling carefully if you suspect the anxiety is a result of extreme parental pressure.

6. Structure class seating arrangements so that students with high test anxiety are paired with those who exhibit low levels of test anxiety. Visible on-task behavior, appropriate work habits, and low visible anxiety exhibited in students with low test anxiety may be modeled by students with high levels of anxiety as these more positive working behaviors are rewarded with teacher praise and positive results.

7. Provide accommodations, where appropriate, for students with documented test anxiety

- Untimed or extended time formats
- Small group administration
- Oral administration
- Bulleted essays

8. If the above recommendations are not sufficient, seek consultation from the school psychologist or counselor regarding the possible need for psychological assessment and more extreme services and supports from others. A parent conference may be needed.

Resources:

Bakunas, B. (1993). Putting the lid on test anxiety. *Learning, 22*(2), 64-65.

Bass, J., Burroughs, M., Gallion, R. & Hodel, J. (2002). Investigating ways to reduce student anxiety during testing. *ERIC*. EBSCO.

Goonan, B. (2003). Overcoming test anxiety: Giving students the ability to show what they know. *Measuring Up: Assessment Issues for Teachers, Counselors, and Administrators*.

Harris, H. & Coy, D. (2003). Helping students cope with test anxiety. *ERIC*. EBSCO.

Statton, D. (2007). Teaching test taking skills.

http://lesson-plan-help.suite101.com/article.cfm/teaching_test_taking_skills.

Strumpf, J. & Fodor, I. (1993). The treatment of test anxiety in elementary school-age children: Review and recommendations. *Child and Family Behavior Therapy, 15*(4), 19-40.

Wachelka, D. & Katz, R. (1999). Reducing test anxiety and improving academic self-esteem in high school and college students with learning disabilities. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, 30, 191-198.

www.counsel.ufl.edu/SelfHelp/testAnxiety.asp: Test Anxiety.

www.inspiringteachers.com/tips/anxiety: Overcoming Test Anxiety.

www.utea.org/testing/tips/parentsandAnxiety.htm: Test Anxiety: Tips for Parents.

Contributors:

Sarah Blake

Cassie Shutt