



Addressing Test Anxiety

With Students with Learning Differences

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Overview & Goals

Introductions

Definitions

Significance

Educate, Empower, Equip, Intervene

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Experience

- Assistant Professor, WTAMU
- School Counselor, Lubbock ISD
 - *3 years Elementary School*
 - *5 years Middle School*
- Teacher, San Marcos CISD
 - Dyslexia Specialist
 - GT Education Facilitator

Education

- PhD, Texas Tech University
- BA, MEd, Angelo State University

What is test anxiety?

- A combination of physical symptoms and emotional reactions that interfere with your ability to perform well on tests
- Many students experience varying levels of test anxiety throughout their years of learning

Physical: Headache, nausea, excessive sweating, shortness of breath, rapid heartbeat, lightheadedness, and feeling faint.

Test anxiety can also cause panic attacks, which are the abrupt onset of intense fear or discomfort in which you may feel like you are unable to breathe or like you are having a heart attack.



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Emotional symptoms: Feelings of stress, fear, helplessness, and disappointment, negative thoughts (rumination about past poor performances, consequences of failure, feeling inadequate, helpless), mind going blank, and racing thoughts.



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Behavioral/cognitive symptoms:

Difficulty concentrating, thinking negatively, comparing yourself to others, and procrastinating.



Causes for Test Anxiety

Fear of Failure

Students may put immense pressure on themselves and associate self-worth with their grade on a test. Students may ruminate on negative thoughts regarding themselves.

Lack of Preparation

Students may wait until the last minute to study or prepare for a test. According to a number of studies, “cramming” for a test is not successful and can leave you feeling anxious and overwhelmed.

Causes for Test Anxiety

Poor Test History

Not succeeding on the previous exam can make you anxious for the next exam. It is important to remember to stay in the present moment when taking an exam so you remain focused. Don't dwell on the past.

Perfectionism

Perfectionism is having extremely high performance expectations for yourself. Research studies show that students who have high perfectionism and high self-criticism tend to have high test anxiety and do *worse* on exams. Try to get students to recognize their hard work and allow for some mistakes.

What can we do
now to help
reduce test
anxiety?

Preparing for Tests

- Empower students by developing a consistent routine for preparing for tests
 - Write down or create a calendar of upcoming tests
 - Create a study schedule for the days leading up to the exam
 - Create a method of studying unique to them (flashcards/read aloud/drawing)
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Practicing for Tests

- Ask their teacher if there are older versions of a test to allow for more practice
 - [STAAR Released Tests](#)
 - Practice the same type of test in a similar test environment to school ([Practice Online Format](#))
 - Practice time constraints before the test
 - Practice according to learning styles
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Improving Lifestyle Choices

- Proper Sleep Hygiene
 - 9-11 hrs of sleep per night
 - Follow a bedtime routine
 - Keep regular sleep/wake times (even on weekends)
 - Importance of Sleep
 - Improved concentration
 - Improved fact recall
 - Proper Diet
 - Discourage sugary/caffeinated drinks (10oz apple juice = 1 can Coca Cola)
 - Encourage leafy greens and healthy fats which gives the brain fuel
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Pre-Test Strategies

- Get a good night of sleep
- Gather all materials you need in advance
- Arrive on time and know your seat
- Eat a healthy breakfast
- Play calming music
- Visualize success
- Engage in some positive self-talk or mantra
 - WDEP
 - SMART GOALS
- Collaborate with school professionals

Test Taking Strategies

- Relaxation Techniques
 - Preparation Techniques
 - Positive Self-Talk and Visualization
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Using Relaxation Techniques

- Breathing Techniques
 - [Square breathing](#)
 - Color breathing
 - Tension Release
 - Tense muscles, feet to head
 - [5-4-3-2-1 Relaxation Exercise](#)
 - Observation/Distraction
 - Low Impact Exercise
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Healthy Coping Skills Combined with Relaxation Techniques

- Thinking positively
- Finding humor
- Problem-solving
- Managing time and priorities
- Exercising regularly
- Eating a healthy diet
- Getting enough sleep
- Spending time outside
- Reaching out to supportive family and friends
- Slowing heart rate
- Lowering blood pressure
- Slowing breathing rate
- Improving digestion
- Controlling blood sugar levels
- Reducing activity of stress hormones
- Increasing blood flow to major muscles
- Reducing muscle tension and chronic pain
- Improving focus and mood
- Improving sleep quality
- Lowering fatigue
- Reducing anger and frustration
- Boosting confidence to handle problems

Post-Test Strategies

- Breathe
 - Positive Self-Talk
 - Take note of feelings
 - Take note of how your preparation met your needs (or not)
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Dyslexia

Appropriate Accommodations

- Oral/Signed Administration
 - Identified with Dyslexia or similar
 - Documented evidence of reading difficulties
 - Text-to-Speech/Auto Text-to-Speech
- Basic Transcribing
- Content and Language Supports
- Spelling Assistance
- Supplemental Aids
- Individualized Structured Reminders
- Extra Time

Dysgraphia

Appropriate Accommodations

- Basic Transcribing
 - Content and Language Supports
 - Spelling Assistance
 - Supplemental Aids
 - Individualized Structured Reminders
 - Extra Time
-

ADHD

Appropriate Accommodations

- Oral/Signed Administration
 - Identified with Dyslexia or similar
 - Documented evidence of reading difficulties
 - Text-to-Speech/Auto Text-to-Speech
 - Supplemental Aids
 - Individualized Structured Reminders
 - Chunking of Test Items
 - Frequent Breaks
 - Extra Time
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Gifted Learners

Appropriate Accommodations

- Preparation is extremely important
 - Calming techniques
 - Frequent breaks/Extra time
 - Positive self-talk to address perfectionism
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Questions?



Best Practices

- ★ Know your strengths
- ★ Know your learning and studying style
- ★ Prepare
- ★ Practice
- ★ Have a plan for relaxation techniques
- ★ Evaluate your own performance
- ★ Learn from the past

Keep in touch!



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[Center for Learning Disabilities](#) Webinars