

Test Anxiety & Standardized Testing

The Positives of Anxiety

- **Stigmas related to anxiety** may lead one to believe that all anxiety is negative and needs to be alleviated. This is a myth!
- A little bit of sympathetic arousal might be **good for when you have to take a test** because it will get you "up" for the test and make you more alert.
- It is important to acknowledge **healthy and unhealthy signs of anxiety**.

What is Test Anxiety?

- **Anxiety is an emotion** characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure or upset stomach.
- **Test anxiety is a type of performance anxiety** – a feeling someone might have in a situation where performance really counts or when the pressure's on to do well.
- **Test anxiety can impair** capacity to think, plan, and perform on tests.



Possible Causes of Test Anxiety



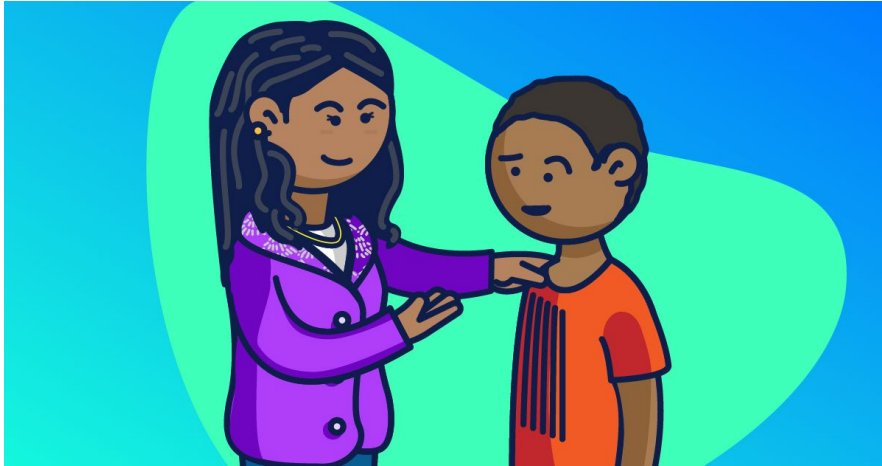
- **Increased pressure** to perform may lead to maladaptive behaviors in children and adolescents.
- **Generalized anxiety** that is exacerbated during evaluations.
- **Repeated difficulties** with test-taking or other performances tend to lower self-confidence, which in turn can create conditions for more frequent and intense experiences of anxiety.
- **Continued stress** likely will worsen a student's anxiety, further impairing performance, self-esteem, and motivation.

Signs of Test Anxiety

- Excessive worry about performance
- Sleep disturbances
- Physical symptoms include sweaty palms, accelerated heart rate, upset stomach, etc.
- Change in appetite
- Feelings of agitation or irritability
- Difficulty concentrating
- Avoiding school on test taking days
- Withdrawing from typical activities and interests



Managing Test Anxiety



- **Talk to your child** about their feelings and how to accept mistakes. Share times that you felt stress and how you coped with that stress.
- Ensure that your student gets a **good night's sleep!**
- **Practice self-affirmation** (i.e., "I can do this!", "I am confident!").
- **Eat a healthy** dinner before test day and breakfast on test day.
- **Keep a consistent schedule** and arrive to school on time
- **Review strategies** for coping with stress
- **Practice optimistic thinking.** For example, when trying a new activity, they may think "I'm terrible at this." A healthy thought would be "I'm going to try my very best."

Test Taking Tips for Kids

- **Don't spend too much time** on any one question.
- **Multiple choice tests:** read each answer and then cross out the ones you know aren't right to help yourself narrow it down.
- **Pick an answer and stick with it:** we all have the tendency to second-guess ourselves and it can lead to wasted time and wrong answers.
- **Break things up:** When you start to feel panicked, look for a way to change the focus. Move onto the next page or task.
- **Accept when you don't know something:** Sometimes the best way to manage your anxiety is to accept that you don't know the answer to a question and move on.

Strategy: Breathing Exercises

1. Sit straight up in your chair in a good posture position.
2. Slowly inhale through your nose.
3. As you inhale, first fill the lower section of your lungs and work your way up to the upper part of your lungs.
4. Hold your breath for a few seconds.
5. Exhale slowly through your mouth.
6. Wait a few seconds and repeat the cycle.



Additional breathing exercises:

“Smell the flower, blow out of the candle”

Square breathing

Finger breathing

Strategy: Tensing and Differential Relaxation

1. Put your feet flat on the floor.
2. With your hands, grab underneath the chair.
3. Push down with your feet and pull up on your chair at the same time for about five seconds.
4. Relax for five to ten seconds.
5. Repeat the procedure two or three times.



Student Supports

- **School Counselors:**
 - Dianne Redding (2-5) – Reddingd@fultonschools.org
 - Jen Soloff (K-1) – Soloffj@fultonschools.org
- **School Social Worker:**
 - Randi Downey – Downeyr@fultonschools.org
- **School Psychologist:**
 - Kim Solomon – Solomonk1@fultonschools.org
- **On-Site Mental Health Partner**
 - Summit Counseling - <https://summitcounseling.org/schoolbasedservices/>
- In addition to the mental health professionals at Sweet Apple, your child's teacher and administration are great resources! Please see our website for additional contact information:
<https://www.fultonschools.org/sweetapples>