Santa Paula Unified School District

Mental Health Matters

March 2025

Supporting Students with Anxiety in School

Anxiety disorders are among most common disorders facing children and adolescents but are often underrecognized and undertreated. Incidence of anxiety has risen tremendously over the past decade and now affects up to 30% of adolescents. Anxiety is a healthy human emotion essential for survival, however anxiety disorders are distinct clinical conditions that first present in elementary school or earlier and can significantly impair children's and adolescents' ability to function at their optimal level in the classroom. Anxiety can often coexist with depression and ADHD.

Anxiety and Anxiety Disorders in Children and Adolescents

Anxiety is a healthy human emotion that helps children and adolescents prepare for challenges like taking a test or manage dangerous situations like riding a bike on a busy street. Healthy anxiety is usually expectable and proportionate to the challenge. Typically, the better prepared the person is the less (healthy) anxiety they will experience.

For example:

- A student studied hard for the test and is prepared;
- An adolescent is highly skilled at bike riding, wears a helmet and protective clothing, and rides only in the bike lane.

In contrast, the less prepared a child or adolescent is, the more (healthy) anxiety they might experience.

That said, some children and adolescents live in situations where they are exposed to persistent and severe stressors. They can have severe and persistent anxiety – an expectable and appropriate reaction to challenging life circumstances.

Healthy Anxiety in the Classroom

A teacher may notice that some students:

- Come to school less prepared and thus, have more anxiety about the schoolwork;
- Have problems with learning and have more anxiety about their area of challenge;
- Have problems paying attention or sitting still and have anxiety about not understanding and doing the work in the classroom;
- Live in challenging environments and have anxiety about their safety and the wellbeing of their family, and home/neighborhood environment.

All of the above situations would be 'normal,' expectable anxious reactions to challenging circumstances.

Full article found at https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/school-health/mental-health-in-schools/supporting-students-with-anxiety-in-school/?srsltid=AfmBOop0_THZ6Ah5H5jFOP-q1IFsy_ygiI7z_R4w7jm2OB0OgGzNu4MC

Need Mental Health Support?

OPTUM EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP) OFFERS **FREE CONFIDENTIAL HELP**

Call toll-free

888-444-8624 any time

OR

Go to www.liveandworkwell.com and browse as a guest using code **CSEBO**



SPUSD

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In case of an Emergency:

- **911 For Immediate Support**
- **Ventura County Crisis Team (866) 998-2243 –(24 hours)**



Coping with Student Anxiety

With understanding, students can begin to determine how they can manage anxiety. You can teach students several techniques to use during class without drawing attention to themselves.

Deep breathing: Slowing heart rate, lowering blood pressure and increasing oxygen intake all have a calming effect. Common exercises are belly breathing and the 4-7-8 breathing exercise (inhale for four counts, hold for seven, exhale for eight).

Grounding: Grounding can distract students' mind from their anxiety and keep them grounded in the present. Common exercises include the 5-4-3-2-1 senses technique (five things you can see, four things you can feel, etc.), counting how many things in shades of a particular color can you see around the room and counting backward by 7, starting at 100.

Imagery: When students create a detailed mental image of a safe and peaceful place, they redirect attention away from what is stressing them and toward an alternative focus.

Progressive muscle relaxation: This is the practice of tightening one muscle group at a time followed by a relaxation phase with release of the tension. Students tense and relax the muscle groups one at a time in a specific order, beginning with the lower extremities and ending with the face.

Positive self-talk and affirmations: This helps students challenge self-sabotaging and negative thoughts. Students can practice through journal writing, negative-thought stopping or snapping a rubber band during negative thoughts. You can help students select affirmations that speak to them. When students repeat the affirmations – and believe them – they can start to make positive changes.

Journaling: Journaling helps students clarify their thoughts and feelings, gaining valuable self-knowledge. Students can process their anxiety by fully exploring and releasing the emotions involved.

Desk yoga: Neck rolls, cat-cow stretch, shoulder shrug, triceps stretch, seated twist and the seated pigeon pose are all exercises students can discretely practice at their desk.

Once students determine which techniques work for them, you can assemble a list with descriptions for the student to discretely tuck into a notebook as a quick reference. Or, the student can keep their journal, list of affirmations or picture of their peaceful place where they can access it without classroom disruption. Having this survival kit available can bring a feeling of control over their anxiety.

Full article found at https://www.schoolcounselor.org/newsletters/january-2020/coping-with-student-anxiety?st=NJ