



STUDENT SUCCESS: WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

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UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY: WHAT IS IT?

- Any uncomfortable feeling that we experience; sad, angry, irritable, scared, etc.
- Our body is telling us, “Something isn’t right here! I don’t feel like my normal self.”

(Biological Fight or Flight response)

WHAT DOES ANXIETY LOOK LIKE?

- Behaviorally (through anger, impulsivity, shutting down, etc.)
- Somatic (bodily, physical) symptoms (headaches, stomachaches, shakiness, sweating, gastrointestinal problems, etc.)
- Restlessness, feeling on edge, fatigued, sleep disturbance, difficulty concentrating, irritability, mind going blank, muscle tension, worries, intrusive thoughts, etc.

WHERE DOES ANXIETY COME FROM?

NOT HAVING CONTROL

- Anxiety is our body's natural way of reacting to situations that threaten our personal sense of control.
- When situations don't go the way I want or plan, my anxiety increases as my personal sense of control goes down.

ANXIETY SCALE

10 Completely overwhelmed. I definitely can't focus or concentrate. I don't know what to do to calm myself down. I feel like I can't do anything without my anxiety controlling me and getting in the way.

8-9 Overwhelming anxiety; very difficult time focusing and concentrating; short tempered and easily reactive toward others. It feels like I spend all my day's energy thinking about my anxiety or what makes me feel anxious.

7 Feeling more overwhelmed. Now I don't even want to deal with the stressor. I want to be left alone and not talk about or deal with the issue at hand.

6 Stress is increasing. I don't feel I have as much control as I would like, but maybe if I talk to someone about it, I can figure out what to do.

5 Anxiety is there and I'm aware of it, but I'm able to manage it. I don't spend my day focusing on my anxiety. My anxiety is manageable.

4 Starting to feel anxious. Possibly anticipating something I don't want to deal with, but I'm not in the midst of the potential stressor.

2-3 Neutral, feeling fine. Anxiety hardly affects me at all. I don't have to spend time managing it, and it doesn't get in the way of whatever I want or need to do during the day.

0-1 Feeling no anxiety at all. Feeling like nothing can go wrong!

WHAT DO I DO WHEN MY ANXIETY IS AT THE TOP OF THE SCALE?

When your anxiety gets to be at an 8, 9, or 10, the only thing you are to do is focus on calming your body.

Your goal is to calm the nervous system.

You are not to be thinking about why you are so anxious, but focus on engaging in an activity to help calm the nervous system, such as:

- ☐ Take space
- ☐ Exercise
- ☐ Yoga
- ☐ Listening to music
- ☐ Coloring
- ☐ Puzzles, etc.

WHAT DO I DO WHEN MY ANXIETY IS AT THE TOP OF THE SCALE?

- Do not engage in conversation when you are high on the scale, even when someone else is pushing you to talk.
- It is not productive and will likely make the anxiety worse.
- Take space until you have come down to at least a 7 on the scale, where you are better able to focus, concentrate, and have a more calm and productive conversation.

WHAT ELSE DOES ANXIETY AFFECT?

Self Esteem/Sense of Self

- Our self-esteem takes a hit when we internalize negative core beliefs and when our personal sense of control is threatened.
- We become vulnerable to internalizing negative thoughts such as:

I can't do this

I'm not good enough

I'm not smart enough

I'm a disappointment

I'm a failure

No one likes me

DEFENSE MECHANISMS

What happens when we are at an 8, 9, 10 on the scale, feeling completely overwhelmed and not know what to do to manage that overwhelming feeling in a healthy, controlled way?

We go into Defense Mode

We reach for whatever is at our fingertips to alleviate that awful feeling... Bringing temporary relief or a false sense of control.

[UNHEALTHY] DEFENSE MECHANISMS

AVOIDANCE (not allowing ourselves to sit with our anxiety)

Blaming others

Justifying our behaviors

Making excuses for our behaviors

Manipulation

Lying

Projecting our anxiety onto others

Aggression/violence

Alcohol or substance use

Self-harm/eating disorders

Fear of rejection/loss

HOW DO I MANAGE MY ANXIOUS THOUGHTS?

- Identify your presenting concerns or biggest worries.

Ask yourself, “Is there any evidence that these thoughts (assumptions/anticipatory thoughts) are *absolutely* true or *definitely* going to happen?”

- If there is no evidence to support these thoughts, practice shifting your focus to what is happening in the moment.
 - What is your priority right now?
 - What is your responsibility right now?

HOW DO I MANAGE MY ANXIOUS THOUGHTS?

If you are anticipating something to happen that could actually happen (maybe it's happened before and it could happen again), identify what you might be able to do if that situation happens.

Identify what your options are that are within your control, to manage the potential situation as best you can.

Identify Plan A; Plan B; Plan C

HOW DO I MANAGE MY ANXIOUS THOUGHTS?

Ask yourself questions – “What have I thought about doing so far?”

“Who do I need to talk to about this?”

“What is my priority right now?”

We don't have evidence to prove that the situation will definitely happen, but if it does, you will already feel more prepared to manage the situation, knowing what you can do, which will increase your personal sense of control.

COMMUNICATION

- By communicating with your parents and teachers about your anxious thoughts, you are using the greatest means of control.
- Try to let your parents and teachers know what you are worried about, anticipating, afraid of happening, and any other worries or concerns.
- Set limits with your peers: It's okay to tell someone "No," or not do what they are telling you to do if what they are telling you is a bad choice, makes you feel uncomfortable, or hurts you or another person. Your peers are not in charge of you. They do not have control of you. YOU have control of you!

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO FOR MYSELF?

Flexibility in thinking

- It's very easy for us to think in “all or nothing,” “black or white” ways.
- Either I have to be 100% perfect at what I'm doing, or else I'm a failure. (All or nothing)
- As much as we need to work hard and reach for our goals, we need to practice accepting that I might not be perfect in everything I do. It really is okay to get a B or a C on a test or project. As long as I know that I worked hard and I did my best, and can still learn from my mistakes, then I'm doing my job. My grades do not determine my self-worth. My grades don't take away from who I am as a person. A bad grade doesn't make me a bad person. I know I am a good student, I work hard, I'm responsible, and I hold myself accountable, which means I'm doing my job.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO FOR MYSELF?

- Shift your focus from the negative thoughts of not doing well on an assignment, to what you can do moving forward.
- Be careful of expectations: Again, we want to set goals and work hard to attain them, but I need to focus on what I need to do for myself that's in my own best interest, not what others think I should do. I have to learn from my own choices, good or bad, and when I'm not allowed to practice this, I'm being put at greater risk of higher anxiety and am enabled where I'm not learning on my own.
- Limit your time on social media- Do not allow others to dictate your choices in order to feel "approved" or "accepted." Social media stops us from focusing on ourselves, and allows others to have control over us as we become more concerned about how others judge us. Don't let others have that control over you. You can make your own choices.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO FOR MYSELF?

Boredom

- Practice being bored. Require yourself to have at least 30 minutes of “down-time” by:
 - Being by yourself
 - Not being on your phone, watching TV, iPads, playing video games, or talking to friends
 - Being in a quiet environment
 - FOCUS ON YOURSELF

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO FOR MYSELF?

Boredom

- Allowing yourself to feel emotions and process your thoughts, knowing that you are exercising control over your uncomfortable/unsettling thoughts, and that you will not allow them to take control over you and stop you from being happy and being yourself. You will process these thoughts and feelings for a short amount of time, and then shift your focus to your next task at hand, focusing on being in moment.
- Without learning how to be bored and be able to sit with our own thoughts and feelings, we are more prone to increased anxiety. Daily distractions prevent us from adequately processing and learning how to manage our anxiety.

FOCUS ON YOURSELF

Hold yourself accountable for your own responsibilities.

Focus on the control you have yourself, versus comparing yourself to your peers or making decisions based on what others want from you or expect from you.

Establish healthy sleep-wake routine, getting to sleep at a reasonable time (and for adolescents to wake themselves up in the morning).

Prioritize SLEEP over homework

Establish a healthy balance of academics, extracurriculars, socializing, eating and sleeping. **Allow room for downtime!!**

THE IMPORTANCE OF SLEEP

Sleep – Children require 10-13 hours/night

Adolescents require 8-10 hours/night

Prioritize sleep over homework!!!

Limit your screen time!!!!

- No screen time within an hour before bed.
- Screen time prevents us from sleeping and getting healthy, quality sleep, which puts us at greater risk of anxiety the next day.