

FAST FACTS: Helping Children who have Test Anxiety

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Text anxiety is when a student excessively worries about doing well on a test. While most students experience some level of nervousness before, during, or after an exam, it can be a powerful motivator for those students. However, for students who have excessive anxiety, it can become a major burden and negatively effect test performance.

Test, or performance, anxiety typically occurs:

1. In the presence of a difficult, threatening, or challenging situation
2. When you believe that you are inadequate or incapable of meeting the challenge, and
3. You fear the consequences of possible failure.

This FAST FACTS sheet will provide information about test anxiety, and strategies for coping with it.

Symptoms of Test Anxiety

Physical: headaches, nausea or diarrhea, extreme body temperature changes, excessive sweating, shortness of breath, lightheadedness or fainting, rapid heart beat, and/or dry mouth.

Emotional: excessive feelings of fear, disappointment, anger, depression, uncontrollable crying or laughing, feeling of helplessness.

Behavioral- fidgeting, pacing, substance abuse, avoidance.

Cognitive- racing thoughts, “going blank,” difficulty concentrating, negative self-talk, feelings of dread, comparing yourself to others, difficulty organizing your thoughts.

What Causes Test Anxiety

There are multiple causes for test anxiety. There may be a **negative prior experience** surrounding test taking that may serve as an activating event. Students who have experienced some of the symptoms of test anxiety may develop **anticipatory anxiety**, and worrying about anxiety can be just as debilitating as the anxiety itself. The anxiety can build as the testing situation approaches, and can interfere with a student’s ability to prepare.

Lack of preparation itself contributes to anxiety. Students with poor time management, poor study habits, and lack of organization can lead to a student feeling overwhelmed and underprepared to perform well on an exam. Being able to anticipate what an exam will cover, and knowing all the information that has been covered during test preparation time, are abilities that have a direct impact on test performance.

Lack of confidence, fear of failure, and other negative thought processes can become so extreme that it is irrational and devastating to test performance. Traits such as **perfectionism** can lead to unreasonable goals of test outcomes, and students may spend more time focusing on the negative consequences of failure than preparing to succeed.

Strategies for Reducing Test Anxiety

Preparation: Develop good study habits, spread studying out over several days; ask for help when needed; eat good foods, get adequate rest, and exercise to build energy and focus; attend school regularly and complete all assignments in a timely manner; make practice tests.

Keep a positive attitude: Develop reasonable expectations; do not allow your grades to become dependent on the outcome of one exam; avoid negative and irrational thoughts about catastrophic results; set up a system of rewards for dedicated studying and good test performance; encourage yourself.

Relaxation techniques: Deep breathing exercises, imagery and visualization, and muscle relaxation techniques can increase focus and concentration; don't arrive too early or get distracted by others preparing for the test; check to make sure you will have everything you need; make decisions about what to wear and when to depart the night before an important test.

Learn good test-taking skills: Do not panic if you can't remember something right away; answer questions you know well first, and then go back to other ones; read questions and directions carefully before you begin; outline essays before you begin to write; keep short-answers short; don't spend a lot of time reviewing answers to avoid overanalyzing responses.

HELPFUL TIPS IN TIME MANAGEMENT

1. Develop a To-Do list- use a standard format, make it comprehensive, and maintain it continuously
2. Prioritize- identify **Critical, Important,** and **"Can Wait"** tasks
3. Time Metabolism- figure out your **"Prime Time"** and do your tough tasks then
4. Organize your work area
5. Schedule your time wisely

Remember to communicate with your teachers if you are struggling with test anxiety! Many teachers will do what they can in order to make their students have the most pleasant and relaxing testing experience.

If problems continue or worsen, speak to your child's doctor. If he/she is diagnosed with anxiety, special accommodations can be provided through documents such as 504's or IEPs.

All information on this FAST FACT sheet is attributed to Dr. Warrenetta Mann, Dr. Julia Lash, and the Psychological Services Center at the University of Cincinnati. Visit their website at www.psc.uc.edu.