



Stress and Anxiety: How to Support Students

**ALDI Symposium
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What is Stress?

‘A cognitive/physical reaction when we perceive a situation as a threat to our well-being that overwhelms our ability to cope’

Sympathetic vs. Parasympathetic

Sympathetic (Fight or Flight)	Parasympathetic (Rest and digest)
Increased heart rate	Relaxed heart rate
Increased respiratory rate – shortness of breathe	Relaxed breathing through diaphragm
Decreased blood flow to brain – confusion, difficulty thinking clearly	Increased blood flow to brain – thinking clearly
Decreased blood flow to GI tract – stomach aches	Increased blood flow to GI tract - Digestion working well
Increased blood flow to muscles – fight/flight	Decreased blood flow to muscles
Throat tightening	



Is Anxiety Normal?



What is Anxiety?



What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is the uneasiness, worry, or tension we experience when we expect a real or perceived threat to our welfare. It is necessary for preparation and protection from danger.

Wagner, 2005



When does Anxiety become a Problem?



- ✓ Significant distress
- ✓ Excessive, intrusive, uncontrollable
- ✓ Duration, Intensity, Frequency
- ✓ Interferes with functioning

Anxiety or Anxiety Disorder?

Anxiety

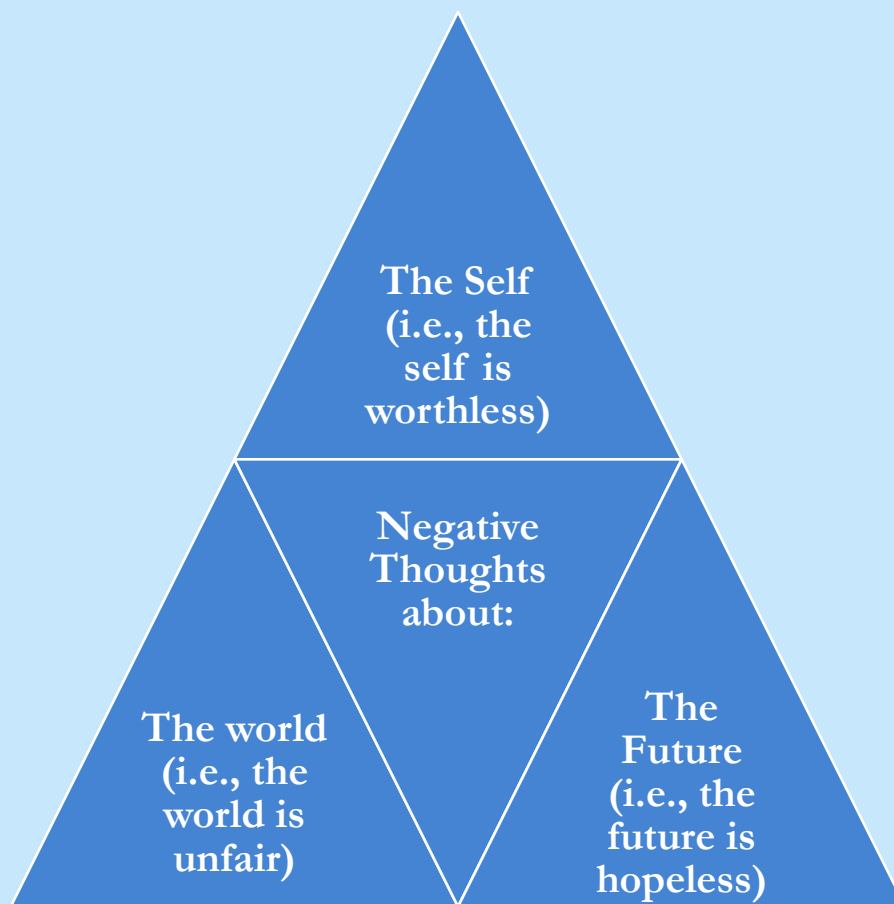
- * Normal feeling when faced with threat, danger, stress
- * Often experience physical symptoms
- * Related to life experiences: a new school, sports competition
- * Time limited
- * Appropriate for situation
- * Not necessarily reaction to a negative situation

Anxiety Disorder

- * Interferes with daily functioning
- * May be triggered by significant distress
- * Frequent physical complaints
- * Anticipatory worry
- * Fear/worry out of proportion to situation
- * Constant worrying (i.e., past and future)
- * Irritability/opposition/trouble concentrating
- * Avoidant behavior



Anxiety and Depression



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What Might Teachers See?

- ❖ Avoidance of situations (tests, public speaking, places/school)
- ❖ Persistent perfectionism – school work erased and rewritten
- ❖ Constant worry about performance
- ❖ Irritability, trouble concentrating
- ❖ Constant need for praise, reassurances, clingy

What Might Teachers See?

- ❖ Emotional, easily frustrated, crying, outbursts, fatigue
- ❖ Frequent physical complaints
- ❖ Falling grades
- ❖ Task refusal, oppositional to avoid
- ❖ Often in conflict, avoids group work

Shared Experience

At your tables, present a student with anxiety that you were involved with and discuss the following:

- 1) What were made the situation particularly challenging?
- 2) What were the most effective strategies and why?

We will then discuss as a large group

Questions or Issues

Considering what has been presented this morning, please write down any questions or issues that you would like to see addressed in the second part of the workshop this afternoon. Please hand them in before you leave for lunch.

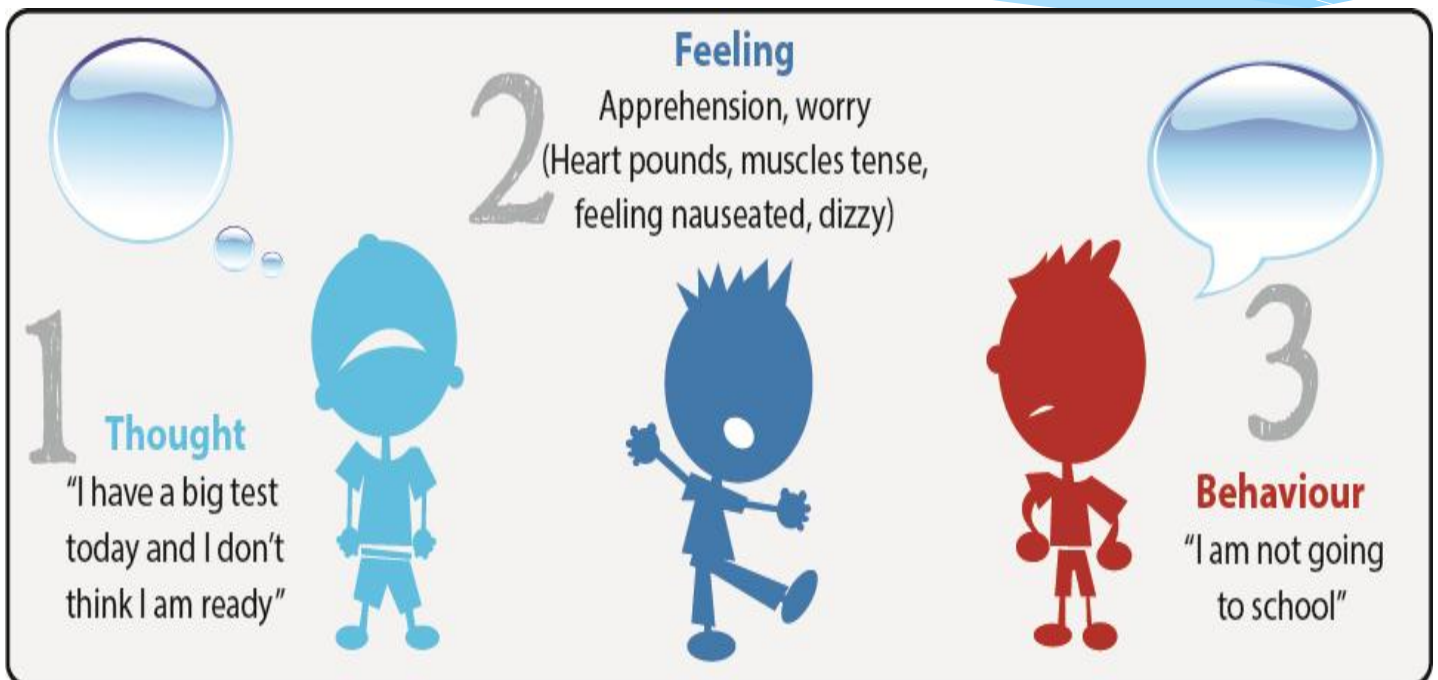
Supporting Students with Anxiety: Nuts and Bolts



Safe & Secure School

- ❖ Ensure a welcoming school environment
- ❖ Routines and predictability (patience)
- ❖ Engage with student to determine their ability to cope
- ❖ Balance accommodations vs. demands
- ❖ Allow alternative evaluation
- ❖ Use a team approach

Understanding the Foundation of Anxiety



Cognitive Distortions

Fortune Telling	“I know I will fail”
Overgeneralization	“I always make mistakes”
Mind reading	“Everyone hates me” “People are laughing at me”
Filtering	Focus on the negative not the positive
Overestimating of Danger	“I am going to die”
Catastrophizing	“I’ll freak out and nobody will help”

Realistic Thinking

“Not everything your mind tells you is true”

- ❖ What is the evidence?
- ❖ How accurate are the beliefs?
- ❖ What are the alternatives?
- ❖ What are the realistic probabilities?
- ❖ Accepting uncertainty
- ❖ What is the worst that can happen?
- ❖ Put things in perspective

(Wagner 2012)



Reframing Unhelpful Thoughts

Anxiety fuelled thinking

“I’m going to mess it up”

“Everyone is going to laugh at me”

“I’m going to throw up!”

“No way am I doing this!”

“I got to get out of here!”

Positive helpful thinking

“I am going to get help to prepare because its hard for me”

“I’m going to do the best I can”

“I know I can do it”

“I can face my fears!”

“I am in charge here not my negative thoughts!”

“I am going to do this!”

Thoughts & Feelings

Situation: I have to do a presentation in class

Thoughts

“I suck at speaking in class”
“Everyone will laugh at me”
“I am going to screw this up
and fail everything”

Feelings

Nervous
Scared
Worried

Physiological Reactions

- ❖ My heart is pounding
- ❖ I am sweating so much
- ❖ My stomach hurts
- ❖ My head feels like it will split in two

Managing Feelings

- ❖ Integrate into school day
- ❖ Deep breathing
- ❖ Progressive Muscle Relaxation (see handout)

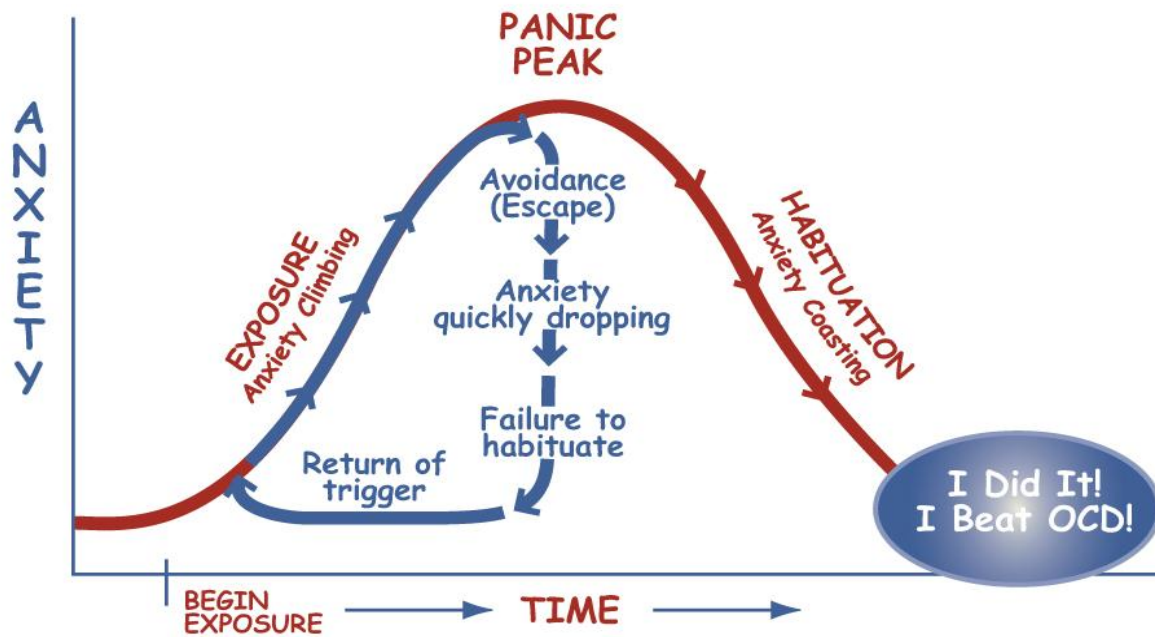
Anxiety & Behaviour

- ❖ Hyper-vigilance (checking if its safe)
- ❖ Escape (“I’m out of here”)
- ❖ Avoidance (“No way I’m doing that!”)
- ❖ Reassurance seeking (“Is it good?”)

Exposure

- ❖ Confronting fear in a safe manner & habituation
- ❖ Avoidance strengthens fear
- ❖ Exposure weakens fear
- ❖ Anticipatory anxiety greater than actual situation
- ❖ Anxiety passes and is harmless

The Vicious Cycle of Avoidance



Gradual Exposure

When there is a feared situation help the student face their fear in small steps

- ❖ Fear of being in school
- ❖ Fear of speaking or presenting in class
- ❖ Fear of being rejected by peers
- ❖ Fear of being sick

Supporting Exposure: Presentation Hierarchy of Fears

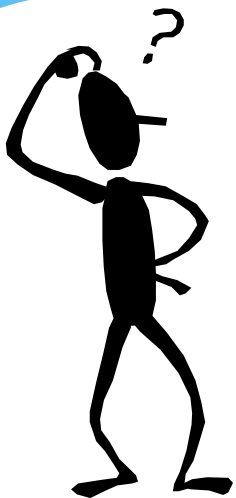
Presentation in front of the class	10
Speak for 5mins in front of the class	9
Presentation in front of 5 people in class	8
Presentation in front of teacher only	7
Write an answer on paper and present to teacher	6
Raise hand to ask a question	5
Go up to the teacher to ask a question	4
Raise hand in class when unsure	3
Raise hand in class when somewhat sure	2
Raise hand in class when sure of answer	1

Supporting Exposure: School Refusal Hierarchy of Fears

Stay in school all day no phone call to Mom	10
Stay in school half day no phone call to Mom	9
Stay in school half day 1 phone call to Mom	8
Go to class & stay until recess	7
Go to school and stay with Ms. X until recess	6
Walk to bus stop with Mom, get on bus, Ms. X meets you at school, go home	5
Drive to bus stop, get on bus, Mom & Ms. X meet you at school, go home	4
Drive to school and meet Ms. X and return home	3
Get in car, drive to school, return home	2
Wake up, get dressed, do school work at home	1

Case Study

- ✓ At your tables read and choose one case study (Joey or Madison) and outline strategies to support the student in the classroom and school (record the strategies).
- ✓ We will then come together as a larger group and share



Questions?

Thank you!

For more resources on anxiety or other mental health areas, please visit our website:
<http://cemh.lbpsb.qc.ca/>

