

COPING WITH ANXIETY - HELPING YOUR CHILDREN BE MORE RESILIENT

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AGENDA

IDENTIFICATION

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

PREVENTION AND COPING

- ▶ IDENTIFICATION:
 - ▶ What is anxiety?
 - ▶ A Normal reaction to stress
 - ▶ Anxiety vs Anxiety Disorder
 - ▶ Normal reaction to stress
 - ▶ Can be good/bad
 - ▶ Harmful when excessive

SOME SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY

- ▶ Heart pounding
- ▶ Sweating, cold, clammy hands
- ▶ Tension, dizziness, feeling faint
- ▶ Disturbed sleep
- ▶ Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- ▶ Difficulty breathing
- ▶ Hypervigilance



HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

- ▶ Feeling anxious for no reason
- ▶ A matter of degree
- ▶ Worry about everyday events
- ▶ Constantly checking to see if you are correct (obsessing)
- ▶ Feeling of panic

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

- ▶ NERVOUSNESS MAY BE INBORN
- ▶ NERVOUSNESS MAY BE LEARNED
- ▶ SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE AND BELONGING
- ▶ FAMILY- CONFLICT WITH SIBLINGS, FRICTION WITH OR BETWEEN PARENTS, FEELING OF LETTING PARENTS DOWN, EXPECTATIONS FOR PERFORMANCE AND NEED FOR APPROVAL
- ▶ SLINGS AND ARROWS OF OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE - LOST OF INCOME, HOUSE FIRE, DEATH
- ▶ TRANSITIONS - MIDDLE TO HIGH, LEAVING HOME (somatic complaints)
- ▶ ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE
- ▶ SCHOOL REFUSAL

ACTIVITY:

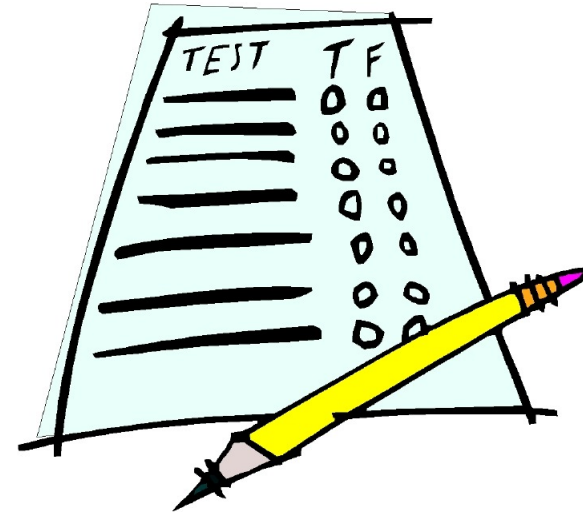
**FOLLOWING
DIRECTIONS**

What is Test Anxiety?

Uneasiness, nervousness and/or apprehension felt before, during, or after a test or evaluative situation that significantly interferes with performance, emotional and behavioral well-being

A Culture of Testing

- ▶ Tests, tests, tests everywhere
- ▶ High stakes
- ▶ High pressure
- ▶ Ubiquitous, inescapable
- ▶ Necessary in real life situations



Role of Test Anxiety

Facilitating

- ▶ Appraisal as challenge
- ▶ Motivation
- ▶ Effort and preparation
- ▶ Problem-solving
- ▶ Coping skills
- ▶ Mastery and control

Debilitating

- ▶ Appraisal of threat
- ▶ Excessive preparation
- ▶ Outcome overly important
- ▶ Constant preoccupation
- ▶ Impaired performance

Levels of Anxiety

Low

- Insufficient preparation
- Not important

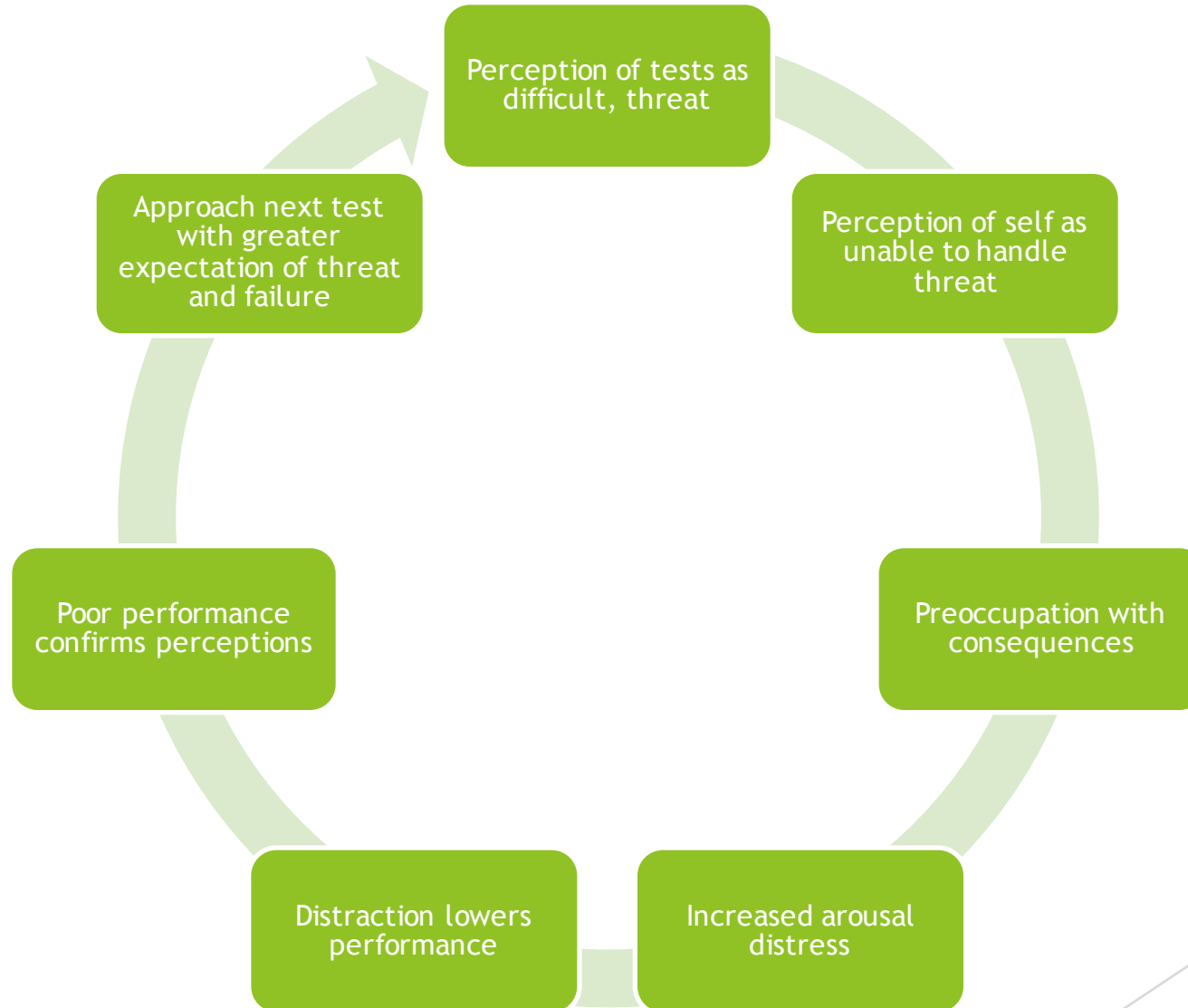
Optimal

- Productive energy
- Test important

High

- Excessive preparation
- Tests very important
- Preoccupation

Vicious Cycle of Test Anxiety



Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

- ▶ Fear becomes reality simply by one's behavior
- ▶ Feared outcome is triggered by the person's response
- ▶ Applies to thoughts, actions, interpersonal situations



How Common is Test Anxiety?

- ▶ Range from 1% to over 40%
- ▶ Different definitions
- ▶ Midpoint about 20%
- ▶ 4-5 students in a class of 25

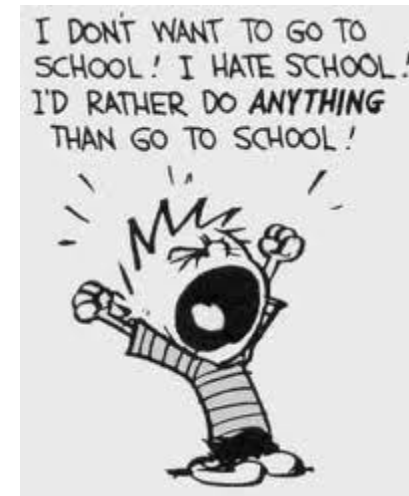
Age & Gender Differences in Test Anxiety

- ▶ Test anxiety scores rise in grades 3 to 5
- ▶ Rise to high point in junior high
- ▶ Level off in high school
- ▶ Slight decline in college
- ▶ Gender differences start in 3rd-4th grades
- ▶ Females consistently higher levels of test anxiety



Effects of Test Anxiety on Students

- ▶ High level of stress
- ▶ Negative attitude toward tests
- ▶ Lower academic motivation & effort
- ▶ Negative attitude toward self
- ▶ Potential for unethical test behavior



Test Anxiety & Achievement

- ▶ Negative effect on achievement
- ▶ Correlation increases with grade level
- ▶ Low ability related to higher test anxiety
- ▶ Not all high test anxiety students perform poorly



Study Skills: Knowing What to Study

- ❑ Study Guides
- ❑ Cooperative Learning Techniques
- ❑ Provide clear expectations about what to study
- ❑ Use educational games and simulated tests to review test content, questions, and conditions

-Salend, 2011

Study Skills: Knowing How to Study

- ❑ Create a study schedule
- ❑ Test oneself at home
- ❑ Use mnemonic devices
- ❑ Study in a place without distractions
- ❑ Flash cards

-Sawka-Miller, 2014

Effective Test-Taking Skills

- Sawka-Miller, 2014

- ▶ Goal: Stay relaxed, focused, and motivated
 - ▶ Pay no attention to what others are doing
- ▶ Memory dump
 - ▶ Every time students studies; as well as on test
- ▶ Work on easier items first to build confidence
 - ▶ 4 times: Answer questions you know cold; answer those you didn't immediately remember, but now do; make educated guesses on rest; one more time for clerical errors
- ▶ Budget your time
- ▶ Highlight key directions

SCHOOL REFUSAL

- ▶ A NORMALLY ANXIETY PRODUCING EVENT BECOMES LARGER THAN LIFE OR CAN BE TRIGGERED BY:
- ▶ AN EVENT UNRELATED TO SCHOOL
 - ▶ Changing relationship with parent
 - ▶ Illness of parent or student
 - ▶ Divorce or separation
 - ▶ Relocation
 - ▶ Death of a loved one (family or pet)

AN EVENT RELATED TO SCHOOL:

- ▶ Performance on tests or schoolwork
- ▶ Safety concerns - gangs and bullies
- ▶ SOLs and high stakes tests
- ▶ Change in teacher
- ▶ Change in schools or grade level
- ▶ Relationship with teacher
- ▶ Peer relationships and boyfriend/girlfriend

- ▶ SEPARATION IS OFTEN WHAT IS BEHIND SCHOOL REFUSAL BECAUSE THEY ARE CONCERNED THAT SOMETHING WILL HAPPEN AT SCHOOL OR SOMETHING WILL HAPPEN AT HOME WHILE THEY ARE AT SCHOOL.
- ▶ SOMETIMES THIS GIVES THE CHILD A SENSE THAT THEY CAN GIVE THEIR PARENTS A CAUSE TO RALLY AROUND TO BRING THEM TOGETHER IN A UNITED FRONT.



▶ BREAK

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PREVENTION AND COPING

ACTIVITY

**REFLECTION ON LIVED
EXPERIENCE OF ANXIETY AND
SUCCESSFUL COPING.**

BUILDING ON THE RELATIONSHIP - THE BIG PICTURE (SAFETY, PREDICTABILITY, SECURITY)

- ▶ **FLOOR TIME**
 - ▶ **LITTLE ONES**
 - ▶ **TEENS**

WHAT TO DO ???

- ▶ LISTEN CAREFULLY WITHOUT FEELING COMPELLED TO TALK
- ▶ HELP TRACE ANXIETY TO SPECIFIC SITUATIONS
- ▶ REVIEW OR REMIND OF PREVIOUS SITUATIONS AND SUCCESSES
- ▶ PRAISE WHEN THEY TAKE PART IN THE FEARED ACTIVITY - BUT DON'T OVERDO!
- ▶ STOP REASSURING YOUR CHILD - ITS HARD FOR A CHILD TO HEAR THE LOGICAL SIDE OF THE BRAIN (HE WANTS TO LISTEN BUT HIS BRAIN WON'T LET HIM)
- ▶ 3 STEPS - FREEZE, EMPATHIZE, AND EVALUATE
- ▶ HIGHLIGHT WHY WORRYING IS GOOD (THEY DON'T NEED TO FEEL SOMETHING IS WRONG WITH THEM)

- ▶ GO FROM “WHAT IF” TO “WHAT IS” (BRING THEM BACK TO THE PRESENT NOT TIME TRIP INTO FUTURE.)
- ▶ TEACH THEM TO THINK ACCURATELY - THE 3 Cs.
 - ▶ CATCH THE THOUGHT (PUT IT IN A BUBBLE ABOVE HEAD)
 - ▶ COLLECT EVIDENCE - (CHECK EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT OR NEGATE THOUGHT)
 - ▶ CHALLENGE THEIR THOUGHTS

10 DO'S AND DON'T'S

- ▶ 1. The goal isn't to eliminate anxiety, but to help a child manage it
- ▶ 2. Don't avoid things just because they make a child anxious
- ▶ 3. Express positive - but realistic- expectations
- ▶ 4. Respect his or her feeling, but don't give them too much power
- ▶ 5. Don't ask leading questions
- ▶ 6. Don't reinforce the child's fears
- ▶ 7. Encourage the child to tolerate the anxiety
- ▶ 8. Try to keep the anticipatory period short.
- ▶ 9. Think things through with the child
- ▶ 10. Try to model healthy ways of handling anxiety

Cognitive Behavioral Approach

- 1) Identify and label feelings and thoughts
- 2) Identify worry thoughts, feared consequences
- 3) Replace worry thoughts with realistic thoughts and calming self-talk
- 4) Evaluate situation after completion

Wagner, 2005a

Feelings Thermometer



Replace worry thoughts with realistic thoughts and calming self-talk

- ▶ Realistic Thinking:
 - ▶ What am I worried about?
 - ▶ What are the chances that it will happen?
 - ▶ What proof do I have that it will happen?
 - ▶ What else could happen?
 - ▶ So what if it happens?
 - ▶ Can I be absolutely sure it won't happen?
 - ▶ How could I handle it if it happened?

Replace worry thoughts with realistic thoughts and calming self-talk

▶ Calming Self-Talk

- ▶ I'm nervous, but I can handle it.
- ▶ I think I'll do okay.
- ▶ It's a fair test.
- ▶ I just have to concentrate and I'll do fine.
- ▶ I know this information.
- ▶ I'm having trouble with some questions, but I'm doing well on others.

Evaluate situation afterwards

- ▶ How would I rate the level of anxiety during the event?
- ▶ What positive self-talk did I use that helped me?
- ▶ What relaxation or calming strategies did I use that helped me?
- ▶ Were there times I let the anxiety get the best of me?
- ▶ What could I do next time to have even less anxiety?

NEXT STEP

- ▶ INDIVIDUAL OR FAMILY THERAPY
- ▶ MEDICATION
- ▶ COGNITIVE BEHAVIOR THERAPY
- ▶ BIOFEEDBACK
- ▶ RELAXATION - BREATHING TECHNIQUES

Use Relaxation Strategies

- ▶ Taking voluntary control over involuntary tension
- ▶ Deep breathing
- ▶ Visual imagery
- ▶ Muscle relaxation

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- ▶ Involves systematically tensing and relaxing different muscle groups through the body one at a time
- ▶ Often combined with diaphragmatic breathing
- ▶ Use scripts (age appropriate)
- ▶ Teens may prefer to do this on their own
- ▶ Could audiotape script for them
- ▶ Full session - 10 to 20 minutes



Miller and Miller (2014)



▶ Thanks for coming!!



▶ Questions?

▶ Comments?

Presentation Sources

- ▶ Cheek, J., Bradley, L., Reynolds, J., Coy, D. (2002). An Intervention for Helping Elementary Students Reduce Test Anxiety. *Professional School Counseling*, v6 n2 p162-64.
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- ▶ Wagner, A.P. (2007). *Cognitive-Behavioral Strategies to Overcome Test Anxiety: A Clinician's Perspective* {powerpoint slides}.