

Calming the Storm: Managing Stress and Anxiety in the Classroom

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Anxiety Disorders are:

- a) due to lack of motivation
- b) a result of weak faith
- c) an excuse to get extra time on assignments
- d) something everybody experiences
- e) none of the above
- f) all of the above

What is Stress/Anxiety?

- physical, mental and emotional response to a stimulus, otherwise known as 'stressor'
- Adaptation/coping response that helps the body to prepare for challenging situations: adaptive vs maladaptive

Think-Share-Pair

- What is your experience with individuals who struggle with anxiety?
- Have you had students with anxiety that interfered with their school work?
- Have you had family members or friends with anxiety that gets in the way of school, work or relationships?

What types of things are kids usually worry about?

- Failing Grades
- Separation from parents
- Transitioning to new grades or new schools
- Being judged by other students
- Making new friends
- Talking in public
- Conflicts with teachers

Here's what students with anxiety wish their
teachers knew...

https://youtu.be/jf404_H0r8Q

What is Anxiety?

Normal Anxiety: We all feel nervous or worried at times. This anxiety can be a helpful feeling when it motivates us or warns us of danger.

Anxiety Disorder: An anxiety disorder, on the other hand, causes unexpected or unhelpful anxiety that :

- SERIOUSLY impacts our lives, including how we think, feel, and act
- INTERFERE with daily living.

When is anxiety problematic?

INTERFERE WITH DAILY LIVING:

1. Absences from school/School Refusal
2. Avoidance of age-appropriate activities or needs to do them with their parents (ie going on field trips, doing presentations in class)
3. Sleep disturbance
4. Concentration – student is so worried they cannot concentrate in class (change in grades)
5. Anxiety is experienced in the body recurrently with headaches and stomach aches, panic attacks etc.

Who do anxiety disorders affect?

- Most common mental health problem in youth
- Anxiety affects up to 10% of youth
- Anxiety can be triggered by a specific event or stressful life experience.
- Sometimes there just doesn't seem to be a reason.

Risk Factors

- Genetic and Environmental
 - Child temperament – anxious as a toddler
 - Family history of anxiety/depression
 - Family stressors (conflict between parents, low SES, death of loved one)
 - Parenting stress (modelling poor coping skills)
 - Childhood abuse/neglect
 - Traumatic experiences as a child: losses
 - Disturbance in family environment
 - Prenatal and pregnancy related factors

Epidemiology

- Trouble managing anxiety usually begins in early childhood (before age 12)
- School refusal – peaks at entry to JK, age 7-9, entry to middle or high school
- Separation anxiety and Specific Phobia have the earliest onset
- Social phobia – usually present in late childhood and adolescence
- **9.2%** of students age 6-8 personally report struggling with worries that get in the way at school or at home
- **12%** of children age 12-14 report anxiety that impacts them at school or at home
- **8.9%** of students age 14-17 report struggling with worries that get in the way at school or at home

Common Outcomes of Untreated Childhood Anxiety

Poor academic
performance

Limited occupational
options

Impaired social
functioning and more
social isolation

Decreased coping skills

Co-occurrence of
anxiety with other
mental health issues
(depression, panic
disorder etc)

Use of recreational
drug

Approach to support/treatment

Enhancing parent and children's understanding about anxiety

- Provide psychoeducation basics about anxiety
- Refer to a counsellors or mental health professionals if needed

Emotional Check in - "Rate how you are feeling today?"

- Improve students awareness of their emotions

Improve parent and child's coping skills

- Doing deep breathing and using other relaxation tools
- Distraction techniques: Art Station, Mindfulness walks, Games
- Encourage daily journaling
- Get students to share inspirational quotes with each other
- Select a short story/article for the class to read about a successful person with anxiety

Provide individualized support to student

- Breaks if required
- Check in with student at lunch/during breaks
- Encourage students with small exposures

Common Signs to lookout for in the Classroom

- Usually the quieter children who fly under the radar
- Withdrawing: Avoiding after school clubs/activities or recess
- Not participating in class/Not doing homework → "I'm no good at school"
- Asking for reassurance from teachers, parents or siblings --> "what if I can't finish the assignment on time?" , "what if my parents forget to pick me up?"
- Missing class --> "I want to stay home with my mom/dad"
- Tantrums, crying or "freezing"
- Worrying about judgment by peers → "other kids will laugh at me"
- Unable to read out loud in class
- Taking repeated bathroom breaks
- Perfectionistic student – good grades (spending all night doing homework)
- Frequent panic attacks, stomach aches, or headaches

Trauma and Losses

- Magical Thinking
- If-Only Thinking
- Unresolved losses

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Onset:

- Can happen at any age

Trigger:

- Follows a terrifying event that a child learned about, witnessed or experienced

Symptoms :

- Recurring nightmares
- Sleeplessness
- Fearfulness
- Irritability
- Intense vigilance/Startling easily
- Avoidance of talking about trauma/reminders/cues
- Emotional numbness
- Social withdrawal
- Angry outbursts

Ways to Help the Student

- Provide a familiar, calm, consistent environment
- Create an atmosphere in which the child feels safe to re-enact or discuss a trauma, or express his or her feelings without judgment -- yet do not pressure the child to do so
- Be aware of certain activities that may trigger the child's anxiety or regression and safeguard against them
- If you suspect that the child is a danger to him or herself or others, seek help immediately

Language Arts

- Can help transform memories of fear and helplessness
- Not be direct that the topic triggers traumatization
- Connecting with possibilities of dreams, validation, reflection
- Possible topics:
 1. Issues of loss and being lost or invisible
 2. Issues of rejection or being excluded
 3. Issues of brokenness, helplessness
 4. Issues of betrayal

Issues of Loss and Being Lost or Invisible Examples

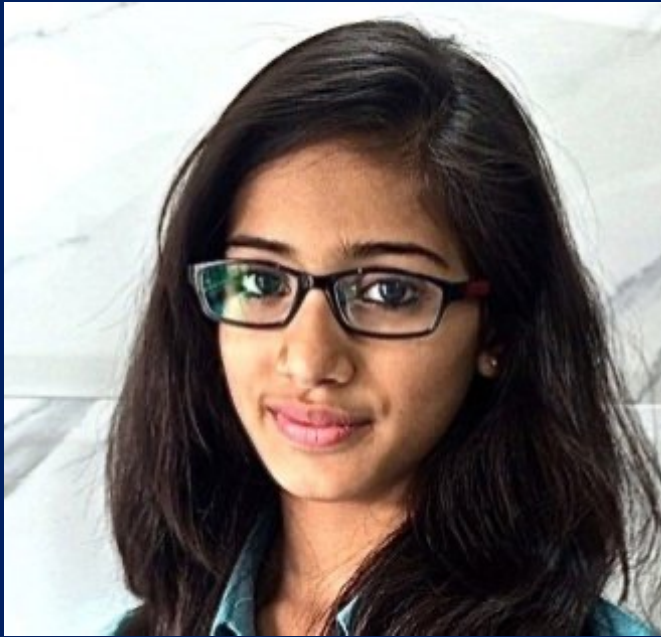
A school bag designed to provide support, strength, and encouragement to students changing school. How might it be most helpful, and what difference might it make?

A prince who never listens to his subjects or pays any attention to their requests or needs

Different Activities

- Poetry
- Art
- Ad Campaigns
- Comic Books
- Character Education : Feelings Mural, Iceberg Project

Meet Fatima...



- Supportive family
- Worrier since she was a kid
- Started in grade 9 now, tummy aches and headaches in the morning resulting in missed school days
- Parents say she is up at night worrying about test and assignments and has trouble sleeping
- She has missed tests in the last week because she was anxious
- She has also expressed worries about her parents, siblings and grandparents

Strategies for Fatima...

Education:

- Provide education around anxiety to Fatima and her parents

Expectations:

- Establish realistic expectations for amount of time to be spent on homework/studying for tests

Distractions:

- Encourage participating in after school activities to reduce anxiety (sports/clubs)

Check In's:

- Check in's with Fatima at the beginning of the day

Tools:

- Create a study schedule with Fatima – model appropriate amounts of study and preparation time
- Create a "coping" book with tools to identify anxiety and tools to help cope

Meet Ahmed...



- 7 year old boy, single child
- Difficulties with transition to daycare and JK as a child
- Mother was recently unwell
- Father working 2 jobs to support the family
- School refusal – Ahmed wanting to be at home with mother, crying in the mornings

Strategies for Ahmed...

Education:

- Reassurance to child and parent
- Education the parent and child that anxiety normally decreases overtime with appropriate strategies

Distraction:

- Use distraction techniques at drop-off time
- Engage student in game/activity
- Encourage drawing/painting/art project

Tools:

- Create coping book with steps for the child to take to deal with anxiety (ie, (1)Deep breaths (2) Drawing (3) Walk to water fountain (4) Talk to teacher (5) Call home

Supports:

- Provide encouragement and check-ins with the student through the day
- Get the whole class to participate in relaxation techniques

Meet Yusuf...



- 15 year old boy
- Parents recently immigrated 1 year ago
- Difficulty making friends in JK and in middle school
- Currently in new school : isolated, withdrawn, does not participate in class, anxious about presenting in class
- Spends most of his time at home online/playing video games
- Poor academic performance recently

Strategies for Yusuf

Education:

- Provide education to Yusuf and parents
- Normalize feelings of anxiety

Gradual desensitization

- Start with small group activities with friendly classmates

Classwork Modifications:

- Provide option for a small group presentation

Tools:

- Encourage relaxation techniques (visualization, deep breathing)

Tips:

AVOID Forcing student to do things with provoke significant anxiety (ie. Talking in front of the class)

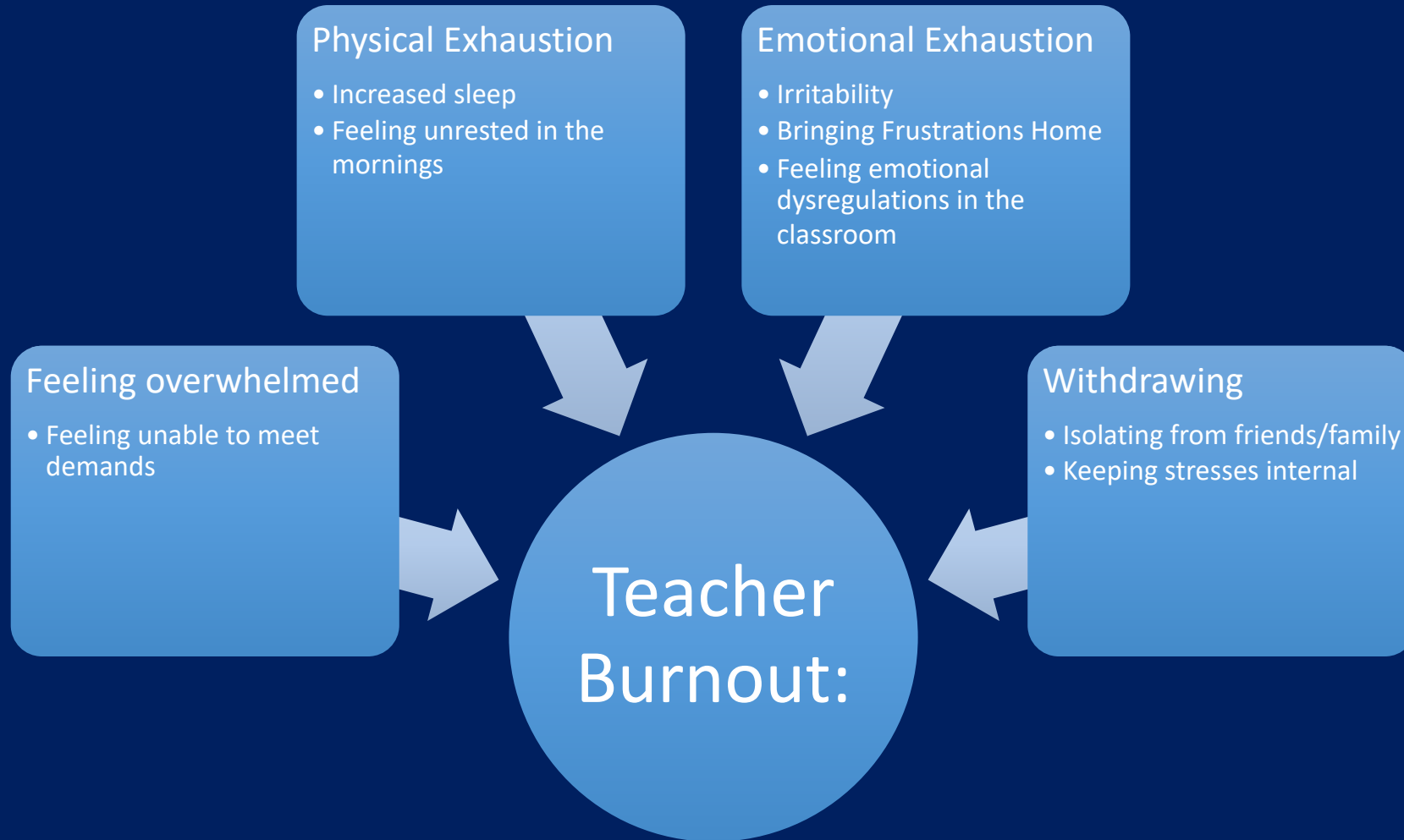
Tools for Educators

- When Something's Wrong – Strategies for Teachers → <https://cmho.org/documents/res-cprf-teachers-2007.pdf>
- Keys to Parenting Your Anxious Child by Dr.Katarina Manassis
- MindShift App for students
- Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada
- The Teacher's Guide to Student Mental Health by Dr.William Dikel

Tools for Educators

- If you are worried about a child's anxiety significantly impacting their mood or their ability to participate in school please speak with their parents and provide them with the contact to your local children's mental health agency if you think this is required to get your student the support they need!
- Support could include :
 - Counsellors
 - Family therapists
 - Psychoeducational assessments to rule out learning disabilities,
 - Group therapy
 - Comprehensive Multidisciplinary Assessments to ensure there are no other social or medical concerns that could be addressed

Self-Care :



Self-Care Exercise

- Scenario:
 - It is a winter day, you have just marked 60 tests and had a parent come into the class room who expressed their frustration over their sons poor performance in school. You come home and you own child is sick with a fever and your partner is out of town. You also have to prepare for a lesson tomorrow, need to finish exam questions and have important meeting to prepare for...

How do you cope in a healthy way?

Thank you for your participation
and attendance!

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