



STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Anxiety Tip Sheet for Intermediate/Secondary Students

Anxiety is a normal emotion experienced by children, youth and adults. Anxiety is our body's reaction to perceived danger or stressful life events. It alerts us to threats, protects us from danger and can help us reach an important goal.

Anxious feelings can result from certain medical conditions, difficulties at home, work or school and/or stressful life events. If a child or youth exhibits prolonged worries or fears, physical symptoms (e.g., headaches, nausea, stomach pains, diarrhea) that are increasing in frequency and intensity, this may be an indication of an Anxiety Disorder. Some common anxiety disorders include General Anxiety Disorder, Social Anxiety and Separation anxiety. Depending on severity and impact on life, families may need to talk to a physician or mental health professional.

More information and resources on Anxiety can be found at: www.anxietycanada.com

For more information on how to support a mentally healthy classroom visit: smho-smsc.ca

Noticing Signs of Anxiety Problems

Anxious feelings are experienced by everyone from time to time. However, if feelings of worry become excessive and persistent over a longer period of time, these feelings and accompanying thoughts can interfere with a student's wellbeing and ability to learn.

As an educator you are well positioned to notice and support a student who is struggling with anxiety at school. Anxious students may be quiet and well behaved or (due to fight or flight response) may be disruptive and non-compliant.

Common Signs of Anxiety in Youth

- ✓ Refusal and avoidance of classroom activities
- ✓ Difficulty participating in groups
- ✓ Excessive fear of making mistakes, or desire to be perfect in appearance and work projects
- ✓ Separation issues
- ✓ Poor self-esteem; viewing themselves as incompetent, unlovable or worthless
- ✓ Having trouble falling asleep due to excessive worrying about daily events, getting enough sleep or staying asleep

Normal Anxiety	Problem Anxiety
Reasonable	Excessive
Productive	Detrimental
Manageable	Uncontrollable
Focusing	Paralyzing
Specific	Generalized
Time-Limited	Chronic
Age-Appropriate	Age-Mismatch

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How to Support Students: Managing Anxiety

TIER 1: Classroom/Educator Support: 'Good for All'

Who can help?: School CYW & LRT

- Be consistent and predictable with your daily classroom routines. Encourage good study habits and the use of agenda, calendar, or visual schedule. Additional strategies include: Prompt students to set phone reminders, check-in with students to ensure they have understood assignments, provide advanced warning for changes in routine, and make one-on-one time available to review assignments.
- Speak in a calm tone and give feedback that alleviates worries. Teach feelings vocabulary, stress response or body cues associated with anxiety. Model a growth mindset for students, everyone makes mistakes, view them as a learning process. Teach social-emotional skills to all students and build awareness and understanding.
- Practice and encourage the use of deep breathing exercises in the classroom to help students learn and keep their calm. Examples include: finger-tracing breathing, circle breathing, and belly breathing.
- Create a welcome, accepting and inclusive atmosphere in the classroom. Examples include: greeting and checking-in with students, offering encouragement and validation, having fidget toys or a quiet, separate space available, displaying positive messages around the classroom, and recognizing and rewarding small improvements and help-seeking.



TIER 3: Targeted Intervention

- Individual coaching and/or counseling
- Targeted Accommodations
- Community Involvement

TIER 2: Targeted Support

TIER 1: Educator and Classroom Support

TIER 2: Targeted Accommodations 'Required for Some'

Who can help?: School CYW, LRT, Student's Family

Practice and coach calming and coping strategies. A range of anxiety-related strategies can include:

- Be curious. The student's thoughts and emotions may be due to difficulties in learning, friendships or change. Sometimes the fear or worry is unlikely, however it feels real for them and the body reacts.
- Help students identify anxiety-provoking thoughts. Thoughts impact emotions, and emotions influence behaviours. When students can identify distressing thoughts, they're more likely to seek out appropriate coping strategies and support.
- Allow time and space for students to engage in their preferred coping strategy.
- Recognize resiliency and students taking small steps to overcome fears.
- Group work into manageable tasks and accommodate expectations for challenging work or situations.

TIER 3: Targeted Intervention for an Individual

Who can help? In School Team, Resource Team (depending on individual case)

Support depends on individual case, can include:

- Targeted accommodations to education program, Individual counselling, psychoeducation and support for families or guardians, referral to community mental health agency, involvement of physician

Suggested Books and Videos for Educators and Students:

The Anxiety Workbook for Teens by Lisa M. Schab
Brightspace: Conquering Stress Binder
mentalhealthliteracy.org

Community Services Information

- **Contact Brant** 519-758-8228
- **Haldimand-Norfolk REACH** 519-587-2441
- **Kids Help Phone** 1-800-668-6868