



STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



Anxiety Tip Sheet for Primary & Junior Educators

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-smso.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 Children

- ✓ Refusal and avoidance of classroom activities
- ✓ Extreme shyness around peers
- ✓ Separation Issues
- ✓ Difficulty participating in groups
- ✓ Complaining of physical symptoms (i.e., stomach pains)

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. Use visual schedules and reminders.
- Speak in a calm tone. Be reassuring and give feedback that alleviates worries.
- Teach feelings vocabulary and stress response or body cues associated with anxiety. (Refer: books & videos)
- Teach social-emotional skills to all students and build awareness and understanding.
- Model a growth mindset for students. Everyone makes mistakes. View them as a learning process.
- Practice and encourage the use of deep breathing exercise in the classroom to help students learn and keep their calm. Have posters that visually describe one or two breathing techniques.
- Create a welcome, accepting, inclusive atmosphere in the classroom.



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. For example: Taking deep breaths, slowly counting to 10, journaling, taking a time out by listening to music, visualization and meditation, sensory activities to bring self into the moment, practicing gratitude and using distractions.

Range of anxiety related strategies can include:

- Be curious. The student's thoughts and emotions may be intense and heightened but it may be due to real difficulties in learning, initiating friendships or constant change. Sometimes the fear or worry is unlikely. Either way, it is real for them and the body reacts.
- Ensure expectations are clearly understood
- Have private check-ins. Reinforce positive thoughts, growth mindset, communication and self-advocacy
- Recognize brave behaviour.
- Chunk work into manageable tasks.
- Accommodate expectations for challenging work/situation rather than avoiding altogether.

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 family/guardian, referral to community mental health agency, involvement of physician.

Suggested Books and Videos for Educators and Students:

Ruby Finds a Worry by Tom Percival
When Worry Takes Hold by Liz Haske
When My Worries Get Too Big by Kari Duun Buron
The Worry Box by Suzanna Chiew
Fight Flight Freeze - A Guide to Anxiety for Kids
www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfSbWc3O_5M

Community Services Information

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