

MANAGING TEST ANXIETY

Test anxiety is a specific phobia whose symptoms interfere with concentration, problem solving and creative thinking. Symptoms can include excessive or unreasonable fear, tension, apprehension and somatic arousal before, during or after an examination. In most cases, test anxiety is associated with excessive concerns about performance as well as “fear of anxiety symptoms.” Avoiding tests is usually not a realistic coping option. Test anxiety varies in intensity from normal (experienced by most people but does not impair performance) to a crippling anxiety disorder. Studies have found that 41% of students experience anxiety associated with subject quizzes and standardized tests. For 25-30% of students, performance is lowered as a result of anxiety. In those cases, test results are not a valid indication of knowledge or ability. Test anxiety can generalize beyond poor test performance and lead to lower academic achievement, behavior problems, school refusal and becoming turned off to learning.

Before tests:

- Prepare and study in advance
- Develop good study skills
- Make and use flash cards
- Take good notes
- Make outlines and summaries
- Participate in study groups
- Use school resource centers if available for study tips, tutoring and other supports
- Talk to teacher for help or clarification on information you don't understand
- Learn and practice relaxation skills
- Develop a healthy life-style including proper diet, exercise and adequate sleep
- Visualize yourself doing well on tests
- Practice positive self-talk regarding the test
- Avoid talking about exams immediately before test taking if it raises anxiety level
- Be familiar with test time and location
- Limit worrying to a pre-determined “worry time” and say “not now” at other times
- Prepare the night before and collect any items you will need to take to the exam

During tests:

- Sit where you will have minimum distractions
- Carefully read any test instructions
- Scan the test and plan your approach
- Move on from difficult items instead of losing valuable time or going blank
- Focus on the test and stay in the here-and-now
- Avoid comparing yourself to other people's progress
- Use relaxation skills to counteract tension or worry

Special accommodations for severe cases:

- Extra time to complete tests
- Alternative locations for test taking to minimize distractions and reduce anxiety
- Alternative assessment methods: oral exams, written essays or take home exams
- Tutoring in weak subject areas