



## **Test anxiety - FAQ sheet for Teachers/Parents/Administrators**

### ***What is anxiety?***

Anxiety refers to a condition that is experienced when a person is exposed to a situation that is threatening or when they are apprehensive about situations that may occur in the future. While *worry* is the emotion that seems to best describe anxiety, the experience can be manifested through feelings, thoughts, behaviors as well as bodily changes.

### ***What is test anxiety?***

Test anxiety refers to the anxiety that children and adolescents can experience when they are being evaluated, such as when they take an exam.

### ***Doesn't everybody get nervous during tests?***

Some children cope rather well with evaluative situations. However, 30% of all children experience anxiety at such severe levels that they have difficulties functioning in their day-to-day lives. Over time, chronic test anxiety may lead to a loss of motivation for school-related tasks as well as a decreased sense of self-esteem (Huberty, 2009).

### ***Where does test anxiety come from?***

Exactly how and why test anxiety comes about is not fully understood, but there are a few things that point us in the right direction. First of all, test anxiety doesn't just magically appear out of nowhere. Children who exhibit symptoms of anxiety in circumstances that are not related to exams or who exhibit a greater number of fears than expected (the dark, spiders, dogs, etc.) are much more prone to demonstrate test anxiety.

Secondly, children who experience pressure when preparing for their exams may present with test anxiety before or during their exams. Finally, test anxiety can develop into a vicious cycle. The anxiety from one test fuels the anxiety for subsequent tests and can make it more intense and unpleasant. If this cycle continues without intervention, feelings of powerlessness can lead to other, more serious consequences..

Additionally, we know that test anxiety can be fueled or exacerbated by fear of failure, lack of preparation, and /or a poor history of test taking.

### ***What are the symptoms of test anxiety?***

Test anxiety symptoms fall into 3 categories: physical, emotional, and cognitive/behavioral.

The physical symptoms may include, but are not limited to: headaches, stomach aches, nausea, perspiration, rapid heart rate, muscle tension, lightheadedness, feeling faint, tics, sleep problems, and localized pain.

Emotional symptoms include but are not limited to: crying, feelings of irritability, feelings of helplessness, disappointment, fear, and oversensitivity.

Cognitive/Behavioral symptoms include but are not limited to: difficulties focusing and paying attention, problems remembering information, restlessness, trouble solving problems, task avoidance, rapid speech, withdrawal, perfectionism, failure to complete tasks, and erratic behavior.

These symptoms are all very real for the student experiencing them.

### ***What are the associated behaviors and triggers of test anxiety?***

Patterns of behavior may be associated with test anxiety. Task avoidance, which can be a symptom of test anxiety, often results in procrastination. Children may procrastinate in studying for tests, which may result in their feeling unprepared to take a test. They may try to cram the night before, which is not conducive to remembering information in an organized way. The combination of lack of preparedness and cramming results in anxiety during the test, which most likely impacts test performance.

Students may also be concerned about how their performance compares to peers. Additionally, they may worry about the impact of poor test performance on their grades, their ability to move to the next grade level, and how their grades may affect their future plans, such as entrance into college or other training programs.

### ***Treating test anxiety***

Different students experience different levels of test anxiety. For some, focusing on changing patterns of behavior in relation to procrastination and studying help alleviate test anxiety significantly. The use of self-relaxation techniques and positive self-talk can also be very effective. For students with higher levels of anxiety, these strategies can be paired with other practices such as yoga, exercise, good nutrition, and good sleep habits.. For students who experience severe test anxiety, the addition of therapy may be necessary. School-employed clinicians such as school psychologists, school social workers, and school counselors can provide counseling services to help students develop coping skills and manage test anxiety.

### ***References***

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