



# Test Anxiety Toolkit

Reducing Test Anxiety  
for Students & Teachers

Tennessee Department of Education | April 2016



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# Purpose

This toolkit is designed to increase awareness of the realities of test anxiety while also providing guidance on how to help educators identify students who may be experiencing test anxiety, provide high quality prevention and intervention strategies to reduce test anxiety, and avoid passing on their stress or test anxiety to students.

TNReady, the state’s new assessment in grades 3–11 math and English language arts, will provide educators, parents, and students with better information about our student’s process toward college and career readiness. The best preparation for TNReady is quality instruction every single day. However, we know that anxiety can prevent students from doing their best. Our goal as a state is to support the nearly one million students of Tennessee in their emotional and academic needs while preparing them for life after high school graduation.

In order to measure our progress, we’ve set three goals as a state, identified in the department’s strategic plan, [Tennessee Succeeds](#). Once accomplished, each of these goals will signal that a K–12 education in Tennessee is meaningfully preparing our students to take advantage of opportunities after their high school graduation. **First**, Tennessee will rank in top half of states on NAEP in fourth and eighth grade in 2019, and **second**, Tennessee will have an average ACT composite score of 21 by 2020. The **third** goal in the department’s strategic plan—for the majority of high school graduates from the class of 2020 to earn a postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree—is critical for students’ future success.

Students’ ability to show what they know on state tests is important in order to inform all educators—from the classroom level to the state level—about how students are doing academically and what we need to do to support their growth and success. Developing students’ comfort and confidence with test taking will not only help them feel comfortable with state, district, and classroom assessments, it will also prepare them for success in postsecondary and their careers. As we know, professionals often have to perform on-demand tasks, meet tight deadlines, and think on their feet. This toolkit is designed to be a resource as teachers and schools interact with and support students and families before and during classroom, district, and state assessments.

## ***Goals***

The goals of the toolkit are to:

- Define test anxiety, its causes, and its academic and social/emotional impact on student performance
- Share research-based prevention and intervention strategies at the school, classroom, and individual levels
- Identify specific strategies for all educators in reducing test anxiety
- Share strategies to reduce adult anxiety
- Provide a list of specific, research-based curricula and/or programs that counselors can utilize in both prevention and intervention activities

# Reducing Test Anxiety in Students and Teachers

## **Introduction**

Having some stress or nervousness is normal, especially for bigger projects or in critical moments. In fact, almost all of us experience some degree of stress in our personal and/or professional lives. While stress is often considered a negative feeling, stress can be positive—in small doses. For instance, it can motivate us to start and complete tasks efficiently, help our brains focus on a specific task at hand, and improve our physical performance and stamina. It can help us tackle new problems and push us to excel. As long as we continue to challenge ourselves, stress doesn't go away. The goal, then, is to positively and effectively channel our stress.

*Test anxiety is a type of performance anxiety.*

Test anxiety is defined as a *state of uneasiness and distress before and during a test that often lowers performance*. Test anxiety is a type of **performance anxiety**, a feeling someone might have in a situation where performance really counts or when the pressure is on to do well. For example, a person might experience performance anxiety when he or she is about to try out for the school play, sing a solo on stage, get into position at the pitcher's mound, step onto the platform in a diving meet, or walk into an important interview. Like other situations in which a person might feel performance anxiety, test anxiety can bring on "butterflies," a stomachache, or a tension headache. Some people might feel shaky, sweaty, or feel their heart beating quickly as they wait for the test to be given out. A student with really strong test anxiety may even feel like he or she is physically ill.

Test anxiety is composed of three major components: *cognitive, affective, and behavioral* manifestations. Test anxiety affects students of all ages and levels of ability. Each individual experiences these different components in different ways. General characteristics of each component are listed in the chart on the next page.

Cognitive	Affective	Behavioral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack self-confidence</li> <li>• Preoccupied with negative thoughts</li> <li>• Worry about ability</li> <li>• Overemphasize potential negative results</li> <li>• Feel helpless</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affective responses can be present before, during, and even after a test and often present as worry, fear, and/or panic.</li> <li>• Experience physiological symptoms such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased heart rate</li> <li>• Perspiration</li> <li>• Nausea</li> <li>• Frequent urination</li> <li>• Cold hands</li> <li>• Dry mouth</li> <li>• Muscle spasms</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Procrastination</li> <li>• Poor study skills and habits</li> <li>• Being physically tired during testing</li> </ul>

Test anxiety is *not* the same as doing poorly on a certain test because your mind is on something else. Most people know that having other things on their minds—such as a breakup or the death of someone close—can also interfere with their concentration and prevent them from doing their best on a test.

### ***What Causes Anxiety?***

All anxiety is a reaction to anticipating something stressful. Like other anxiety reactions, test anxiety affects the body and the mind. When you are under stress, your body releases the hormone *adrenaline*,

which prepares it for danger (you may hear this referred to as the "fight or flight" reaction). That is what causes the physical symptoms, such as sweating, a pounding heart, and rapid breathing. These sensations might be mild, moderate, or intense. The release of the hormone also suppresses concentration, short-term memory, and cognitive function.

*Adrenaline suppresses concentration, short term memory, and cognitive function.*

Focusing on negative things that could happen also fuels test anxiety. For example, someone worrying about doing poorly might have thoughts like, "What if I forget everything I know?" or "What if the test is too hard?" *Too many thoughts like these leave little mental space for thinking about the test questions.* People with test anxiety can also feel stressed out by their physical reaction and think things like "What if I throw up?" or "Oh no, my hands are shaking."

Similar to other types of anxiety, test anxiety can create a vicious cycle: The more a person focuses on bad things that could happen, the stronger the feeling of anxiety becomes. This makes the person feel worse, and because his or her head is full of distracting thoughts and fears, it can increase the possibility that the person will do worse on the test.

### ***Who's Likely to Have Test Anxiety?***

People who worry a lot or who are perfectionists are more likely to have trouble with test anxiety. People with these traits sometimes find it hard to accept mistakes they might make or to get anything less than a perfect score. In this way, even without meaning to, they might actually pressure themselves.

*It is estimated that up to 10 percent of students have a relatively high level of anxiety and 40 percent of students experience a mild form of anxiety.*

Students who aren't prepared for tests but who care about doing well are also likely to experience test anxiety. If you know you are not prepared, it is likely that you will be worried about doing poorly. Students can feel unprepared for tests for several reasons. They may not have studied enough; they may find the material difficult; or perhaps, they feel tired because they did not get enough sleep the night before.

### ***How Does Test Anxiety Affect Students?***

For elementary, middle, and high school students, test anxiety can manifest in different ways.

Elementary	Middle	High
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Throwing tantrums, often misread as anger</li> <li>• Unable to tolerate any sort of criticism</li> <li>• Disruptive in the classroom</li> <li>• Withdrawing</li> <li>• Unable to sleep in own room</li> <li>• Separation anxiety</li> <li>• Avoidance of certain activities; fear of being embarrassed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More prevalent in females</li> <li>• Appears as anger</li> <li>• Increased negative attitude and self-talk</li> <li>• Avoidance of certain activities</li> <li>• Increased self-awareness and feelings of being judged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disruptions in class</li> <li>• Negative attitude and self-talk</li> <li>• Avoidance of certain activities</li> <li>• Apathetic</li> <li>• Hopelessness</li> <li>• Tearfulness</li> <li>• Physical agitation</li> </ul>

It is

estimated that up to 10 percent of students have a relatively high level of anxiety, with another 40 percent experiencing a mild form. **A very small percentage of these students will self-identify and refer themselves to counseling.**

Test anxiety in school-aged children has a wide range of implications; the two most notable are that test anxiety has a negative effect on school performance and that it has also been shown to be related to poor self-esteem and self-concept along with poor peer relationships (Turner et al., 1993). Hembree (1988) found in a meta-analysis of over 500 studies that test anxiety reduced academic performance at almost every educational level between elementary school and college (Chapell et al., 2005). In addition, McDonald (2001) consistently found that gender and ability level are also related to test anxiety, with higher prevalence rates among females and among students with moderate to high academic ability.

Additionally, the anxiety that some students experience during the test can cause overall distractibility by irrelevant environmental stimuli (e.g., activities outside of the classroom; and conditions inside the classroom, such as temperature and lighting). These interfering environmental factors affect test performance in highly test-anxious students regardless of the format of the test, the difficulty of the items, or the amount of time allowed (Cassady, 2004).

## School-wide Prevention and Intervention

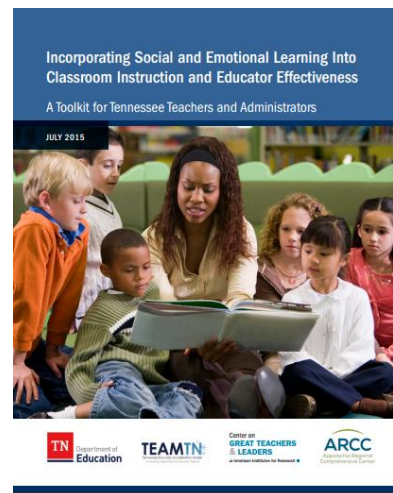


Reducing test anxiety can be achieved through both prevention and intervention models. School leaders should develop a comprehensive plan to utilize strategies that work to prevent student and teacher anxiety with assessments, as well as provide targeted interventions for those who need additional supports. This plan can be a component of school-based initiatives to improve and/or maintain a positive school climate.

School climate refers to the **quality** and **character** of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students', parents', and school staff members' experiences with school life and reflects school's norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. Research has shown that positive school climate is associated with stronger academic performance, higher graduation rates, decreased incidences of violence, and increased teacher retention. School climate has also been shown to have a moderating effect on the performance of students who report feeling anxiety and pressure surrounding the process of standardized testing (Mulvenon et al., 2005).

Creating a safe and supportive school climate is a critical component for student success. Social and emotional learning is at the heart of a positive school climate. The resources below guide school leaders in implementing practices and processes that build and enhance positive learning environments. The department's [conditions for learning division](#) can provide support for school leaders working to improve school climate. Please reference the resources below.

- [Incorporating Social and Emotional Learning into Classroom Instruction and Educator Effectiveness: A Toolkit for Tennessee Teachers and Administrators.](#)
- [Safe and Supportive Schools Technical Assistance Center](#)




All stakeholders can participate in a creating a positive school climate, especially around preparing students for formal assessments. The following strategies may be included in a school-wide prevention approach.


## ***Administrators***

Administrators are responsible for creating an environment that best supports student learning. They are charged with setting high expectations for effective instruction and student performance. Providing stakeholders with the support and resources necessary to meet those high expectations will lead to greater success.

- Develop an Assessment Plan** that guides instruction and intervention to give educators the tools they need to address student needs. An Assessment Plan identifies all of the formative assessments, including practice tests that will be administered to students in addition to the required state assessments. The plan should include the purpose of the assessment as well as the administration details (date, time, location, etc.). The [example](#) shows the various assessments that will be given and specific details about each assessment, including expectations, timelines, and resources. Create your own plan or click [here](#) for a helpful template.



**Dogwood Elementary School  
will be ready  
for TNReady!**



**3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA and Math**

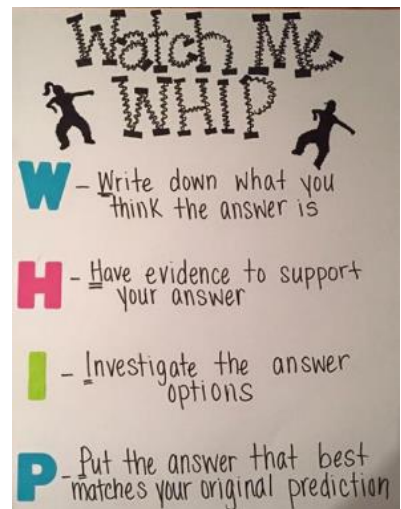
Item	What is it?	When?
<b>Amplify - Beacon</b> Login: <a href="https://www.mclasshome.com/learn/login.do">https://www.mclasshome.com/learn/login.do</a> Received email July 30 from Melissa Hart with your login information	<b>Two Purposes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 District Benchmark Assessments for all TNReady courses →</li> <li>Tool teachers can use to develop quizzes, common assessments, etc. →</li> </ul>	1. August 24- September 18 2. November 30- December 17 3. March 7- April 1  Available for teacher use at any time to make assessments
<b>MICA</b> (Measurement Incorporated Classroom Assessment) Login: <a href="https://micatime.com/">https://micatime.com/</a> Received email May 19 from the state with your login information	<b>Free TNReady Item Sampler</b> About: <a href="http://support.micatime.com/">http://support.micatime.com/</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See back for more information</li> </ul>	Available for teacher use at any time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has 9-12 sample items for every standard</li> <li>Can use Practice Tool</li> </ul>
<b>TNReady Practice Tests</b> via MIST (Measurement Incorporated Secure Testing)  You will receive a link to the site prior to the first window	<b>Free Optional Practice Tests:</b> the TDOE is making available to simulate the TNReady test on the actual MIST secure testing site  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See back for more information</li> </ul>	3 Windows: 1. September 28- October 30 2. January 4- February 6 3. March 7- April 8  <small>Note: Should have students complete at least one of these practice tests to become familiar with the MIST platform</small>
<b>TNReady</b> Information: <a href="http://www.tennessee.gov/education/topic/tready">http://www.tennessee.gov/education/topic/tready</a>	<b>The real deal!</b> <b>This replaces the EOCs!</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tennessee's new assessment over the State Standards (NOT the SPTs)</li> <li>The test is in two parts, all online through the MIST testing site</li> </ul>	<b>Part I:</b> February 8- March 4 <b>Part II:</b> April 15- May 13

**TNReady Blueprint:** for planning purposes: <https://www.tn.gov/education/article/tready-blueprints>  
**PDF comparing TCAP/EOCs to the new TNReady test:** <https://www.tn.gov/assets/genies/education/attachments/tready-question-comparisons.pdf>

- Identify appropriate roles for all staff in the Assessment Plan.** Think strategically about how educators not delivering direct instruction can support the assessment plan. Align strengths and trainings to best meet the needs of students and teachers. For example:
  - Instructional coaches can provide academic interventions to students who have not mastered the content.
  - School counselors can provide test taking and study skills instruction to all students. Counselors are also trained to work individually and in small groups with students who may be experiencing personal, emotional, or social issues that are impacting achievement. It is important that counselors are available to assist students who may be experiencing anxiety prior to and during the assessment.
  - Technology specialists can provide assistance to teachers on building student capacity for online testing.
  - Staff members in the building that are not providing direct services to students should be in charge of coordinating testing logistics.

TNReady is designed to assess true student understanding and problem-solving abilities, not just basic memorization skills.

- **Communicate clearly and frequently** to ensure that all stakeholders understand the purpose of the assessments, how the results will be used to drive instruction, and the logistics of test administration. The department's [Parent Guide to Being TNReady](#) is a great resource to share with parents and families via school website, emails, and electronic newsletters.
- **Provide professional development on test anxiety.** Ensure that all staff members understand what test anxiety is and how it impacts students. Training will also give the adults at school tips for managing their own stress and preventing them from passing it along to students. This [presentation](#) can be used for faculty training.
- Create a positive environment during assessments. Remind students and teachers that this is **an opportunity to show what the students know** and provide better information to teachers and parents to ensure students are developing the skills necessary to be successful in postsecondary education and the workforce. Engage students in projects to build their self-confidence. Examples could include:
  - Poster contests
  - Daily trivia contests
  - [Video/Song Contest](#)
- **Celebrate successes with students and teachers.** Student achievement is one of many aspects of assessments that can be celebrated. Increased attendance during the assessments, successful completion of make-up assessments, and reduction in discipline incidents during the assessments all contribute to a successful assessment program. Recognizing these positive elements helps to reduce anxiety for both students and teachers. Ideas include:
  - Casual dress day for both students (excused from dress code) and teachers
  - Ice cream sundaes
  - Grade level parties/picnics
  - Grade level games (i.e., silly Olympics, kickball tournaments)



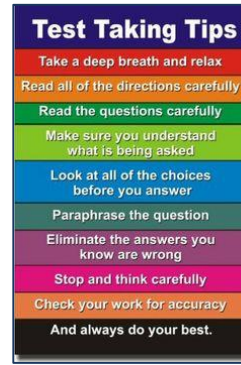
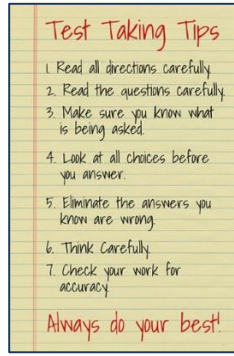
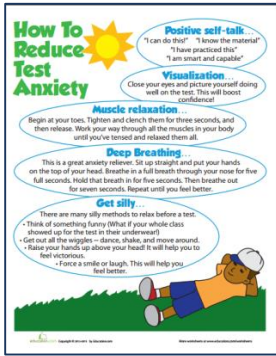
## ***Classroom Teachers***

Classroom teachers have a great deal of influence on students' anxiety levels regarding assessments. That influence spans the classroom environment to teaching methods. When teachers employ the following strategies they are helping to reduce test anxiety for the students as well as for themselves.

- **Set high expectations for students** and communicate the belief that they can meet them. Knowing each student's academic and development levels helps teachers to personalize learning for his or her success. Differentiating instruction ensures students are offered multiple opportunities to meet learning outcomes.
- **Prepare students by building self-confidence in their skills and knowledge through practice.** Students should have ample opportunities to demonstrate what they know—from unscored practice during class to quick checks for understanding to benchmark assessments. A state assessment shouldn't be the first time a student has the chance to show their skills and knowledge.
- **Focus instruction on standards** rather than on test questions. When students understand that they are learning content rather than gaining information to pass a test, it decreases the pressure they may feel at test time.
- **Utilize student support services** available at your school in your district, such as instructional coaches, RTI<sup>2</sup>, tutoring opportunities, etc.
- **Communicate with parents** about upcoming assessments, student's academic progress, and ways that they can support their child's learning at home.
- **Help students become comfortable and familiar** with the test structure, test instructions and guidelines, time limits, the importance of pacing, and the different types of test formats. Consider designing some classroom tests using the standardized test format throughout the year so that students get comfortable with the layout.



- **Explore and talk about test anxiety in class** by discussing students' concerns, and if necessary, meet with the school counselor and parents of identified students to address the issue.
- **Develop and display classroom posters:**



## School Counselors

School counselors plan and implement comprehensive programs to prepare students for learning and assessment. The focus of these programs includes not only academic support but also social and emotional development. School counselors have training to assist students, teachers, and parents to effectively manage emotional issues that may interfere with student learning. This includes test anxiety. Comprehensive counseling services effectively prepare students to perform at their highest level on state and district assessments. School counselors contribute to a positive learning environment where students are confident in their abilities, feel comfortable asking for assistance, and know that challenges are part of the learning process.

- **Conduct school counseling lessons** on test taking strategies, anxiety reducing coping skills, etc. as part of a comprehensive program that address academic development (example presentation [here](#)).
- **Implement small group/individual counseling** for students who are exhibiting symptoms of test anxiety.



- **Review assessment data** to identify students who may not be performing well on these assessments to determine if test anxiety could be a contributing factor. Provide small group counseling, individual counseling, and parent/teacher consultation to identify and implement intervention plans.
- **Collaborate with teachers** to help them integrate appropriate coping skills into their curriculum and lesson plans.
- **Provide parent education and awareness opportunities** for learning how to support their children as they prepare for assessments, as well as additional support for parents whose students are experiencing test anxiety.
- **Identify community providers who may be able to assist** with educational trainings on test anxiety as well as those who are able to provide more intensive support for students who may be experiencing high levels of anxiety.
- During assessment periods, school counselors should **be available to assist students** in reducing anxiety as they begin testing.

### ***Other Educators (Instructional Coaches, Support Staff, etc.)***

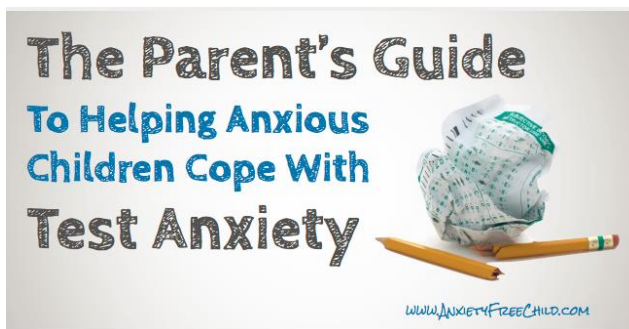
Successful assessment plans include all educators. Depending on the resources within each school, support personnel should be included in assessment plans. Aligning each educator's skills and training to identified needs or gaps in the assessment plan will lead to a more successful administration of the assessment.

- **Know the assessment plan**, including the purpose, type, and administration plan for each assessment. Help communicate this information with various stakeholders, including peers, students, and parents.
- Discuss your role with administration to **determine the best supports for students during an assessment**.
- **Collaborate with teachers** to identify how to support classroom instruction.

### ***Parents***

Parents are important partners in making sure that students are prepared for both learning and assessments. When children experience anxiety, they will look to trusted adults, like their parents and guardians, for help navigating the experience. Schools should partner with parents to ensure that they have the resources to effectively support their children.

- **Stay informed** about the type of formal assessments that your students will take at school. This includes the purpose, format, and timeline of the assessments.
- **Meet with your child's teacher** to discuss progress and any areas needing improvement. Collaborate on strategies that can be used at home to support the child.
- **Talk with your child about testing.** Explain to you your child that he or she will take standardized tests to measure what they know. Explain that these tests use the same standards to measure student performance across the state to show what students have learned. Standardized tests are rulers that teachers, schools, school districts and even states use to measure what and how they teach and how well students are learning what is taught.
- **Encourage your child to do his or her best.** However, avoid placing too much emphasis on a child's test scores.
- **Ensure that your child has the supplies needed** for assessments. Many schools assist in providing these materials to students.
- **Help your child get restful sleep and healthy meals** during assessments. Meeting physical needs of children helps them to focus on doing their best.



## ***Students***

Effective preparation for assessments can help reduce anxiety for students. Both schools and parents should work together to teach students skills to help them manage their feelings and thoughts during assessments. This will help as students show what they know on the assessment,

and these skills will also translate to other on-demand experiences in their lives. Students gain confidence from exercising control over their emotions.

- **Develop good sleep habits, healthy diet and exercise.**
- **Prepare for assessments** by engaging in classroom instruction, completing assignments and enrichment activities, and asking for assistance when needed. Avoid trying to cram for the assessment.
- **Create a comfortable and calm environment** for yourself. Wear comfortable clothes during the exam and maintain relaxed body posture during test. Be aware of physical signs of increasing anxiety and implement calming and coping skills to reduce anxiety. Take deep breaths and attempt to regain composure when anxiety levels are high or when negative thoughts are present.
- **Utilize effective time management and test taking skills.** Be aware of time allotted during the test, read directions carefully, and review answers.
- **Seek support** if experiencing anxiety about upcoming assessments. Talk with parents, teachers, and/or school counselors to learn strategies to minimize test anxiety.

## Classroom Prevention and Intervention

Teachers can employ a variety of activities to help prevent test anxiety in their classroom as well as address concerns students may have around taking tests. Many of these activities can be used on any given day in the classroom, and these strategies can be adapted and utilized for all developmental levels of students.

### **Morning Meetings**

Morning meetings are a great way for teachers to prevent an environment of anxiety. An effective morning meeting will **set the tone** for respectful learning, create a climate of trust, motivate students to feel significant, create empathy, encourage collaboration, and support social, emotional, and academic learning. Creating an environment of confidence, trust, and learning will



allow students to feel ready to take on assessments or other assignments, and cope with feelings of anxiety.

- [Routines and Procedures for Morning Meetings](#)
- [Responsive Classroom](#)

### **Test Taking Strategies**

While the best preparation for assessments is quality instruction, having the tools to effectively take a test can help students gain confidence. School counselors can be a great resource for teaching test-taking skills. Partner with your counselor to ensure that your students have these important skills.

- [Sample Elementary School](#)
- [Sample Middle School](#)
- [Sample High School](#)

### **Mindfulness**

Mindfulness allows a person to **focus on the present moment** and prepares the mind to respond to challenges or stress in more effective ways. Mindfulness fosters concentration, understanding, learning, and peace.

*It is really hard to be anxious if you are completely focused on the present moment.*

Mindfulness skills help with a person's:

- perceptions and appraisals of stress,
- emotion-regulation,
- meta-cognition,
- feeling out of control,
- suffering, and
- multitasking

Learned mindfulness skills can:

- bring teens into the present moment through a reduction of focus on the past or future and more attention on the here and now;
- reduce rumination, "distorted" thinking, worries, negative self-talk, and judgments;

- increase letting go, empathy, patience, being with what is, and kindness toward self and others; and
- help focus on the self-regulation of attention, thoughts and emotions.

The following are additional resources on integrating mindfulness in your classroom:

- [Resources For Teens](#)
- *Mindfulness for Teen Anxiety: A Workbook for Overcoming Anxiety at Home, at School, and Everywhere Else (Teen Instant Help)* by [Christopher Willard PsyD](#)
- *The Mindful Teen: Powerful Skills to Help You Handle Stress One Moment at a Time (The Instant Help Solutions Series)* [Dzung X. Vo MD FAAP](#)
- *Sitting Still Like a Frog: Mindfulness Exercises for Kids (and Their Parents)* by [Eline Snel](#)

### **Tips for Teachers During Assessments**

- Post the *daily routine* in the classroom and let students know in advance any changes in the schedule. Letting students know exactly what is expected will help lessen anxiety. For a student with anxiety, a sudden change can cause discomfort. Knowing in advance what the day will be like will help in transitions.
- Play *soothing music* during down time. Many times playing soft music can help children to calm down and can relieve stress. During quiet activities or seatwork, use soothing music to give students the opportunity to experience its benefit prior to assessments.
- Researchers have found that *gum chewing* can help students during testing, and reduce the effects of anxiety. The results suggest that gum chewing can act as an effective intervention to relieve test anxiety for the low- and medium-trait-anxious students.

## **Individual Intervention**

The school counselor can play a pivotal role in preventing and helping students learn to cope with test anxiety. There are many strategies that a school counselor can work with students on, whether it is through classroom guidance, small group lessons, or individual sessions. Teachers and school counselors will need to work together to ensure that students who exhibit the most anxiety get the attention they need to learn coping skills.

## ***Alignment to School Counseling Standards***

When school counselors work to provide prevention and intervention strategies for students who may experience test anxiety, they are meeting standards for their school counseling programs. Tennessee's School Counseling Student Standards identify skills, attitudes, and knowledge that lead to academic achievement and postsecondary readiness. When a student effectively manages test anxiety, he/she is demonstrating mastery of the following standards:

1. Students will acquire and utilize the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors necessary for academic achievement.
2. Students will acquire an understanding of self as an individual and contributing member of a diverse local and global community.
3. Students will demonstrate appropriate personal safety, responsibility, and coping skills that lead to physically and emotionally healthy behaviors.
4. Students will develop employment readiness skills that lead to success in postsecondary education and training and in the workforce.

These strategies can be used for individual or small group interventions for students who may be experiencing higher levels of anxieties.

### **Neutral Tool**

It is important to catch negative mind loops that reinforce self-doubt or uncomfortable feelings. Every time you catch a negative thought repeating itself, stop the loop and practice going to neutral. Start by focusing on the area around your heart. This helps to take the focus off the mind loop. Then breathe deeply. Breathe as if your breath is flowing in and out through the center of your chest. Breathe quietly and naturally, four-five seconds on the in-breath, and four-five seconds on the out-breath. While you're breathing, try to find an attitude of calmness about the situation.

### **Square Breathing**

Have students draw a square on a notecard. Instruct them to start at the top left corner, trace their finger to the right corner all while breathing in, then from the top right corner down to the bottom right corner they breath out, and so on around the square.

### **Address the "What If" Question**

Many times before students take a test or begin an activity, much of their anxiety stems from a

build-up of negative, “what-if” thoughts: “What if I fail?”, “What if I can’t remember anything?”, or “What if I run out of time?” Try writing a what-if question that is positive and can help you take the *big deal* out of the situation and begin to see things in a different way. Examples of these kinds of questions are, “What if I remember everything?” and “What if I can feel calmer than I think I can?”

### **Thinking Positive Thoughts**

Brain science has revealed that good feelings like appreciation can actually help the brain work better. When feeling nervous or anxious, try this: Remember something that makes you feel good. It could be a pet, how it feels when to get big hug from a loved one, or after a fun day at the park with friends. After you remember how you felt, hold that feeling. Pretend you are holding it in your heart. Let yourself feel that feeling for 10–20 seconds or more. Repeat as often as necessary.

### **Manipulatives and stress reducing activities**

- Decorate relaxation stones for students to rub when they begin feeling anxious.
- Create a [worry warrior](#). Students can “give” their worries to the warrior to handle.
- Create a mind jar (soda bottle filled with colored water and glitter for kids to shake when anxious).
- Make a collage of pictures that help the student relax or strategies that they can use to help them relax.
- Draw a comic strip showing a student using positive coping skills.
- Make stress fidgets or stress balls



# Adult Stress and Anxiety

When the adults in school are feeling anxious about assessments, it is often unintentionally passed on to the students. Many of the activities that help students can be beneficial for adults as well. When the strategies mentioned earlier are not effective for reducing adult anxiety, adult educators should seek support to effectively manage their emotions.

- Teachers can consult with their school counselor to identify stress-reducing techniques that may help.
- Most school districts offer an Employee Assistance Program, which includes support for reducing stress and anxiety.

Educators can take advantage of these [helpful resources](#) to help eliminate negative thoughts and feelings that could be passed on to students. Not only will this benefit students, but it will allow the educator to more clearly focus on *teaching* their students. Great teaching is one of the most important factors in students' academic achievement. Ensuring that educators are equipped to provide that high-quality instruction is a best practice that will lead to greater student learning and academic achievement. Working together we can help increase our students' confidence and comfort with state, district, and classroom assessments, as well as prepare them for success in postsecondary experiences and their careers.

## Additional Resources for Reducing Test Anxiety

[ASCA: 2004: Helping Students Overcome Test Anxiety](#)

[School Counseling Files: Tools for Anxious Kids](#)

<http://www.hagerstowncc.edu/sites/default/files/documents/11-test-anxiety-tips.pdf>

**30+** **WAYS TO DE-STRESS**  
**IN LESS THAN 10 MINUTES**

- LISTEN TO YOUR FAVORITE TUNES
- HEAD OUTSIDE
- STRETCH
- MEDITATE
- READ FOR PLEASURE
- WALK, BIKE, SKATEBOARD AROUND THE BLOCK
- COUNT TO 10
- DANCE
- JOURNAL
- WRITE DOWN 10 THINGS YOU'RE GRATEFUL FOR
- DOODLE OR DRAW
- TELL SOME JOKES
- CALL A FRIEND
- CHEW A PIECE OF GUM
- FOCUS & NOTICE YOUR PRESENT SURROUNDINGS (GROUNDING)
- DISCONNECT FROM TECH
- LOOK AT A HAPPY PHOTO
- SQUEEZE A STRESS BALL
- WATCH A FUNNY YOUTUBE VIDEO
- PUNCH A PILLOW
- DEEP, SLOW BREATHING
- READ AN INSPIRATIONAL QUOTE
- SPEND TIME WITH YOUR PETS
- PRACTICE YOGA POSES
- DO 20 JUMPING JACKS
- DO SOMETHING NICE FOR SOMEONE
- SIT IN THE SUN
- VISUALIZE A SAFE, COMFORTING PLACE
- PICK SOME FLOWERS
- GIVE YOURSELF A NECK MASSAGE
- TAKE A SHOWER
- KICK A SOCCER BALL

[www.SharonMartinCounseling.com](http://www.SharonMartinCounseling.com)

<http://www.healthcentral.com/anxiety/school-258065-5.html>

<http://teacherpop.org/2015/03/how-to-reduce-stress-and-anxiety-in-the-classroom/>

<http://anxietyfreechild.com/test-anxiety/>

<http://www.stressedteens.com/take-a-chill/>

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