

Tips for Teachers: Reducing Test Anxiety in Students

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Some children (like some adults) are more susceptible to stress (anxiety) than others. Anxious children may really struggle with test taking. Most people feel some anxiety when being tested/evaluated/critiqued. That is a normal response. For some, however, the anxiety is extreme and needs addressing. We want all of our students to do their best on tests, but we don't want them to be anxious about taking them. It might be helpful to think about why the student is so anxious about being tested. Do they struggle with perfectionism? Are they hard on themselves if they make mistakes? Do they fear disappointing someone like a parent or a teacher? Do they fear looking foolish? Being made fun of? Failing? If we know specifically what the child's fears are, we can address them more effectively. Even without this specific knowledge, however, we can know that for some children taking a test is a painful experience. Here are a few tips and comments on ways to help our all of our kids do their best without feeling so pressured.

1. Establish Test Taking Rules in your Classroom:

- a. Do your Best on Every Test!
- b. Only do your work. (no sharing of ideas now)
- c. It's only a test, nothing to stress
- d. When it's done, it's done. Move on

Post and review the rules prior to every test. After a few weeks, the children will have them memorized. Discuss them with the children the first few times. Get them to "explain" what they mean.

2. Do a 2 minute relaxation exercise prior to beginning a test

- a. Place both feet flat on the floor and lay your hands in your lap
- b. Close your eyes and take 3 good breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth. Model the breathing to about the count of 3. Count aloud to help them.
- c. Shrug your shoulders up high and let them down...down more
Try to make your arms, neck, and shoulders feel like cooked spaghetti.
- d. Say aloud to the class: I am relaxed, prepared, and ready to perform my best.

The children should be in a fairly relaxed state now. Keep your voice low, soft and relaxed to keep the feeling going as you begin the test.

3. After the test, do a quick debrief.

- a. Praise **effort** (I saw how hard you were working. I liked it.) Praise **respectful quiet** (the room was so quiet. Thank you for being so respectful and allowing everyone a quiet room in which to work.) Praise **attitude** (I saw hard work, but confidence. That matters to me.)
- b. Ask the class how they felt about the test. Their own effort. Their stress. Make it one of several comments so it isn't overdone. Let them know they can tell you in private if they felt stressed but didn't want to share in front of others. If they do, consider involving school support staff to work 1:1 with the child to help.
- c. Shake it off. Literally with younger kids. Shake it out their fingertips.
- d. Move on!

Remember, kids are emotional sponges and they soak up feelings without knowing they are doing it. Monitor your own stress and make sure that you are not sending anxiety signals to your kids.

Reach out for support if you have an anxious child in your classroom. School support staff can partner with you as we work together to educate the total child.

