

UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY

STRATEGIES FROM STUDENTS, FAMILIES, AND SCHOOL STAFF

SELF AWARENESS

Five Key Questions to Increase Teacher Self Awareness

1- Am I taking proactive steps to identify and defuse my own "emotional triggers"?

Take periodic "timeouts" before, during, or after both "positive" and "challenging" Interactions with students.

Ask yourself:

- "What led me to respond this way?"
- "Is this way of responding helping or hurting this relationship?"
- "Is it helping me grow as an educator?"
- "Is it helping the youth make better choices?"

It is important to remember that we are often unaware of our primary emotional triggers. Actively seek consultation from colleagues and supervisors regarding behaviors and/or attitudes which are helping or hurting your effectiveness in the classroom.

Ask a colleague or supervisor:

- "What do you see as my biggest strength in working with students with behavioral and emotional concerns?"
- "What types of problems or student behaviors do I find the most difficult?"

2- Am I paying attention to what I need to pay attention to?

Teachers who support students with emotional and behavioral concerns can become so attuned to problem behaviors and perceived weaknesses that they often inadvertently neglect to recognize and build on students' positive behaviors and strengths.

Strategy for Shifting Your Focus (The Penny Transfer Technique)

Take five pennies and place them in your left pocket.

Identify a student in your classroom who regularly needs to be redirected. Ideally, this should be a student whom you find difficult to engage. Every time you are able to verbally encourage that student for something they do well, transfer a penny to your right pocket. It is important to avoid phony or superficial affirmations (e.g., "I like your new jeans"). Your goal is to move all five pennies to the right pocket by the end of the day. Repeat this exercise each day for 2 weeks. (Note: You may need to use less pennies or extend the timeframe several days if you are only with the student for one period.)

3. Am I using effective strategies to reduce burnout and nurture my own mental health?

Teachers need safe places to express their feelings and frustrations and recharge their emotional batteries. Talking with supportive colleagues is one of the most effective coping strategies.

- Recognize the difference between productive venting and an unproductive pattern of negativity and complaining.
- Take time to assess your conversations with friends and colleagues about your classroom and students.
- Ask yourself whether these conversations are helping to reduce or amplify your stress level.
- Periodically gauge your feelings and coping skills and seek out positive models.
- Stop and ask yourself, "What is your vision for the children and youth that you teach?" If necessary, explore new strategies (e.g., exercising, seeking professional help, reframing student behavior, finding humor in potentially humorous situations, commending yourself for ways you are making a difference) for managing your stress and increasing your own morale.

4. Am I using an appropriate sense of humor to build relationships, diffuse conflict, engage learners, and manage my own stress?

An appropriate sense of humor is an effective strategy for engaging students who seem to be disengaged. To assess whether you might be incorporating an appropriate sense of humor into your classroom, periodically ask yourself the following questions:

- "How often do I laugh as I teach?"
- "Do students seem to enjoy learning in my classroom?"
- "For the most part, do I enjoy working with students with behavioral and emotional disorders?"
- "Do I use humor as a technique to diffuse difficult situations or avoid potential power struggles?"
- "Does humor used in my classroom (by me or my students) tend to bring people closer together or push them further away?"

Based on your responses to these questions, it may be helpful to seek consultation or additional resources to more effectively incorporate humor into the classroom. Also, remember that qualifying language was used in these questions ("for the most part," "tend to"). You do not need to inject humor into every lesson plan or difficult situation. An honest self-assessment, however, will likely provide you with direction regarding areas where a change in attitude or behavior may be helpful.

5. Do I regularly acknowledge significant ways I (and others) are making a difference in the lives of students?

Teachers who perceive themselves as having the ability to bring about desired student results are more likely to perceive their students as teachable and worthy of their attention and effort.

Strategy for Recognizing Difference Makers: The Starfish Calendar

This technique is similar to the "Penny Transfer Technique"; however, the objective is to recognize the positive behavior of teachers.

First, find a calendar. Draw and cut out pictures of yellow and orange starfish. When you recognize another educator making a difference (e.g., taking extra time after class, encouraging a student to talk to their counselor, using a creative intervention), communicate in some way that you appreciate their efforts. Then, write a brief description of the behavior on a yellow starfish and paste it on the date in your Starfish Calendar. At the end of the day, identify a specific way you made a difference, and paste an orange starfish in the calendar. Make a conscious effort to find one yellow and one orange starfish each day. This should only take a few minutes. If you happen to miss a day, try to find two the following day.

REFERENCE:

Richardson, B. G., & Shupe, M. J. (2003). The importance of teacher self-awareness in working with students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 36(2), 8-13.

RESOURCES:

[2021 CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH REPORT- The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children's Mental Health What We Know so Far](#)

[Mental Health America: 2021 COVID-19 and Mental Health: A Growing Crisis](#)

[AAP-AACAP-CHA Declaration of a National Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health](#)

[Mindful Teachers: How Teachers Can Share Mindfulness with Their Students](#)

[Social Thinking](#)

[Second Step](#)

[Go Zen: A Mindful Minute](#)

[GoNoodle](#)

[Headspace](#)

EDUCATOR ROUNDTABLE STRATEGIES

Strategies for Setting Up the Environment

- Building community and relationships with and among students
- Calm space with options to move, take deep breaths, use fidgets, have quiet time
- Teaching students about what happens in the brain when we get worried and anxious, and how we can learn to regulate our bodies and emotions
- Music in the classroom at 80 beats per minute which is the resting heart rate of a child
- Flexible seating- cushions, floor
- Use of syllabi and rubrics to provide big picture and break down learning into smaller units
- Use of a planner or agenda to keep organized
- Provide notice of assignments, tests ahead of time
- Modeling how to manage anxious feelings by stating how you are feeling and the strategies you find helpful – providing students with language and strategies they can try

Strategies for Supporting Students in the Moment

- Building a relationship with a student is the foundation for tailoring (choosing) strategies in the moment
 - Helps identify their triggers
 - Helps anticipate triggers that may emerge throughout the day
- Strategies depend on the context & are adapted to meet the needs of each individual student
- Stay calm & be mindful of tone of voice & proximity
- Keep in mind confidentiality
 - Be mindful of privacy so the student does not feel exposed
 - Be explicit who you will be sharing the information with
- Support the student, show them you care and help process what they are experiencing
 - Get to the root of what is triggering their reaction
- Ask the student if there is someone they would like to talk to
 - Rely on other staff supports in the building
- Invite the student to go outside the classroom to get some air/some space
 - Offer movement breaks in the hallway
- Offering choices for what a student may need in the moment
- Help label their experiences
 - Reflect back to students what you see they are experiencing
 - Reflect back their feelings
- Encourage and empower students to advocate for what they need in the moment

Strategies for Partnering with Families

- Build relationships and connections with families through greeting them at arrivals and dismissals, connecting with them at school events, and asking about their or their child's interests and hobbies outside of school
- Have the first interaction with a family be positive: Share something that their child is doing well at school
- Be mindful of all that families have going on personally and professionally: Seek and offer options for how a family can participate in a meeting about their child



- Find ways to celebrate the variety of cultures that represent the school community. Invite families to teach the school community something about their culture.
- Collaborate with other school professionals who have more familiarity or better understanding of a family's language or culture
- View conversations with families as learning opportunities: Families are experts on their child. Ask families about strategies they use at home with their child that are helpful
- Be mindful of how a family may understand and approach anxiety
- Recognize that families have their own histories and lived experiences with school systems that can contribute to their feelings about schools and the relationships they form with school professionals
- Activate the power that families have: Help them to know their rights and what support and resources are available for their child and for themselves
- Invite families to participate on school committees to amplify their voices in decisions that affect the school

THE STRESS RESPONSE IN KIDS

FIGHT	FLIGHT	FREEZE
Yelling, Screaming, Using Mean Words	Wanting to Escape, Running Away	Shutting Down, Mind Goes Blank
Hitting, Kicking, Biting, Throwing Punching	Unfocused, Hard to Pay Attention	Urges to Help, Isolates Self
Blaming, Deflecting Responsibility, Defensive	Fidgeting, Restlessness, Hyperactive	Verbally Unresponsive, Says "I don't know" a lot
Demanding, Controlling	Preoccupied, Busy with Everything But the Thing	Difficulty with Completed Tasks
Oppositional, Defiant, Noncompliant	Procrastinating, Avoidant, Ignores the Situation	Zoned Out, Daydreaming
Moving Towards What Feels Threatening	Moving Away From What Feels Threatening	Unable to Move, Feeling Stuck
Inhibits, Aggressive, Offended, Aggressive	Anxious, Frenzied, Scared, Worried, Overwhelmed	Depressed, Numb, Bored/Apathetic, Hopeless

WholeHearted School Counseling

5 TRAUMA-SENSITIVE TOOLS FOR BACK TO SCHOOL

- SEATED SELF-HUG
- SEATED TWIST
- FEELING BREATH
- SEATED FORWARD FOLD
- OCEAN BREATH

@ULTRAVOAGED

WHAT WE OFTEN THINK ANXIETY LOOKS LIKE IN KIDS:

- Lots of Worrying

HOW KIDS ACTUALLY SHOW THEY ARE FEELING ANXIETY:

- Negative Thinking
- Wants to Pull their Hair Out
- Hypersensitive, Givest Up Easily
- Lots of Worrying
- Stomach aches, Headaches, Irritability
- Disorganized or Acting Out
- Avoidance
- Lack of Attention, Easily Distracted
- Needs Constant Reassurance and/or Clarity
- Higher Frustration
- Wishes to be in their Mom's Arms, Inflexibility

WholeHearted School Counseling

8 Things to Say to an Anxious Child

@mamapsychologists x @teenhealthdoc

- You are safe with me
- It's ok to feel nervous
- Let's go for a walk
- Let's draw the worry, how big is it?
- What do you want to say to your worry?
- Let's sit together until the thought passes
- I am here for you
- Let's take a few deep breaths together