

FAST FACTS: TEST-TAKING ANXIETY

Definition

- Worry or distress associated with taking a test that severely interferes with test performance despite adequate preparation (Southwestern College, n.d.).
- A form of performance anxiety (TeensHealth®, 2011).

Prevalence

- Many students report being more stressed by tests than by anything else in their lives. However, test anxiety happens when the feeling is so overwhelming or intense that it affects performance in serious ways.
- About 20% of students have high test-anxiety, and another 18% have moderately high test anxiety (American Test Anxiety Association, n.d.).

Causes

- Pressure to perform well
- Past test experiences that were not positive
- Fear of failure (Study Skills Handbook, n.d.).



Population

- Test anxiety rises sharply in grades 2-4 and remains high during middle school and high school.
- 10 million children in North America suffer from test anxiety (ATAA, n.d.).

Effects

- Mental distraction- Students may be unable to concentrate and may be easily distracted by environmental stimuli (SSH, n.d.).
- Mental blocks- Students may “blank” or “freeze” on tests, making it difficult for them to think about what they are supposed to do (SSH, n.d.).
- High anxiety reduces working memory, confuses reasoning, increases mistakes, and results in lower test scores (ATAA, n.d.).

Sings and Symptoms

- Physical distress- fidgeting, upset stomach, increased heart rate, shortness of breath, dry mouth, muscle tension, nausea, sweaty palms, headache (SSH, n.d.).
- Emotional upset-excessive fear, crying, shutting down, angry outbursts, frustration, negative thinking (Southwestern College, n.d.).

Coping Strategies

- Calm Place-Use your imagination to create a place where you feel calm, confident, safe, and strong.
- Breathe, Picture, Focus-Take slow, deep breaths while counting to five. Picture yourself in your calm place. Tell yourself to focus on the strategies that you have pre-determined to use for this task.
- Positive Self-Talk-Think positively. Replace anxious thoughts with positive statements. For example: If I stick to my study schedule, I will pass this test.
- Keep Kool Tunes Shields-Use music to create mental shields to help you cope with stressful situations. Sing a song in your head that has a healthy message and has the power to shift your mood into a positive frame.
- The power of mental practice-Imagine yourself in control. Picture yourself being successful in using the strategy you have chosen to help you reach your goal (Greg & Webb, 2010).

Test-Taking Strategies

1. Use slow breathing to relax.
2. If you begin to get anxious, repeat slow breathing and picture your "Calm Place" for a moment to break the stress cycle. Focus on your test taking strategy.
3. Look over the entire test to determine how long it is and where the most points are. Determine a time limit for each section.
4. If you use acronyms, or other memory aids, write them down on a piece of paper.
5. Answer the easy questions first. Often these questions will have clues to harder questions.
6. Go back to the harder questions. Look for clues. Eliminate any obvious wrong answers. If you are still not sure of the correct answer take your best educated guess.
7. Budget your time so that you have a few minutes left at the end to check your answers. Make sure you do not leave any blank (Greg & Webb, 2010).

Websites

<http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=283>

<http://www.heartmath.org/education/testedge/why.php>

<http://www.familyeducation.com/home/>

<http://www.stress.org/>

References

American Test Anxiety Association. (n.d.). *American Test Anxiety Association*.

Retrieved from <http://www.amtaa.org/index.html>

Greg, B., & Webb, L. (2010). *Student success skills*. Boca Raton, FL: Atlantic Education Consultants.

Southwestern College. (n.d.). *Overcoming test anxiety*. Retrieved from http://www.swccd.edu/~asc/lrnglinks/test_anxiety.html

Study Skills Handbook. (n.d.). *Test-taking anxiety*. Retrieved from hs.qrsd.org/guidance/study-skills.doc

TeensHealth®. (2011). *Test anxiety*. Retrieved from http://kidshealth.org/teen/school_jobs/school/test_anxiety.html