




2. THE FEAR OF FEAR ITSELF... WHEN ANXIETY TAKES OVER! Dealing with my anxiety

Targeted competency(ies) (ÉKIP, WHO)	ADAPTATION AND STRESS MANAGEMENT
Cross-curricular competencies (QEP)	ACHIEVING THEIR POTENTIAL COOPERATION
General workshop objectives	<p>AT THE END OF THE WORKSHOP, THE STUDENT WILL BE ABLE TO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • distinguish between stress and anxiety • recognize when they are feeling anxious • understand the concepts of comfort zone, avoidance, and exposure • identify their trigger situations • use new strategies to prevent or relieve anxiety


Total duration

60-MINUTE version, follow all steps

40-MINUTE version, DO NOT do the activities marked with the  icon

Materials and preparation

Print the following sheets

- *Sacha's case* (1x per student)
- *My intolerance level* (1x per student) 
- *Breathing exercise* (1 copy for yourself)

Materials required

- *Chalkboard and chalk or interactive digital board (IDB)*



A. Stress... anxiety... What's the difference? (10 minutes)

1. Tell the students they will be playing a quiz game about stress and anxiety. Explain that for each question asked, they will have to answer either TRUE (open hand raised) or FALSE (fist raised).
2. Start the game with the following questions. After each question, give the correct answer based on the explanations provided (Lupien, 2019; Marchand, Letart & Seidah, 2018; Shih & Lin, 2017; Strack *et al.*, 2017; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908).

QUIZ: TRUE OR FALSE

- **Stress is always negative.**

False. Stress gives your body the energy it needs to deal with the perceived threat. In controlled amounts, stress boosts performance.

- **There's no difference between stress and anxiety.**

False. Stress is an alarm reaction to a real, concrete situation, like when you come face-to-face with a bear while walking through the forest. Anxiety is when you worry about a situation that hasn't necessarily happened yet. Just thinking about what might happen causes your body to send signals of stress and anxiety.

- **Anxiety is the fear of fear itself.**

True. Anxiety is the tendency to imagine worst-case scenarios and to worry about things that haven't happened yet. For example, if you stop taking walks in the forest because you're afraid you might get eaten by a bear, that's anxiety.

- **Anxiety is normal.**

True. Everyone experiences anxiety at one time or another; it's completely normal. It becomes a problem if it prevents you from functioning properly, causes you to avoid certain situations, or makes you feel upset or uncomfortable.

- **If you have anxiety now, you'll have it for the rest of your life.**

False. You can learn to overcome anxiety. The more tools you have to cope with anxiety, the more likely you are to avoid suffering from it over the long term.

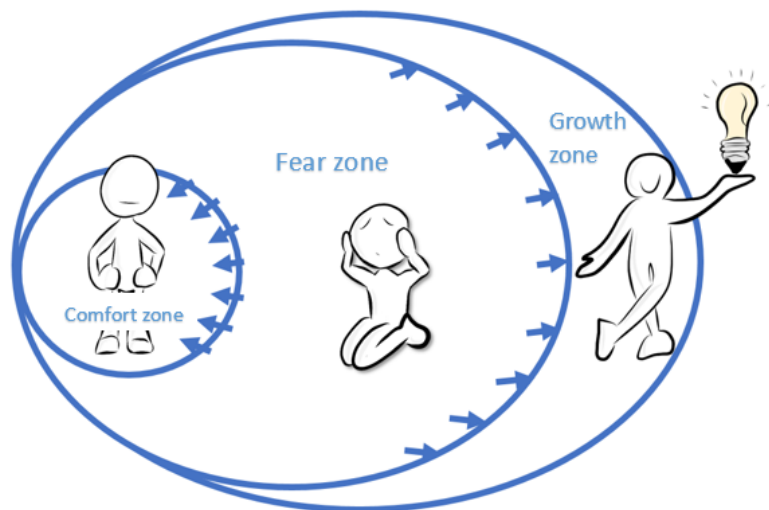
B. Video: Sacha and anxiety - Part 1

C. My comfort zone (25 minutes)

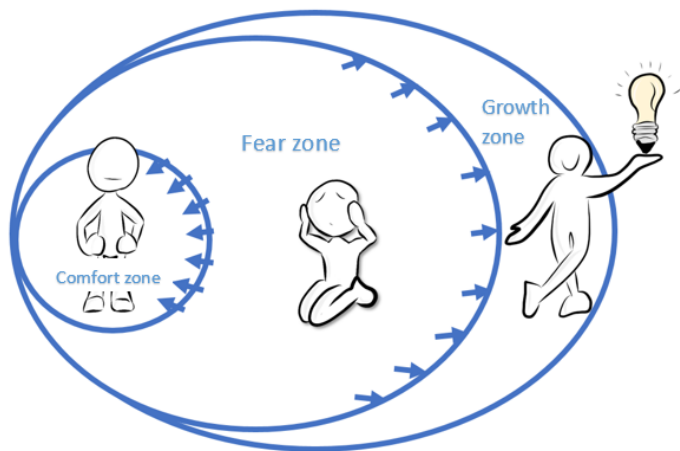
1. After watching the video, mention that Sacha seems to be feeling anxious about his soccer game. But that he's also anxious about other things these days...

2. Move the desks to make a big, open space in the middle of the classroom.
3. Ask for a volunteer to stand in the middle of the classroom and all the other students to stand in a circle around them.
4. Explain that the student volunteer is Sacha, then read the description at the top of the *Sacha's case* worksheet.
5. Explain the concept of the comfort zone:

"Your comfort zone is that place where you feel good in life; it's your familiar territory. It's the relationships, events, and environments where you know how to react, where you don't ask too many questions. Basically, you're comfortable. Or at least you think so (White, 2009)." Show the students the following image in the PowerPoint presentation. Explain that the students standing around the volunteer represent Sacha's comfort zone.

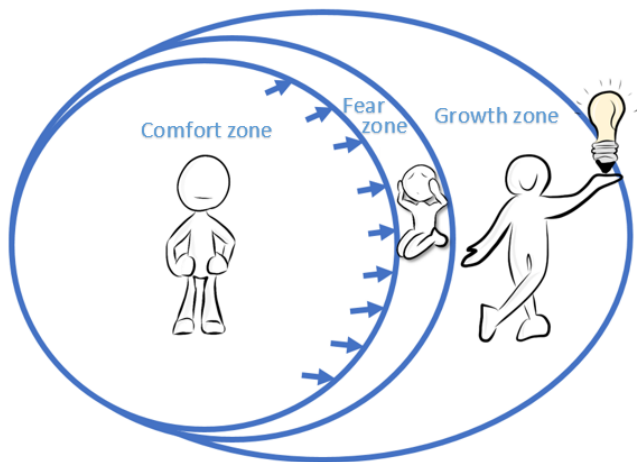


6. Read the first part of the scenario and ask the students to all take a big step toward Sacha, shrinking the circle.
7. Read the second part of the scenario and ask the students to all take another big step toward Sacha, shrinking the circle even more.
8. Read the third and final part of the scenario and ask the students to all take another step toward Sacha, so that now they're standing right next to him.
9. Using the image in the PowerPoint presentation, explain that anxiety can happen when you think about situations that are outside of your comfort zone.



You would have to enter the fear zone. You don't know how to react, you're afraid of the unknown, and you don't feel well. You're tempted to avoid these situations and retreat back into the cozy familiarity of your comfort zone, like Sacha did in the scenario. This is called **avoidance**. Avoidance feels good in the short term because it instantly lowers your anxiety levels. The problem is, the more you avoid a situation, the more frightening it becomes. Your comfort zone shrinks and you start to feel trapped inside it, or you begin to feel more uncomfortable each time you step outside it.

10. Suggest that the students act out Sacha's scenario again, this time changing how he reacts to anxiety-provoking situations. Read the first part of scenario 2 and ask the students to all take a big step away from Sacha, widening the circle.
11. Read the second part of the scenario and ask the students to all take another big step away from Sacha, widening the circle even more.
12. Read the third and final part of the scenario and ask the students to all take another step away from Sacha, making the circle as wide as possible.
13. Using the image in the PowerPoint presentation, explain that the more you face your fears, the less scary they become, and they might even disappear. This is called **exposure**. Exposure can be very uncomfortable in the short term because facing the scary situation will cause your anxiety level to rise. Remember that anxiety isn't dangerous; it's temporary and it eventually goes away.



14. The more you expose yourself to a situation, the less anxious you'll feel about it. You'll feel more comfortable, more confident, and freer—just like Sacha, whose comfort zone is becoming less cramped. Stepping outside of your comfort zone is also a great learning opportunity. You can then discover your growth zone (Forsyth & Eifert, 2007; Gosselin *et al.*, 2019; Harvey & Ilic, 2014).

D. Intolerances that distort reality (15 minutes)

1. Ask the students why they think the same situation can be very stressful for one person, whereas for someone else, it won't be at all.
2. Complete their answers by explaining that we all have different tolerance levels depending on the type of situation... like being “allergic” to some situations but not others!
 - For example, Naomi is “intolerant” of situations where she feels judged. When she bumps into friends who are laughing together, she immediately thinks they're laughing at her. Youssef, who is not at all “allergic” to being judged by others, bumps into the same group of friends laughing and thinks he'd like to hear their joke, which seems hilarious.
3. Explain that these intolerances are like glasses that sometimes distort reality. When you're aware of them, you can make an effort to remove these distorting glasses and look at the situation differently.
4. Using the titles, definitions, and images in the PowerPoint presentation, briefly explain the five main types of intolerance.

Title. Intolerance to uncertainty: I worry about everything!

Definition. This is an intolerance of potential danger, change, and anything new.



Title. Perfectionism: I'm not satisfied unless it's perfect.

Definition. This is an intolerance of the risk of error, a tendency to criticize your own achievements, and an intolerance of things not being perfect



Title. Excessive responsibility: I feel guilty all the time.

Definition. This is an intolerance of consequences that might happen to or affect others; you think it's your fault because you didn't do anything to prevent them.



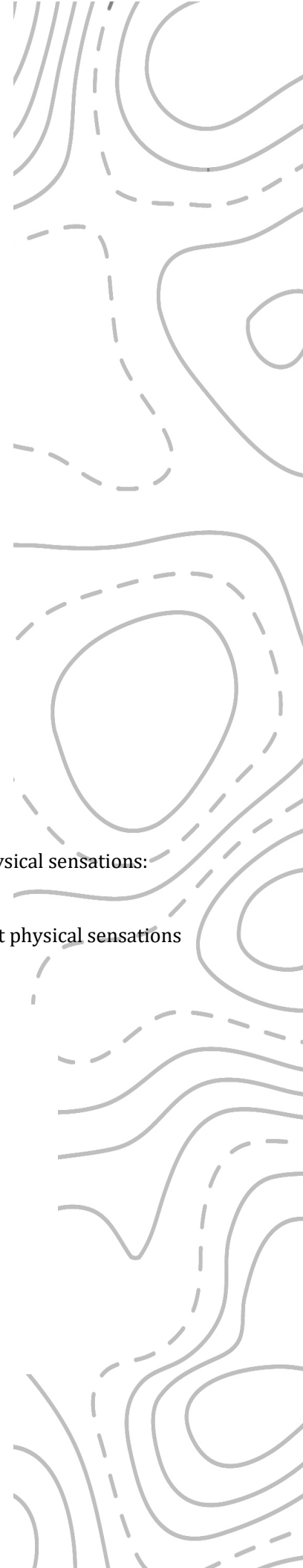
Title. Fear of others' judgment: I know they're judging me.


Definition. This is an intolerance of the possible judgment and criticism of others, mockery and being laughed at.



Title. Intolerance of negative emotions and unpleasant physical sensations: something's wrong with my body!

Definition. This is the tendency to worry excessively about physical sensations and symptoms caused by anxiety.



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5. Hand out the *My intolerance level* worksheet and ask the students to rate how much each type of intolerance sounds like them, on a scale of 1 to 10.
 6. Once they have completed the worksheet, you can ask for a few volunteers to share their answers.
 7. Conclude by saying that this exercise illustrates how they can be more sensitive to **and tend to avoid** certain types of situations. By being aware of this, they can pay closer attention to this type of intolerance in their daily lives and try to adopt strategies for dealing with it instead of avoiding it.

E. Strategies for dealing with my anxiety (15 minutes)

1. Remind the students about Sacha's experience in the video (soccer game). Ask them what advice they would give Sacha to lessen his anxiety or help him cope with it better.
2. Conclude with the following strategies listed in the PowerPoint presentation (Centre RBC d'expertise universitaire en santé mentale and its partners (2019)):
 - adopting healthy lifestyle habits (enough sleep, exercise, balanced diet, time for fun and relaxation, etc.);
 - recognizing their physical sensations and the first signs of anxiety;
 - replacing their unhelpful thoughts with helpful thoughts, learning to see things differently;

- using strategies to deal with their emotions;
 - confronting anxiety-provoking situations instead of avoiding them, being willing to step outside of their comfort zone;
 - using concrete methods to calm themselves down when faced with a stressful or anxiety-provoking situation (seen in the last workshop):
 - exercising
 - talking to someone about their stress
 - having fun with their friends
 - drawing, painting, sculpting, creating something
 - maintaining healthy friendships
 - doing a mindfulness exercise
3. Suggest that students try a short breathing exercise. Use the *Breathing exercise* printable worksheet.



F. Video: Sacha and anxiety - Part 2 and REMINDER: HORS-PISTE challenge (5 minutes)

This week, ask the students to pay attention to how they react in stressful situations in their daily lives (with peers, at school, in sports and extracurricular activities, at home). Ask them to try to apply at least two strategies for dealing with their anxiety.



Description. Sacha and his family recently moved to a new city, which has created a lot of anxiety for him. Sacha often worries about what the other students at his new school think about him. He hates being in situations where he might be laughed at and does everything possible not to attract attention.

SCENARIO 1

Part 1. In school today, Sacha's teacher asks all the students to tell the class what they did on their summer vacation. Sacha's heart starts racing and his palms get sweaty: "Oh no, please, anything but that! I don't know what to say... the others will laugh at me." Sacha tells the teacher he's feeling sick. He goes to the office and calls his mom to pick him up.

Part 2. This morning, Karim invited all his classmates to a party at his house that same night. Sacha immediately decides he's not going, because he's worried about who he'll hang around with and that he won't know what to say or do. He's made up his mind: He's staying home.

Part 3. At lunch today, Sacha goes to the cafeteria but doesn't see his new friend, Nolan. Sacha doesn't know where to sit and doesn't want to ask someone else because he's worried about being rejected. He hides out in the library for the entire lunch break.

SCENARIO 2

Part 1. In school today, Sacha's teacher asks all the students to tell the class what they did on their summer vacation. Sacha's heart starts racing and his palms get sweaty: "Oh no, please, anything but that! I don't know what to say... the others will laugh at me." Sacha tries to take a few deep breaths and calm down. He tells himself that the worst that can happen is he might trip over his words. When it's his turn, Sacha gathers his courage and tells his classmates about how his family moved this summer. The other students ask questions and take an interest in his story. Sacha feels much better.

Part 2. This morning, Karim invited all his classmates to a party at his house that same night. Sacha doesn't want to go because he's worried about who he'll hang around with and that he won't know what to say or do. To face his fears, Sacha decides to ask his new friend Nolan to go with him. His initial nervousness quickly gives way to laughter when Karim's mother drops the cake on the floor.

Part 3. At lunch today, Sacha goes to the cafeteria but doesn't see his friend, Nolan. Sacha doesn't know where to sit and doesn't want to ask someone else because he's worried about being rejected. But Sacha gathers up his courage and sits down at one of the tables. Alix quickly sits beside him, and they spend their lunch break getting to know each other better.

Here are the five main types of intolerance. For each type of intolerance, try to identify how much it sounds like you.

Intolerance to uncertainty: I worry about everything

It doesn't sound like me at all			It sounds a bit like me				It really sounds like me		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Perfectionism: I'm not satisfied unless it's perfect.

It doesn't sound like me at all			It sounds a bit like me				It really sounds like me		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Excessive responsibility: I feel guilty all the time

It doesn't sound like me at all			It sounds a bit like me				It really sounds like me		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Fear of others' judgment: I know they're judging me.

It doesn't sound like me at all			It sounds a bit like me				It really sounds like me		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Intolerance of negative emotions and unpleasant physical sensations: something's wrong with my body!

It doesn't sound like me at all			It sounds a bit like me				It really sounds like me		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10



Printable worksheet *Breathing exercise*

Sit in a comfortable position.

Now focus your attention on your breathing.

PAUSE

Breathe normally, without forcing or trying to change anything about your breathing.

Pay attention to the movement created by the air entering and leaving your body.

Notice your stomach and chest rising when you inhale.

PAUSE

Now shift your attention to your stomach and chest falling as you exhale.

Pay attention as you inhale and exhale a few times.

PAUSE

If you feel comfortable, you can try inhaling and exhaling for one or two seconds longer, to try to take deeper breaths and increase your sense of calm.

PAUSE

Now go back to your normal way of breathing.

Take as much time as you need to inhale and exhale, without any extra effort.

If your thoughts wander, simply refocus them on your next inhale.

Take the time to take two or three more deep, calming breaths.

PAUSE

Now open your eyes and reconnect with your surroundings.

If you feel calm, try to hold onto the feeling for as long as possible, focusing on your breath as needed.