

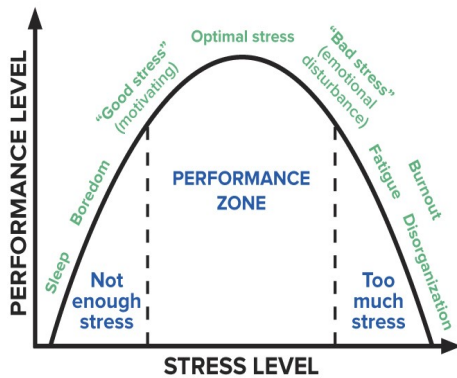


Anxiety is Everyone's Business!

Stress and anxiety are challenges for many children and teenagers—but also for you as a parent! This document is a reference tool to help you develop your knowledge about anxiety and learn practical strategies to help your children deal with anxiety.

Stress or anxiety?

Stress is a universal and necessary response of human beings. It's an alarm signal that motivates the individual to take action in order to adapt and survive. Faced with a stressful situation, your child either confronts it by taking action or flees it. Procrastination is a way to escape.



Did you know?

The inverted stress curve shows how stress is necessary when well-balanced.

However, too little stress or too much stress has a negative impact on functioning.

(Palazzolo & Arnaud, 2013; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908)

Anxiety occurs in anticipation of a situation. The situation doesn't need to be real to trigger an anxiety response. It's also the tendency to create disaster scenarios and to imagine fears based on things that haven't yet occurred. It becomes problematic if it prevents your child from functioning properly and causes distress.

Anxiety is the fear of being afraid!

(Lupien, 2019; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908)

This tool was developed by



Centre RBC
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Signs

To help students deal with their anxiety, you first have to spot them! Here are some signs that indicate that a student may be anxious. It's important to note that these signs may vary from student to student.

- Difficulty sleeping;
- Loss of appetite;
- Intense fears leading to avoidance;
- Excessive control of their environment;
- Fear of new situations;
- Refusing to attend school or participate in activities;
- Difficulty making friends;
- Stomach aches and headaches, vomiting, fatigue, muscle tension;
- Concentration and organizational problems;
- Excessive need for reassurance;
- Irritability, tantrums, bouts of tears, opposition;
- Low self-esteem, distress.

(Government of Québec, 2018; Dumas, 2013; CYMHIN-MAD, 2010; Hincks-Dellcrest-ABCs, n.d., in Government of Ontario, 2013)

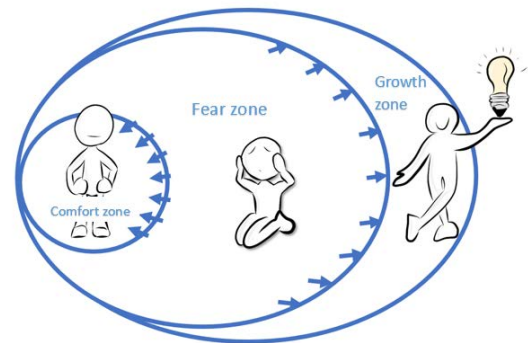


Anxiety may sometimes take the form of **oppositional behaviour, tantrums** or **embarrassment**. This may be perceived as laziness, a lack of motivation or respect for the teacher. Remember that these are **defence mechanisms** that support students' belief that they won't succeed or aren't up to the task.

(Dumont, Leclerc & Massé, 2015)

COMFORT ZONE: an important concept

A **comfort zone** is a situation where students **feel good** or in familiar territory. To successfully expand this comfort zone, students must go through their **fear zone**. To avoid being afraid, students may tend to return to their comfort zone. This is called **avoidance**. The more students avoid fear, the more their comfort zone shrinks and the greater their fear zone increases. On the contrary, the more students face their fears, the more their comfort zone expands and their fear zone shrinks. They can thus discover a world of growth!



(based on White, 2009)

Avoidance is anxiety's best friend!

Although avoidance at first seems to calm down anxiety, it ends up making it worse. It's therefore important to help students deal with anxiety-provoking situations. This is called **exposure**. Anxiety is uncomfortable, but it's not dangerous!

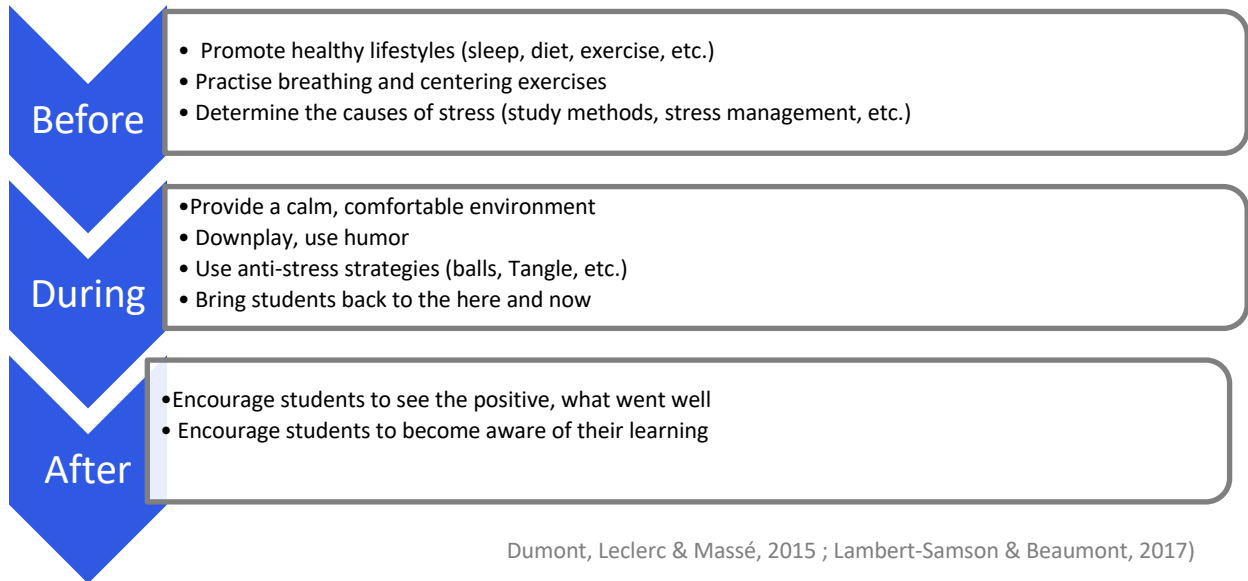
SCHOOL SYSTEM AND ANXIETY



The current school system, which is based on academic achievement (where everyone's performance is assessed on the basis of grades and where competition is pervasive), can exacerbate the stress and anxiety experienced by some students.

Let's work together to create a caring environment 😊

Influence the classroom environment BEFORE, DURING and AFTER exams!



"I never lose. I either win or I learn."

- Nelson Mandela

Attitudes to encourage

1. Act as a role model

Stress resonance

Like sound, stress resonates with the people around a stressed or anxious person. These people then feel the stress and their bodies will also produce stress hormones. The closer the people are, the stronger the response.

(Lupien, 2019)

- Talk about your emotions and use effective strategies to manage your own emotions and stress (your stress may exacerbate your students' stress);
- Address the anxiety-provoking situations you are going through and share your strategies;
- Accept mistakes;
- When you are faced with a problem, talk about your strategies to find a solution;
- Take care of yourself by adopting healthy lifestyles and, if necessary, seek help.

(Psychology Foundation of Canada, 2011)



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2. Create safe, positive and welcoming environments

- Create a place in the classroom where students can calm down if necessary;
- Focus learning on the task rather than the result;
- Plan free time, use games or arts activities to stimulate learning;
- Establish clear, consistent and predictable routines;
- Establish clear rules and consistently and coherently apply disciplinary measures;
- Announce routine changes in advance;
- Create an environment where mistakes are considered as learning opportunities;
- Promote team activities to help them develop prosocial behaviours and make new friends;
- Encourage students to talk about their emotions; ask them questions about how they are feeling.

(Psychology Foundation of Canada, 2011, Wilson, 1999; Johnson, Eva, Amy, Johnson & Walker, 2011; CYMHIN-MAD, 2010; Hincks-Dellcrest-ABCs, n.d., in Government of Ontario, 2013; Otto, 2016)

3. Promote a positive, caring attitude

- Adopt a positive, optimistic attitude;
- Focus on building a relationship of trust with students;
- Believe that each student can succeed and use students' strengths to help them learn;
- Identify and highlight each student's strengths;
- Do activities that foster positive emotions.

(Every Moment Counts, 2014; Psychology Foundation of Canada, 2011; Wilson, 1999)

4. Try out stress management strategies in the classroom with students

- Physical exercise;
- Yoga;
- Breathing and relaxation;
- Mindfulness;
- Arts;
- Laughing;
- Contact with nature.

Did you know that:

No one strategy will be suitable for everyone. Suggest a variety. To be effective, practice is needed.

For more information: <https://sante-mentale-jeunesse.usherbrooke.ca/je-suis-un-jeune/boite-a-outils-2/strategies-pour-apprivoiser-mon-stress/>

(Every Moment Counts, 2014; Psychology Foundation of Canada, 2011; Gasparovich, 2008; Leroux, 2016)

5. Help students see things differently

- Help students to consider difficulties or mistakes as learning opportunities;
- Talk about the positive and negative aspects of a situation, even if it's a difficult situation (e.g. you can't go outside for recess because it's raining. It's disappointing, but we could take the opportunity to play a new game);
- Help students see various sides of the same situation and question their perception.

(Every Moment Counts, 2014)

6. Help students manage what is making them anxious

- Encourage students to gradually perform tasks they fear in small steps;
- Don't avoid situations that scare them. Teach students to face them calmly while supporting them;
- Encourage students when they're courageous, highlighting the times when they have faced their fears.

(CYMHIN-MAD, 2010; Hincks-Dellcrest-ABCs, n.d., in Government of Ontario, 2013; Couture, 2016)

7. Be a good listener

- Don't trivialize or minimize what your students are going through; fear is real, even if you don't understand it;
- Normalize what students are experiencing;
- Help them put their emotions into words;
- Ask questions and listen;
- Don't try to find a solution to these fears at all costs; children often simply need to be heard and understood;
- Set up a time with students when they can talk to you about their concerns instead of constantly responding to their demands for reassurance. This will help them develop their tolerance for uncertainty.

(Couture, 2016; Naître et grandir, 2016)

Resources for further information

- Mouvement Santé Mentale Québec: <https://www.mouvementsmq.ca/>
- Canadian Psychological Association: <https://cpa.ca/>
- Douglas Institute: <http://www.douglas.qc.ca/info/stress?locale=en>

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