



## TEACHER TIPS

# Anxiety

Anxiety is mental and physical distress due to genetic and/or environmental factors, which can result in a fight, flight or freeze response. Nearly 32 percent of youth struggle or have struggled with a diagnosable anxiety disorder. Unfortunately, statistics indicate that nearly 80 percent of those individuals do not get treatment. Though anxiety can be managed in some cases, certain youth struggle with managing it, which may affect their ability to function in the classroom, with peers and at home. This anxiety can even be debilitating at times.

### Signs, Symptoms & Tips:

- **Difficulty concentrating or focusing.** This student could be one who stares off during class or takes extended/shortened amounts of time to complete his/her work. This student may choose to do a more calming activity instead.
  - **Tip:** The student may not recognize that he/she is not focusing or that he/she is taking a lengthy amount of time to complete work. Pull the student aside from class and acknowledge this behavior with a calm voice. “Jordan, I noticed that it has been hard for you to focus on your work during class. What would make it easier for you to concentrate in class?”
- **Difficulty controlling worries.** In the classroom, this student may constantly ask the same questions throughout the day or week.
  - **Tip:** Patiently acknowledge the student’s feelings and reassure the student of the answer to his/her question, even if you have answered it multiple times.
- **Panicking.** This student may show distress when questions are not answered immediately or if the answers are unknown at this time. These students may have anxiety over presenting in front of their class.
  - **Tip:** Provide as much information about the question as you can. Prompt the student to take a deep breath with you. You could have the student request that a friend stands with him/her while they present or you could offer to have a trusted person in the room with him/her.
- **Avoiding people, places or social situations.** This could be the student who is “shy” in the classroom and does not verbalize much throughout the day. This student may also avoid large unstructured parts of the day such as gym or eating in the cafeteria. It could also be a student who does not have many social interactions with peers and may avoid engaging in group projects. Some students may fear specific people, places or things, which can further interfere with functioning.



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- **Tip:** Acknowledge the student’s feelings and thoughts and attempt to understand the reasoning behind this/her behavior. “I can see that going to the gym is hard for you to do. Let’s figure out a way that we could make it easier. Would it be helpful if I came with you?”
- **Emotionally distraught when not meeting expectations.** A student might cry or get overly upset if he/she gets a poor grade or is not picked for an activity. Another student might become upset if he/she is forced to answer a question or engage in an activity.
  - **Tip:** If a student becomes upset when asked to answer a question, have a peer help the student answer the question. If a student becomes emotionally distraught, you can prompt the student to take a couple of deep breaths with you. You could also prompt them to identify three things you see, two things you hear and one thing you feel. This can help a student regulate their emotions.
- **Difficulty with transitions.** Transitions can be before or after a break from school, before or after changing teachers/grades, two-hour delays/early releases or changing desks and in between activities throughout the day. This could be the student who asks many questions about the schedule for the day since there was a two-hour delay that morning. This could also be the student who is resistant to come to class at the beginning of the year due to having a new teacher or being in a new school.
  - **Tip:** If there is a sudden change in schedule, explain the change and prepare the student(s) for it if you know in advance. You may need to review it multiple times. Be aware of transitions at home as well, which could include foster care, joint custody and life events/death/loss.
- **Restlessness or on edge.** A student who is anxious may have difficulty staying in his/her seat. Another student may struggle with speaking out of turn. This could also be the student who asks to go to the bathroom multiple times during class.
  - **Tip:** Provide choices for the student. You could also ask the student to be a helper in the class or complete specific jobs for you.
- **Irritability.** This student could yell at the teacher when prompted to finish his/her paper before the end of class.
  - **Tip:** Avoid power struggles. Allow the student to express frustration and validate his/her feelings. Try not to argue with the student while he/she is escalated. Avoid giving demands during this time until the student is calm. Engage the student in a regulating activity such as walking, playing with Play-Doh or drawing/coloring.

**Things to know:**

- Anxiety does not look the same in every student.
- Realize the student does not like being or feeling anxious.
- A strong teacher-student relationship can help reduce anxiety.
- Approach student with a calm, quiet voice to show you care.

Consult with the school social worker or counselor. Nationwide Children’s has school-based therapists in your school. If you have a student who can benefit from these services, contact the school counselor or school social worker, or call Nationwide Children’s Behavioral Health Intake Department at (614) 355-8080.

**Learn more at [NationwideChildrens.org/Care-Connection](https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/Care-Connection).**

