

Strategies:

Pupil profiling - Understand your pupils. Meet with parents and the child, if appropriate, and talk about successes and difficulties. Helping the child to understand that they have been heard and what will be in place for them will help to alleviate anxiety and foster self belief. Create a pupil passport so evidence of this discussion can be seen.

Class Room Environment - Choose preferred seating areas that is identified as specific to the child. Emotional regulation area outside of the classroom to be made available. Clear routine to be displayed and discussed.

Academic Teaching - Provide pupils with a discreet way of securing support. Preparing for the following day, alleviates the uncertainty. Use of language can make a difference, try not to rely on the competitive e.g. 'excellent listening...' but use the reasoning 'I am really pleased that you listened carefully' so that they can understand that you have noted their specific effort. Non verbal signs of approval e.g. thumbs up provide security without scrutiny from others. Encourage children to reflect on the positive, always recognise the current achievements before thinking about next targets. Make reasonable adjustments e.g. time out space.

Social Teaching - Provide structured activities for social times and select positive and supportive role models. Allow time to reflect on any concerns that may have arisen in this time. Building self esteem within a peer group environment by setting achievable tasks and praising in social groups.

Emotional Teaching - Use visual resources to manage the awareness of increasing anxiety and support the understanding of the scale of emotions. Teach relaxation, and positive imagery strategies. Reassurance that feeling emotional is ok and normal. Identify key adults with whom a child can access support from when needed, or who can monitor well being and intervene when the need for help is identified. Use social stories to support understanding of fears, emotional responses and how to deal with them.

There may be an unconscious internal pressure for the child to test whether s/he is as useless and s/he feels, or whether there is a possibility that s/he may be of some value. If the child can experience a sense of his/her own success and value, that is the basis upon which it is possible to build a more positive and regenerative self-esteem. Greenhalgh, 1994.

If the child is experiencing consistent high levels of anxiety it is always best to speak to a medical professional.

The Whole School:

- ◆ A culture of celebrating differences and an awareness of the importance of good mental health
- ◆ Listening to the voices of pupils and their parents in order to plan in a meaningful way
- ◆ Clear concise communication
- ◆ Commitment from all on how to minimize and manage changes and loss of routine
- ◆ Understanding and open culture about anxiety
- ◆ Flexibility to teach in an innovative style, and identify personalised strategies for pupils
- ◆ Adults to understand that behaviour is communication.

Schools are key in identifying anxiety and implementing interventions that can be taught to pupils to manage these times successfully. As society places increasing demands on our children and young adults, a supportive ethos and open discussions about mental health are an increasingly important requirement, in order to ensure that our children build their resilience and self-belief and learn to cope at times of anxiety.

'Living with anxiety is like being followed by a voice. It knows all your insecurities and uses them against you. It's gets to the point when it's the loudest voice in the room. The only one you can hear' [Healthy-Place.com](http://HealthyPlace.com)

Reference

Cooper P. (2000) *Understanding and Supporting Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. London.

Greenhalgh P. (1994) *Emotional Growth and Learning*. Routledge. London.

Plummer.D (2010) *Helping Children to Cope with Change, Anxiety and Stress*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. London.
www..HealthyPlace.com



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Supporting the Anxious Child



'When little people are over-whelmed by big emotions, it's our job to share our calm, not join in their chaos'

L.R.Knost - The Gottman Institute

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What is anxiety:

- Anxiety is a general feeling of apprehension and worry that is a normal reaction to stressful situations.
- It can persist even when the cause is not clear
- Feelings of anxiety can become debilitating if not managed. Day-to-day functioning is impaired and thoughts and feelings can become irrational
- Anxiety Disorders are classified by feelings of panic, fear or irrational discomfort in everyday situations.

Anxiety Verses Stress—What's the difference?

Stress: tends to come and go and is mainly triggered by external factors such as work and relationships

Anxiety: is stress that continues after the external stressor has gone. It can make people think that things are actually worse than they are, and although stress can sometimes be motivational, too much can lead to anxiety

A little bit of science...

'When stress is excessive of continuous over a long period of time, even at relatively low levels, then we will experience a 'toxic' build up of stress hormones such as cortisol.' 'Cortisol plays a part in raising blood glucose level and in breaking down fat and other proteins to provide extra energy for the fight/flight reactions.

However, high levels of cortisol can affect our memory capacity and will dampen our immune system. This coupled with a fall in levels of dopamine and serotonin (feel-good hormones) in the pre-frontal cortex can cause us to feel 'overwhelmed, fearful, and miserable colouring our thoughts, feelings and perceptions with a sense of threat or dread, as if everything we need to do is far too hard' (Sunderland 2006, cited in Plumer 2010)

The Differing Experiences:

All children experience stress differently and will experience a feeling of risk when trying something new. Risk taking activities can motivate and encourage, but for some pupils they can initiate feelings of fear, defeat and high insecurity.

The Effect of Anxiety:

Emotional:

Inability to switch off worry and anxiety
Health and well-being reduces
Over sensitivity, defensiveness and hostility are more likely
Emotional outbursts can increase
Feelings of depression and helplessness more likely
Self-esteem falls
Lack of confidence
Finding it hard to concentrate
Avoiding everyday activities
Irritable or clingy

Behavioural:

Speech Problems Increase
Interests and Enthusiasm Diminish
Absenteeism may occur
Low energy levels
Disrupted sleep patterns
New Information is ignored
Bizarre behavioural patterns may appear
Possible risk of drug use and suicide threats.

Physical:

Tiredness
Muscle aches
Trembling or shaking
Stomach ache
Feeling sick
Headache
Insomnia
Bed wetting
Bad dreams
Loss of appetite

Cognitive:

Concentrations and attention span decreases
Distractibility increases
Short and long term memory deteriorate
Response speed becomes unpredictable
Error rate increases
Organisation and planning abilities deteriorate
Delusions and thought disorders increase

Implications for Teaching and Learning

Environment - Fast paced environments don't allow children time to process and regulate their feelings. Feeling crowded on all sides can foster a sense of panic. A feeling of competition and comparison with peers can reduce good self esteem.

Work - Verbal instructions can be forgotten quickly especially at time of stress, having to ask an adult for support can increase anxiety. Work needs to be carefully planned to ensure a careful balance of encouragement to take a risk and the potential anxiety if it is too difficult. Work is often focused on the total outcome rather than steps which can appear unachievable.

Homework - Fear and stress of homework can start avoidance behaviours this can then lead to anxiety and panic due to the work not being completed. Preparation for tests and the fear of work not being correct can lead to heightened stress levels. If learning is difficult in school this then continues into the home environment and the negative feelings are embedded throughout the whole day.

Friendships - Some children find social settings highly stressful and fear scrutiny and judgement and often perceive themselves as being disliked, leading to social exclusion.

Adults - Demands both real and perceived, can be over thought and taken in a negative manner. Feelings of being overwhelmed, and scared that they won't be able to please can lead to avoidance and inability to form supportive relationships with those who can help.

Growing up and Puberty - The uncertainty of changes to the body at the time of puberty can be scary for some children, and alongside the change in hormones, loss of confidence and emotional resilience can become an increasing area of concern.

Emotional Regulation - The ability to self regulate and self calm, ensures that we are not over-whelmed by negative emotions. With high level of stress and anxiety and the inability to regulate emotions children might revert to the Fight, Flight, or Freeze reactions, physically manifesting in a 'melt-down' or self isolation.

Transitions - Many children struggle with transitions and a change to the norm. For an anxious child moving away from the security of routine and environment can trigger high stress levels and fear. This can become an ingrained response to all transitions, no matter how minor, and the unknown rather than being exciting as it is for some, can become a time of anguish for others.