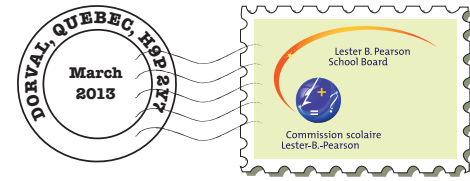




To: *Our colleagues throughout Quebec* From: *The Lester B. Pearson School Board, SSD*



ANXIETY As we approach the last part of the school year we are often faced with the challenge of keeping students motivated and coping with the pressures of upcoming exams. This is a time in which stress and anxiety can often emerge in both student and staff. This CEMH postcard is about understanding anxiety and ways to help deal with it.

Normal Anxiety vs. Anxiety disorder

The experience of anxiety can be a normal and healthy reaction. It may occur when we encounter new and challenging situations (such as starting high-school or meeting new people), when we have to deal with demanding tasks (such as exams or giving a presentation), or when we are faced with unfortunate events (such as divorce or illness). Normal feelings of anxiety are temporary and tend to diminish once we have found a way to cope with the situation. However, anxiety becomes problematic when it is continuous and debilitating, and occurs frequently even when we are not faced with new challenges. Anxiety can develop into a disorder that affects the individual both physically and mentally, prevents the person from functioning appropriately and can even lead to depression. In children and teens, anxiety can result in social withdrawal, school refusal and failure and behaviour problems. <http://www.anxietycanada.ca/english/childhood.php>

Physical responses during anxiety

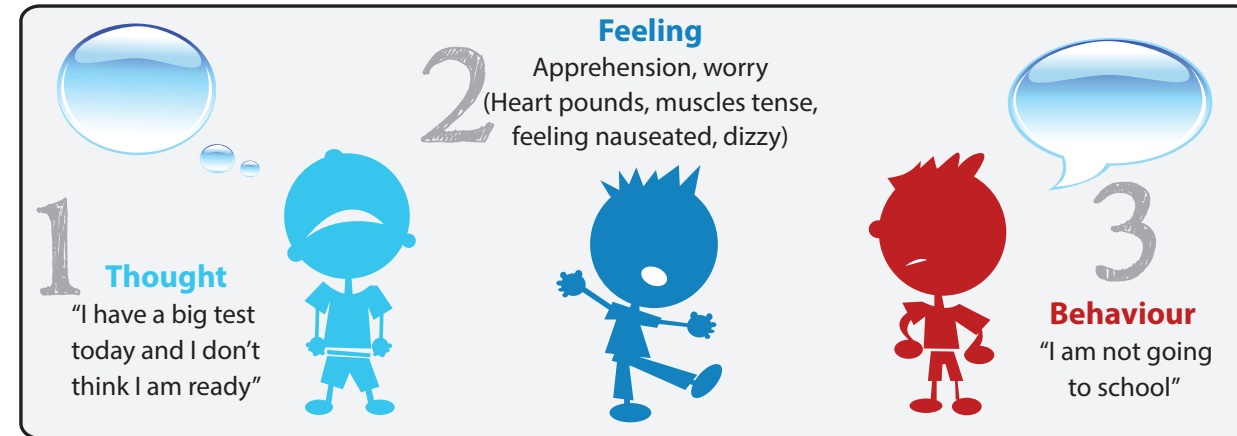
- Heart beats fast, blood pressure rises, breathing rates speed up, muscles become tense, digestion slows, liver releases sugar to provide energy and more.
- These anxiety responses evolved in order to prepare the body to deal with real threat or danger. These physiological changes, termed the FLIGHT OR FIGHT response, are useful because they help us respond faster and with more efficiency. Primitive man, faced with predators, would not have survived long without these life saving responses.

Why do people feel sick or unwell when anxious?

- Unlike primitive man, nowadays dangers do not spring at us from behind a bush. Nevertheless, these responses can occur in situations that are perceived as threatening (such as having to perform in front of a large group or going to the dentist). In addition, the continued experience of these responses become physical symptoms such as nausea, dizziness, difficulty concentrating, fatigue, headaches and more.

How do our thoughts contribute to anxiety?

Thoughts influence the way we feel, and in turn, the way we feel will often influence how we act.



Signs of anxiety in Children and Teens

Constant worrying, emotional, feeling overwhelmed, frequent physical complaints, irritability, avoidance behavior (ex. not coming to school), oppositional behaviour, trouble concentrating, difficulty completing work, procrastination, asks to leave the classroom/go home.

What schools can do to help

- Build a relationship with your students.
- Routines and predictability.
- Rewards for process, not product.
- Comfortable calm places in the classroom/school.
- Provide reassurances.
- Model coping statements.

Click on these links below:



- <http://www.worrywisekids.org/node/52>
- <http://www.worrywisekids.org/node/40>
- http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca/professionals/mh_for_teachers_classrooms.php
- http://www2.massgeneral.org/schoolpsychiatry/info_Anxiety.asp#interventions_school
- http://www.adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/children_anxiety-disorders-school

Positive thinking and other coping strategies

- Help children focus on what is going well, not what isn't.
- Help students label their feelings.
- Helping children find ways to create helpful strategies to cope with challenges.
- Find opportunities to teach children relaxation techniques.
- Build in problem solving skills.
- Encourage healthy lifestyle choices (exercise, nutrition, sleep).

- <http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu/ebp/training/CopingCatInfo.htm>
- <http://www.friendsinfo.net/downloads/FRIENDSintrobooklet.pdf>

If you have found this postcard to be helpful and informative, please share it with colleagues. Dissemination of information about mental health is the first step toward promoting better mental health!

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