

Possibilities to Help Students Deal With Stress and Anxiety, Manage Anger and Build Confidence

Part 2
2:30—4:00

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Helping Students Move From Reaction to Action

We can't change a child's previous experiences or current situation but we do have the power to make the best of the time they are with us.

We can show children strategies so they can learn to deal with challenging situations and move from reaction to action.

Givens

We know that students sometimes 'act out' their stress and anxiety with fidgeting, moving and other behaviours that impact learning for themselves and others.

You probably have created calm spaces for kids and have fidgets and self regulation friendly seating. Check out, northstarpaths.com.

Go to [longstoryshortz](http://longstoryshortz.com) for wonderful stop motion videos.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s1eZ7h6u3JM>

Their videos are also great for sharing with families.

5 Possibilities to Reduce Stressors to Help Students Deal With Anxiety:

- fidgets
- seating and reducing distractions
- breathing for calmness
- worry tamers
- confidence builders

Breathing Our Way to Feeling Better

With all we have to do with kids I'm sure we can think, "DO I have to teach them how to breathe too?" Showing students options gives them different ways to handle stress and put themselves in a better state for learning. The bonus is it gives us a chance to 'catch our breath.'

Hoberman Sphere

You can use a Hoberman Sphere to demonstrate breathing rate.

As you slowly pull the sphere out and push it back in students breathe in and out in rhythm to the movement.

I teach kids to make a sphere with their fingers so they can cool down even if they don't have the Hoberman.

<http://www.hoberman.com/fold/Sphere/spheres-choice.htm>

Tone Bar

Using a tone bar is a way to give students a chance to experience a calming break.

Show students the tone bar and tell them:

"I am going to use this mallet to ring the bar on this stand.

I'd like you to close your eyes or look doe softly.

Listen to the sound until you can no longer hear it.

When you can't hear the sound put your hand up."

A Breath of Calmness

A great calming activity adapted from yoga class.

Hold both fists loosely in front of you.

"Smell the flower, blow the bubble."

Do 3 times.

My friend Bethany Weins uses these variations:

Blowing out a flaming marshmallow, cooling hot soup, blowing on wet nails, blowing out birthday candles, and blowing a dandelion for wishes.

Elevator

Students hold arms at sides and clasp hands in front of body.

Raise arms slowly to above the head as you breathe in.

Breathe out slowly as arms come down slowly.

Go up and down 2 or 3 times to be calmer. I show students the 'invisible elevator.'

They do the Elevator withers at their sides just visualizing their arms going up and down.

They learn to 'turn away from trouble', breathe and do the elevator without using their arms.

Breathing Buddy

For younger students try having the children bring a small "breathing buddy" toy like a Beanie Baby.

When it is time for 'powering down' have the students get their buddy, lie down and place on their 'buddy' on their belly. They are to focus on the 'buddy' as they breathe slowly. One grade 7 teacher had his students cool off after gym doing this activity by having the students remove their sneakers and place them on their diaphragm area.

Square and Circle Breathing

Students breathe in though their noses visualizing a square shape in the air in front of them.

Students breathe out through their mouths making a circle shape in the air in front of them.

Square Breathing

Breathe in for the count of 4, hold for 4, out for 4, wait for 4, repeat breathing to gain calmness and help deal with anxiety.

Check out the website for Julie Anne Richards for excellent ideas on helping students understand and deal with anxiety. I learned this from Julie Ann Richards. It works!!!

www.julieannerichards.com

Link Ups

Cross one foot in front of the other foot.

Cross one wrist over the other while interlacing your fingers then drawing your hands up to your chest. I say, "Arms out in front, thumbs up, thumbs down, hands together and fold them in to your chest.

Place your tongue on the roof of your mouth. Breath deeply.

Uncross your arms and legs and place your fingertips together while continuing to breath deeply.

With very young students or students with special needs I give them the alternative of simply crossing their arms on their chest.



Worry Words

In a great article, 4 Rituals That Will Make You Happy, According to Neuroscience, Alex Korb says that when we name our feelings it helps to reduce arousal because using words requires us to use our pre frontal cortex and reduces arousal in the limbic system.

<http://www.bakadesuyo.com/2015/09/make-you-happy-2/>

“ In the short term, worrying makes your brain feel a little better
— at least you’re doing something about your problems.

The Upward Spiral:

In fact, worrying can help calm the limbic system by increasing activity in the medial prefrontal cortex and decreasing activity in the amygdala.

That might seem counterintuitive, but it just goes to show that if you’re feeling anxiety, doing something about it — even worrying — is better than doing nothing.”

Alex Korb

What If?

One possibility to help deal with worry and develop resilience is to play WHAT IF? We do this as a whole group then students work with a partner or small group to make suggestions for WHAT IF? They print their ideas on strips. then take turns to pull a strip and help each other come up with possibilities for handling the issue.

Move Worries Along

When we get exercise our body is more able to deal with adrenaline and cortisol. One of the most effective things we can do to help students deal with stress is to build in a chance for kids to move as a whole group and set up plans for kids who need a chance to use large muscles. A couple loops around the field or an impromptu dance session gives kids a distraction and a way to get some increased blood flow. Many classrooms and schools have designated spaces where kids can skip, use a small rebounder, or get a variety of other movement opportunities.

Change the Channel

We know better than to try talking people out of worrying but giving them the information that there are ways they can deal with worry helps. Choice gives us the feeling of power. Years later my former students tell me they still use 'change the channel.' I explained that sometimes when we are worrying it can help to say, "I'm worrying about _____, I can do like I do with the TV and change the channel." We practiced together with the kids picking a worry, naming it and using their thumb to press the 2nd knuckle on the index finger. Sounds too easy but it worked. Putting this in 'iLanguage' kids can **sweep one APP away and 'tap a new APP.'**

Parking Lot

It can be helpful to have a white board or pad of paper that kids have easy access to. Writing their concerns or having them written by someone else provides some assurance someone will support them. With older students we have a BURNING QUESTIONS BOARD with sticky notes for kids to post their questions.

Think the Good Stuff

My father's expression, "**If thinking about it is going to make it so, think the good stuff,**" works for me and has worked for friends, colleagues and kids. As soon as worrying begins I name it for myself and then remind myself I have a choice and I can "think the good stuff." It distracts me from worrying and give me a positive focus. "Think the good stuff" can become a mantra or kids can choose their own 'worry chaser.'

Worry Boxes, Bags or Dolls

One way to help kids deal with their worries is to give them an opportunity to tell them or write them down. A little box or a small bag can be a place to put worry notes or some teachers have given students craft sticks and bits of fabric or pipe cleaners to make worry dolls.

Giving Our Brains Something to Do Besides Worry

It is not possible to worry when we give our brain other tasks. We teach our kids tottery things like whispering the alphabet, humming, counting backwards.

Calming Jar

Calming jars or bottles are a way to help kids to understand how our minds can go from swirling to calm. You can make these with students if you have adult help. To make the jars or bottles you put 4 parts hot water in a plastic bottle or jar, add 2 parts glue and 2 parts glitter and a few drops of food coloring. Some people add a small toy or lego. Once the bottles are filled, dry the top and use a few drops of super glue to seal the jar or bottle. When students want a calming break they can shake the bottles and then watch as the glitter settles. I use mini shampoo bottles They work well and take up less space.

Self Regulation Boxes or Bags

One Saanich teacher had her students decorate small shoe boxes and choose some items from home that they can use for a quiet time after lunch. When her students come in from lunch they get their quiet boxes and have a 5 minute cool down time.

Another teacher who has older students has a routine that serves the same purpose. She puts on classical music and gives her students time to read, draw, use modeling materials, and puzzles ...

Stretches

Many people have found it very helpful to do yoga stretches with students. Some teachers have received negative comments about doing 'yoga' in school so they have learned to call the activity stretching. You might like to check

<http://www.yogacalm.org/>

Compression Exercises

Compression or stretching help restore balance to our nervous system when we are stressed and anxious (over aroused) or bored and sleepy. (under aroused).

Push on a wall with both hands, feet firmly planted on the ground.

Hold for the count of five. Try to make the room bigger, or move the wall.

Sitting in a chair, place both hands together, elbows extended.

Push hands together as hard as you can. Try to pull them apart.

Sit on a chair, Grip the sides with your hands. Push down. Try to lift yourself up.

A session participant Kim, suggested cutting an exercise band in half lengthwise and giving students a 50 cm piece. The student can hold one end in their hand and wrap the rest around their lower arm. the wrapping and unwrapping gives the feeling of pressure that relaxes some students.

Rings and Bracelets

When we are worried we sometimes wring our hands. The pressure is calming.

- Use one hand to gently squeeze and twist around each finger and arm.
- Repeat on other side.

Squeeze the Toothpaste

Muscle compression helps us relax. Have students take turns to 'Squeeze the Toothpaste' by starting at the shoulder, using 2 hands to work down each arm.

An alternative is to have kids use the outside of their hand to slide down their own arm.

*See if you can find a bean bag chair. It offers a hug every time you sit in it.

Many schools supply weighted vests but if your budget doesn't allow for that a supersize bean bag makes a good lap pad. One teacher added a pocket on the front to hold fidgets. The long micro bags make excellent shoulder weights.

Sling Shot

Sling Shot is an excellent way to help students work through frustration and negative energy.

Sling Shot—palms up, bend both arms so they are parallel to your body.

Arms front—raise arms up so elbows are level with the ears.

Arms back—swing arms back so elbows are behind your back.

Happy hands—curl fingers as in a fist, place thumbs on top of index fingers.

Sling shot—repeat the whole process 3 times, quickly.

Time-in Becomes - Take a Break

Time Out is punishment and not productive. For students who need a respite from all the activity in a classroom a break in a quiet space can be useful. We can use a quiet spot for a "time-in" space. It can be as simple as a spot with few distractions and quiet activities or Stuart Shanker's suggestion of a classroom library in a quiet space. Many classrooms and schools now have BREAK areas. We meet with students to set guidelines and list suggestions for break activities.

GLP Walk

We take time once a day for a GLP walk. Students go for a walk and take turns to tell each other one thing they are:

- grateful for
- have learned
- promise

My Gratitude Jar

Kristin Wiens has just published a book to teach children about Mindfulness. In MY GRATITUDE JAR, Mrs. Lane has the whole class make gratitude jars. Each day the students write a note to tell what they are grateful for. Jacob isn't too keen on this but by the end of the book he learns the value of gratitude. You can purchase copies on this book from <http://northstarpaths.com>.

