

## 504 Accommodations for Students with Anxiety Disorders

Although anxiety does not necessarily impact a student's academic abilities, it can affect their ability to learn. Parents and teachers can work together to help a student succeed in the classroom. There are a number of ways staff can make the school day easier and less stressful for a child with anxiety:

**Create a “safe” place for the child to go when anxiety symptoms are high** or during stressful times. This may be the nurse's office or a staff member's office. Establish rules for the use of the “safe” place. These rules should include items such as, the student must inform the teacher they need a few minutes to calm down, and a set time limit.

**Be aware of physical symptoms of anxiety and provide activities to distract the child.**

Calming activities, such as, reading or listening to music may help to alleviate some of the physical symptoms and allow a child to return to class work after a period of time.

**Allow a few minutes at the beginning of the day for the child to transition into the school day.** Additional transitional periods might be necessary for other times when routine is disrupted. This can be providing five to ten minutes for the child to prepare their papers and school supplies or simply a few minutes for the child to sit quietly before the school day begins. If the time before school is difficult for the child, it may be beneficial for them to either enter the classroom a few minutes before or a few minutes after the rest of the class arrives.

**Talk to the student about what interventions they would find helpful.** Having the student discuss strategies may help them to be involved in reducing their anxiety symptoms. This also provides the child an opportunity to talk about situations that cause anxiety symptoms as well as for them to be more aware of their symptoms.

**Teach the child relaxation techniques they can do at school,** such as deep breathing exercises. Talk with parents about the techniques used at home and try to incorporate them into the classroom.

**For children avoiding school because of anxiety, offer suggestions such as coming to school for a shorter day.** The longer the child avoids going to school, the more difficult it is for them to return. Allowing them to come to school for shorter periods will give them a chance to face their fears but may make it easier if they know they will be able to return home at lunchtime.

**Use small group activities throughout the day.** Children with anxiety may be better able to cope with small groups of a few students rather than large classroom study. Have the class break into small groups to complete class work to encourage participation.

**Reward effort by a student with anxiety.** When a child shows effort or is able to control their anxiety symptoms through interventions, let them know you have noticed and are proud of their efforts.

**Create group activities that role-play appropriate behaviors.** Teach young children what to do in specific situations. This can help all students learn how to handle situations such as anger management, stress reduction, test anxiety. Providing instruction to the entire class will decrease the focus on the child with anxiety.

**Decrease situations that induce stress.** Teachers can restructure assignments to decrease the amount of stress for a student. For example, instead of having a child stand in front of the class to read a report, find creative ways to complete reports. Allow students to make posters or record presentations at home on a tape recorder.

**Discuss anxiety symptoms privately with the student.** Never single out a child or call attention to their anxiety in front of the class. This can cause humiliation or embarrassment and increase anxiety symptoms.

**Discuss alternative ways of handling situations.** Talk to the student after an anxiety attack about how the situation could have been different or what strategies could have been used (by both the student and the teacher) to make the situation better.

**Find books that address children with anxiety.** Incorporate these books into reading curriculum. This not only helps the child with anxiety to feel better about their anxiety but also can help the other students in the class be more understanding of the condition.

**Teach positive self-talk to the entire class.** Helping children to be aware of the negative way they talk to themselves, such as the use of “I can’t” and help them to develop a more positive way of talking to themselves.

**Post the daily routine in the classroom and let students know in advance any changes in the schedule.** Letting students know exactly what is expected will help lessen anxiety. For a student with anxiety, a sudden change can cause a panic attack. Knowing in advance what the day will be like will help in transitions.

**Help students break assignments down into smaller segments.** This can help to decrease feeling overwhelmed by large assignments and help a student work on each section.

**Play soothing music during down time.** Many times playing soft music can help children to calm down and can relieve stress. During quiet activities or seatwork, use soothing music.

**Incorporate exercise into the school day.** Stop lessons for a few minutes or do stretching exercises in between lessons. This can help reduce stress.

**Use computerized reading programs.** Allowing children time to work on their own rather than in a large group can reduce stress and anxiety.

**Discuss what sections of a book will be read aloud with a student before calling on them to read.** If reading aloud in the class causes stress and anxiety, plan ahead of time and let a student practice a small selection the night before.