



Ministry of Education
SINGAPORE

4th Annual Mental Health Awareness Briefing



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2009

Promoting
Mental
Health

2010

Prevention
of Suicide
in students

2011

Resilience

2012

Change and
Transition



Overview

- Transitions
- Anxiety
- School-based strategies to manage anxiety



Transitions



What is School Transition?

- Usually seen in terms of a set of skills and abilities where the focus is on school readiness.
- A period of change in which children and families adjust to
 - new roles,
 - identities and expectations,
 - new interactions and new relationships.
 - greater levels of activity,
 - pressures associated with school life.
- This change will assert and influence children's attitudes, confidence, and performance both socially, emotionally and academically.



Adapting to the School Environment

- Academic expectations and demands of school,
- Physical environment of school,
- Social environment at school,
- Communication strategies between teachers and families,
- Philosophical underpinnings of teaching and learning.



Impact of Transitions

- Academic adjustment
- Social adjustment
- Gender differences



Two Elements in Successful Transition

- Settling well into school life
- Getting used to new routines



Experiences with Poor Transition

These children tend to :

- Experience bullying,
- Worry about their ability to perform to expectations,
- Worry about having new and different teachers for subjects,
- Worry about whether they can make friends.



What schools can do:

- Responsibility of the school to induct the child into the ways of the school.
 - Buddy system
 - Programmes/ processes to facilitate transition to school
 - Information sessions for parents
 - Avenues for students to seek help, where necessary



In the Classroom ...for teachers

Provide

- **Sense of security** (e.g. trusting, positive response to authority, not anxious, handles change)
- **Sense of identity/self-concept** (e.g. ability to take risk, accept criticism, express emotion and knowledge about self)
- **Sense of belonging** (e.g. ability to co-operate, comfortable in a group, accepted by peers)
- **Sense of purpose** (e.g. self-directed, sets realistic goals, tries new things, good work habits)
- **Sense of competence** (e.g. uses strengths, sets goals, knows weaknesses, seeks challenges)

How?

- define what is expected
- build a positive environment
- build trust

- accurate feedback
- feelings of self-worth
- self-awareness

- self-acceptance
- acceptance of others
- service to others
- part of team

- foster a climate of risk-taking
- convey realistic expectations
- translate goals into actions

- makes choices and decisions
- self-evaluation
- tolerates frustrations
- uses resources



Anxiety



Mental Health

- Mental Health = “state of emotional and psychological well-being in which an individual is able to use his or her cognitive and emotional capabilities, function in society and meet the ordinary demands of everyday life ” – *World Health Organization (WHO)*
- Emotional and social health of children play pivotal role in helping child nurture his sense of self-efficacy and self-worth



Anxiety Disorders in Children and Adolescents

- Anxiety symptoms encompass excessive worries, fears and misery .
- Considerable overlap of symptoms.
- Often runs in families.
- Presence of adverse life events.
- Often arises from threatened or actual separations from key attachment figures.
- Different developmental stages in life pose different risks of certain types of anxiety,
 - e.g. separation anxiety and simple phobias for younger children



Causes of Anxiety

- Genetic predisposition
- Chronic physical illness
- Stressful life events
- Adverse early childhood experiences
- Family discord



Manifestations of Anxiety

- Worrying about safety of themselves or their parents
- School refusal
- Reluctance to sleep alone
- Headache or stomachache
- Clinging to caregiver
- Panic or tantrums when separated from caregiver
- Fear of talking to strangers
- Worrying about things before they happen
- Poor concentration



Impact on anxious child

- Poor academic performance
- Negative feedback from teachers
- Labeled as “crazy” or “emo”
- Friends do not like to be near or play with them
- Frequent issues at home, e.g. quarrels, outbursts, meltdowns
- Not understood by some parents
- Chronic low self-esteem
- Self-fulfilling prophecy
- Conduct problems



Children and Adolescents

- Children are not miniature adults
- They have unique problems of their own
 - School-related, academic, disciplinary, peer relationships and parental issues
- They do not employ the same coping styles



School-based Strategies to Manage Anxiety



BE

WATCHFUL



Be prepared

Engineer social support

Watch out for symptoms of anxiety in your student

Acknowledge your student's anxiety and provide a listening ear

Try to avoid giving excessive reassurances

Calmly react to your student's anxiety

Help your student understand about his/her anxiety

Furnish your child with relaxation strategies

Use cognitive strategies

Let your student face his/her fear gradually



- **Be prepared**
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- Prepare the student and parents in advance as much as possible.
 - Provide information on the new situation/environment and the timetable/schedule for the first day/week.
 - Provide avenue for the student/parents to seek more information/help.



- **E**ngineer social support

- Have a buddy system
- Create opportunities to interact during recess
- Let the student know how to seek the form teacher/FTSC for help



- **W**atch out for symptoms of anxiety in your student

- As anxious children tend to keep their problems to themselves and are generally well behaved and quiet in class, their anxiety problems are often overlooked until they start to greatly affect the students functioning in school.
- Be alert to behavioral and physical signs of anxiety such as increasing avoidance of feared situations and complaints of stomachache, headaches or chest discomfort etc.



- Does my student show signs of avoidance in class and in school?
- Does my student exhibit symptoms of anxiety especially in situations that is uncomfortable to the student?
 - Headache or stomachache
 - Nausea
 - Vomiting
 - Shortness of breath/ dizziness
 - Heart palpitations
 - Muscle tension/ trembling
 - Poor concentration
 - Restlessness
 - Irritability
 - Fatigue



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- Does my student worry a lot and focus only on negative outcomes?
 - Is my student underperforming?



- **A**cknowledge your student's anxiety and provide a listening ear
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- Validate your student's feelings. Do not dismiss their anxiety immediately.
 - Whenever possible, listen to your student's thoughts and feelings first without any interruption. This allows your student to feel that you are concerned about him/her and what he/she is going through. This will encourage your student to reveal to you more about his/her fears.

Tips for helping students cope with transition/anxiety



- **T**ry to avoid giving excessive reassurances
 - Resist giving reassurances repeatedly as it may become a form of positive attention for the student, which may encourage the student to exhibit more anxious behaviors.
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Tips for helping students cope with transition/anxiety



- **C**almly react to your student's anxiety
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- By responding to your student's anxiety in a calm manner, this not only helps reduce your student's perception of his/her fears as being threatening but also allows your student to model how you can cope with anxiety calmly.



- **H**elp your student understand about his/her anxiety
- Educate your student that his/her anxiety and the physical symptoms of anxiety that he/she is experiencing is normal, harmless and temporary.
- Let your student know that she is not alone in feeling anxious and that most children have anxiety problems at some point in their lives.

Tips for helping students cope with transition/anxiety



- **F**urnish your child with relaxation strategies
- Teach your child how to stay calm and reduce his/her physical symptoms of anxiety through deep-breathing exercise.
- Deep breathing exercise



Tips for helping students cope with transition/anxiety



- **U**se cognitive strategies such as coping statements and realistic thinking

- Develop coping statements with your students.
- For older students, you can teach your child to challenge his anxious or negative thoughts and change them to more realistic ones

❖ After helping the student to identify his/her anxious thoughts, get the student to consider these questions:

- Is there any evidence for/against this thought?
- What are some possible alternative explanations?
- What will I advise my friend who is in a similar situation?



Tips for helping students cope with transition/anxiety



- **L**et your student face his/her fear gradually

- Encourage your student to use his/her relaxation exercises and/or cognitive strategies to overcome his/her fears or anxieties.
- Start with a situation that the student feels a bit anxious. After the student gains confidence that he/she can manage his/her anxiety in that situation, proceed gradually to situations that evoke greater levels of anxiety.
- Give your student lots of praise for trying to overcome his/her anxiety.



