

ANXIETY IN THE CLASSROOM

How to Talk to Your Students

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When you recognize that a student may be exhibiting symptoms of anxiety and/or OCD, it's important that you take the time to speak to them. However, knowing what to say, and how to address your concerns is **not always easy**.



OVERVIEW



Seven Tips for Talking to Students With Anxiety and/or OCD

- 1 Take student concerns seriously
- 2 Offer validation & acceptance
- 3 Avoid shaming
- 4 Avoid calling people out
- 5 Encourage students to share their struggles
- 6 Developing a game plan
- 7 Be mindful of how you communicate

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR STUDENTS

In this video, Aureen Wagner, PhD, talks about how you can go about explaining anxiety to a student, and how you can help them to identify if they are experiencing excessive anxiety.



HOW TO TALK TO YOUR STUDENTS

Anxiety is a normal emotion that everyone experiences from time to time, but severe anxiety can be debilitating, and may meet the clinical criteria to be considered a disorder.

Up to 25% of students in your classroom may be experiencing anxiety at a level to be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.



HOW TO TALK TO YOUR STUDENTS



Take their concerns seriously.

- Anxious students often feel embarrassed/ashamed about their difficulties, and it takes courage for them to discuss their fears with you, regardless of their age.
- When they do, it is important to take their concerns seriously. Do not label them as “silly” or accuse your student of making an excuse for perceived shortcomings.

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR STUDENTS



Offer validation and Acceptance.

- Validating someone's fear isn't the same as agreeing that their fear is true.
- It is an acknowledgment that their feelings are understandable, and you accept them. For example, you might say, "If I thought my mother would die if I didn't say my prayers 20 times, then I would have a hard time concentrating in class, too."
- Offering validation and acceptance are powerful ways to build a positive and trusting relationship between a teacher and his/her student.

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR STUDENTS



Avoid shaming.

- Eliciting shame is an unhelpful and unproductive way of giving feedback. Instead of getting a person to change their behavior, it usually simply shuts them down.
- A student who has been shamed, whether intentionally or unintentionally, will feel humiliated, angry, and worthless, and may exhibit behaviors that are even more challenging to manage in the classroom.
- Examples of shaming statements are: “Why would you do that?” or “What is the matter with you?” or “You are acting crazy!”

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR STUDENTS



Do not “call out” students in front of class

- Anxious students don’t want to be the center of attention for any reason, especially if they are in the throes of an anxiety attack.
- If your student is fidgeting, isolating, late to school, or avoiding touching things or participating in class discussions, it is best to address your concerns privately instead of in front of the class. Set up a time to speak with the student.



HOW TO TALK TO YOUR STUDENTS



Encourage students to tell you if they're struggling.

Here are some ways to increase the likelihood that your student will engage with you:

- Set up a regularly scheduled check-in (for example, every Tuesday)
- Agree upon a specific time of day (for example, before school starts) for a student to contact you
- Agree upon the method by which the student can contact you (a hand-written note, or an email)

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR STUDENTS



Encourage students to tell you if they're struggling.

- Sometimes students are reluctant to seek out help from their teachers or other school personnel because they perceive this as being a bother, fear being annoying, or they just don't know what to say.
- To prevent this, explain that you would like to know if your student is struggling, in order to prevent the situation from escalating.

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR STUDENTS



Develop a “game plan” with your student.

- Work with your student to construct a plan to use when his or her anxiety is triggered. Be sure to document this plan and share it with other teachers and your student’s parents.
- Finally, after using the plan several times, meet with the student to review its effectiveness and adjust as necessary.

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR STUDENTS



Develop a “game plan” with your student.

The plan might include:

- Specific cues or signals to use to communicate that the plan is going to be implemented
- The use of fidget toys or movement breaks
- A designated quiet space for a time out
- Coping strategies such as deep breathing, mindfulness, or cognitive restructuring exercises

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR STUDENTS



Develop a “game plan” with your student.

- Anxious students respond positively to a personal style that is consistent, firm, and kind.
- When interacting with a student who is anxious, it is best to be calm, clear, and directive. For example, you might say, “Come with me and sit here. Let’s do a deep breathing exercise.”

THANK YOU.

QUESTIONS ?

International OCD Foundation

55 Court St. #310
Boston, MA 02108
(617) 973-5801
iocdf.org | info@iocdf.org

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