

ANXIETY IN THE CLASSROOM

Impact of Anxiety and OCD at School

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OVERVIEW



- 1 Levels of anxiety
- 2 Social/Behavioral Impact of Anxiety and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- 3 Examples of Anxiety/OCD Impact on A Student at School

ANXIETY/ OCD AT SCHOOL

- Anxiety and OCD can have a significant impact in the school setting.
- These conditions can affect a student's classroom behavior, academic performance, and social interactions.



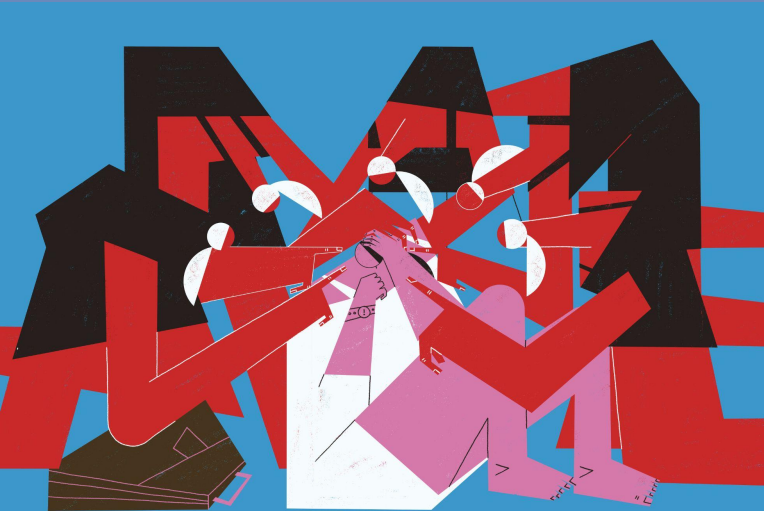
LEVELS OF ANXIETY

- A moderate level of anxiety benefits learning because it drives students to do the work that's necessary to succeed in school.
- Some anxiety before an important test or presentation is typical for many people, and that once the test or presentation is over, the anxiety subsides.



LEVELS OF ANXIETY

- A high level of anxiety that remains consistent over time is abnormal and can obstruct learning; it grips the brain and effectively shuts it down.
- Some experts believe that severe anxiety is a learning disability because it makes it much more difficult for a student to take in, process, and retrieve information.



WHAT IS THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF ANXIETY AND OCD IN SCHOOL?

In this video, Denise Egan Stack, LMHC, talks about the different ways that children may exhibit signs ways that anxiety and/or OCD can impact a child the school setting.



IMPACT OF ANXIETY/ OCD AT SCHOOL

Difficulty taking in information.

Students with excessive anxiety may have difficulty paying attention to what needs to be learned. The student's worries take up a lot of space in his or her mind, and this interferes with his or her ability to concentrate on other things, follow multi-step instructions, and switch attention from task to task in a flexible and efficient way.



IMPACT OF ANXIETY/ OCD AT SCHOOL



Difficulty taking in information.

- If a high school student is anxious because she thinks she may have HIV because she may have not washed her hands well enough after having used the bathroom, then she will have a more difficult time learning a new math concept or reading and interpreting a poetry passage.
- If an elementary school student is fearful that something bad happened to his mother because they are separated, then he will have to work much harder than his peers do to follow the multi-step instructions his teacher is giving about an art project.



IMPACT OF ANXIETY/ OCD AT SCHOOL



Information is not processed properly.

- **Even if anxious students can pay attention in class, it is often on a surface level because their cognitive abilities have been overtaxed by anxiety.**
- They do not use previously learned information as they take in new facts; therefore, earlier learning isn't expanded upon or developed in an enriching way. In addition, because attention and concentration are intermittent, students often have incomplete knowledge in a given area.

IMPACT OF ANXIETY/ OCD AT SCHOOL



Information is not stored or consolidated in long-term memory.

- If new information isn't being expanded upon, it will not be stored properly. As a result, students may have trouble accessing information from long-term memory.
- If a student is unable to recall previously learned information, then he or she may not do well on exams, even if he or she studied and knew the information the night before. Students may develop "test anxiety" as a result, which further impairs their ability to access knowledge.

IMPACT OF ANXIETY/ OCD AT SCHOOL



School refusal.

- Anxious students miss school for many reasons, including not wanting to be separated from their parents, wanting to avoid social situations, or because of physical illness related to anxiety, such as a stomach ache or headache.
- When students are frequently absent, they miss instruction time and it is difficult to catch up on missed assignments. This, in turn, creates more anxiety and stress, and impacts a student's ability to perform optimally.

IMPACT OF ANXIETY/ OCD AT SCHOOL



Disrupted sleep.

- Doing homework often takes anxious students longer due to procrastination, difficulty transitioning between tasks, slow work pace, and/or perfectionism. As a result, students stay up late trying to complete their assignments.
- Anxious students may also have difficulty falling or staying asleep because of worry over things like an upcoming test or social event. Sleep deprivation results in low energy levels and disrupts memory and concentration, all of which hurt academic performance.

IMPACT OF ANXIETY/ OCD AT SCHOOL



Difficulty with social interaction.

- Social anxiety may also impact a student's ability to participate in classroom discussions, group work, presentations, or other activities that require social interaction with peers.
- While the student may appear disinterested or disengaged in the classroom, this is actually social anxiety creating an obstacle that prevents students from participating in activities, even when they would prefer to do so.

IMPACT OF ANXIETY/ OCD AT SCHOOL



Slow pace of work.

- Compulsions, which are behaviors that are intended to reduce anxiety, may cause a student to work very slowly, due to perfectionism or rituals surrounding note-taking (e.g., *checking handwriting quality, organizing notes, and including every bit of relevant information*).
- Students with anxiety may engage in compulsive re-checking of information when reading, which slows their pace and hinders overall fluency. Intrusive worries may also impact decision-making on multiple-choice items (e.g., *"Maybe I missed something, let me re-read that last section" and "I should recheck to make sure that I didn't make a mistake"*).

IMPACT OF ANXIETY/ OCD AT SCHOOL



Missing assignments.

- Students with perfectionism often fail to turn in assignments because their work doesn't *feel* good enough or complete. This can be misinterpreted by teachers to mean the assignment was not completed by the deadline or at all, which will negatively affect a student's grades.

IMPACT OF ANXIETY/ OCD AT SCHOOL



Executive functioning skills.

- Skills such as organization, planning, and prioritizing – are important to academic success. Research shows that executive functioning deficits are more common in students with both anxiety and depression and that they become exacerbated when symptoms are more pronounced.

IMPACT OF ANXIETY/ OCD AT SCHOOL



- It is possible for students with extreme anxiety to perform as well as their non-anxious peers, but **it requires much more effort to do so and often comes with a significantly higher level of stress in the long run.**
- It is thus important for teachers to **pay attention to students' work patterns and techniques rather than just their grades.**
- **Early identification of academic, behavioral, and/or social challenges** can help teachers work together with students and their parents to address obstacles to the student's school performance before they become serio

CENTERING RACIAL EQUITY.



- In any discussion of disabilities and/or conditions that impact school functioning, it's important to reflect on the potential inequities that occur for students of color in this space. Research shows that there is a "significant disproportionality" that exists for BIPOC students, particularly when it comes to who is identified as needing special education services and how they are treated thereafter.
- It is thus important for school personnel to use best practices to promote racial equity in approaching how they advocate for and support their students with anxiety/OCD.

CENTERING RACIAL EQUITY.



- Invest in training/professional development for all relevant school personnel on disability
- identification and student support, with an emphasis on improving workforce diversity and culturally responsive practices.
- Prioritize accurate and transparent data collection and reporting, including standardizing data collection processes.

CENTERING RACIAL EQUITY.

- Follow evidence-based evaluation processes to determine eligibility, seeking outside expertise/consultation on including considerations for cultural and/or linguistic differences as-needed.
- Prompt administration to audit the district's special education policies and processes, including those surrounding discipline, to identify biases and work to reduce them.
- Find ways to develop relationships and create an open dialogue with families to improve understanding of cultural contexts and increase family buy-in.

Practice Recommendations (*adapted from the National Center for Learning Disabilities*)

THANK YOU.

QUESTIONS ?

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