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Reducing Test Anxiety

Anxiety can be debilitating in a test-taking situation, but it is important to remember that not all students experience test anxiety. There is a story about a first-year teacher who entered his room on test day and said jokingly to his seventh-grade class, “Well, is everybody nervous?” A student raised his hand and replied, “I’m nervous that I’m not nervous!”

Some students experience test anxiety, while others do not. And there are students for whom tests occasion a modicum of anxiety that not only does not inhibit their performance, but actually enhances it! The type of test anxiety we are concerned with here is the kind that severely impedes a student’s ability to perform on a standardized test. But how do you know when a student has this kind of anxiety? There are several things that might tip you off:

- Tardiness on test day
- Absenteeism on test day
- Crying
- Hyperactivity
- Lethargy
- Jitteriness
- Shallow breathing
- Sweating
- Distractibility/inability to focus/going blank
- Nausea
- Muscle tension

Of course, one of the biggest clues of test anxiety is when a student who demonstrates knowledge and understanding of content via his/her daily classroom performance falls apart when confronted with a standardized test which is assessing the same skills.

Fortunately, there are a variety of strategies that can be taught to students suffering from test anxiety that can help them manage it. These strategies, however, should be routinely practiced by students in order for them to be effective. There is very little point in modeling positive self-talk five minutes before a test and then expecting that it will be of any use.

A Note to the Test Givers

Students are not the only people who experience test anxiety. Teachers, administrators, and other school personnel responsible for administering standardized tests can also experience anxiety around test time as pressure to increase student achievement mounts. While this is understandable, it is important to remember that anxiety is contagious: Anxious educators can often, inadvertently, create anxious students. Be mindful of your demeanor when administering the test. Create a relaxed, positive environment. Smile and maintain your sense of humor. Know that you have done your best to prepare your students. And your best is all you and they can do!

Practice Comprehension Questions

Mercury and the Woodman

By Aesop

A woodman was chopping down a tree on the bank of a river. His axe accidentally flew out of his hands and fell into the water. The woodman was upset that he lost his axe. Suddenly, Mercury appeared and asked him why he was so upset. The woodman told Mercury what happened. Mercury felt sorry for the man so he dove into the river and brought up a golden axe. He asked the woodman if this was the one he had lost. The woodman said that it was not. Mercury dove a second time and brought up a silver axe. He asked the woodman if this was his axe. "No, that is not mine either," said the woodman. Once more Mercury dove into the river and brought up the missing axe. The woodman was happy at getting his axe back. He thanked Mercury warmly. Mercury was so pleased with his honesty that he gave him the other two axes.

When the woodman told the story to his friends, one of them became jealous. He decided to try his luck for himself. So he went and began to chop a tree at the edge of the river. He let his axe drop into the water on purpose. Mercury appeared as before. When he found out that the man's axe fell in the river, he dove in and brought up a golden axe. The fellow cried, "That's mine. That's mine." He reached out his hand for the prize. Mercury was so disgusted at his dishonesty that he refused to give him the golden axe. He also refused to get the axe that he let fall into the stream.

Directions: Read each question and fill in the answer circle for your choice. After you have answered each question, think about whether the question is *literal*, *inferential*, or *analytical*.

1. How did the woodman lose his axe?
 - (A) He threw it away because it was broken.
 - (B) It accidentally flew out of his hand.
 - (C) His jealous friend stole it from him.
 - (D) Mercury stole it from him.

THINK! What kind of question is this?

2. Mercury decides to help the woodman because
 - (E) he loves him.
 - (F) he owes him a favor.
 - (G) he feels sorry for him.
 - (H) he promised him that he would.

THINK! What kind of question is this?



Practice Comprehension Questions *(cont.)*

3. Why do you think Mercury helps the woodman?
- Ⓐ He's bored.
 - Ⓑ He's trying to impress him.
 - Ⓒ He's trying to win favor with the other gods.
 - Ⓓ He sees that the woodman is a humble, hardworking man.

THINK! What kind of question is this?

4. What is the second axe that Mercury retrieves made of?
- Ⓔ silver
 - Ⓕ gold
 - Ⓖ wood
 - Ⓗ bronze

THINK! What kind of a question is this?

5. Why is producing a gold and silver axe a good way to determine if the woodman is honest?
- Ⓐ Woodmen love axes.
 - Ⓑ Woodmen rely on axes for their living.
 - Ⓒ People are often tempted by great wealth.
 - Ⓓ None of the above

THINK! What kind of a question is this?

