

Working with Students with Anxiety in the Classroom



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Boone County Schools Mental Health Coalition

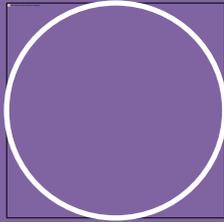


Continuum of Care

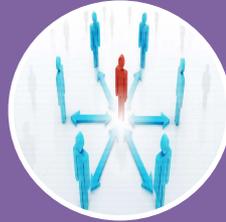


<p><u>Optimal Well-Being</u> Occasional to mild stress; no impairment</p>	<p><u>Emotional Concerns</u> Mild to moderate distress; mild or temporary impairment</p>	<p><u>Mental Illness</u> Marked distress; moderate to disabling or chronic impairment</p>
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Teacher's Roles in Mental Health



Observer



Catalyst



Team
Member/
Collaborator



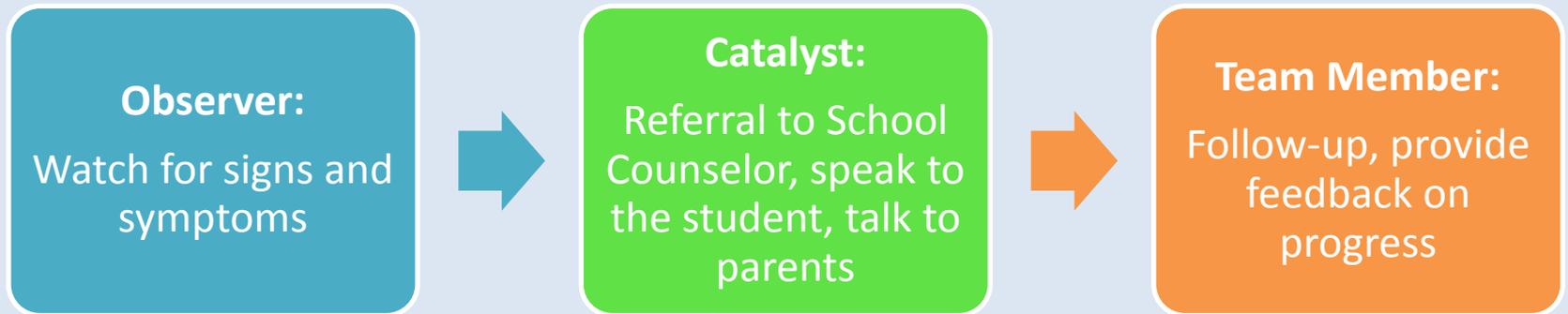
Educator



Role Model



Teacher's Roles in Mental Health



Making a Referral

- Refer to School Counselor, Outreach Counselor, or Intervention Team
- Mention the behaviors and/or symptoms you notice (specifics!)
 - Frequency: how often is it occurring?
 - Intensity: to what degree is it occurring?
 - Duration: how long does it last?
 - Impact: how does this impact functioning?
- Response should match the severity
- Be the catalyst and take action using your schools individualized referral process!

Discussion on Referrals

- What is working well with your schools referral process?
- What questions or concerns do you have regarding your referral process?
- How do you follow-up on referrals?

Confidentiality

- Confidentiality is crucial to maintaining a trusting teacher-student relationship
- Treat mental health information as private unless it violates the limits of confidentiality
 - Limits are related to safety
 - Let student know you will break confidentiality
 - Always share with School Counselor or in collaboration
- Focus on voicing concern regarding symptoms rather than diagnosis

Risk and Protective Factors

- Most major youth mental health problems are rooted in four environmental circumstances:
 - 1) Toxic life events
 - 2) Limited opportunities to learn and practice prosocial behaviors and socio-emotional skills
 - 3) Unstructured, unpredictable environments
 - 4) Absence of adult supervision
- *Nurturing environments* at home and school counter these risk factors and can prevent mental disorders.

Fostering Resilience



Protective Factors

- Caring adults
- Genuine youth-adult relationships
- Self-regulation skills
- Opportunities for involvement
- Academic achievement
- Effective parenting
- Physical and psychological safety
- Positive expectations and effective classroom management

Risk Factors

- Poverty
- Problems in community environment
- Problems in family environment
- Abuse and neglect
- History of behavior problems
- Low parent education
- Negative behavior and experiences
- Violence in school



Student-Teacher Rapport

- Rapport between a student and teacher is vital because this supportive relationship with an adult can have a significant positive impact on the student's academic functioning
- Difficult students cause burnout and stress
- Important to be a positive role model for these difficult students

Building Rapport with Challenging Students

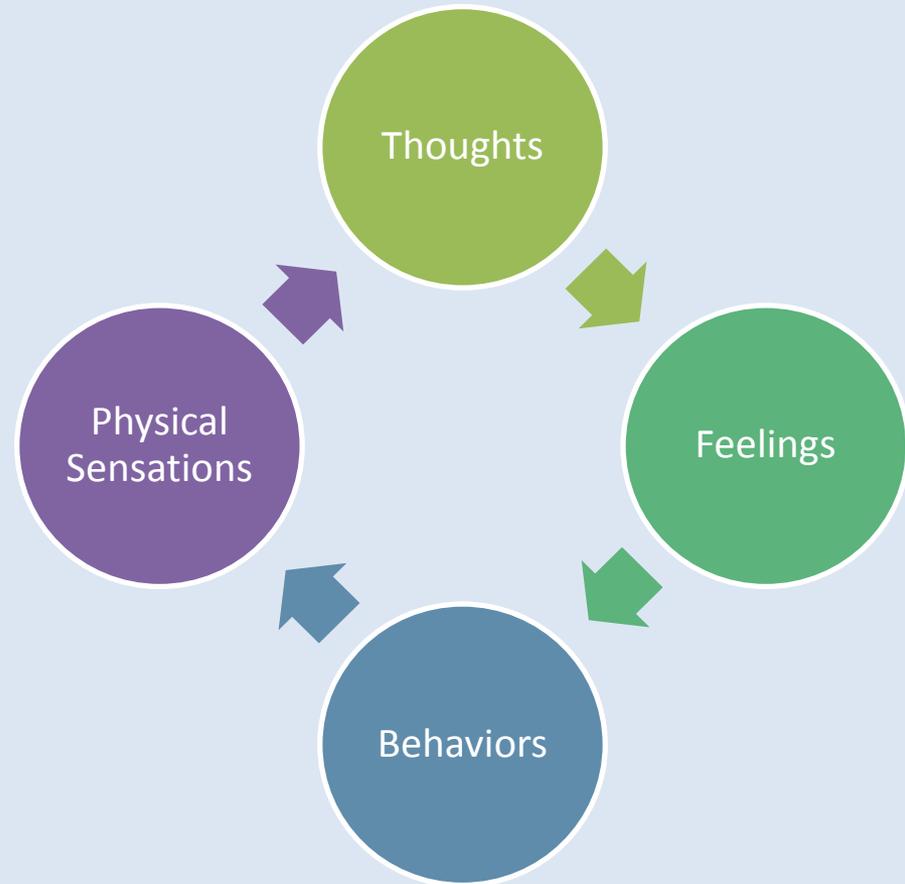
- Consistently make an effort to learn who they are outside of school
- Set expectations & enforce classroom rules positively
- Be patient and calm during interactions with the student
- Seek opportunities to individualize instruction
- Use positive & appropriate language
- Match your words with your non-verbal language
- Use I-centered statements
- Pair criticism with praise
- Use active listening to facilitate communication with the student



ANXIETY PROBLEMS

What is Anxiety?

- Anxiety is a psychological and physiological response that includes one's **feelings** (i.e. discomfort, fear or worry), **behaviors** (avoiding or withdrawing), and **physical sensations** (sweating, increased heart rate, shallow breathing, etc).
- Demonstrating excessive distress out of proportion to the situation: crying, physical symptoms, sadness, anger, frustration, hopelessness, embarrassment



Some Anxiety is NORMAL!

Anxiety is an essential developmental process that prepares children to navigate difficult situations.



Age	Fear
5 years	Wild animals, bodily injury, dark, strangers, separation from parent
6 years	Ghosts, monsters, witches, dark being alone, thunder and lightening
7 years	Dark, monsters, storms, being lost, kidnapping, being alone
8 years	Dark, strangers (kidnapper, robber), guns or weapons, being alone, animals
9 years	Dark, being lost, bad dreams, bodily harm or accident, being alone
10 years	Dark, people, bad dreams, punishment, strangers
11 years	Dark, being alone, bad dreams, being hurt by someone, being sick, tests, grades
12 years	Dark, punishment (being in trouble, bad grades), being alone, being hurt or taken away, tests, grades
13 years	Crime, being hurt or kidnapped, being alone, war, bad grades, tests, punishment
14+ years	Failure at school, personal relations, war, tests, sex issues (pregnancy, AIDS), being alone, family concerns

Robinson III, E., & Rotter, J. (1991). Children's fears: Toward a preventative model. *School Counselor*, 38(3), 187.

Signs to Look for:

1. Out of proportion to the demands of the situation
2. Cannot be explained or reasoned away
3. Beyond voluntary control
4. Leads to avoidance of the feared situation
5. Persists over an extended period of time
6. Maladaptive
7. Not age or stagespecific

Types

- **Generalized Anxiety Disorder**
 - Extreme worry, tense, self-conscious, strong need for reassurance
- **Phobias**
 - Unrealistic and excessive fear of objects or experiences
- **Panic Disorder**
 - Attacks consisting of intense fear, elevated heartrate, dizziness, and nausea
- **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder**
 - Repetitive thoughts and behaviors
- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**
 - Triggered by an event—PTSD can produce strong memories, flashbacks, or problematic thoughts

School-Specific Anxiety: School Refusal

Signs & Symptoms:

- Complain of physical symptoms shortly before it is time to leave for school
- Frequent requests to visit school nurse
- Physical symptoms: headaches, stomachaches, nausea, or diarrhea.
- Tantrums
- inflexibility
- Avoidance
- Defiance



School-Specific Anxiety: Test Anxiety

Causes

- Fear of failure
- Lack of preparation
- Poor test history

Signs & Symptoms

- **Physical symptoms:** Headache, nausea, diarrhea, excessive sweating, shortness of breath, rapid heartbeat, light-headedness and feeling faint can all occur. Test anxiety can lead to a panic attack, which is the abrupt onset of intense fear or discomfort in which individuals may feel like they are unable to breathe or having a heart attack.
- **Emotional symptoms:** Feelings of anger, fear, helplessness and disappointment are common emotional responses to test anxiety.
- **Behavioral/Cognitive symptoms:** Difficulty concentrating, thinking negatively and comparing yourself to others are common symptoms of test anxiety.





Long term Effects of Anxiety

- Research shows that untreated students with anxiety disorders are
 - at higher risk to perform poorly in school
 - miss out on important social experiences
 - engage in substance abuse

Gender Variations of Anxiety

- Females are twice as likely to suffer from panic disorder or social phobia compared to males
- Females face a slightly higher risk for specific phobia
- Females are more likely than males to be victims of physical or mental abuse, a known risk factor for PTSD
- Females report more somatic symptoms
- In males, anxiety often appears as irritability and externalizing behaviors (i.e. behavior problems in school)

What Does Anxiety Look Like?

Behaviors

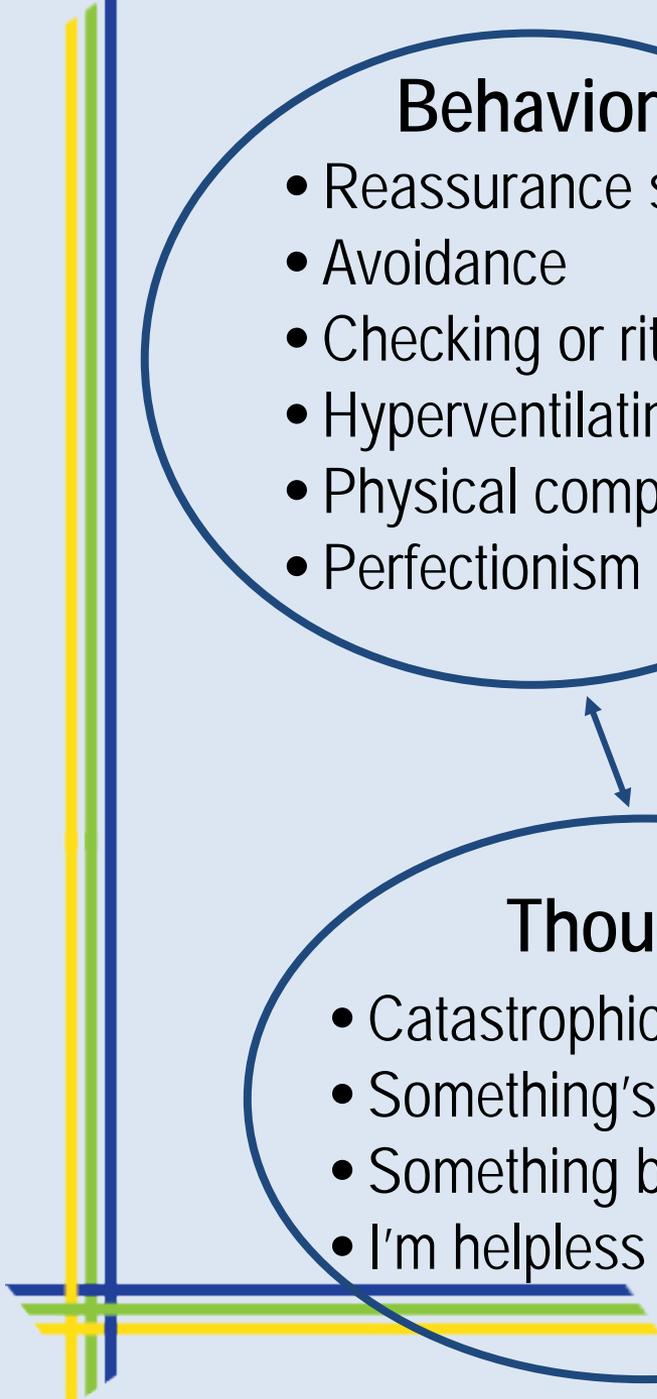
- Reassurance seeking
- Avoidance
- Checking or rituals
- Hyperventilating
- Physical complaints
- Perfectionism

Feelings/ Physiology

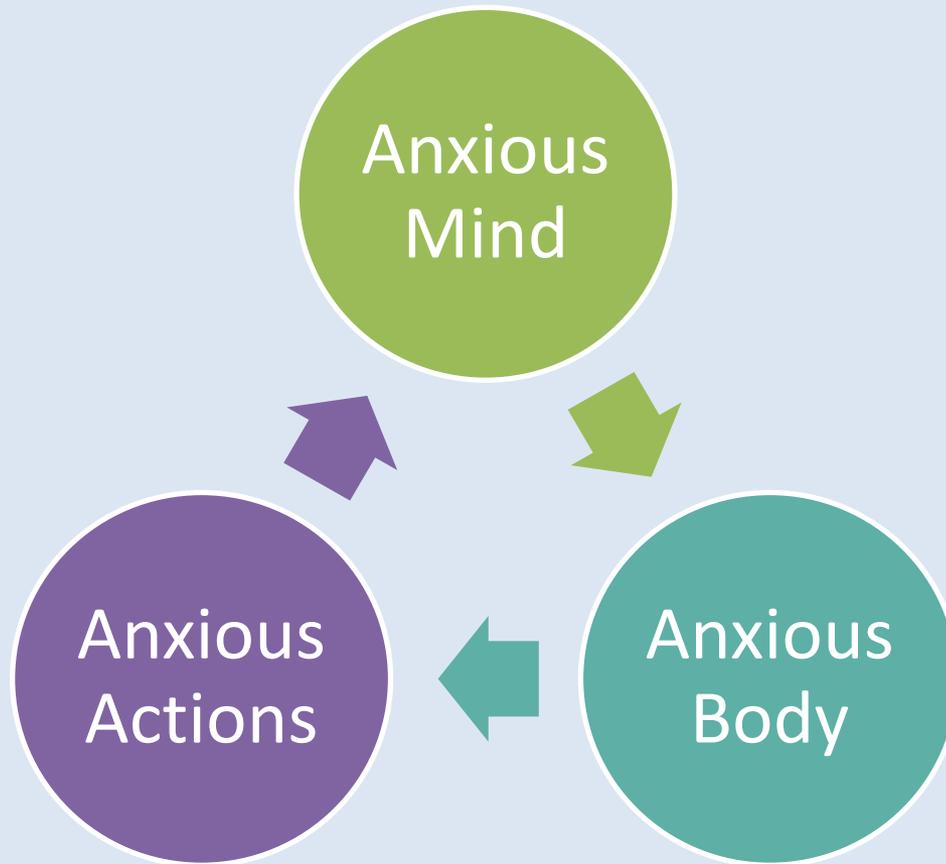
- Fear, worry, apprehension
- Physical reactions (racing heart, sweat, shaking, muscle tension)

Thoughts

- Catastrophic thinking
- Something's wrong
- Something bad will happen
- I'm helpless



The Worry Wheel



Interventions for Anxiety: How Teachers Can Help!



Promoting Calm Behaviors

Anxious Actions/Behaviors

- Reassurance seeking
- Avoidance
- Checking or rituals
- Hyperventilating
- Physical complaints
- Perfectionism

Promote Calm Actions/Behaviors

- Structured, predictable environments
- Model and reinforce "strong voice"/"strong body"
- Teach self-calming skills (deep breathing, imagery)
- Extinguish reassurance seeking, physical complaints
- Encourage and reward small risk taking
- Provide opportunities for social/academic success
- Implement social skills/resiliency curriculum
- Foster positive peer and adult relationships
- Provide academic supports and accommodations
- Involve parents

Promoting Calm Thoughts

Anxious Thoughts

- Catastrophic thinking
- Something's wrong
- Something bad will happen
- I'm helpless

Promote Calm Thoughts

- Distraction!
- Give simple coping statements
- Model and reinforce positive and adaptive thinking
- Use cognitive modeling strategies
- Teach self-praise skills
- Support self-efficacy ("you can do this")
- Encourage recall of success and mastery experiences
- Provide label for child's experience ("you're having fun")
- Implement resiliency curriculum

Relaxation Skills

What are Relaxation Skills?

Mindfulness

Progressive
Muscle
Relaxation

Deep
Breathing

Belly
Breathing

Guided
Imagery

Relaxation Skills (cont.)

- What Relaxation Skills are NOT:
 - Mindfulness and some practices such as yoga were derived from religious practices
 - We are not speaking to you about religious practices
 - All relaxation skills are void of religious wording
- Preliminary evidence for use of practices in schools with students
 - Decrease in stress & anxiety
 - Decrease in absenteeism
 - Increase in executive functioning skills
 - Associated with emotion regulation

Relaxation Skills *Implementation*

- **Who**: All Teachers/All Classrooms
- **What**: Relaxation Skills strategies provided (Menu of Options)
- **When**: Daily (Start of Day, When Return from Lunch & **Flexible**)
 - *Examples – transitions, during difficult times (break)*
- **Where**: Wherever Works Best!
 - Examples - classroom, gym, outside, etc.

Relaxation Resources: Go Noodle

– Categories → Calming

– Channels:

- Maximo Channel – Yoga

<https://app.gonoodle.com/channels/maximo>

- Flow Channel - Mindfulness Exercises

<https://app.gonoodle.com/channels/flow>

- Empower Channel - Mind/Body

<https://app.gonoodle.com/channels>

- Think About It - Reflections

<https://app.gonoodle.com/channels/think-about-it>

Deep Breathing or Belly Breathing

- Gives the body energy and delivers oxygen throughout the body
- Breathe from the diaphragm; not chest
- YouTube Resources:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxbdX-SeOOo>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZbzDOpylA>



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Involves tensing and then relaxing different muscles in the body
- Helps students learn difference between being tense and feeling relaxed

Example – Hands and Arms

» YouTube Resources:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aaTDNYjk-Gw>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPQak4vxoRE>



Guided Imagery

- Uses visualization and imagination to bring awareness to the mind-body connection
- Takes students on a journey/experience

- YouTube Resources:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlv6Y1tq1sQ>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KF52txZvUsA>



Other Helpful Websites

- <http://kidsrelaxation.com/>
- <http://move-with-me.com/>
- Youtube Channel – GoZen -
<https://www.youtube.com/user/gozenonline>

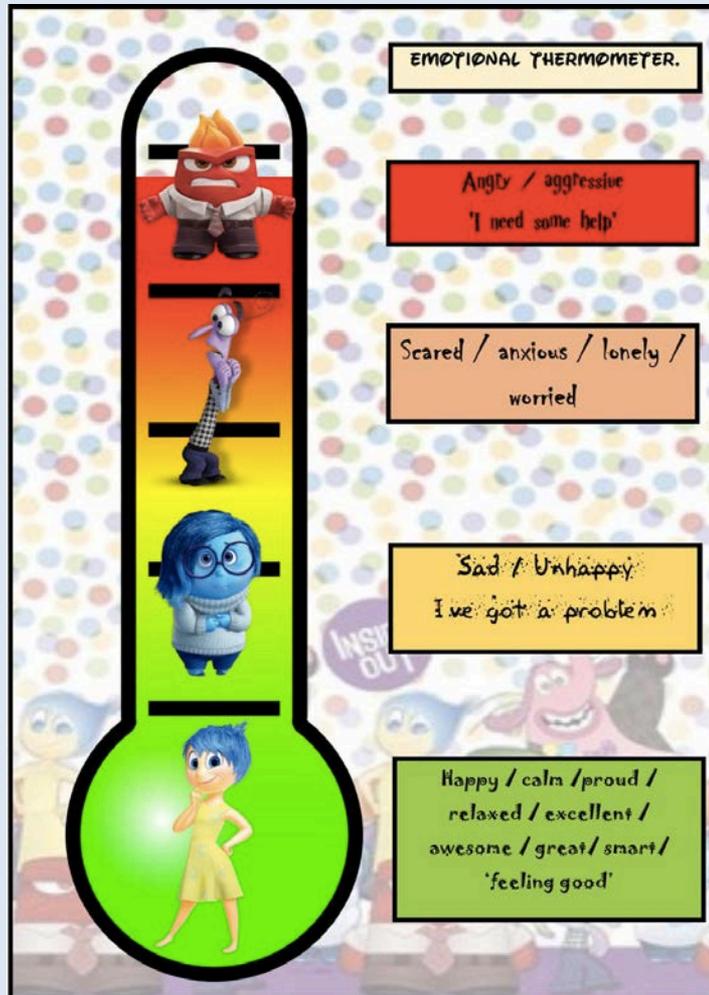
Simple Coping Statements

- I can do this.
- Anxiety won't hurt me.
- Feeling tense is normal.
- I can tolerate this.
- This feeling will pass.
- It is okay to make mistakes.
- Facing my fears will help them go away.

Helpful Phrases

- I am here for you. You are safe.
- This feels scary AND you are staying calm.
- What calming tool do you want to use?
- What do you need from me?
- Let's take a deep breath together.
- This feeling will pass.

Mood Ratings



How Big is My Problem?

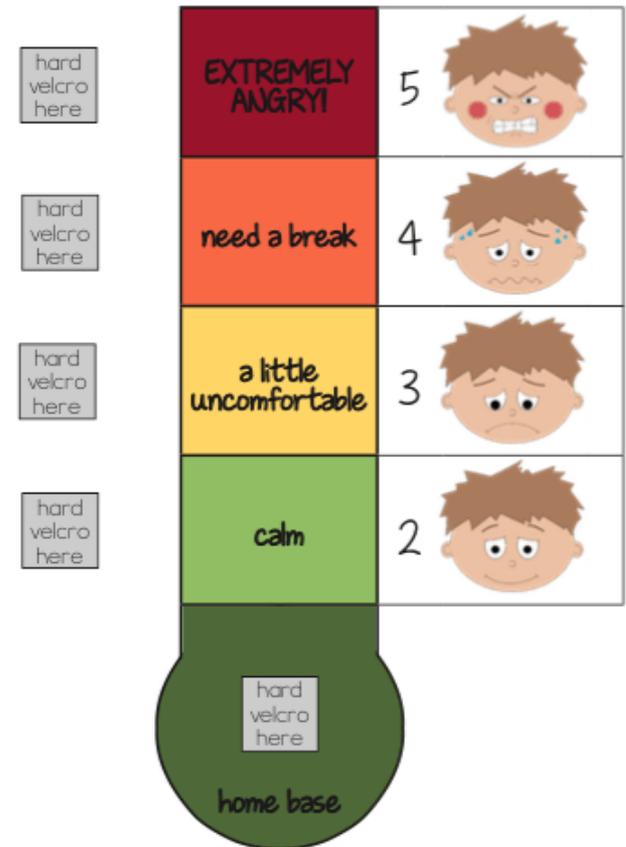
- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 5 | Emergency
You definitely need help from a grownup (fire, someone is hurt and needs to go to the hospital, a car accident, danger). |  |
| 4 | Gigantic problem
You can change with a lot of help (getting lost, hitting, kicking, or punching a friend, throwing or breaking things, bullying). |  |
| 3 | Big problem
You can change with some help (someone is mean to you or takes something that is yours, a minor accident, needing help calming down). |  |
| 2 | Medium problem
You can change with a little help (feeling sick, tired, or hungry, someone bothering you, being afraid, needing help). |  |
| 1 | Little problem
You can change with a little reminder (not being line leader, not winning a game, not taking turns, making a mess). |  |
| 0 | Glitch
You can fix yourself (changing clothes, cleaning up toys, forgetting favorite toy or blankie). |  |

Mood Ratings (cont.)

5	 <p>“Penalty Flag” I Am Exploding - I Am So Angry. I Will Be Removed.</p>
4	 <p>“Tackle” I Am About to Explode. I Need to Leave the Room NOW.</p>
3	 <p>“Timeout!” I Am NOT Able to Do my Job and Need to Ask to Take a Break.</p>
2	 <p>“Pass to the End Zone” I Am Still Calm, Focused, and Able to Do My Job.</p>
1	 <p>“Touchdown!” I Am Calm, Focused, and Doing My Job. Keep it Up!</p>

FEELING ANGRY

When I am feeling angry, I can communicate my feelings to an adult.



EXTREMELY ANGRY!	5		hard velcro here
need a break	4		hard velcro here
a little uncomfortable	3		hard velcro here
calm	2		hard velcro here
home base			hard velcro here

Helpful Apps

Primary/Elementary:

- *Breathe, Think, Do with Sesame*
- *Breathing Bubbles*
- *Smiling Mind*



School Refusal Interventions

- Assess the student's motivation for avoidance: is it reactive or proactive?
- Schedule a brainstorm meeting with all involved parties: school administration, teachers, school counselor, outside therapist, parent and child (if age appropriate).
- Behavior contracts for attending school that provide positive reinforcement (contingent on attendance).

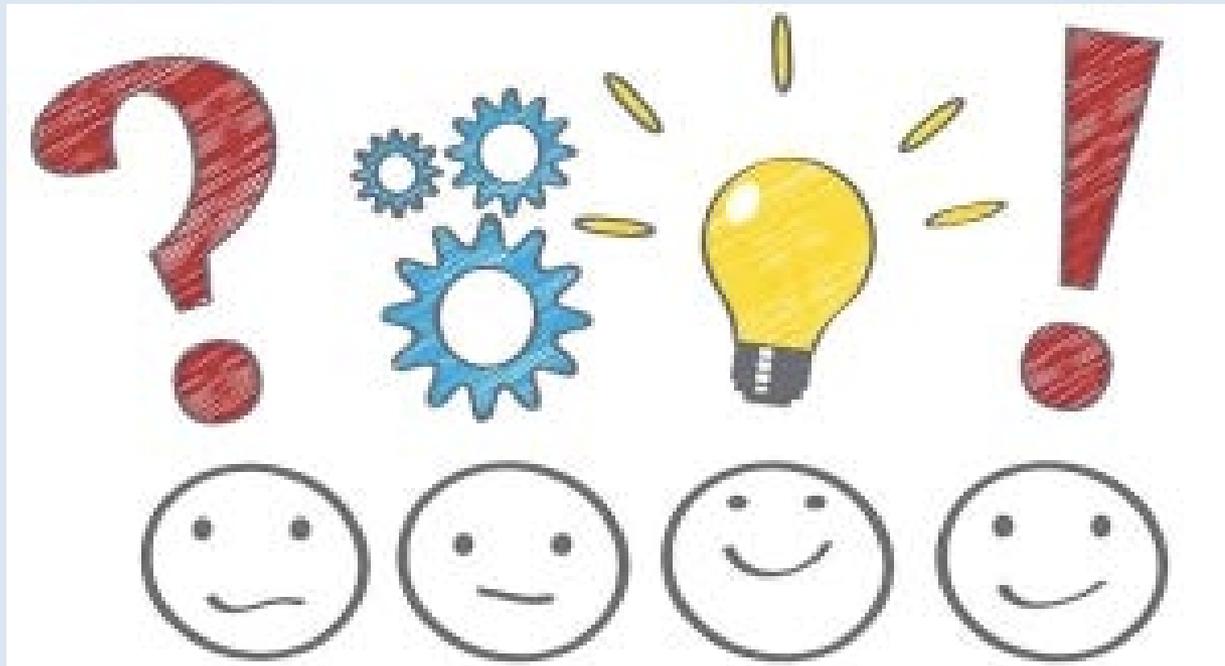
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