

"Cliff Notes" for Helping Students with Anxiety/Depression

In General

- Focus on Strengths. Speak to the child you want to see, not the one you don't.
- Do not underestimate the importance of early identification and intervention.
- Take a long term approach and follow through consistently with open communication.
- Recognize that being a supportive, involved adult is no small thing; it may be the only thing.
- When you suspect or "feel" that something is not right, trust your instincts and ask, consult, and refer.
- Avoid the traps of dismissing or minimizing symptoms and "blaming the victim".
- Recognize genetic, environmental and individual differences and their influences.
- Teach "Emotional Intelligence". Help students identify, express and manage their emotions.
- Demonstrate and make overt your covert attempts to be emotionally healthy yourself. Take time to point out how important mental health is. Challenge any stigmas about mental health and seeing help.
- Seek out consultation and support from others, do not feel trapped by promises about "secrets". Protect confidentiality if needed but consult others often. Recognize reporting requirements as they arise and use available resources.

Depression

- Depression is "stinky thinking".
- Reward effort and recognize individual gains.
- Use "group therapy" techniques to bring out and support troubled students in the class "milieu".
- Be "real", authentic and create opportunities to listen, avoid feeling like you need to offer solutions, thank them for the honor of sharing with you.
- Teach cognitive behavioral strategies; relaxation training, deep breathing, feeling identification, body sensation awareness, thought awareness and self talk, challenge maladaptive cognitions, encourage positive self statements.
- The glass is *always* half full.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions about self harm. Acknowledge feelings, offer support and state plan for help with steps to follow through.
- Use sport psychology and performance psychology to address issues in a nonthreatening manner.
- Offer opportunities to have troubled student be seen positively by peers.
- Take breaks when needed to avoid frustration. Recognize you are part of the treatment team and communicate openly and often.
- Keep school as the "safe" place.

Anxiety

- Anxiety is your brain telling you there is danger when there is not.”
- If possible consider classroom based education on stress management and discussion of anxiety and performance. (See handout on teaching stress management to children.)
- For older children and adolescents have them rate their level of classroom anxiety on the first day as part of a “get to know them” exercise. This will help you identify your anxious performers and help you to develop a strategy with them for your class (when called on, reports etc.)
- Use differential praise and questioning to help anxious children respond.
- Support and understanding are key. Normalize anxiety, but remember you cannot “force” someone to face their fears.
- Model stress management yourself; take a deep breath, say a positive coping thought out loud.
- Practice making mistakes and desensitize kids to “stupid” questions.
- Speak to the child separately, offer resources and referrals.
- Use nonverbal behaviors to reinforce coping skills (a wink, smile or nod).
- Show the anxiety vs. performance graph and talk about peak performance as your personal best.
- Remember, your goal is to create an environment where the anxious child will feel safe enough to take risks and “face their fear”. Celebrate even the smallest steps (but don’t overdo it for socially anxious kids!)

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