

High school students have identified that the most common anxieties experienced at school are:

- 1 Final exams/tests (92%)** – “I don’t like being tested on a bunch of stuff at once so it really stresses me out which makes me space out.”
- 2 Social situations (67%)** – “Anything involving other people is pretty much a nightmare for me.”
- 3 Class presentations (63%)** – “I hate presenting projects to the class ... I always think that it’s the end of the world when I have to present my project. I become a nervous wreck. I start stuttering, my hands and legs shake, and my face goes red.”
- 4 Homework (17%)** – “It’s like well I just [worked] five hours last night, I was exhausted. I need to sleep, I need to eat, I can’t be doing math homework at 12:00 every night. It’s ridiculous.”
- 5 Pressure from parents (13%)** – “Afraid of failure I guess ... and parents seem to put lots of pressure on kids to do well. Even receiving like a 70% to an 85% they bug you about not doing as good as you could’ve.”

“There really aren’t times that I don’t experience anxiety. For me personally, it’s a constant issue when I’m at school.”

“For me, there isn’t one single thing that gives me more anxiety than the other. Nearly every aspect of school causes me anxiety.”

“I experience anxiety at school on a daily basis I would say. ... There’s almost always this knot I feel in my stomach when I’m at school.”

Student Resources

Kids Help Phone
kidshelpphone.ca
1-800-668-6868
(available 24/7 for children and youth ages 5 - 21)

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)
www.cmha.ca

teenmentalhealth.org

Your school counsellor, your teacher, a friend

“I think anxiety would be a very deep, dark blue because anxiety reminds me of the feeling I get when I’ve been underwater for too long and the ocean gets darker the deeper you get. The worse [the] anxiety, the deeper you are. The deeper you get, the more suffocating it is.”



The Project

Their Voices: What High School Students are Saying About School-Related Anxiety

The purpose of the study is to further our understanding of anxiety as experienced by high school students, and how these anxieties can be mitigated.

Through 10 weekly confidential journal entries, and five focus groups, we asked students from grades 9, 10 and 11 what their greatest school-related anxieties were and to make suggestions for their teachers to help reduce these anxieties.

"Schools have a profound influence on children, their families and the community. Young peoples' ability and motivation to stay in school to learn and utilize what they learn is affected by their mental health. Schools are crucial in building or undermining self-esteem and a sense of confidence" (World Health Organization, 1995).

Teachers want to help and agree that they are part of the solution, but often feel they are unable to help (Froese-Germain & Riel, 2012).

The Findings

"What gives you the most anxiety at school?"



92% of students said they had anxiety before an exam or tests and during final exam week.



67% of students said they felt anxious during social situations.



63% of students said they had anxiety while presenting to the class.



17% of students said they felt anxiety when their teachers assigned too much homework.



13% of students said the pressure from their parents related to school work gave them anxiety.

Students were asked to describe the characteristics of an ideal teacher (one they would feel comfortable approaching with a mental health concern, or any concern).

RESPECTFUL REASSURING TRUSTWORTHY NICE UNDERSTANDING COOL
COMFORTABLE KNOWLEDGEABLE HUMOROUS CONFIDENT RESPONSIBLE
GOOD RELATIONSHIP EASY TO TALK TO RELATABLE INSPIRING OPEN CARING
FRIENDLY REALISTIC APPROACHABLE WILLING TO LISTEN CONFIDENTIAL
HAS THEIR OWN KIDS DOWN TO EARTH GENUINE INTEREST IN STUDENTS

Recommendations From Students to Address Their Top Three School-Related Anxieties

Final Exams and Tests

- Consider alternate formats such as open-book finals – focuses on learning not memorization.
- Establish a "drop-in" session for students to catch up if needed.
- Provide an anonymous "please review" box for lingering questions or concerns.

Social Situations

- School-wide BBQ or other events.
- Connect older students with younger students through relationship building.
- Reduce cliques through school-wide community building.
- Get to know classmates better by playing games, etc.
- Find a balance between students choosing groups and the teacher choosing the groups.

Presentations

- Provide choices or options for presentation and audience.
- One-on-one with a teacher.
- To their friends.
- Stand at the back of the room with a PowerPoint presentation at the front.
- To younger students (builds confidence).
- Present in groups instead of alone.
- Give more time to prepare and practice.
- Start slowly and build expectations.

10 Ways Teachers Can Support Students

- 1 Build a caring school/classroom culture.
- 2 Build strong, genuine and caring relationships with students.
- 3 Talk about mental health, provide resources, teach students the skills to manage their mental health.
- 4 Be sensitive to students' needs - observe, respond, check-in.
- 5 Provide an anonymous option for communication (e.g., question box, journal).
- 6 Reconsider assessment methods. For example don't give culminating exams, incorporate final projects or provide open-book exams with higher level questioning techniques.
- 7 Teach students study strategies, give time to review in class.
- 8 Provide instruction not instructions; re-teach in a different way.
- 9 Provide choices for presentation method/ audience and ensure expectations match outcomes.
- 10 Consider student context when giving homework.

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