What is anxiety

Anxiety is when your mind and body react to dangerous or unfamiliar situations with extreme fear. It is that sense of stress that anticipates to an event or a significant occasion.

Going back to school, in the middle of a pandemic, can be very stressful for students, as it is for parents and teachers.
Top Fears By Age

8-11 years old
- Fear of ghosts
- Fear of dying
- Fear of being sick
- Fear of failing at school
- Fear of peer rejection
- Fear of being home alone
- Fear of "bad guys"

18-20 years old
- Fear of germs and being sick
- Fear of being homeless
- Fear of death
- Fear of being an adult
- Fear of not finding life purpose
- Fear of academic or job performance
- Fear of looking like a fool or sports
- Fear of social issues
- Fear of not being part of others
- Fear of them thinking of them
Common anxieties

Some of the most common forms of anxiety these days are related to...

- Germs
- New classes
- Routines
- Changing classes/teachers
- Common areas (cafeteria, hallways, recess, gym...)

What are some signs of anxiety

Here are some of the signs of anxiety you might notice in students...

- Irritability and increase of defiant behavior
- Changes in appetite
- Refusal to go to school
- Sadness
- Lack of energy
- Inability to concentrate
- Upset stomach
- Increased heart rate
- Uncontrollable worry
- Irrational fear
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Isolating
How to talk to kids?

One of the most important things you can do is to talk with your child about what is happening and how the pandemic makes you feel as an adult. Let him or her know how this situation is affecting you.

Explain some things you are doing to minimize anxiety and how you are coping with this situation. Modeling coping skills and healthy habits is the best support you can show your child at this time.

Ask questions and let your child talk about his own feelings and fears, and validate them.
Validate anxiety

You can support your students at home by listening to their concerns and reaffirming that the schools are doing the best they can to keep all students, teachers and staff members safe.

What can we do?

❖ Check on your child frequently
  ➢ Listen to what he or she has to say
  ➢ Validate their emotions
  ➢ Let them know that their frustrations and concerns are understandable

❖ Teach them how to practice safety rules at school
  ➢ Wash hands frequently
  ➢ Use hand sanitizing
  ➢ Keep social distancing
  ➢ Wear face covering
Validate anxiety

What can we do?

❖ Practice healthy habits
  ➢ Maintain physical activity
  ➢ Eat healthy meals
  ➢ Follow a basic routine
  ➢ Make sure they get enough sleep

❖ Be a role model
  ➢ Practice breathing exercises
  ➢ Encourage your child with positive notes in their lunch box
  ➢ Remind them that they are helping protect others by following school safety protocols
  ➢ Read with your child the Smart Restart notifications to ensure he or she knows the district is working on safety and you are aware and in agreement with safety protocols
Types of Anxiety and Cognitive Triangle

**Types of Anxiety**

- **Generalized Anxiety**: An excessive amount of anxiety or worry in several areas of life, such as job responsibilities, health, finances, or minor concerns (e.g., completing housework).

- **Phobias**: A very intense fear of a specific situation or object, which is out of proportion to its actual threat. For example, a fear of giving speeches, or of spiders, could be considered a phobia.

- **Panic**: An extreme anxious response where a person experiences a panic attack. During a panic attack, the individual experiences numerous physical symptoms, and is overwhelmed by a feeling of dread.

**How Does Anxiety Grow?**

Anxiety drives people to avoid the things that scare them. When a "scary" thing is avoided, there is an immediate but short-lived sense of relief. However, the next time a similar threat arises, it feels even scarier. This creates a harmful cycle of avoidance, and worsening anxiety.
Coping strategies

Here are some strategies you can use to help your child cope with anxiety

❖ Focus on what you CAN control
❖ Limit media exposure
❖ Decatastrophize
❖ Engage in calming activities (mindfulness, meditation, apps)
Can/Can’t control

We know that there are things that we can control and things we cannot control.

If we cannot have any control over a situation (pandemic), all we can do is to have some calming techniques to cope with it.

However, our students need to understand that we can always have some control over our reaction to different situations.

FOCUS on what you CAN control!
Can/Can’t control

- Washing my hands and practicing good hygiene
- Staying home
- The things I consume (food, water, media & news)
- Self-care
  - My thoughts and actions
  - Reaching out for support and to help others
- Knowing that I am doing everything I can and being at peace with that
- The world’s situation and spread of the virus
- What other people do or don’t do to take care of themselves
- The government’s response
- Statistics and facts
- Laws and regulations
Limit Media Exposure

Secondary Trauma-- having feelings of trauma even though you have not been directly affected by the event.

While there is no hard and fast time limit, consider:

The Three C’s

❖ Child
❖ Content
❖ Context

Decatastrophize

Catastrophic thinking is a magnification of fears and is common when we experience anxiety. Decatastrophize is a cognitive technique used to reduce catastrophic thinking and help de-escalate the anxiety level of an individual.

How do we do that?

❖ Feelings feel real and are valid, but they are NOT always the truth.
❖ Identify the thoughts that are making you feel anxious.
❖ Challenge your thoughts and tell your feelings the truth.
❖ Take some time to think about what the truth is as you take some deep breaths
Decatastrophizing

Cognitive distortions are irrational thoughts that have the power to influence how you feel. Everyone has some cognitive distortions—they’re a normal part of being human. However, when cognitive distortions are too plentiful or extreme, they can be harmful.

One common type of cognitive distortion is called catastrophizing. When catastrophizing, the importance of a problem is exaggerated, or the worst possible outcome is assumed to be true. By learning to question your own thoughts, you can correct many of these cognitive distortions.

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<th>What are you worried about?</th>
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<th>How likely is it that your worry will come true? Give examples of past experiences, or other evidence, to support your answer.</th>
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<th>If your worry does come true, what’s the worst that could happen?</th>
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<th>If your worry does come true, what’s most likely to happen?</th>
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<th>If your worry comes true, what are the chances you’ll be okay...</th>
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Calming Activities - Mindfulness

Mind Yeti
Mindfulness for Kids and their Adults

What is Mindfulness?
Mindfulness: a state of nonjudgmental awareness of what's happening in the present moment, including the awareness of one's own thoughts, feelings, and senses.

Components of Mindfulness
Awareness: During a state of mindfulness, you will notice your thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations as they happen. The goal isn't to clear your mind or to stop thinking—it's to become aware of your thoughts and feelings, rather than getting lost in them.
Acceptance: The thoughts, feelings, and sensations that you notice should be observed in a nonjudgmental manner. For example, if you notice a feeling of nervousness, simply state to yourself: “I notice that I am feeling nervous.” There's no need to further judge or change the feeling.

Benefits of Mindfulness
- Reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Improved memory, focus, and mental processing speed
- Improved ability to adapt to stressful situations
- Greater satisfaction within relationships
- Reduced rumination (repetitively going over a thought or problem)
- Improved ability to manage emotions

Mindfulness Practice
Note: Mindfulness is a state of mind, rather than a particular action or exercise. However, without practice, mindfulness is difficult to achieve. These techniques are designed to help you practice.

Mindfulness Meditation
Sit in a comfortable place, and begin paying attention to your breathing. Notice the physical sensation of air filling your lungs, and then slowly begin to notice the sensations of your breath—how it feels, the rise and fall of your chest and abdomen, and so on. Then, turn your attention back to breathing.

Mindfulness Walk
While walking, make a point to practice mindfulness. Start by noticing how your body moves and feels with each step. Then, expand your awareness to your surroundings. What do you see? Hear? Smell? Feel? This technique can be expanded to other daily activities.

Body Scan
Pay close attention to the physical sensations throughout your body. Start with your feet, and move up through your legs, groin, abdomen, chest, back, shoulders, arms, hands, neck, and face. Spend anywhere from 15 seconds to 1 minute on each body part.

Five Senses
- Make a conscious effort to notice the present moment through each of your senses:
  - 5 things you see
  - 4 things you feel
  - 3 things you hear
  - 1 thing you taste
  - 1 thing you smell
Even though we all experience anxiety in different ways, there are common symptoms that you can find in terms of feelings, behaviors, thoughts, and cognitive experience.

The recommendation is for you to pay close attention to any changes in your child's behavior, for example avoiding regular or familiar situations, overreacting, or being defiant. Look for emotional signs of anxiety like distress, feeling overwhelmed, or extreme fear. Monitor your child's academic progress and stay in close communication with your child's teacher.

By monitoring and identifying any changes your child may be experiencing, you are not only helping but supporting his or her emotional well being. Ultimately, you are teaching your child that it is ok to feel anxious, but that anxiety can be under control by learning coping skills and/or calming (mindfulness) activities.
Questions

If you think you or child is experiencing significant anxiety and it is not manageable on your own, please reach out to your school counselor for more resources.