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The fear of childhood is growing. According to a study cited in a recent Washington Post article, the diagnosis of childhood anxiety in children ages 6-17 has increased by 20% in recent years. Anxiety is increasing in children of school age. The possible causes of fear are numerous. A short scan of some articles (coupled with my own observations and experiences) shows many potential contributors, including current news/world events, the pressure of social media, trauma, poverty, increased academic expectations, pressure from anxious families, and biological and genetic predispositions. For teachers, this is overwhelming. The causes feel immediate, and the symptoms (panic attacks, explosive behaviors, refusal to work, antisocial behavior, etc.) disrupt learning for everyone – which reinforces fear for all. Instead of focusing on what we can't control, we can focus on a few things we can. Let's create safe havens for children — classrooms where anxious children can find peace and comfort. The following three ideas are a great starting point. [tweet\_box design=default float=center] Three ways to reduce students' anxiety: Clean your classroom, attend routines, and use supportive language. #edchat #SEL #teachertalk [tweet\_box] Declutter Your Classroom Especially when the school year is in full swing, it's easy for classrooms to get shabby. When books and papers are stacked high, when walls are crowded with displays, and when materials are chaotic, students may feel overwhelmed, nervous, or frustrated. There are a few ways to clean things up: Flexible seating offers autonomy and the ability to find a comfortable workplace. Teacher Materials: Place binder, curriculum leaders, professional development resources, and other such materials behind curtains or in cupboards. At least we have hatched old materials and shelves. Student needs: discarded crayons and dried-out markers. Straighten supply containers. Store supplies for previous (or future) units a-site (or at least in containers that are neat and stacked out of the way). Classroom Ads: Take down anchor charts that are not in use. Stick up posters with a corner hanging on it. Change old bulletin boards to make them more up-to-date. Have students assemble a piece of work they are proud of, on a piece of building paper, and decorate the room with student work. Reduce furniture: Can you get rid of a few desks? Is there a junky table in the back of the room that collects clutter but that no one sits? It's amazing how much more open more inviting a room with less furniture feels! Create a cozy feeling: Take a walk through your favorite café, bookstore or restaurant for classroom design inspiration. How are these rooms set up to be inviting? You can add a few plants to your room or put some small white lights along a bookshelf. Perhaps a floor lamp or a small fish tank would create a cozy feeling. Remember that the physical environment of a classroom classroom how students feel and act. Have students help. Are you afraid that some of these suggestions will take a lot of time (if you're already exhausted)? Let students help! Invite children to stay for a break or a free time to create a new bulletin board ad. At the end of a Friday, take 30 minutes to clean and straighten the room together. It will be fun for them, and they will feel more possession in the classroom! Revisit Transition Routines You have taught routines in the first weeks of school. How do they work? Transition periods, whether from reading to math, in a separate room or from one class to another, are often stressful times for children. Here are some ways to ensure that transition routines are appropriate. Are they realistic? Do students really have enough time to move from one place to another? If many students complain about the time they have, or when many seem hasty and breathless, chances are they need more time. Are expectations development-appropriate? Should we really expect six-year-olds to walk in a single line of files while they look straight? Should we really expect ten-year-olds not to talk when they move from one place to another? Set realistic expectations and students will be more successful and help them feel calm and relaxed. Are they respectful? How could the feeling of our classroom improve when, instead of expecting students to enter the room and sit directly to an entrance task, students have to take two minutes of relaxed social interaction? Imagine how much more respected students might feel if, instead of trying to squeeze every minute out of each day, we allowed them to breathe between tasks and classes and relax. Could they even be better able to learn vigorously if they had a chance to decompress a little? Reset as needed. Just because we have taught and practiced a certain routine does not mean that we have to stick with it if it does not work. We can always opt for a reset to try out a different routine. You can ask your students for ideas on how to make transitions realistic and respectful. Introduce and practice the new routine, and then wait for a Monday or the day back from a holiday to make it official! See your language What we say (and how we say it) has a profound impact on how our students feel. With the best intentions, we all fall into language habits that are our best intentions and actual goals for the students See if any of the following language suggestions could help alleviate students' anxiety. Hide anger: Especially when the year has got off to a good start, it can be frustrating when students ask us questions to which we think they should know the answers. Where should I put this paper?, asks one student. We could betray irritations and snap: how often do I have to say that? Where have we put papers in all year round? This is supposed to be a disgrace. It takes fewer words and is kinder to say: In the finished work work Praise: This may seem counterintuitive. Shouldn't praise help children feel better? Actually, it is often not. Praise is a form of evaluation. A steady stream of good job! and Awesome! sends the message that students are always judged, which can increase anxiety. Manipulative praise (I like the way Jenny sits quietly and is willing to learn! — a message that is actually addressed to her fellow human beings) can set up students as competitors, stoke resentment, and strain student relationships. Rethink how to encourage hard work: Without meaning, we can stoke students' fear by encouraging them to work hard. Check out the chart below for some ideas. Instead of... (What's wrong with that?) Consider... Try your best. Can you ever do your best? Be realistic instead. Put some solid effort. Good readers make connections when reading. Children might be worried: If I don't make connections yet, does that mean I'm not a good reader? Instead, focus on the benefits of strategies. Connecting while reading will help you better understand and enjoy your reading. Next year, their teachers will expect you to ... This sets the tone that next year is scary and that children are not ready. Instead, focus on this year! Something that will help you succeed now is... It must be repeated. Many factors that cause anxiety in students are far out of our control, so let's focus on some things we can. Of course, adding some plants to our classrooms or adding a minute or two to transition times is not a magic cure. (If only it were so easy!) However, these seemingly small adjustments to our classrooms can help create safe havens for all students. Mike Anderson Mike Anderson has been an educator for more than 25 years. He has been a teacher in public schools for 15 years, teaching preschool teachers, training swimming teams in schools, and teaching classes at university degrees. Today, he works as a consultant for professional learning for teachers in the U.S. and beyond. In 2004, Mike was awarded the National Milken Educator Award, and in 2005 he was a finalist for NH Teacher of the Year. In 2020, he was awarded the Outstanding Educational Leader Award by The NHASCD for his work as a consultant. As a bestselling author, Mike has written eight books about great teaching and learning. If he doesn't work, Mike can hang out with his family, cultivate his perennials gardens and look for new walkways around his home in Durham, NH. School can be a stressful place for children, both as well as academically. Anxious minds can stand in the way of students teaching their potential. Teachers are at the forefront of helping students alleviate their fears and strains, and with the right tools and strategies, they can get anxious students back on track. Common classroom anxiety anxiety in the classroom is pretty normal, and knowing the common types is necessary to help students cope. Some typical problems that affect the include: Classrooms accepted by classmates are their own unique social communities, and when students struggle to fit in with their peers, it can lead to anxiety. Being selected last for teams and not having a seat in the lunch room can have a serious impact on students. Like others, some students are particularly concerned about school performance and fear being seen as too smart or too stupid. These students are unlikely to attend classes, and they may also refuse to do homework or other activities. Separation anxiety students with separation anxiety overly worrying about their parents leaving, often to the point of classroom disruption. This anxiety tends to be most common in younger students and is often seen during the drop-offs and during the early part of the day. Specific phobias Although classrooms can't always prepare for all phobias, it's beneficial to be aware of what's common. Everyday things like pets in the classroom and thunderstorms can panic some students. Identify Student Anxiety The signs of student anxiety are not always easy to recognize and can sometimes be misidentified. It is important that teachers remember that only medical serators can diagnose students, but the role of the teacher is to look for red flags. Some of these flags may be: Excessive absences If the school causes anxiety among students, they will try to avoid them. You can fake a disease or not administer it. Once at school, they can also routinely ask to go to the nurse's bathroom or office. Somatic discomfort Similar to excessive absences, anxious students can complain of headaches, stomach pain, nausea, palpitations, operating disorders or other physical ailments caused by excessive stress. Outbursts or disruptive behavior Anxious students can ask frequent and repetitive questions, speak out of line or become restless. Anxiety caused by bullying or group pressure can cause one student to strike at another. Avoid being called in class Often students who do not raise their hands in class do so because they do not know the answer. However, some students avoid volunteering because they fear the judgment of their classmates, or they have stage fright and can't handle the attention they pay. Distorted students with fear can develop a compulsion for failure and perfectionism. They tend to think all or nothing or think catastrophically (a single mistake will ruin everything). Teachers can always screw these students with phrases like I or nothing is always heard correctly. Reduce student anxiety With the practice, children can learn to slow down their anxious brains, and teachers can help them. Here are some activities that can make it easier for anxious students in the classroom. Take it Outside Sometimes a change of landscape is all students need to ease their thoughts. If the whole class takes a break, everyone can benefit, and no student is singled out. Go and talk Pull the student aside ask what bothers him. As a bonus, the bit of movement can increase endorphins. Make it positive It is difficult to be anxious when you write about positive things. Invite students to keep a thank you diary in which they can write whenever fear or misfortune strikes. Exercise Deep Breathing Deep Breathing helps students to mitigate the physical reactions of stress. Meet one-on-one meetings with students who are afraid are particularly critical when they express praise or criticism, both of which have the potential to cause embarrassment. Accommodation for older students, ADA test accommodations can make all the difference. Children with anxiety are likely to do better at school if given the right tools, such as longer time and cue sheets. Choose from more than 280 online training courses to promote and re-certify teacher salaries. Available for CEU/clock hours or in partnership with regionally accredited universities for graduate loans. Browse Courses More strategies and interventions for dealing with anxiety in the classroom Identification and mitigation of stressors in the classroom is an important part of classroom management. In Advancement Courses strategies to address students' anxiety, you develop actionable classroom strategies to support students struggling with anxiety. The interventions you develop in the course help you create a classroom environment where students can deal with their stressors and focus on learning. Learn.

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