

Anxiety in education: the impact it has on people and best ways to cure anxiety

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An End to Anxious Education

Anxiety is one of the most prevalent mental disorders in America with approximately forty million citizens experiencing it, according to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America. Unfortunately, many of those individuals are students going through the American public school system. While school can be stressful enough on its own, the addition of an anxiety disorder can make the entire process extremely difficult. Psychology Today claims that the average high school student in the twenty-first century experiences the same levels of anxiety as the average psychiatric patient in the 1950's (Leahy). Sixty years ago, these levels of anxiety were enough to result in professional treatment; in today's world, these anxiety-ridden students are expected to navigate a school system that is not designed for them. Change is needed in the way students with anxiety are treated in the American public school system.

The typical public high school in American is designed for students free of the burdens of anxiety. Anxiety is a demon that strikes when it pleases, not always when the counselor is available or a student is allowed to leave the classroom at all. To top it off, students with anxiety are more likely to be bullied in a school environment than their anxiety-free peers (Swearer). It is clear that anxiety is an issue that can interfere with an individual's wellbeing. In a school setting, anxiety can have detrimental effects on a student's grades, attendance, and attention. A strong negative relationship exists between academic performance and anxiety. As anxiety increases, academic performance suffers (Nadeem). Academic performance that exceeds

expectations is necessary for a successful school, thus making anxiety an issue that public schools should want to prevent or alleviate among its students. Due to the prevalence of anxiety among students attending American public schools, it is necessary for the schools to accommodate for them. Improvement is needed in the identification of anxiety-ridden students, the accommodations for their needs, and preventative actions taken by the American public school system in order to reduce the prevalence anxiety among students. Anxiety has become a real issue among America's youth, and change is needed in the schools that these students are spending their developmental years in.

Anxiety is not always obvious among those who suffer from it. Sometimes it is written off as part of growing up. In some cases, it is diagnosed as ADHD or simply a behavioral disorder. Because it is not always apparent that a student is suffering from it, it's not easy to accommodate to their needs. Many students with anxiety don't feel comfortable telling someone at school about it. One aspect that could be improved upon is the identification of students with anxiety. Sometimes, when it takes the form of malignant pre-test nervousness or concern over a big project, anxiety is easy to identify. Other times, anxiety does not easily present itself. Educators should be encouraged and informed on how to keep an eye out for symptoms of what could be anxiety. This would improve things in that educators could then put forth the effort required to tend to the student's needs. This would also allow them to inform parents of their student's situation since many times parents work much of the day and do not spend a great deal of time with their child.

Since educators at school do spend time with students on a daily basis, it would be easier for them to identify the anxiety.

Anxiety takes a variety of forms in an educational environment. Students may suffer from separation anxiety, which makes their schooldays harder in that they are overly worried about being apart from their guardians. This can result in inattentiveness, strong emotions that may lead to breakdowns, and potentially school refusal. In younger students, separation anxiety is common because they have spent the first few years of their life with their parents by their sides. As students grow older, if separation anxiety remains an issue, then other forms of anxiety could be lingering within. While a fear of going to school can signify anxiety, a disinterest in returning to school after a vacation or a sick day may also be a symptom of anxiety. Students with anxiety may experience overwhelming worry in regards to making up the work they missed while they were gone. Generally, students with attendance issues are seen as lazy, but they could actually be experiencing anxiety. Other students suffer in social environments, and as school is a primarily social environment, things can get difficult for those students. Students who lack an interest in developing social relationships or even possess a fear of socialization entirely may be suffering from social anxiety. For students with social anxiety, the school day can feel much longer and more painful than what it needs to be. Spending hours a day surrounded by peers that you do not feel connected to, being forced to work in groups of people who cause intimidation, and having to communicate with strangers in a school setting can all worsen anxiety in students. Selective mutism is also

a symptom that may indicate the presence of anxiety. This can cause students to become uncomfortable when required to speak, which can complicate a student's ability to reach the expectations placed upon them at school. In some students, anxiety can essentially lock up a student's brain and make it difficult to focus on anything but the anxiety that is taking over. Anxiety can also cause restlessness in students for similar reasons. While anxiety sometimes looks like general inattentiveness, disinterest, and laziness, it can sometimes appear as if it is a different disorder entirely.

It is not uncommon for anxiety to be perceived as a different disorder and be treated as such. OCD may arise as result of a student's attempt to manage their anxiety. Acts of constant hand-washing or counting may actually be an effort to alleviate anxiety (Ehmke). Anxiety may sometimes appear to be ADHD or an attention disorder. While it sounds close enough, ADHD medication will do nothing to help the child if the source of the problems is anxiety. Disruptive behavior as a result of anxiety may be written off as a behavioral problem. When students with untreated anxiety find themselves in an anxiety-triggering situation, they may act out. Students with anxiety are generally believed to be quiet and timid, and so this manifestation of anxiety is not usually properly diagnosed. It is important for anxiety to be identified properly in order for the correct treatment to be implemented. Because students spend a lot of time at school, and many of their symptoms will arise there, it is the responsibility of educators to improve their identification of anxiety in students.

Improper handling of student anxiety by staff also contributes to the increasing levels of anxiety among students. Public schools in American are not an inherently safe place for students with anxiety. Halls cluttered with loud and careless students, edgy teachers who express little to no desire to help students cope with emotions, and counselors who would rather berate a student than give them advice. There should be an outlet within the school for students with anxiety. The abundance of standardized tests, benchmarks, ACT's and more lead to the impression that the primary concern of educators is how well you perform in their class. Stoic and strict teachers are not easily approachable by students with anxiety, and so it is unlikely that they will seek help on their own. Anxiety can lead to students being late to class or missing it entirely, and more often than not they are met with disdain from their teachers. There needs to be an understanding that anxiety interferes with a student's ability to adhere to a strict school schedule. Anxiety does not always arise at a convenient time. Oftentimes there is not a counselor available when needed. This fact alone can cause heightened anxiety among students in that they know there is nowhere to turn if an anxiety attack strikes. In order for students with anxiety to perform at their full potential in a public school environment, the administration of the schools needs to improve the way these students experience school. This can be done by incorporating safe spaces into schools, improving the counseling system, bringing in plans that protect these students, or even developing special schools or programs designed to alleviate anxiety in students. The addition of these accommodations could potentially encourage anxiety-ridden students to reenter the school environment if they, for example, were

experiencing school refusal. Students struggling in school could begin to manage their anxious feelings at school and focus more on their studies. Indubitably, accommodating to the scholarly needs of a student with anxiety would be a beneficial step in improving their academic experiences.

Quandax Road in Fairfax County, Virginia has already made bounds in regards to their accommodations for students with anxiety. Through the implementation of their Aspire program, they have been able to make things easier for their particularly anxious school body. Aspire is specifically designed to reduce the daily hardships a student with anxiety may experience on any given school day. Aspire students are allowed to enter the classroom through the back of the school, away from the main bunch of students getting off busses, forming clusters to discuss the newest gossip, and in some cases, bullying. They are even allowed to enter the opaque-windowed classroom after the bell rings as to avoid the potential of seeing other students. This simple adjustment makes a world of difference for students who cannot bear the thought of surrounding themselves with all their classmates. Upon entering the classroom, students are not typically greeted in efforts to reduce attention drawn to them. Tall wooden boards are sometimes placed around students to make them more comfortable.

Students are also free to do their work online, which reduces the anxiety surrounding a fear of makeup work upon return after a break. In addition, there is an abundance of therapists and social workers in the room, ready to help. They use methods like basketball, rewards for progress, and exposure therapy to help the students make progress. Aspire is a prime example of

the many ways that schools can work to alleviate anxiety in students; however, preventative action is better than corrective action. Schools can also work to prevent anxiety in their students.

Students are not generally taught how to manage stress and anxiety, save a brief section in their single health class. If schools began educating students on stress and the ways to deal with it, it would be less likely that serious school-related anxiety disorders arose. Students could have routine visits to a school counselor to assess their overall anxiety levels, therefore allowing them to make changes if anxiety was on the rise. Schools can also work to reduce a number of stressors in a student's life and at which point they are presented. Marian Wilde from Great! Schools offers several tactics schools can employ to help reduce stressors. She claims that the primary source of childhood stress in schools is standardized testing. State-level standardized tests, such as the ISATs in Illinois, are particularly stressful for many students. Some grade levels require students to pass these tests in order to move on to the next grade, which results in third graders fearing the possibility of being held back. One method of lowering anxiety in students would be reducing the significance of standardized testing or revising it entirely (Wilde). Homework has also become a primary stressor in the life of a student, as many feel that it is being assigned in greater amounts and at younger ages than ever before. Examining homework policies or perhaps coordinating between educators to reduce the overall homework load at any given time could potentially aid students in managing their stress and anxiety. Additionally, students could actually be given the opportunity to

sleep during the school day. Many students are up late into the night studying or scrambling to finish their overload of homework. This leads to anxious students, torn between their inherent need to sleep and their present need to complete their assignments and stay on top of their studies. Overall, that results in groggy students with reduced ability to adequately perform during a school day. According to CalmClinic. com, lack of sleep can contribute to anxiety by reducing an individual's ability to cope with stress. Teaching stress management and reducing stressors in a school environment are both viable methods of reducing stress among a student body. The reduction of stress in schools would aid the overall goal of improving the way anxiety is treated in a school setting.

Students in America's public schools are experiencing anxiety at greater levels than ever before. School has become more stressful and demanding, but the overall structure has not adapted to fit the needs of these increasingly anxious students. In order to reduce anxiety levels in students, it is crucial for improvement to take place in the way these students are treated in a school environment. Anxiety needs to be identified in students before it becomes a serious issue, and students with anxiety need to be identified in order to accommodate to their educational needs. Schools should implement strategies to manage preexisting anxiety in students in order to ensure them a comfortable and productive school day. Schools also need to work towards helping prevent anxiety from arising in students by reducing stressors and teaching stress management. The result of these

improvements will result in more success among students and happier citizens overall.