



# Counselor's Corner

## Topic for the Month: Test Anxiety and How to Help

Greetings MLCPA Family!

Testing season is upon us, and it has everyone on edge. So, the focus of this month is around understanding why some of us have those feelings around this time and, as a result, don't perform as well on tests even though we know the material.

### What is test anxiety?

While most people feel some level of anxiety before a test, test anxiety is a form of performance anxiety and can impair learning and hurt test performance. Test anxiety is a combination of physical symptoms and emotional reactions that interfere with your ability to perform well on tests.

Symptoms of test anxiety can include physical symptoms such as sweating, nausea, rapid heartbeat or simply the feeling of "butterflies" in the stomach. Other symptoms include avoidance of the test taking situations and the inability to concentrate.



### Ways to Help

- **Take care of your physical needs:** This is the **MOST** important. It is hard to comprehend material or use strategies we have learned when our physical needs are not met, so make sure you get a good night's sleep the day before the test; eat a good breakfast and bring healthy snacks, if allowed. Being hungry and/or sleepy during a test increases the likelihood of negative thoughts and negative outcomes.
- **Learn & practice relaxation and mindfulness techniques:** Techniques like deep breathing, grounding or progressive muscle relaxation can help calm a busy mind and relax a tense body helping you focus or refocus on the test.
- **Establish a pretest routine:** Figure out what works best for you when getting prepared for a big test and do that every time you test. Familiarity helps reduce stress and anxiety.
- **Study early and efficiently:** The better prepared you feel for a test the more relaxed you will feel.
- **Get to class or the testing space early:** Rushing raises stress and anxiety levels.
- **Words of affirmation from support systems:** A lot of anxiety comes from the high stakes of testing and the feeling that this single test will make or break their future. While to cannot change what's at stake, you can reassure your child that this test does not define who they are, their level of intelligence or their future and that you will support them regardless of the results.

## Relaxation techniques to try before or during the test

### Deep Breathing

Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds, hold it for 4 seconds and exhale for 6 seconds, then repeat for about 3 to 5 minutes to refocus.

or

Every 2 pages or sections, stop and take a deep breath in, hold it for 5 seconds, and exhale for 5 seconds. Do this as many times as you need to before you begin the next page.

Focusing on your breathing, even for a minute, helps to reset the brain and allow you to calm down and refocus on the task in front of you.

### Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Focus on tensing various muscle groups in your body and then releasing them to create a feeling of relaxation.

Start by tensing your toes in your shoes, hold for about 5 seconds then release.

Next, tense up the muscles in your legs, hold for about 5 seconds then release.

Continue this step through different muscle groups in the body and focus on the sensation of relaxation you get after each release.

### 5-4-3-2-1 /Senses Grounding Technique

- ❖ What are **5** things you can see? Try to focus on small details or less obvious things.
- ❖ What are **4** things you can feel? Notice the feeling of the material of your clothes, the chair you are sitting in, the computer keys or pencil you are touching.
- ❖ What are **3** things you can hear? Pay attention to the sounds your mind and ears usually tune out like the ticking of the clock, the sound of traffic outside, the footsteps of the testing proctor.
- ❖ What are **2** things you can smell? Try to notice the smells in the air around you, pleasant or unpleasant. The idea is to notice them.
- ❖ What is **1** thing you can taste? If you have a snack or gum, focus on the flavors you taste. If not, focus on the taste already in your mouth. Can you still taste breakfast? Or the toothpaste you used?

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