



Happy It's May Railroaders!

May in school can be a refreshing and busy time of the school year. It can also be when we start to see stress/anxiety levels in ourselves and others start to pop up as the school year winds down...and testing becomes a more frequent experience in everyone's daily.

It is hard to believe we are nearly 35 weeks into a 40 week school year. As mentioned in past articles this year, it is important to be mindful that this is a race not a sprint. Finishing strong in these last few weeks of the school year can make a difference in achieving personal goals and success...and for some, this helps to keep summer school off the agenda for summer! It can be a stressful time for many.

Stress can be good; a motivator, a mindset, a focal point to a goal. But when it gets too intense and/or couples with higher levels of anxiety, it can actually do the opposite and keep you from achieving your goals, performing tasks on time.

Students, during this time of year face a handful of stressors in the form of standardized tests. The stakes may feel higher to students (and teachers) which can fuel their anxiety. From state testing to Regents exams, these can be overwhelming if not approaching from a growth mindset. Below are *Five Tips to Help Cope with Test Anxiety*... these are helpful strategies for students, parents and even teachers to be mindful of as we enter the test taking season.

### **1. LISTEN TO YOUR CONCERNS ABOUT TESTS - AND ABOUT THE FUTURE.**

Many school tests help to determine academic standing, benchmarks for academic growth and even where a student will go beyond graduation. These tests may be especially stressful for teens with learning and thinking differences who may feel unsure about their future. Regardless, having an adult or peer who listens to hear, versus listens to reply, is a huge support for someone going through stressful mindsets around testing...or any performance anxiety. Listen, reflect, and give self permission to progress versus trying for perfection

### **2. HELP YOURSELF OR OTHERS AVOID STRESSFUL CRAMMING.**

Last minute cramming for an exam can increase stress and anxiety. Most of this stems from issues and struggles around organization and time management. One strategy to help manage this is to create a monthly calendar or timeline checklist of tests, projects, or other academic assessments that fall into the worry list category for you as a student. From here, the person can set up a weekly schedule to pinpoint the important test days and when to plan time to review before each quiz or test. Blocking off dedicated time helps to keep balance, and when things seem chaotic in a stressed/anxious mindset...this can be a beacon of light to get through that worry storm.

### **3. BE SURE YOU KNOW YOUR TESTING SUPPORTS/RESOURCES**

Knowing what your specific stressors or needs are can help others help you reduce your anxiety/stress levels. When students have routines or strategies that they use for managing stress, encourage this behavioral choice as it will help to better assess what is being tested; not their ability to test. If a person has testing accommodations because of a specific document/plan, it is important to both self advocate and, for adult supports, provide opportunities to facilitate those supports.



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#### 4. ELIMINATE SURPRISES WITH INFO IN CONTEXT WITH THE TEST ITSELF

Some High Schoolers become anxious when they don't know what to expect from the tests they take. Will this be a short answer or multiple choice, is it timed, what will others think if I am still working and everyone else is finished quickly? Being proactive and discussing what type or combination of questions will be on the test (presets) allows students to know what to expect and be proactive in how they are preparing for the test/quizzes they are about to take. This builds confidence going into the tests, lessens levels of anxiety and stress. Additionally, communicating what you as a student struggle with specifically helps adults to focus their support on what you need versus what they assume you want help with. This will help with practicing in advance the skills and information needed for the testing itself.

#### 5. COMMUNICATE (SELF AND WITH SUPPORTIVE ADULTS) THAT SETBACKS HAPPEN...AND THAT IS OK

Even with good study habits, some students with learning and thinking differences may not do well on tests. They may start dreading the tests and become anxious over them because they are afraid of failing; both the test and even fear of how it impacts the overall year/grade. Try countering that fear by coming up with an action plan for after a disappointing test grade. You can try a strategy line tell yourself/your student: "I know you [I] studied hard for that test. Now you [I] know what you did effort wise and what did or didn't work so well. Let's talk about (reflect on) what could be done better the next time you [I] take a similar test."

Walking yourself through, or processing with someone with whom you respect their opinion, can go a long way to reducing current anxiety around tests, and build confidence for future testing or academic performance.

Take a few minutes with someone who you trust and respect to review some of these strategies and maybe try a few before the next big test or exam you have coming up...you may just find yourself less stressed and more confident in your abilities and academic performance.

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