

*Not in the Best Interest of Self:
9 Strategies for Helping Students
Challenged by Anxiety Conditions*

Summit on School Climate and Culture

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Anxiety flavors

- Separation Anxiety
- Selective mutism
- Phobias
- Generalized anxiety
- Social anxiety disorder
- Obsessive compulsive disorder
- Panic disorder
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Anxiety:

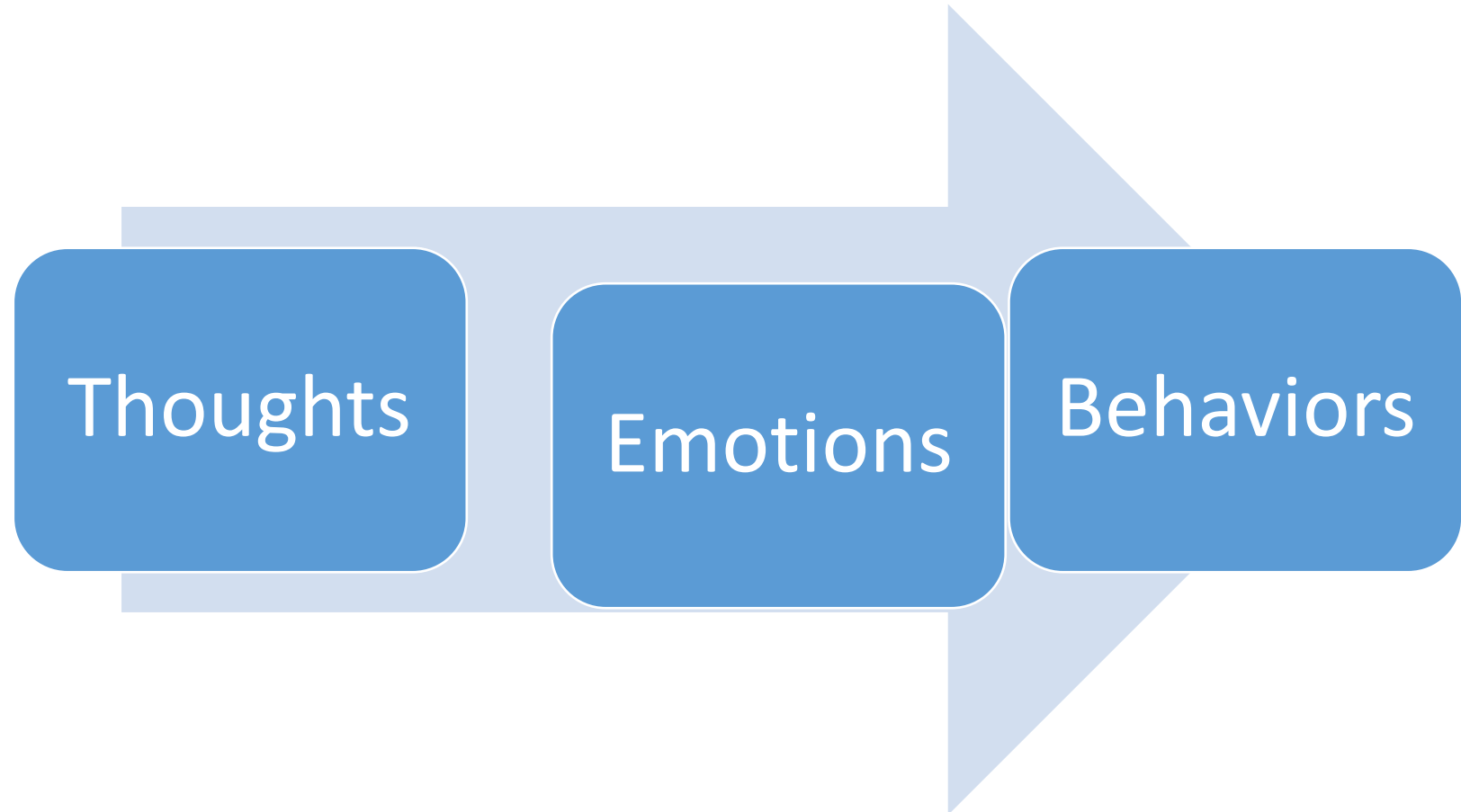
Thoughts, Feelings, and Behaviors

Cognitive-behavioral model of anxiety disorders

- Biology/genetics and what we are taught from others come together
- We may get the message to “stop feeling!” When we feel, the pressure to stop our emotions creates anxiety
- Thoughts and repressing our feelings can lead to distorted feelings, an inability to cope, and an overwhelming sense of pending disaster or doom
- “Cognitive Distortions”

#1 Changes in thinking: cognitive restructuring

- Cognitive Behavioral Modification/Therapy (CBT)



#2

Helping students “know” themselves

- **Psychoeducation:** Learning about your temperament, your personality, your unique cognitive & emotional needs; understanding how anxiety works within yourself
- **Monitoring:** Recognizing your early warning signs: “feelings”
- **Relaxation training:** Calming skills to manage arousal
- **Cognitive retraining:** Replacing negative thought patterns with more positive and constructive thoughts
- **Assertiveness training:** Teaching skills designed to get needs met, including skills for handling teasing or bullying
- **Behavior training:** Problem solving/conflict solving, social, relationship, communication, and behavior skills

#3 Relaxation for *Balance & Focus*

Fight or Flight

- Stress trips the fight/flight response system
- Adrenaline & cortisol flow
- Logic & focus are diminished
- Reacting, not responding
- Chronic stress leads to high blood pressure, increased heart rate, and muscle tension

Relaxation

- Health protecting
- Improved ability to plan and respond
- Less distorted thinking
- E.g., “Breath in the clouds”, Stress cards
- And...



#4 Finding the assets: *Reframing*

Negative feeling/sounding

- Avoid
- Hide
- Refuse
- Worry

Positive feeling/sounding

- Cautious
- Carefully observe
- Think before you act
- Get clear about what it takes

#5 Power Poses

www.gostrengths.com

renee@gozen.com

“Power Poses”, promoted by SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY researcher Amy Cuddy

SMALL SPACE

When you feel overwhelmed and worried, you may want to not even be seen. You may “shrink” the space you are occupying.

BIG SPACE

Actually practicing “taking up more space” has been shown to lower feelings of discomfort and increase social confidence.

#6 Teaching Social Skills

Boy's Town Press: Treating Youth with DSM-IV Disorders

- Asking for help
- Stress management
- Expressing emotions
- Making positive statements
- Identifying feelings
- Optimism
- Use of leisure time

#7 Accommodations In the classroom for expressions of anxiety

What you might see

- Frequent erasing, starting over
- Refusing to get started
- Worry about a test

- Resisting getting involved
- Avoiding participating in class discussions

How to respond

- Praise quality of effort, not perfect work
- 1:1 hurdle encouragement
- Small grades, not huge; extra credit options
- Incorporate interests & expertise

(#7) More accommodations

What you might see

- A noticeable rise in discomfort
- Discomfort in large gatherings
- Escalating tension

- Test time pressure
- Fear of answering questions
- Discomfort reporting in front of the class

How you might help

- Send on an errand; “therapeutic bouncing”
- Allow to select a “vantage point” seat/place
- “Decompression zone” – a person who can assist with relaxation skills
- Extra time; a quiet zone alternate place
- Determine: “yes/no” or “essay” response comfort
- Allow audio recording instead of oral reporting

#8 Support from & with peers

- Watch for comfortable relationships, and pair the student with those students
- Consistent structure & routine
- Allow the student to watch others to “see” how to participate
- Accept nonverbal communication - nodding, pointing to words or pictures, drawing, gesturing
- Appreciate any social interaction or communication

#9 The Power of Self talk

- Teaching skills to help the student stop, reflect, and think clearly
- Knowing when to stop thinking
- From irrational to rational

Thank you for your work for students who struggle with anxiety. You have the opportunity to improve their lives!

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