

Test Anxiety and Your Child

March is the month of MSA! Third and Fifth graders will be taking state standardized tests that will be one measure of their academic progress. It's a good time to remind ourselves of the signs and symptoms of test anxiety, and its possible effects on your child. Test anxiety can become a distractor to your child's true abilities, inhibiting performance and depressing test scores. In addition, it is an uncomfortable feeling that may cause your child to seem withdrawn and apprehensive about school.

What should I look for?

If your child is experiencing test anxiety, (s)he may experience one or more of these symptoms:

- Sweating
- Dizziness
- Heart palpitations
- Stomach or head aches
- Difficulty sleeping
- Bedwetting
- Crying
- Overall nervousness or unusual fidgeting

What Can I Do?

- Really *listen* to what your child is saying. Try to be casual about the testing, and assure your child that feeling worried or anxious is normal. Avoid *excessive* reassurances ("You'll do *great!*"), as this may make the child feel that you are not being honest.
- Keep informed about what tests your child will be taking, and what they will be used for (ie: placement, determining growth, etc.)
- Assure your child that (s)he will have other opportunities to show what they have learned. The test is not his/her only chance.
- It is not possible to 'cram' for the MSA, or other standardized tests. Assure your child that they have been taught everything they need to know to do well on the test.
- Share your own experiences of important tests that you have taken, and how everything turned out alright in the end.
- Have your child picture him/herself doing well. Practice positive thoughts, such as, "I don't have to be perfect." And "I can be nervous later, right now, I have to concentrate on taking this test."
- Don't allow your child to avoid the situation. ("OK, you can stay home today")
- Don't be impatient. ("Just take the test. What are you so worried about?")
- Remind your child of ways to relax, such as taking a deep breath when they feel overwhelmed.
- Assure your child that while tests are important, you will love them no matter what!
- **Finally, don't underestimate the simple steps of a good night's sleep, and healthy breakfast on test day!**

It can be hard to distinguish normal anxiety, from a more serious problem. Be sure to consult with your child's teacher, or your school counselor, if you are worried about your child's anxiety level.

Resources for this article:

Test Anxiety: Conceptualization and Remediation Strategies by John Zbornik

Communicating with Your Child about Test Anxiety from www.uft.org

The Parent Letter; A Letter for Parents by the NYU Child Study Center

Parent Spot from Mohonasen Central School District – www.monohonasen.org

For more information, consider these resources:

The Institute of HeartMath

www.heartmath.org/education/testedge/why.php

Family Education Network

www.familyeducation.com/article/0,1120,66-2127,00.html

The American Institute of Stress

www.stress.org