

## **Some Facts Psychologists Know About.....Test and Performance Anxiety**

When I was talking with students the other day, I noticed that when I mentioned the word "WASL," all the students started to shudder and one student exclaimed, "Please don't say that word!" At home, you may have seen other signs of anxiety as the start of WASL testing approaches for 3rd – 5th graders.

I consulted the "experts" at the University of Cincinnati, and this is what I found out! I hope it helps.

- Many students experience some nervousness or apprehension before, during, or after an exam. This kind of anxiety can be a powerful motivator.
- Too much anxiety can be detrimental, especially if students find themselves thinking "I can't do this" or "I'm stupid," feel their heart racing or find it difficult to breathe, suddenly "know" the answer after turning in the test, feel like they "go blank," or become distracted, overwhelmed, or frustrated.
- Test anxiety can develop because of some prior negative experience with test taking, a lack of confidence, a fear of failure, a lack of preparation, or when a student's self-worth is too closely tied to the test.
- Fortunately, there are several things that students can do to make test anxiety manageable.

**Preparations** – Make sure your child eats good foods & gets adequate rest prior to the test.

**Keep a positive attitude** – Help your child to develop reasonable expectations, avoid negative thoughts and encourage them self. Teach your child how to engage in "positive self-talk." Some examples might "I'm ready....I can do this...I'm prepared...I will do my best...my best is good enough."

**Relaxation techniques** – When anxious, we often take shallow breaths, and when we feel like we are not getting enough air, we tend to get more anxious. Have your child practice taking 2 - 3 slow deep breaths when they are feeling anxious and have them imagine taking the test feeling confident and relaxed, as if it was another classroom assignment.

**Learn good test-taking skills** – Teach your child not to panic if they can't remember something right away; tell them to answer questions they know and then go back to other ones; teach

them to read the questions and the directions carefully before they begin.

**Gain Perspective** – Teach your child that one mistake does not equal failure and that one bad performance does not mean they are worthless. Take some time to talk about the most likely consequences of their performance. Develop phrases that are realistic to counter the tendency to catastrophize. An example might be, “This is just one test.”

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