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Managing Exam Anxiety

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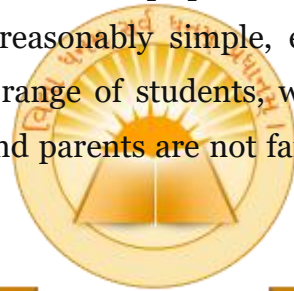
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ABSTACT

Exam anxiety is one of the most important aspects of negative thoughts and has direct negative effects on school performance. Exam anxiety is a psychological condition that involves severe distress before, during and/or after an exam, making it impossible for students to do deliver best performance. As any parent or teacher knows, exam can create crippling anxiety in students—and anxious kids can perform below their true abilities. This is because highly anxious children are more sensitive to failure and react more to evaluation from adults than low-anxious children do. More specifically, high-anxious children have strong drives to avoid criticism and failure because they fear negative evaluation. In contrast, low-anxious children are more motivated to approach success and obtain praise since they do not have as much fear of failure. These differing motivational patterns have important behavioral consequences. But new research in cognitive psychology and science is giving us a clear idea of the link between stress and performance, and allowing experts to develop specific strategies for helping kids manage their fears. These potential solutions are reasonably simple, effective and, as recent studies show, inexpensive. Some work for a broad range of students, while others target specific groups. Yet they're unfamiliar to many teachers and parents are not familiar, who remain unaware that exam anxiety can be so easily relieved.



Keywords: Managing, Exam Anxiety.

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Introduction:

Exam anxiety is a fact in today's schools. The results of studies suggest that there are remedies classroom teachers can use to support their students who suffer from exam anxiety. Although there isn't one specific remedies that can help a student's in anxiety, these remedies may make the anxiety more manageable. It is also important to note that this research did not assess the effectiveness of such remedies, just the fact that they exist.

What is Exam Anxiety?

Exam anxiety is the experience of intense fear before, during and after exam situations. It is characterized by a pattern of physical sensations, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. The physical sensations involved are those of acute anxiety or the fight or flight response. Some examples include a racing heart, sweaty hands, shortness of breath, and nausea. The fight or flight response is our bodies normal and adaptive response to fear and while unpleasant it is not harmful. It is helpful when it occurs in the appropriate context, for example, in the face of physical danger (e.g. jumping out of the way of a car and running away from a tiger.). It can help to increase our attention to the threat and enhance effective response. However, it is not so useful when the threat we are facing with is psychological. The thoughts involved in exam anxiety typically include negative predictions about performance or the physical sensations being experienced; for example, 'I'm going to fail', 'I can't do this', 'My heart is pounding so fast I can't concentrate'. The feelings involved are of fear or panic and the behavioral component is escape/avoidance (or the urge to). A number of factors contribute to exam anxiety.

Causes of exam anxiety

- Exam anxiety is a learned behavior for which the causes generally fall into one of the following three categories.
- **Lack of Preparation**
- Exam anxiety stems from many sources, but is mostly caused by a lack of exam preparation. Poor study habits, cramming the night before the exam, poor time management, lack of organization of the text, notes and homework are examples of being unprepared. Not studying at all or waiting until the last minute can leave individuals feeling anxious and overwhelmed.



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- **Fear of Failure**

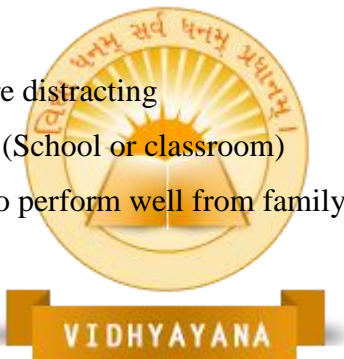
- Exam anxiety can be caused by worrying about how others are doing on the test and the consequences if you don't do your best. While the pressure to perform can act as a motivator, it can also be devastating to individuals who tie their self-worth to the result of an exam.

- **Poor Exam History**

- Exam anxiety can be caused by worrying about past exam performance. Bad results or previous problems with exam-taking can lead to a negative thought and influence performance on future exams. Unfortunately, these feelings have a tendency to intensify if you are already on academic probation.

Other Causes of Exam Anxiety are following:

- Low self-esteem
- Not ready for the exam
- Exam-taking environments that are distracting
- Highly competitive environments (School or classroom)
- High expectations and pressures to perform well from family
- Negative attributions
- Poorly designed exams
- Time constraints



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Symptoms of Exam Anxiety

- Exam anxiety may be a physical, emotional or mental response you experience, such as feeling an instant headache, butterflies in the stomach or going blank before or during an exam. Overall, there are three components of exam anxiety.¹
- **Physical Symptoms of Exam Anxiety**
- Headache, tension, nausea, diarrhea, excessive sweating, shortness of breath, rapid heartbeat, knot in the stomach, light-headedness and feeling faint can all occur. Exam anxiety can lead to a panic attack, which is the abrupt onset of intense fear or discomfort in which individuals may feel like they are unable to breathe or having a heart attack.



- **Emotional/Behavioral Symptoms of Exam Anxiety**
- Feelings of anger, fear, panic, restlessness, nervousness, continual doubt, helplessness and disappointment are common emotional responses to exam anxiety.
- **Behavioral/Cognitive Symptoms of Exam Anxiety**
- Difficulty concentrating or organizing thoughts, thinking negatively and comparing oneself to others, indecisive about an answer, and going blank are common symptoms of exam anxiety.

Myths of Exam Anxiety

- **While exam anxiety is real, there are generally following myths surrounding the subject:**
- Exam anxiety is an anxiety disorder.
- Students are born with exam anxiety.
- Exam anxiety cannot be reduced.
- Doing nothing about exam anxiety will make it go away.
- Any level of exam anxiety cannot learn math.
- Very intelligent students and students taking high-level courses, such as calculus, do not have exam anxiety.
- Attending class and doing homework should reduce all exam anxiety.
- Being told to relax during an exam will make you relaxed.
- Reducing exam anxiety will guarantee better grades.
- All students who are not prepared have exam anxiety.
- Students who are well prepared will not have exam anxiety.

Tips for managing Exam Anxiety

Be prepared. Develop good study habits. Study at least a week or two before the exam, in smaller increments of time and over a few days (instead of pulling an "all-nighter"). Try to simulate exam conditions by working through a practice test, following the same time constraints.

Develop good test-taking skills. Read the directions carefully, answer questions you know first and then return to the more difficult ones. Outline essays before you begin to write.

Maintain a positive attitude. Remember that your self-worth should not be dependent on or defined by a test grade. Creating a system of rewards and reasonable expectations for studying can help to produce



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effective studying habits. There is no benefit to negative thinking

Stay focused. Concentrate on the test, not other students during your exams. Try not to talk to other students about the subject material before taking an exam.

Practice relaxation techniques. If you feel stressed during the exam, take deep, slow breaths and consciously relax your muscles, one at a time. This can invigorate your body and will allow students to better focus on the exam.

Stay healthy. Get enough sleep, eat healthfully, exercise and allow for personal time. If you are exhausted—physically or emotionally—it will be more difficult for students to handle stress and anxiety.

Visit the counseling center. Schools are aware of the pressure exams can take on students. They have offices or programs specifically dedicated to help students and providing additional educational support so that students can be successful.

Relaxation Techniques to Relieve Exam Anxiety

Try one of the following relaxation response techniques to help control exam anxiety.

Deep

Breathing Method

- Sit straight up in your chair in a good posture position.
- Slowly inhale through your nose.
- As you inhale, first fill the lower section of your lungs and work your way up to the upper part of your lungs.
- Hold your breath for a few seconds.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth.
- Wait a few seconds and repeat the cycle.

Palming Method

- Close and cover your eyes using the center of the palms of your hands.
- Prevent your hands from touching your eyes by resting the lower parts of your palms on your cheekbones and placing your fingers on your forehead. Your eyeballs must not be touched, rubbed or handled in any way.
- Think of some real or imaginary relaxing scene. Mentally visualize this scene. Picture the scene as if you were actually there, looking through your own eyes.
- Visualize this relaxing scene for one to two minutes.



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Tensing and Differential Relaxation Method

- Put your feet flat on the floor.
- With your hands, grab underneath the chair.
- Push down with your feet and pull up on your chair at the same time for about five seconds.
- Relax for five to ten seconds.
- Repeat the procedure two or three times.
- Relax all your muscles except the ones that are actually used to take the exam.



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Conclusion

Anxiety is a behavioral and emotional disorder caused by the activation of sympathetic nervous system. In education domain, students experience high level of anxiety while performing in exams. In fact, academic exam and school work are considered to be the most stressful events of adolescent's life .

Students with high exam anxiety and negative emotionality are more prone to debilitated performance resulting in co-morbid psychosocial burdens and self destructing behaviours. The teachers, administrators and counsellors should consider this factor and take initiative to remove exam anxiety among students. It is impotent duty of school administration to appoint counsellors to address hidden issue of exam anxiety by providing suitable suggestions. The school psychologists should consider these differences while planning personality development programmes with special need to eliminate exam anxiety among school students. It is a right time for the policy makers and curriculum planners in school education to incorporate the programmes on coping mechanisms as an important module in school curriculum and to appoint school psychologists for planning and executing appropriate personality development programmes which modifies not only the exam anxiety of students but also their improve overall personality.



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