

WHEN WORRIES BECOME WORRYING: UNDERSTANDING CHRONIC ANXIETY



Grades 4-7

When Worries Become Worrying: Understanding Chronic Anxiety Health and Physical Education & Career Education

Purpose of the Lesson:

We all experience anxiety and stress from time to time. But how do we know the difference between stress and anxiety? And how do we detect when anxiety becomes a persistent enough problem that we might need help to cope with it? This lesson introduces students to these distinctions and invites them to unpack some of the things that make them anxious. It also provides time for them to brainstorm ways to cope when they are feeling anxious and some resources they can use for if they feel as though they might be experiencing chronic anxiety.

Curriculum Competencies:

Career Education (Grade 4-7)

- Identify and appreciate their personal attributes, skills, interests, and accomplishments and their growth over time (Grade 4/5).
- Recognize the need for others who can support their learning and personal growth (Grade 4/5).
- Demonstrate respect for differences in the classroom (Grade 4/5).
- Make connections between effective work habits and success (Grade 4/5). Demonstrate safe behaviours in a variety of environments (Grade 4/5).
- Appreciate the influence of peer relationships, family, and community on personal choices and goals (Grade 4/5).
- Appreciate the importance of respect, inclusivity, and other positive behaviours in diverse, collaborative learning, and work environments (Grade 6/7).
- Question self and others about the reciprocal relationship between self and community (Grade 6/7).

Physical and Health Education (Grade 4-7)

- Describe and assess strategies for promoting mental well-being (Grade 4).
- Describe and assess strategies for promoting mental well-being, for self and others (Grade 5).
- Describe and assess strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use (Grade 4/5).
- Explore and describe strategies for managing physical, emotional, and social changes during puberty (Grade 4/5).
- Explore and describe strategies for managing physical, emotional, and social changes during puberty and adolescence (Grade 6).
- Create and assess strategies for managing physical, emotional, and social changes during puberty and adolescence (Grade 7).
- Describe factors that positively influence mental well-being and self-identity (Grade 4). Explore and describe how personal identities adapt and change in different settings and situations (Grade 5/6/7).

First Peoples Principles of Learning

- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.

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Video

[Is it Stress or Anxiety?](#) - Campbell Boyd

Guiding Questions:

- What are some of the ways stress is different from anxiety?
- When do worries turn into anxiety?
- How do you cope with being worried and feelings of anxiety?

Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

Preparation: Queue up video/set up projector

1. **Have the students watch the video “Is it Stress or Anxiety”.** This can be found [HERE](#).
2. **Pause the video and use the Guiding Questions to spark discussion.**
3. **Discuss with your students the difference between stress and anxiety.** Explain to them that anxiety occurs when typical things that cause us stress end up becoming blown out of proportion in our minds and we see the possible outcomes as being considerably worse than they will likely be. Stress is a natural response to a stimulus that we feel uneasy or unsure about.

Here are some examples of these differences that you can share with the class that go along with the ones described in the video:

Example 1:

- **STRESS:** You have to get to your baseball game on time. You find it hard to sleep the night before because you're worried you might accidentally oversleep and miss the game. Eventually, you fall asleep, but still wake up with that nervous feeling in your stomach. Once the game is over, you feel calm and relaxed knowing that you made it on time.
- **ANXIETY:** You have to get to your baseball game on time. You toss and turn all night, with thoughts repeating in your head about how much your teammates and coach will hate you if you're late. These thoughts keep you up most of the night. In the morning, you have not rested, but still manage to get to the game on time. After the game, you still feel that pit in your stomach and worry that you didn't perform well enough in the game because you were so tired from not having slept the night before.

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Example 2:

- **STRESS:** You and your friend have a disagreement. Afterward, you feel badly about how the conversation went and worry that you might have hurt their feelings. You think about this throughout the day at school and decide to reach out to them after school to clear the air. After the conversation with them, you feel much better.
 - **ANXIETY:** You had your friend have a disagreement. Afterward, you replay the conversation on a loop in your mind throughout the whole day. You fixate on the things you said to them and worry that they hate you now and no longer want to be your friend. You obsess about it through the night and don't rest at all. The next day when you see them at school, they come up to you and act completely normally. When you bring up the disagreement, they assure you that there are no hard feelings. You feel slightly better, but still worry that they're harboring resentment or anger towards you from the initial disagreement.
4. **Explain what happens when anxiety becomes chronic and what they can do if they feel like this is an issue they are experiencing.** Explain to your students that when anxiety becomes a persistent issue that begins to affect their school life, social life or familial relationships, or physical wellbeing, it might be something that they should seek help for. Provide them with examples of ways they can gain support for anxiety if it has become a persistent issue. Tell them they can reach out to you directly and you can support them in getting help for this.
 5. **Explain the curriculum connections to your students.** Have your students work in groups to come up with ways that they cope when they are feeling stressed or anxious. Tell them that these coping strategies will look different for everyone, so working with their peers to come up with strategies together is a great way for them to bounce ideas off each other and come up with creative coping strategies they might not have thought of on their own.
 6. **Have your students share their lists with the rest of the class.** This can be in the form of short presentations or having them go around to other groups to share in a more personal way.
 7. **Lesson Closure.** Discuss how anxiety and stress can greatly impact our lives. When feelings of stress and anxiety persist over long periods of time, our physical health and mental health can suffer immensely. Explain to them that it is crucial for them to find ways to cope with stress and anxiety, as they will continue to come up throughout their lives and the earlier they find coping strategies that work for them, they more manageable their stress and anxiety will be.