



## TAKE-HOME TIPS: DEALING WITH STUDENTS' TEST ANXIETY

JPA receives tons of questions from teachers and parents about test taking. This month we have many tips to choose from but they all involve a simple idea: inviting an organized and candid discussion your students around test-taking fears and anxieties helps to calm their nerves leading up to big exams.

- 1. What:** Let your child verbalize about being anxious. Just talking about fears can be an important stress outlet. Let your child know it's OK to be anxious.

**Why:** Allowing your child to fully feel their emotions without telling them to "feel differently" communicates that you accept them as they are. This is a powerful message.

- 2. What:** If there are specific reasons for anxiety, treat them as serious. Adults often forget how nervous they were before a test, worried about breaking a pencil point or experiencing the need go to the bathroom.

**Why:** This lets your child know his or her feelings not only matter, but are taken seriously. This will allow them to feel assured that as they face life's stresses, you will be beside them every step of the way.

- 3. What:** Be reassuring. You can work out possible scenarios and options beforehand: "What could you do if you have to go to the bathroom during the test?"

**Why:** This gives children practice with building distress tolerance in a safe space (at home), as well as creates a space to discuss coping strategies for entering stressful situations.

- 4. What:** For school-based tests, help your child study by offering to ask questions that deals with the topic. Use his or her notes or textbook as a resource.

**Why:** This communicates interest in the specific details of their school-work, as well as provides an opportunity for parents to share in important mental preparation for facing stressful situations.

- 5. What:** Use study time for parent-child bonding. Instead of penalties for wrong answers, work together for good answers. If your child gives a wrong answer, don't simply provide the right one; offer a hint and encourage him or her to think carefully. A small reward for both of you (ice cream often works) after a study period can reinforce the good work that you've done.

**Why:** Positively reinforcing growth and efforts shows a child that you accept them and are willing to meet them and support them where they are at, not that you expect perfection.

- 6. What:** Offer to be the student. Let your child teach you the subject at hand. This not only helps with an understanding of the topic but also builds confidence and trust. (This can be a good strategy if your child claims there's no need to study!)

**Why:** This allows the child to feel like they are the expert, and allows the parent to re-experience what it feels like to be a student. This can often teach both parties a lot about what the other's experience is like, reinforcing empathy.

- 7. What:** If your child's school publishes a test schedule (many schools now have online calendars parents can see), try to schedule some study time with your child well in advance of the date.

**Why:** Tackling small pieces of a larger challenge over time can feel more manageable for children, that way they don't feel like they must feel at "100%" overnight.

- 8. What:** It always helps to be familiar with the format of standardized tests. Where possible, consult online resources like NWEA.org.

**Why:** When parents "do their homework" they can provide their child a working knowledge of the format of the test. This allows them to talk with their child about what to expect.

- 9. What:** Work with your child filling in test "bubbles." Remind students to be careful and to think about each possible answer.

**Why:** Simply saying that it is all right to "take your time" may come in handy when other students have completed testing and your child begins to feel pressure to finish quickly. They will remember this affirming and supportive voice in their head and it will help them self-soothe.

- 10. What:** Remind your child that test results do not mean anything about the person taking the test. Tests are ways to discover how to improve in the future.

**Why:** This reminds them that there is a whole lot that makes them special, intelligent and unique. One test does not define this for them.

- 11. What:** The night before a major test, instead of cramming, do something special with your child. A favorite meal, a movie, a game, or anything else that relaxes and focuses on your relationship can have a very positive effect.

**Why:** This is a clear reminder that your relationship is special and important no matter the outcome of test results, and this is the most important thing a child needs to know.