

STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING EXAM ANXIETY

Stress is universal. Everyone experiences it, to some degree. Although you can't always avoid stressful situations, you can take steps to control your stress and anxiety in such situations. Here are some strategies to help reduce exam anxiety:

PREPARE BEFORE THE EXAM

- Learn and review as you go. Don't leave all your studying until the last minute
- Know what you know. Test yourself often on course material. Don't just read and recognize!
- Find out how you will be tested and prepare by answering that kind of question
- Solve problems
- Explain/compare theories
- Apply theories to situations, etc.
- Practice without notes or your textbook and with a time limit, just like on the exam
- Set realistic and achievable goals don't be a perfectionist who tries to learn everything and don't tell yourself that you have to "ace" every exam
- Eat and sleep well before an exam

DURING THE EXAM: BE POSITIVE AND STRATEGIC

- Think positive thoughts at the beginning and throughout the exam. Tell yourself that you are prepared, you can do it, you deserve to succeed, you'll get at least part marks on hard-to-do questions, etc.
- Remember that your future does not depend on the specific outcome of a specific exam
- View exams as an opportunity to show what you know
- Use effective test-taking strategies (See handout on "Strategies for Taking Tests and Exams")

LEARN AND USE RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

- Learn to relax your body by using deep breathing and muscle relaxation
- Prior to an exam, visualize relaxing and coping successfully during the exam. Visualize stress-provoking situations and rehearse mentally how you will handle them and control stress

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

DEEP BREATHING is a way to control anxiety before it gets away from you during an exam, and no one will know you are doing it!

- Close your eyes and breathe slowly and deeply. Fill your lungs deep down with air.
- Focus your attention on your breathing by:
 - inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth
 - listening to the flow of air in and out
 - being aware of the difference in temperature between air going in and air going out
- Be aware of tension in specific parts of your body. Mentally fill that part with clean white light as you breathe in. Carry away stress as you breathe out.

MUSCLE RELAXATION is a technique based on the principle that a muscle becomes more relaxed if it is first tensed uncomfortably. Use Version A at home, especially to help you get to sleep the night before an exam, and Version B during the exam.

Version A

- Sitting or lying in a comfortable position, close your eyes and breathe slowly and deeply (as above)
- Tighten, hold for 5-10 seconds, and then relax one muscle group at a time. Begin with your toes and move up through your calves, thighs, buttocks, abdomen, chest, back, shoulders, hands, arms, neck, face, forehead and jaw.
- Continue to breathe deeply as you systematically relax your body. Try to keep body parts you have already relaxed in that condition as you tense new muscle groups.

Version B

- With your arms at your sides as you sit on a chair, grasp the underside of the seat of your chair and try to lift it off the floor (Of course, you can't! Hold this position, tensing your arms and shoulders, for 5 seconds. Then let go and relax.

VISUALIZATION

- Imagine yourself in a relaxing place: lying on the beach, walking in the forest, sitting by a campfire. Imagine what you see, smell, hear.
- Practice escaping to your fantasy place whenever you want to reduce stress.
- You can also visualize yourself at the exam, staying calm, using effective test taking strategies, and being **SUCCESSFUL**.