

## Lesson Twenty One: The Anxiety Equation

### Learning Goals:

Students will become familiar with the Anxiety Equation and remember how to use it when they are feeling anxious or scared.

### Background:

Anxiety about events taking place in our lives can cause a great deal of stress. The Anxiety Equation, introduced by Christine Padesky, addresses this in a sensible way.

We, as adults, do not own the right to be anxious. Children are living in anxious times, and are exposed to a great deal more than children in the past ever were. It's important, therefore, to be able to take with them about anxiety.

The Anxiety Equation isn't made of numbers. It looks like this:

$$\text{Anxiety} = \frac{[\text{High Estimation of Danger}]}{[\text{Low Estimation of Coping Skills and Resources}]}$$

This means that when you feel anxious or scared, you may think that the danger is greater than it is. Think about the worst thing that could happen. Is it as bad as you thought?

Now think about the skills you have to cope with the danger. When you are anxious, you usually think that you are not going to be able to cope! But you have tons of coping skills. You can use balanced thinking. You can use problem-solving. You can use brainstorming. You can ask for help. You can use your good communication skills. You can practice relaxing. You can get any help or information that you need.

Coping skills can be very simple. They could be:

- ⤴ Taking alone time.
- ⤴ Talking to friends.
- ⤴ Taking advantage of what relaxes you, such as music or a good book.
- ⤴ Brainstorming, even on your own.

Three questions help you to work through the Anxiety Equation:

1. What is the worst thing that can happen?
2. Is it as bad as you thought it would be?
3. What must you do to handle it?

### General Activities (all ages):

Introduce the anxiety balancing questions.

Brainstorm things that make students fearful and anxious and work through the anxiety equation with them.

Give each student a copy of the Anxiety Equation to use while discussing the issue situations below, and those in the handouts.

Use the following examples to work through the anxiety equation:

### **Issue: Fear of not doing well in a sports event.**

No Such Thing as a Bully - Shred the Label, Save a Child  
<http://nosuchthingasabully.com> © Karius and Associates  
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## SAMPLE LESSONS Elementary

### *Brainstorming:*

Think about when you have been frightened. Were you ever in real danger?

### *Storytelling:*

Write a fairy tale about a child who sees danger everywhere, and the fairy who shows there isn't any.

### *Role-playing:*

Act out the fairy tale, using any characters you want!

### *Journaling:*

Perform the fairy tale for the other classes in your grade!

## Middle School

### *Brainstorming:*

What is the greatest danger in your school?

### *Storytelling:*

Inspector Balance has returned, to investigate a report from your class of danger. What will he find?

### *Role-playing:*

Act out the questioning of the Inspector as a mystery story. Provide witnesses!

### *Journaling:*

Create a Facebook note or video describing the investigation!

## High School

### *Brainstorming:*

You have to speak at a school assembly. What is the greatest danger?

### *Storytelling:*

As a class, investigate the possibility of real danger, and compare.

### *Role-playing:*

Act out the story as a courtroom. Provide witnesses!

### *Journaling:*

Speak about danger – real and imagined – at a school assembly, and bring up the Anxiety Equation!

(Overestimation of Danger) **Real Danger:**

- ⤴ Is there a chance that I am more worried than I should be?
- ⤴ What facts show that this is something that I do have to worry about?
- ⤴ What facts show that this is something that I don't have to worry about?

(Underestimation of Skills and Resources) **What I must do:**

- ⤴ Be aware of my own abilities.
- ⤴ Know that this is a team sport, it doesn't all depend on me.
- ⤴ Talk to the coach if I am unsure about what I am supposed to be doing or need more information.

**Issue: Worry that homework will not be complete**

(Overestimation of Danger) **Real Danger:**

- ⤴ Is there a chance that I am more worried than I should be?
- ⤴ What facts show that this is something that I do have to worry about?
- ⤴ What facts show that this is something that I don't have to worry about?

(Underestimation of Skills and Resources) **What I must do:**

- ⤴ Make a plan for how to get the homework done.
- ⤴ Schedule certain times during the day to do homework.
- ⤴ Have a specific place where I like spending time to do homework.
- ⤴ Ask my parents for help in making a plan.
- ⤴ Ask my teacher if I have questions about the homework.
- ⤴ Ask a friend for help.

**Issue: Fear that my friends won't like me if I don't do what they want.**

(Overestimation of Danger) **Real Danger:**

- ⤴ Is there a chance that I am more worried than I should be?
- ⤴ What facts show that this is something that I do have to worry about?
- ⤴ What facts show that this is something that I don't have to worry about?

(Underestimation of Skills and Resources) **What I must do:**

- ⤴ Practice saying no with my friends.
- ⤴ Know that if my friends are forcing me to do something that I don't want to do they are not good friends.
- ⤴ Know that even if my friends decide to dump me, I can make other friends.

# Lesson 21

## Feeling Scared



Marvin Mouse says:

Sometimes I feel really scared when I think I have done something wrong, or when someone is mad at me. Sometimes I feel so scared that I just want to run away. Running away doesn't help very much. If I am in trouble at school and I run home, my parents just make me go back to school. If I am in trouble at home and I run away to my room, my parents make me come out of my room and talk with them anyway. Other times when I am in trouble I am so scared that I just want to fight. When I use bad words or use my fists, I get into more trouble, so I know that is not a good idea. The problem is that I just feel so scared. My teacher taught me a way to think about scary times that really helps.



She taught me to ask myself these questions:

1. What is the worst thing that can happen?
  2. Is it as scary as I thought it would be?
  3. If it is as scary as I thought it would be, what do I need to do to be able to handle it?
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ANXIETY IS

Thinking the danger is high  
and

believing you can't handle whatever is coming.

When you feel anxious or scared, remember to ask yourself -

What is the worst thing that can happen?

Is the worst thing as scary as I thought it would be?

If it is as scary as I thought it would be, what do I need to be able to handle it?

## Anxiety Equation Samples

**Issue: Fear of Monsters under the bed.**

**(Overestimation of Danger) Real Danger:**

Is there a chance that I could be more scared than I need to be?

What facts show that this is something that I do have to worry about?

What facts show that this is something that I don't have to worry about?

**(Underestimation of Skills and Resources )What I need to do:**

Plan a way to feel safe at night.

Let my parents know that I am afraid so that they can help.

**Issue: Worry that homework will not be complete.**

**(Overestimation of Danger) Real Danger:**

Is there a chance that I am more worried than I need to be?

What facts show that this is something that I do have to worry about?

What facts show that this is something that I don't have to worry about?

**(Underestimation of Skills and Resources )What I need to do:**

Make a plan for how to get the homework done.

Schedule certain times during the day to do homework.

Make a special place to do homework.

Ask my parents for help in making a plan.

Ask my teacher if I have questions about the homework.

**Issue: Fear that I will throw up in class one day.**

**(Overestimation of Danger) Real Danger:**

Is there a chance that I am more worried than I need to be?

What facts show that this is something that I do have to worry about?

What facts show that this is something that I don't have to worry about?

**(Underestimation of Skills and Resources )What I need to do:**

Know where the bathroom is.

Let my teacher know that I am worried about it.

Ask if I can just leave the room if I feel like I need to throw up, instead of putting up my hand.

# Lesson 21

## The Anxiety Equation

If you are doing equations in math already, you might go...yuch! An equation!

The Anxiety Equation has no numbers. It looks like this:

$$\text{Anxiety} = \frac{\text{High Estimation of Danger}}{\text{Low Estimation of Coping Skills and Resources}}$$

So what does this mean? It means that when you feel anxious or scared, you will often be thinking that the danger is higher than it is. Think about the worst thing that could happen. Is it as bad as you thought?

Now think about the skills you have to cope with the danger. You can use balanced thinking. You can use problem solving. You can use brainstorming. You can ask for help. You can use your good communication skills. You can practice relaxing. You can get any help or information that you need.

Coping skills can be very simple. They could be:

- Being able to take time alone.
- Being able to talk to friends.
- Knowing what is relaxing for you.
- Knowing how to brainstorm.

### Anxiety Equation Questions

1. What is the worst thing that can happen?
2. Is it as bad as I thought it would be?
3. What do I need to do to be able to handle it?

Example:

I am worried about telling my dad that I failed a test.

1. The worst thing that can happen is my Dad will get mad. I will have to work harder.
2. This is not as bad as I thought it would be.
3. I need to tell Dad and get it over with. I need to think about what I will say. He might be less angry if I have a plan for how I will do better.

# ANXIETY EQUATION

High Estimation of Danger  
Low Estimation of Coping Skills  
and Resources

When you feel anxious or scared, remember to  
ask yourself -

What is the worst thing that can happen?

Is the worst thing as bad as I thought it would be?

What do I have that will help me to handle it? What do I need  
to be able to handle it?

## Lesson 21: The Anxiety Equation

The Anxiety Equation looks like this:

$$\text{Anxiety} = \frac{\text{High Estimation of Danger}}{\text{Low Estimation of Coping Skills and Resources}}$$

So what does this mean? It means that when you feel anxious, you are often thinking that the danger is higher than it is. Think about the worst thing that could happen. Is it as bad as you thought? Is the danger really as high as you thought? If it isn't as bad as you thought, then you might be less anxious already. If it's still pretty bad, you are off to the next step!

The next step is to move to the bottom of the equation. You may be thinking that you don't have the skills to cope with the situation. You have more skills than you are thinking about when you are anxious. Some might be:

You can use balanced thinking. You can use problem solving. You can use brainstorming. You can ask for help. You can use your good communication skills. You can practice relaxing. You can get any help or information that you need.

Coping skills can be very simple. They could be:

- Being able to take time alone.
- Being able to talk to friends.
- Knowing what is relaxing for you.
- Knowing how to brainstorm.

For some situations that make you anxious, it can be a good idea to have a plan for what you would do in your worst case scenario. Make your plan... and then forget about the issue, you'll be ready if it ever happens. If it never happens, then you haven't wasted your good energy worrying about it.

Another bit of information that can help you to change perceptions is to realize that you don't always know if something is bad or good right away. Often it's a good idea to wait before you decide if something is fortunate or unfortunate. David Irvine<sup>1</sup> says "Am I fortunate or unfortunate? Only time will tell."

A very good philosophy.

Another great question!

How much will this situation matter six weeks from now? If it will, then you must solve the problem now. If it won't, then you may be able to stop worrying about it.

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<sup>1</sup> DC Press, Sanford, FA. 2003

## Anxiety Equation Samples

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