

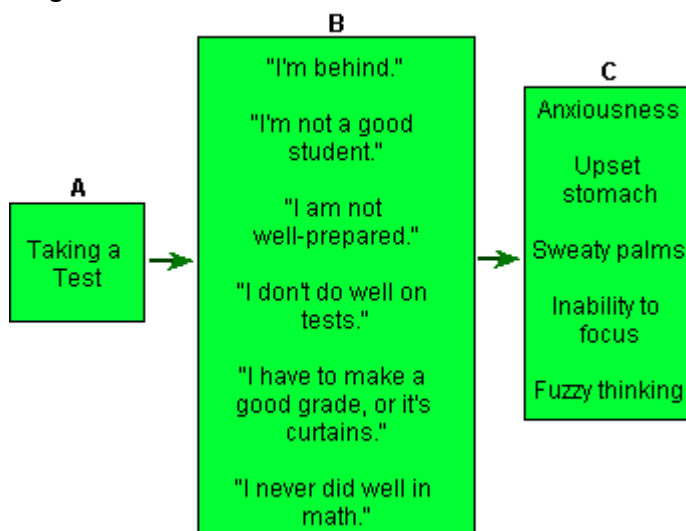
LASSI MODULE: ANXIETY

Anxiety is an emotion that everyone feels at one time or another. But just because anxiety happens to everyone does not mean that you cannot find ways to help control it. Each of us has the ability to:

- become aware of how we feel,
- reflect on our experiences, beliefs, and expectations, and
- control our emotions by changing some of these beliefs and expectations.

Example: A Student With High Anxiety

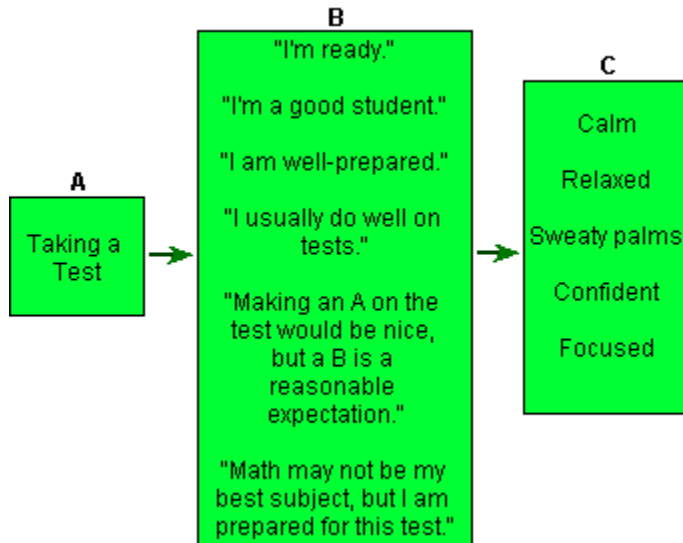
- To help you better understand The ABC Model of Anxiety, shown below is a diagram of a situation where a student finds taking a test to be anxiety-producing.



- Looking at this example, you can see how taking a test leads to beliefs and expectations which interpret the event. By seeing the test only through this lens of perceptions, the student creates the symptoms (e.g., anxiousness, upset stomach, fuzzy thinking).

Example: A Student With Low Anxiety

- Now let's imagine that a different student is about to take this same test. This individual differs from our last example and feels little or no anxiety about the test. Contrast the following model with the one previously illustrated.



- Looking at this example, you can see the difference between the beliefs and expectations that this student has versus our last student. You can also see how this changes the consequences. Which would you rather feel: anxious, sick, and lost or calm, confident, and focused?

Self-Sabotaging Beliefs

Here are some examples of common self-sabotaging beliefs students report:

- I must be unfailingly competent and almost perfect in all I do.
- The past determines the present.
- I am helpless and have no control over what I experience or feel.
- There is a perfect love and a perfect relationship.
- If I don't go to great lengths to please others, they will abandon or reject me.

Think about how realistic these beliefs really are by thinking about the following questions:

- Is it really possible to be perfect in all that you do?
- Is the present only determined by the past? Does this mean you can never change?
- Are you really ruled by your emotions or can you control them?
- What is a "perfect love" or "perfect relationship?"
- Do people really reject you if you don't do everything they want? And even if a person does this, is that really your fault?

Identifying Self-Sabotaging Beliefs

The first step in changing your self-sabotaging beliefs into enabling beliefs involves:

- identifying or remembering situations where you tend to feel anxious,
- figuring out your perceptions of threat (i.e., specific things you are worried about), and
- identifying conflicts among your goals.

For example:

Do your personal and academic goals clash? Is your desire to be popular and spend a lot of time with your friends conflicting with getting your academic work done? Do you want to be a full-time student while also working full-time?

Reducing The Effects Of The Consequences

In addition to identifying and changing your self-sabotaging beliefs and your negative self-talk, you can also lessen your anxiety symptoms by making them less intense. There are different degrees of worrying and there are different degrees of emotional or physical symptoms.

For example:

Being concerned about an upcoming test will usually not keep you from studying and preparing for it. However, if there is any degree of panic over your fears of failing, you will probably have a hard time studying and won't do well on the test. There are methods for preventing these symptoms from happening or for weakening the symptoms. Here are some examples:

- Practice relaxation exercises or meditation.

Reference: LASSI Instructional Modules <http://www.lassimodules.com>

- Practice other common ways people use to reduce anxiety.

For example:

- Learn to play
 - Get regular exercise
 - Talk out your troubles
 - Focus on process, not outcome
 - Be a positive person
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- Beware of dangerous ways to try to mask anxiety and nervousness. Using drugs, alcohol, coffee, etc., to mask the anxious feelings does not work and can make the anxious feelings worse!
 - Be prepared! One of the best ways to avoid anxiety about school activities is to be prepared. Sometimes it even helps to over-prepare so that you build up your confidence.
 - Practice, whenever appropriate. If you are going to take a test or give a speech, practice before you go to class. Practice answering sample test questions alone or with study partners. Practice giving your talk, whether alone or with study partners. Going through the practice successfully can help you feel more confident and relaxed when you face the real experience.
 - There are, however, some "bandage" or "quick-fix" strategies for dealing with anxiety that are short-term. After all, if you are taking a test and feel yourself becoming anxious, you can't just stop and say, "Okay, let me change my belief system." That is why it is important to know strategies that will get you through the immediate anxiety.

Thought Stopping

- Thought stopping is an excellent and usually very effective method for cutting back on negative thinking that occurs when you experience anxiety. As soon as negative self-talk comes to mind, you mentally yell, "Stop!" to yourself. Next, relax for a few moments and either switch to more positive or realistic self-talk or get back to work, whichever is more appropriate. By doing this, you are more likely to stop negative thoughts before they put you in a panic state.

For example:

- If you get anxious during an exam and start to worry, your performance will likely suffer. But if you monitor your thinking and catch yourself worrying rather than working, yell "stop" in your head. Then go back to work. It sounds simplistic, but it really works.

- What makes thought-stopping so effective is that it forces us to monitor our thinking so we can catch ourselves going off-task and worrying before it is too late.

Give Yourself Permission To Worry Later

- If you find yourself feeling anxious, tell yourself, "It won't do me any good to worry about it now. I promise that I will give myself permission to worry after I'm finished with what I'm doing." By allowing ourselves the opportunity to think about it later, we can free ourselves temporarily of the anxiety. In fact, often what will happen is that we then forget whatever we were originally anxious over.
- Giving ourselves permission to worry later when something has to get done gives a "voice" to our concerns and fears but not in a way that is debilitating. It lets us get our work done and gives us a chance later to think about what is bothering us. Then we might change our beliefs or change the situation to reduce our anxiety.

Deal With Potential Consequences Later

- Too often when we are feeling anxious, we play the "what if" game. We wonder, "What if I fail this test?" or, "What if I flunk out of school?" By allowing ourselves to think about potential consequences later, we can free our minds to focus on the task at hand.
- Our anxiety is often focused on the real or imagined consequences of our actions (or lack of action). The more we are distracted by negative actions, the more we tend to get nervous and worried. By agreeing to wait and think about the consequences at a later time, we are saying we want to deal with this, but not right now, so we can get our coursework done.

Test Anxiety

- Taking a test is one event that causes most college students to feel anxious. This is a special case of anxiety that is generally associated with a fear of being evaluated. If you have trouble with test anxiety, you may want to talk to someone at your college's learning center or student affairs office. There are many excellent programs available that help students cope with test anxiety. These programs are very effective and popular with students.
- Looking at the beliefs, perceptions, self-talk, etc., that caused your anxiety in this situation, how could you have changed these to reduce your anxiety? (be specific in your answer)
- Are there any specific ways that you could have reduced the symptoms of your anxiety in this situation?

- Could you have used any of the bandage solutions that we have talked about? Why would this solution work best in this situation?

Suggestions For Reducing Anxiety And Points To Remember About Anxiety

Here are some helpful points and suggestions to remember about anxiety:

- Events or situations do not cause anxiety.
- Your anxiety originates from the perceptions and beliefs that you have about certain events or situations. Therefore, coping with and eliminating anxiety is within your control.
- Anxiety causes several consequences that can be detrimental to your mental and physical health as well as your academic performance.
- There are many ways to reduce your anxiety, but the best way to do this is to change your self-sabotaging beliefs into realistic enabling beliefs.
- The first step to changing your beliefs is becoming aware of the beliefs you have about yourself and different events or situations.
- By paying attention to your self-talk, you can become more aware of your beliefs. You can also reduce your anxiety by using more realistic and positive self-talk.
- Not only is it important to change your beliefs, but it is also important to engage in activities that will help to reduce the symptoms of anxiety.
- Changing your beliefs takes time, so often it is important to also use more immediate solutions for reducing your anxiety (e.g., thought-stopping).
- Reducing anxiety is a continual process that you must monitor and evaluate in order to be successful.

Remember, you have control of the anxiety you feel. It is important to focus on who YOU are and how YOU feel. Feeling concern about doing well in college is good. This will help you stay motivated and achieve your goals. But when you begin to feel anxious or panicky, it is important to become aware of these feelings and do something about them.

Suggestions From Other Students For Coping With Anxiety

- Try to identify the events in your life that are stressful for you and why they seem to make you anxious. Analyze your list to see which stressors are realistic and which ones are not. Often we worry about matters that are not really very realistic, such as working hard to prepare for a test but still worrying that we will receive a flunking grade.
- Speak to counselors at your college's counseling center to learn basic stress management techniques such as muscle relaxation or meditation.
- Ask your teachers, counselors, or parents for help in learning to reduce anxiety over college issues.
- Start a regular exercise program or join a recreational sports team. You will be more likely to stay with the activity if you choose one you really enjoy rather than one that seems like drudgery.
- Check out some of the books, self-help materials, or programs available to help you learn how to deal with anxiety and eliminate self-sabotaging thoughts so that you will be better able to reach your achievement goals.
- Develop your own personal style of getting things done in a calm, orderly way. Whenever possible, take on projects one at a time and work on them until completed.
- Find a friend, counselor, or therapist with whom you can talk. It's extremely helpful to get negative feelings off your chest.
- Write in a journal. If you don't really like talking about your feelings with someone, this is extremely helpful for expressing your negative emotions. Often, by getting them down on paper, you will reduce their effects on your mind and body.