

TEPS

To Whom it May Concern:

The Learning in the Brain conference held in February 2020 in San Francisco focused on Anxiety in the Classroom setting. It was a fantastic professional development activity that I feel lucky to have been a part of. There were two main focuses that I can bring back to my career as a School Psychologist in the district: 1) providing supports to teachers in the district by sharing hands on strategies 2) revamping the Functional Behavior Assessment process with a focus on skills development.

The first important take away from the conference was hands on strategies to share with teachers. According to the Center for Disease Control, 31.9% of 13-18 year olds could be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, while 22-25% of 3-5 year olds could be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. This clearly impacts how we need to educate students in our classrooms. When a student or adult is experiencing anxiety, the body is in a state of “fight or flight.” This heightened state of arousal in our “emotional brain” (i.e. limbic system, amygdala) involves the heart beating quickly, breathing speeding up, and the shutting down of our “thinking brain” (i.e. the cortex). When anxiety increases, there is a direct correlation to decreased working memory. Research shows that we lose 20-30 IQ points when we are in a stressed state. In order for the body to return to a relaxed state the following interventions can be used:

- Use of visuals-Photographs help to encode information into long term memory.
- Develop relationships with Students-Relationships promote a relaxed response and assist with emotional regulation.
- Movement breaks- Movement will increase endorphins.
- Use of humor- Laughter with learning can increase retention up to 44%.
- Provide incentives to use coping skills to relax rather than reinforcing specific behaviors.
- Quiet voice, lights low, quiet music
- Predictable positive attention- For example, “I am going to check to see how you are doing on this at 10:15. If I forget, please tap my shoulder.”
- Cozy corners with cognitive distractions (e.g. Where’s Waldo, books on tape, Mad Libs)- Breaks and walks can actually increase anxiety if thoughts are not redirected.
- Use visual timers with transition warnings. - Visual timer are needed because kids don’t have a concept of time.
- A place for unfinished work- Students need to know they can finish work later.
- Mindfulness moment-What do you see? Hear? Taste? Smell? Feel?
- Deep breathing before a test (e.g. alligator breathe, butterfly breathe, hot chocolate breathing)
- Allowing kids to skip 2 questions on a test
- Model for kids positive ways you handle stress and anxiety!

The second important take away from the conference was to take a new look at the way that Functional Behavioral Assessments are conducted. Stress and anxiety responses may often look disrespectful and like “behavior.” If behavior is a response to stress/ anxiety, then rewards & punishments don’t help. A tool was presented called the “Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems (ALSUP).” This tool can be utilized to make FBAs and Behavior Intervention Plans more meaningful to students by first identifying what specific skills a student needs to be taught before a system of reinforcement can be implemented.

Thank you for the opportunity to attend this meaningful conference. I look forward to continuing to share strategies with teachers, and continuing to train using the ALSUP.



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