

Anxiety – Getting Comfortable Feeling Uncomfortable

Show recording of video of Mr. Johnson sharing his personal journey with anxiety to the class. (I accidentally made 2 videos, the first is short and is just me staring blankly at the screen [or “staring into the abyss” for you Grinch fans] but the right video should play immediately after the first short awkward on). Following the video, display the reflection questions and ask students to fill them out in ways that make them unidentifiable. Ask for volunteers to share what makes them uncomfortable.

Pre-amble: Know that ALL people are uncomfortable in certain situations, however we can persevere and become ok feeling uncomfortable. Below are a few questions to reflect on so that you can realize when you are going to feel uncomfortable, expect those feelings (which makes the worry smaller), and then ride the rough feelings as they come and go. Anxiety can come and go throughout life so learning healthy coping strategies is important for lifelong mental health. Here are some large or small group discussion questions to go through with your class.

1. What situations or places make you uncomfortable?
 - a. Some ideas could include: speaking in front of people, before games/performances, being late for class, being behind in class, sitting in certain areas, large or small group work/discussions, certain classes, etc.
2. Physically, how do you feel when you are deeply uncomfortable and anxious?
 - a. Some answers could include: can't sit comfortably, thirsty, short of breathe, sweaty, stomach aches, legs numb/tingly, can't concentrate/headache, etc.
3. Mentally, what is going through your mind when you are uncomfortable? (have you ever paid attention to your thoughts when you are nervous?)
 - a. Thoughts racing, difficulty concentrating, “in your head,” self-doubt running wild, negative thoughts, “I'm gonna fail/screw up/look stupid, etc.
4. What can we do when we feel anxious?
 - a. It is great if people share what works for them
 - b. For Johnson, some strategies while sitting in class when dealing with nerves are:
 - i. Flexing your leg muscles – this gives an outlet for the adrenaline coursing through your body.
 - ii. Count to 5 when breathing in and then again while exhaling – this will slow your heartrate and breathing down and will help you catch your breathe.
 - iii. Focus on something tangible in the room. Slowly count the lines of a page of loose-leaf – this will help slow your thoughts down and engage your brain in a different activity than worrying about what is happening. Small distractions will reset your thoughts so you can focus on the positive and stop the negative thoughts/pressure.

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- iv. Pay attention to your thoughts! Notice when you start having negative self talk. By catching your negative self-talk, you can stop and correct it. Johnson just calls his “worry”. When Worry shows up, a person can recognize it and mentally talk it down; but, like any skill, it takes patience and practice to learn.