

IEP/504 Anxiety Accommodations: classroom and school environment

1. “Cool down passes” to take a break from the classroom. Clearly explain the concept to the student and watch for signs of task aversion. Examples might include a walk down the hallway, getting water, standing outside the classroom door for a few minutes, completing coloring pages in the back of the room, or using a mindfulness app with headphones.
2. Always keep the child in school. Do not reinforce or increase anxiety symptoms by sending a child home unless necessary.
3. Provide positive reinforcement, like stickers, extended computer time or a special activity when a child tolerates a feared situation.
4. Following directions-Concerns about getting the directions wrong either because of distraction or misunderstanding are common.
5. Signaling the class first when giving directions (flashing lights, clapping hands). When possible, have the directions written on the board or elsewhere. It may help assure anxious children that they have understood the directions.
6. Present verbal encouragement and prompts in subtle, non-punitive ways.
7. Provide a consistent, predictable schedule. Post in a visible place for the child’s reference.
8. Allow breaks as necessary and offer opportunities for action. For instance, pacing without disturbing others, running an errand, handing out papers, or using a soft squeeze ball.
9. Prompt in advance before calling on him to answer a question.
10. Avoid using jokes, sarcasm and bringing unwanted attention to the student. (*I love this one!*)
11. Preferential seating in large assemblies (near the back of the room)
12. Identify one adult at school to seek help from when feeling anxious (school counselor, if available)
13. Buddy system: Pair student with a peer to aid with transitions to lunch and recess (these less structured situations can trigger anxious feelings)
14. Fears of rejection in the cafeteria or on the playground can take the fun out of free time. Help bridge the gap by creating ties between small groups of children. A lunch bunch with two or three children can create a shared experience which kids can draw on later. When working in pairs or small groups, don't always have children choose the groupings themselves. Alternate this with a "counting off" technique or drawing straws to allow variability in the groupings.
15. Anxious children often struggle with the unlikely fear that they will get in trouble. Seat them away from more distracting classmates. It may help them focus on their work and not feeling responsible for the class. (*until I found this one, I had no idea this was a sign of anxiety, one that my son exhibits often!*)
16. Extra time and warnings before transitions.
17. Preferential seating (near the door, near the front of the room, near the teacher’s desk).

IEP/504 Anxiety Accommodations: Homework, Tests, Assignments

1. Extended time on tests will ease the pressure on anxious children, and just knowing that the time is available may obviate the need to use it. Sometimes anxious children become

distracted when they see other children working on their tests or turning them in, they may inaccurately assume that they don't know the material as well. Testing in an alternate, quiet place is preferable for some children. Consider the use of word banks, equation sheets, to cue children whose anxiety may make them "blank out" on the rote material.

2. Clearly stated and written expectations (behavioral and academic)
3. Frequent check-ins for understanding, prompted by the teacher.
4. Modify assignments; have the child complete only odd-numbered problems, allow him the use of a word processor, or give an oral exam instead of a high-pressure, written exam.
5. Allow extra time on quizzes, exams, and in-class assignments.
6. Children with extreme social anxiety may have difficulty with oral reports. Consider having the child present to the teacher alone, or have the child audiotape or videotape the presentation at home.
7. Not requiring to read aloud or work at the board in front of the class (but work towards self-advocacy, link above)
8. Videotaped presentations or presenting in front of the teacher (instead of the class)
9. Tests are taken in a separate, quiet environment (to reduce performance pressure and distraction)
10. Word banks and equation sheets: These are useful for children with test anxiety, who tend to "go blank" when taking a test. Using one notecard for important facts, dates, etc. can also be helpful.
11. Breaking down assignments into smaller pieces
12. Modified tests and homework
13. Set reasonable time limits for homework
14. Record class lectures or use a scribe for notes
15. Homework expectations-If a student is spending inordinate amounts of time on homework because of OCD redoing, rechecking, rereading, or simply worrying that the assignment wasn't done thoroughly enough, the teacher can set a reasonable amount of time for homework and then reduce the homework load to fit into that time frame. Teachers can also give time estimates for each assignment (this could be helpful to the entire class) so that the anxious child can attempt to stay within 10% of the estimated time. Eliminate repetition by having the child do every other math question, reduce reading and writing assignments, consider books on tape if a child is unable to read without repetition, for a child with writing difficulties, consider having a parent, teacher, or another student "scribe" for the child while he or she dictates the answers.

IEP/504 Anxiety Accommodations: other, field trips, etc.

1. Preferential group (teacher or adult child knows well) for field trips
2. Help after illness: Missed work can spike anxious feelings. Providing class notes and exempting students from missed homework can help.
Assign a responsible buddy to copy notes and share handouts. If tests are given the day of the child's return, give them the option to take the test at another time and use the test-time to make up any other missing work.

3. Substitute teachers: Letting the child or family know when a substitute will be in the classroom can help the child prepare.
4. Class participation: A child may fear getting the answer wrong, saying something embarrassing, or having other kids look at them. Determine the child's comfort with either closed-ended questions (requiring a yes or no) or with opinion questions. Start with whichever is easiest. Use a signal to let the child know that his turn is coming. Provide opportunities for the child to share knowledge on topics in which he or she is most confident.
5. Fire and safety drills-While these drills are necessary, anxious children can very distressed by imagining these events. If there is an opportunity, signal the child in person just before the alarm sounds. This may buffer the surprise of the drill and allow children to mobilize with less distress.