

Testing season is enough to make any teacher run screaming from the building. As if the thought of testing alone is not stressful enough, we often get news at the last minute (like the time the state changed its testing window with two weeks' notice, because the test wasn't ready). That's enough to cause stress eating for anyone.

We'd be silly to think teachers are the only ones who feel the crunch. Unfortunately, students often display their nerves in other ways (throwing oranges, missing homework assignments, or hiding inside their sweatshirts). Talk about stress! Not surprisingly, it's easy for teachers and staff to become more reactive to students' behavior. This, in turn, causes a snowball effect, and soon we are all in tears.



Take control of this stressful time and support your students with these tips:

- **Stay calm.** Remember to use your own self-care strategies. A little yoga, junk TV, or spending time with friends can do a body (and mind) good. This will better equip you to handle anything that comes your way.
- **Be proactive and positive.** Rely on your proactive discipline system to stay objective and fair. Students' negative behavior often increases during this time of year. Do your best to remain proactive and positive, reinforcing students when they make good choices. Even with all the stress this time of year, it may be a good time to look at the culture in your classroom. Use these tips to self-evaluate your [learning environment](#).
- **Keep kids informed.** Tell students exactly what to expect before, during, and after the test. If you don't know something, let the kids know that you aren't sure, but you will ask someone and get back to them. Being upfront with students about what you don't know can be as effective in reducing anxiety as telling them what you do know.
- **Provide information sheets.** Review and send home an information sheet of "do's" and "don'ts" for how to prepare for the test (a couple of weeks before the test is usually good timing). Let students know that night-before cramming and eight consecutive hours of X-Box are not good choices prior to a test (or ever). Instead, suggest studying a little each

night, getting plenty of sleep, and being positive. Include tips on how parents can help as well. Parents usually want to do what's best for their child; they just might not know how that looks. Suggestions might include providing a place and time for students to study each night, encouraging children to try their best, and offering lots of praise.

- **Create a study schedule.** Lead students through the process of creating a study schedule. You'll be teaching them a life-long skill: long-term planning. And you will be reducing the need to tell students, "But you've known about this project for three weeks." Here is a [free sample activity](#) from the [Grit & Bear It Activity Guide](#) on making time count.
- **Create individual goals.** Meet with students individually. Review their previous scores and help them set a reasonable personal goal. Help students focus on their effort and personal improvement, rather than competing against others or a state standard.
- **Teach a calming strategy.** Teach students who experience high test anxiety, or those who have experienced past failures, a strategy to stay calm. This might include deep breathing, muscle tension and relaxation, or positive self-talk. Practice these strategies with them ahead of time. *Prepare before the storm, not during it.*
- **Teach students to try when it's hard.** How often do we hear "I give up! I can't do it. It's too hard,"? I once heard a four-year-old trying to entice her preschool teacher to cut out the shape for her. (To no avail, thankfully) As teachers, we've seen many students struggle with perseverance or "grit." Teaching all students the skill of trying when it's hard is a great way to help them overcome life's obstacles, including state testing.

Here are the five simple steps to Trying When It's Hard:

1. Think, "This is hard."
2. Stay calm.
3. Think, "I'll try my best."
4. Try it.
5. Tell yourself, "Good job."

No one likes the pressure that testing brings; teachers, parents, students, and administrators wish we could just skip this time of year. But since we can't, remember to stay positive (for the sake of your own sanity). And remember that even though test scores are important, they are *not* the most important part of what you do.