



MINDFULNESS + TESTING FOR 3RD, 4TH, 5TH GRADERS

Social Emotional Preparation for Testing

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While preparing students for state testing, there is an opportunity to not only practice the academic skills and content, but also to build social emotional and coping skills. Children are likely to experience some form of anxiety as they are exposed to formal testing situations due to high rigor, time pressure, minimal scheduled breaks, and limited adult support permitted. This requires an adjustment from the typical school day routine and available supports, which can create a feeling of vulnerability and anxiety. These emotions and the absence of developed coping strategies interfere significantly with a child's ability to utilize the academic skills needed in a formal testing environment.

Mindfulness is a growing trend in education, as a complement to social emotional learning, and testing is an opportunity for children to practice self-awareness and regulation, and maximize their academic abilities.

Including the following strategies in students' preparation for testing will offer them permission and support in managing the emotions that accompany testing, and ultimately to build endurance and regulation skills to translate to other potentially stressful situations.

1. **Take 5** - Practice acknowledging when children appear overwhelmed and give them permission to put their writing utensils down and close their eyes to take 5 breaths, using the breath as a tool to calm the mind, resetting in order to return back to the task.
2. **Check in with the senses** - Practice using transition times during testing sections or during breaks to encourage children to check in with one or all of the senses in their environment, as a way of grounding into the present moment and easing worry, resetting to continue the task.
3. **Body scan** - Practice noticing when the body is tense vs. relaxed. Give children permission to scan the body during testing, and choose to relax the muscles after observing tension. Becoming aware of the body's messages and then having a choice to relax the muscles is empowering and allows for re-focusing back on the task.
4. **One thing at a time** - Practice acknowledging when the testing feels like "too much" and slowing down the mind before it becomes overwhelmed. Encouraging children to take one thing at a time puts them back in charge of a vulnerable situation, and gives hope and motivation to continue with the task.
5. **Affirmations** - Practice short and simple positive phrases that children can associate with the testing experience, that will help with positive self-talk when they may lose confidence or endurance. Introducing phrases during test preparation like "Do your best", "Take it slow", or "I believe in you" can provide a sense of comfort in the actual testing situation.

Taking a 30-60 second break with one of these practices is an investment in student's motivation, productivity, and stamina. Teachers' ability to practice and model these skills helps children relate to awareness of self and emotional resiliency. Giving children permission to use these skills empowers them to take care of themselves and thrive.