

Tips for Preventing Dependency in Anxious Students

- 1. Don't Accept the Word "Help" in Isolation:** The word help in isolation won't be much help in post-secondary school life. (We don't call our internet providers and say "Help" alone.)
 - a. When your student says "Help", pretend you don't know what the problem is.
 - b. If necessary respond by saying: "What do you need help with?"
 - c. Allow them to self-advocate and articulate their confusion.
- 2. Identify Reassurance-Seeking vs Help-Seeking Questions:** For students who immediately perceive work to be too difficult. Being asked to try something new can elicit negative and self-doubting thoughts in students with anxiety. Instead of jumping in to help and inadvertently reinforcing those thoughts, prompt students to reword their questions.
 - a. When a student immediately asks "What do I do?" or says "I can't do this.", respond by prompting more appropriate questions.

Say: "Did you want to ask me for a check in?" or "Do you want to ask me if you understand the directions correctly?"
 - b. For long term independence: respond by saying "Can you change that question to a more accurate one?"
- 3. Foster Independence with Whole Class Rules that Promote Trying:** Our first thoughts when we initially look at an activity can be negative ("Oh this is going to take forever." or "I can't do this."). Create and post rules that promote trying before giving into those thoughts and shutting down.
 - a. Everyone in this class has to try before they can ask for help.
 - b. Before you ask the teacher, check in with a buddy
- 4. Make Helpful Strategies Visible:** We often assist students verbally and tell them where or how they can find solutions. However, verbal coaching does not always translate to students using strategies independently. Make your most common suggestions visible in your classroom. Consider...

- a. Creating a “What to do when I’m stuck” poster and prominently displayed in your classroom.
 - b. Writing lists for a specific student and taping it on their desk.
 - c. Lists might include-
 - Take a deep breath and Re-read the directions
 - Walk up to the board for a closer look at group practice
 - Check your notes or the book
 - Take a 30 second movement break and begin trying
 - Ask a neighbor
5. **Teach Initiation-The Underlying Skill Deficit of Anxiety:** A lack of initiation skills is the root cause of dependent behaviors. Specifically teaching and displaying initiation skills prevents the teacher from acting as a constant “First-responder”.
- a. When the student says “I need help”, respond by helping the student realize the problem is initiation not *INABILITY*- “Looks like you are having a hard time getting started.” or “This sounds like an initiation problem.”
 - b. Then prompt them to use the poster on the wall to choose a strategy. Including student choice can lead to more success and independence in the future.
6. **Classroom Poster: Highlighting Initiating, Not Avoiding Difficult Assignments.** Create the poster with your class, adding their thoughts and ideas. Be sure to add strategies that bypass negative thinking. Consider these strategy types:
- a. **Chunking:**
 - I am going to work for ___(1-10) minutes at first.
 - I will do the first 2 problems and then stop for a minute.
 - I will do the even number problems on this worksheet first.
 - etc.
 - b. **Not Starting with Permanent Products (expecting to make a mistake):**
 - Use a white board and then transfer thoughts and answers to paper

- Use scrap paper first
- Asking for an extra copy of the homework in case you make a mistake.
- etc.

c. Stopping Inaccurate Thoughts:

- Remember past success on similar assignments
- Use accurate self talk (This will only take 10 minutes)
- Pair something pleasant with something unpleasant (choosing a comfortable chair to work from, listening to music while doing homework)
- Picturing how I'll feel when I'm finished with this task
- etc.

d. Persisting or Initiating When Stuck:

- Do the easy problems first
- Give myself breaks
- Plan a small reward for myself when I am finished
- etc.