



The Counseling Services Center provides activities and services to assist students in achieving their academic goals.

Student's privacy is respected and our services are free of charge to all students.

Office Hours for Namm Hall 108 (718) 260-5030

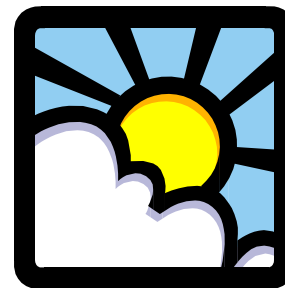
We look forward to meeting your students!



Helping Students Manage

Stress and Anxiety

A Handbook for Faculty



Note from the Counseling Center

The Counseling Services Center supports the educational, emotional and career development of City Tech students by providing opportunities for skill development, counseling and referrals that address obstacles to success. We do not provide ongoing in-depth psychotherapy but can refer you to services in the community. Services include individual counseling for academic, career and personal challenges as well as crisis intervention. We also provide support groups, referrals to campus and community resources, campus outreach, workshops and faculty/staff consultation. The Office of Veteran Support Services receives supervision and oversight from this office.

The Counseling Center at City Tech functions as a screening house for problems students have with personal, academic and career concerns. During this time of crisis, we can help students with questions they have about the effects this pandemic is having on their lives, careers, and education. We might not have all the answers, but we will listen to concerns, give answers when we have them, and direct students to help. We will get through this. Click [here](#) for Strategies to Coping with the Corona Virus Anxiety.

Relevant Statistics re- City Tech's Student Population

(Data from City Tech FACT SHEET 2019-20):

Of those responding . . .

- 35% born outside of U.S. (150 countries represented)
- 73% report language other than English spoken at home
- 38% list their parents as college grads+
- 61% report household income less than \$30,000+
- 80% incoming freshmen receive need-based aid
- 27% work more than 20 hours per week+

These statistics suggest a student population that is lacking in preparation and college experience, with less-than-ideal support systems at home. The data also suggests students lack confidence, have very busy schedules and are dealing with varying levels of stress.

Various factors such as disparities in access to health care, language/cultural barriers, and stigma attached to mental health counseling often keep our

students from getting appropriate help. Stress and anxiety are interfering with many promising students' ability to excel and rise to their academic and personal potential.

Fortunately, there is help available, and you hold it in your hands! Recognizing the symptoms of anxiety, understanding its causes, and utilizing proven and easy to use methods contained within this handbook can effectively reduce this problem for most students.

The Counseling Center offers workshops and culturally sensitive personal counseling to help address these challenges, but we cannot reach all students. Therefore, faculty and staff: we need your help! In order to effectively address this problem proactively, we are offering A HANDBOOK for you to use in your classrooms.

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Statement of Purpose for Such a Handbook

Faculty members are in a unique position within the college community to recognize when a student's stress or anxiety impairs function. Poor class attendance, lack of class participation and low grades can be due to anxiety and difficulty coping with college. Anxiety, excess levels of stress or worry can notably interfere with a student's ability to learn, and can negatively impact his or her academic performance

Consider the following progression:

Stress And Anxiety ⇒ **Poor Academic Performance** ⇒ **Academic Probation** ⇒ **Dismissal** ⇒ **College Retention Rate**

There is a connection here!

When a student's personal career, life goals, hopes and dreams are deferred or destroyed, there too is a tremendous cost to life's most precious resources: human spirit and one's potential to positively impact the world.

This Handbook addresses the above problem and provides practical, easy to use methods to help students better manage their anxieties and life stressors.

Introduction

Stress and anxiety in our culture are inevitable. Rapid pace of life, financial burdens, and personal conflict are widespread among urban college students. The continuing pressures of everyday life take a heavy toll on the physical and mental wellness of millions of people each year. Some experts think stress may cause 50% of all diseases, and it is safe to say that stress frequently underlies emotional and behavioral problems. Also, it is important to note that an individual's history of previous trauma or prolonged stress can exacerbate current anxiety and stress reactions.

City Tech students face life stressors on a daily basis: financial problems, health problems; pressures at work; family problems; losses (due to COVID-19 and other causes, sometimes traumatic), personal relationship issues; difficulty balancing school-family-job-recreation; unemployment; discouragement from looking for work; no quiet time; traffic; crowded subway, noise, etc. When students carry one or more of these stressors into the classroom, challenges abound.

The self-help suggestions offered in this booklet may be useful. Many people can learn to manage stress and anxiety and restore resilience and confidence. Both the cognitive- behavioral principles and relaxation techniques can help to increase wellness and improve students' academic performance.

The latter part of the Handbook includes a variety of relaxation and stress reduction techniques from which to choose. "Breathing Retraining" is recommended to be used alone, or along with one or more of the other techniques. As you will find, "Breathing Retraining" is easy to learn and practice. It is used in combination with a studied approach by The National Center for PTSD's Brief Intervention for Continuing Post- Disaster Distress utilizing Cognitive Restructuring and other Cognitive-Behavioral therapies.

Test Anxiety Workshop (for Faculty use in Classrooms)

Objectives:

- 1. Recognize symptoms of test anxiety**
- 2. Understand the causes of test anxiety**
- 3. Implement strategies to prevent or manage test anxiety symptoms, build confidence and improve academic performance**

Introduce Topic and Engage Students:

Students complete "Test Anxiety Questions" (see at end of document) and discuss in small groups and/or entire group, or, "Think of an occasion when you performed in public (i.e. acting in a play, singing or playing an instrumental solo, dancing, speaking before an audience, athletic competition, some pressured situation before an audience). Write down the event(s). List how you were feeling before the event, what was happening to you physically, and what were some of your thoughts before going on stage." *Discuss above and compare with Test Anxiety.*

1. Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety (*identify and normalize symptoms, complete list to include the following:*)

Physical

- Sweaty palms
- Stomach problems
- Muscle tension/Muscle aches
- Headache
- Rapid heart rate
- Dry mouth
- Chills/Shaking
- Eating/Sleep disturbances
- Fatigue/Exhaustion

Cognitive

- Racing thoughts
- Difficulty concentrating
- Numbing, going blank
- Racing thoughts
- Intrusive thoughts/Flashbacks
- Memory problems
- Problematic thinking
- * All-or-Nothing Mindset
- * Overgeneralization
- "Must," "Should" Statements
- * Catastrophizing
- * Emotional Reasoning

Emotional

- Fear or worry
- Numbing
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Anger/Irritability
- Sadness/Depression
- Feeling lost/Abandoned
- Feeling hopeless

Behavioral

- Restlessness, easily agitated
- Hyper-vigilance
- Increased smoking or alcohol intake
- Isolation/Withdrawal
- Change in activity level
- Blaming- the teacher, the format of the class, the test, the classroom, etc.
- Not reading the directions carefully and becoming confused
- Poor preparation, marathon studying before exam

2. Causes

***The most common cause of test anxiety is the lingering doubt about not being prepared!

- Some even use “test anxiety” as an excuse for not preparing well for tests.
- Other Life Stressors: financial problems, health problems, pressure at work, family

problems, personal relationship issues, difficulty balancing school-family-job-recreation, no quiet time, traffic, crowded subway, noise, etc...

- Sleep deprivation
- Poor diet and nutrition
- History of anxiety or trauma

3. Solutions and Strategies

Confidence and Preparation:

Ask students and discuss, “What came first, Confidence or Preparation?” – ala ‘Chicken and the Egg’ question. Ask what preparation they made today in order to come to college and the reasons for doing so and how this relates to confidence. Build confidence by preparing early, remaining healthy, and knowing strategies for calming down and refocusing.

Prepare Early (The best frontline defense)

- Plan ahead! Develop a Study Plan, one that extends over five or more days will allow information to sink in.

- Organize your material. The better you organize the information to study, the better you will recall related information during a test.
- Study your notes and material over a 5-day period. Avoid “Marathon studying” for long hours because it *produces* anxiety!

Attend to Your Health

- Get enough sleep several days leading up to, and the night before the test
- Eat nutritious meals, avoid stimulants and depressants
- Eat breakfast the day of the test (a growling stomach can be a distraction and make you self-conscious)
- Exercise (‘good stress’) It relaxes muscles, floods the brain with oxygen and re-news energy. A healthier, fitter body is able to withstand other stressors
- Spiritual health: Be sure to tap in your faith traditions and practices to help in time of stress!

Strategy for the Day of the Test

- Prepare: wear suitable clothing, bring a water bottle, high-energy snacks and other exam supplies you may need.
- Arrive at the test site early. Choose your spot where you will be the least dis-tracted (i.e. away from the door, noisy students), and get settled. Do a brief Breathing Retraining (see next section).
- Practice positive self-talk and let go of negative or distracting thoughts. Thoughts such as, “What if I fail...?”, “I hate this test,” “My boyfriend was really a jerk last night!” are not productive and can prevent you from focusing on the directions and actual test questions.
- **Stay focused! If a distracting thought enters your mind, be gentle with your-self, acknowledge it, and replace the thought with positive self-talk (“Although I don’t like this test, I’m prepared and ready to do my best!”)**
- Listen to instructions. Read all directions carefully.
- Survey the exam before you dig in.

IV. Breathing Retraining

Most of us realize that breathing affects the way that we feel. For example, when upset, you may think of taking a deep breath to calm down. Or when anxious, you may breathe in quick, shallow breaths. However, taking a deep breath or breathing quickly often does *not* help. In fact, this type of breathing can actually *cause* anxious feelings. Hyperventilating causes unpleasant and often frightening physical sensations.

When you feel anxious and want to calm down, you need to *slow down* your breathing and take in *less air*. Take a **normal breath and exhale slowly**. It is *exhaling* that is associated with relaxation, not inhaling.

Breathing fast and taking deep breaths are common responses to stress and anxiety. Such habits can be hard to break. Learning to control your breathing takes daily practice. You will find it helpful to first practice during times when you are not anxious. Later, when you have learned this easy to learn and practice technique, you will find it helpful in more stressful situations.

Breathing Retraining Instructions

1. Sit with good posture in chair with both feet flat on floor. Relax your arms and shoulders, feel your head resting comfortably on your neck like a “bobble-head” doll. If necessary, this technique can be used when standing, however, sitting is preferred.
2. Take a normal breath in through your nose with your mouth closed. Breathe slowly and notice your stomach gently expanding (picture a baby sleeping).
3. Exhale slowly through your mouth, long and slow with a quiet “whoosh” (some find it helpful to think saying the word “calm” or “relax” very slowly and while exhaling, for example: “c-a-a-a-l-m” or, “p-e-a-c-e”)
4. Pause, now take the next inhalation- a normal, relaxed in-breath. Flare your nostrils a bit as you feel the cool air gently rush in. When you exhale, notice the breath is now warm.
5. Practice this several times a day, taking 10 to 15 breaths at each practice.

Have Students Do a Breathing Retraining Session (10-15 breath cycle)

You may find it helpful to close your eyes during Breathing Retraining. Especially when practicing, closing your eyes helps maintain focus. After learning the technique, however, it is just as effective when keeping your eyes open. In most classroom or public settings, you may feel more comfortable keeping your eyes open, and *this* breathing technique can be effectively performed unnoticed by those around you!

Remember, the idea of Breathing Retraining is to **become aware of your breathing**, and to **slow your breathing down!** This technique can help you center yourself, re- group, re-focus and clear your mind.

For Test Anxiety, use Breathing Retraining right *before* taking the exam (remember, you have arrived at the test site early!), *during* the test (if your mind wanders, becomes dis- tracted, or you start becoming anxious), and *after* the test (if you start second guessing yourself or obsessing when waiting for the results. Excessive worry after an exam is use- less and destructive).

Breathing Retraining is very easy to learn and very effective in dealing with many anxi- ety-related symptoms, as well as with post-trauma symptoms.

Additional Stress Reducing Techniques/Relaxation Exercises

The following techniques and exercises can help students relax and minimize stress and anxiety. Benefits can also include: lowering blood pressure, increasing concentration, increasing energy and general feeling of well-being. Find out those that suit you best and are most effective with students.

Visualization and Guided Imagery—You can significantly reduce stress with something enormously powerful: your imagination. The power of the imagination far exceeds that of the will. It is hard to will yourself into a relaxed state, but you can imagine relaxation spreading through your body, and you can visualize yourself in a safe, peaceful retreat. To overcome anxious, negative thoughts, you can refocus your mind on positive, healing im- ages. Visualization and Guided Imagery are methods of accessing the right brain (or hemisphere) and using its relaxing power.

1. “Gold Light” —*Begin with “Breathing Retraining.”* Keeping your eyes closed, continue slow, relaxed breathing. Now imagine you are sitting in this room, and the entire room is filled with light, gold light, a warm light. As you imagine the light filling the room, take a full breath in through your nose, filling your lungs to capacity with this light. Hold your breath for 3-5 seconds, and release it. Re- peat this 3 times. As you exhale, you release all stress and worried thoughts. Your negative thoughts and worries will always be there if you want to have them, but for now you are releasing these thoughts when you exhale.

2. “Healing Colors”– *Begin with, “Breathing Retraining.”* Keeping your eyes closed, continue slow, relaxed breathing. Now think of an area of your body that feels tense or uncomfortable. It might be in your back, neck or head. Locate the area of your body that feels uncomfortable, aches, or is tight. Now think of a color that when you look at that color makes you feel at ease, calm and relaxed. Spend a moment visualizing that color before you, surrounding you. Now take a breath in, and as you do, picture that color entering the area of your body that is uncomfortable. Allow the color to penetrate that area of your body, and as it does, begin to feel that area relaxed. *You can ask students after the exercise has ended to describe their color and where it was located. Lighter colors seem to have a more positive effect on stress.*

3. “Creating Your Special Place” –In creating your special place you will be making a retreat for relaxation and guidance. This place may be indoors or out- doors. In structuring your place, follow a few guidelines:

- Allow a private entry into your place
- Make it peaceful, comfortable, and safe
- Fill your place with colorful detail
- Allow room for an inner Guide or other person to be with you

Begin with “Breathing Retraining.” To go to your safe place, sit or lie down and be totally comfortable. Close your eyes...Walk slowly to a quiet place in your mind...Your place can be inside or outside...It needs to be peaceful and safe...Picture yourself unloading your anxieties, your worries...Notice the view in the distance...What do you smell?...What do you hear?...Notice what is before you...Reach out and touch it...How does it feel?...Smell it...Hear it...Make the temperature comfortable...Be safe here...Look around for a special spot, a private spot...Find the path to this place...Feel the ground with your feet... Walk down this path until you can enter your own quiet, comfortable, safe place.

You have arrived at your special place...What is under your feet? How does it feel?...Take several steps...What do you see above you?...What do you hear?

...Do you hear something else?...Reach and touch something...What is its texture?...Are there pens, paper, paints nearby, or is there sand to draw in, clay to sink your hands in and work?...Go to them, handle them, smell them...These are your special tools, or tools for your inner Guide to reveal ideas or feelings to you...Look as far as you can see...What do you see?...What do you hear?...

What aromas do you notice?

Sit or lie in your special place...Notice its smells, sounds, sights...This is your place and nothing can harm you here...Spend 3-5 minutes realizing you are re- laxed,

safe, and comfortable.

Memorize this place’s smells, tastes, sights, sounds...You can come back here and relax here whenever you want...Leave now, by the same path or entrance...Notice the ground, touch things near you...Look far away and appreciate the view...Remind yourself this special place you created can be entered whenever you wish. Say an affirmation such as, “I can relax here,” or “This is my special place. I can come here whenever I wish.”

4. Relaxation Exercise Before Taking a Test

Begin with “Breathing Retraining” and any brief relaxation exercise. Now I want you to imagine it is the day of the Test. See the classroom before you- the chairs, the walls, the blackboard. Enter the class. Sit in the seat you feel most comfortable in. Look around the room. Now see the other students also in the class. These are students you have been with in the class. You feel good about being in this class. You’ve worked hard and learned so much. You say to your- self, “I am as prepared as I ever will be for this test- I am ready”. Take a breath, in and out.

Now imagine that your teacher enters the room. You recognize how much your teacher has taught you this semester. Any negative thoughts are gently acknowledged but pushed aside. You don’t focus on negative thoughts. You feel good as the test is given out. Once you receive the test, you briefly skim it over. Looking at the questions makes your heart pound a little, and you recognize this as nervousness. In order to relax, you take a full breath in and breathe out slowly. You feel better. Throughout the test you become aware of any signs of anxiety and breathe them away.

Now you begin to answer the questions on the exam. You start by going to easiest section first. You know once you answer a few easy questions you’ll feel better and more confident than you already are. You begin solving the problems. Take a breath in and exhale slowly. You become totally absorbed in answering the questions. Nothing else exists at this moment except you and the question. You give all your attention to this question. When you are finished with one problem you remember to double-check it. When you find a mistake you’re grateful because now it is corrected.

Now you move on to the remaining questions, repeating the same process. Take a breath in and exhale slowly. Any negative thoughts are gently pushed

away. You feel good. Soon you will have completed all questions on the exam. You feel good about your answers, but you double-check them since there is still time. You find a few minor mistakes and you correct them- again grateful to find them. Take a breath in and exhale slowly.

Now the exam is over. You walk with your test in hand and turn it over to the teacher. You feel good. You've done well.

Now I want you to return to this room. Become more aware of your body...the classroom. Feel the chair you are sitting on. Wiggle your toes and fingers. You are becoming more alert as you re-enter this workshop...When you are ready, slowly open your eyes

Muscle Relaxation

1. Progressive Muscle Relaxation -Begin with *"Breathing Retraining."* Keeping your eyes closed, continue slow, relaxed breathing. Now focus on your toes. Tighten the muscles in your toes. Tighten and feel every muscle in your toes tighten. Hold about 10 seconds and release. Sense the relaxation in your toes. Be aware of your breath and how relaxed your toes feel. Now move the focus to your entire foot and ankle of both feet. Tighten all the muscles and hold about 10 seconds, then release. Now move your attention back to your toes, tighten your toes, and move to your ankles, up to your calves and thighs, tighten, tighten and hold about 10 seconds, then release. Feel the tension release from your feet and up to your thighs. Breath in and enjoy the relaxed muscles in your feet and legs. *The Facilitator now moves on to other parts of the body continuing with the buttocks, groin, stomach, back, arms, shoulders, neck, face head, repeating the same pattern continuing up the body, ending with the top of the head.*

2.Stretching Exercises (sitting relaxed with good posture, *Be careful not to strain)

•**Fingers:** Separate and stretch out your fingers for 10 seconds. Curl your fingers at the knuckles and hold for 10 seconds. Repeat.

•**Hands and Wrists:** Hold your left hand in front of you sideways with fingers up. With your right palm press the inside of the fingers of the left hand and push gently back for 10 seconds. Now do the same with the other hand Repeat.

•**Shoulders:** Lift your shoulders toward your ears, hold 5 seconds, then relax. Repeat.

•**Neck:** Tilt your head to one side and hold for 10 seconds. Repeat on other side for 10 seconds. Then tilt head back for 10 seconds, and forward for 10 seconds. Then spin head all around slowly, first to the left 3 times, then to the right 3 times.

•**Upper Back:** Clasp your hands behind your head, elbows out, and gently squeeze your shoulder blades together for 10 seconds, then relax. Repeat.

Close with brief session of "Breathing Retraining."

Listening to Music

1.For Relaxation- Listening to music is one of the most common forms of relaxation. Each person gives his or her own meaning to music. It is important, therefore, to select music you find peaceful and soothing when you want to listen to music for the purpose of relaxation. If possible, make a tape of uninterrupted relaxing music (instrumental, without words is best) that you can play daily during stressful times, or whenever you decide to use music to relax. Repetition of the same music that helped you relax in the past carries with it a positive association that is likely to be beneficial in the future!

2.For Inspiration- Listening to music can also be used for encouragement or inspiration (with or without words). Choose music of a positive, inspirational nature that makes you feel good.

Drawing Exercise

"Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain" (Betty Edwards)- Find a quiet place to draw where no one will disturb you. Play music if you like. From an art book or photo choose a picture that interests you. Turn the picture you are going to draw/copy upside down. Do not turn the picture right side up until you have finished. Plan to finish the drawing in one sitting. Allow 20-30 minutes to complete it. You might want to set a timer so you can forget about keeping time.

Look at the upside-down drawing for a minute. Regard the angles and shapes and lines. You can see the lines all fit together...where one line ends, and another starts. When you begin to draw, start at the top and copy each line, moving from line to adjacent line, putting it all together just like a jigsaw puzzle.

Begin to draw. Work your way through the drawing by moving from line to line, part to adjacent part. Take your time...don't make the exercise too complicated...allow your movements to be slow and easy.

After you have finished, notice your state of mind. Do you feel calm and relaxed? Did you lose track of time and meaning? Did you turn off the chatter? Were you able to get away from labeling and focus on the whole rather than the parts of the drawing? Turn your drawing right side up. You will probably be surprised by how well your drawing came out...give yourself a pat on the back.

Using Humor

1. Remember to laugh! Laughter has been called “**the best medicine**,” “a balm for the soul,” a type of “internal jogging.” Laughter can satisfy these claims and many more, making it one of the best types of tension relief. A good belly laugh works your lungs, heart, and muscles, releasing pleasure-producing brain chemicals that relaxes your muscles and creates a feeling of well-being. In fact, studies have shown that 5-10 minutes of hearty laughter is as good for your cardiovascular system as a 30-minute rowing exercise!
2. In his book ***Anatomy of an Illness***, Norman Cousins states that laughter has astounding rejuvenating effects on mind and body and “serves as a bulletproof vest that protects you against the ravages of negative thinking.” It is difficult to remain anxious, angry, or depressed when you are laughing. Laughter gets your attention off yourself and your situation. It gives you the distance necessary to gain perspective on a situation you are probably taking too seriously. And laughter is just plain fun to do! Give yourself more opportunities to laugh as a break from your stressful life.
3. Make laughter a daily habit. Treat yourself to watching your favorite comedians or programs that make you laugh.

4. Finally, never take yourself too seriously. We all make mistakes and sometimes do dumb things. The ability to laugh at oneself is a healthy practice and one worth cultivating.

Important Resources Available:

The Counseling Services Center (N-108)

The Counseling Center offers City Tech students personal, academic and career development support as well as crisis counseling for mental health needs. Although we do not offer in-depth psychotherapy, we can refer you to these and other services in the community. There are also free and immediate services and referrals through our side panel menu on this page. ZOOM conferencing, telephone, or email contact is available. Contact us through the following methods:

- Email: Counseling@citytech.cuny.edu
- Phone: 718-260-5030

Open Zoom Rooms are - available Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday 11AM to 1PM. Students must register using their City Tech email, but no appointment is needed.

Zoom Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85995666921>

Meeting ID: 859 9566 6921

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/kr5iuR6n9>

For those students who email or phone us, a counselor will respond during our operating hours.

Our response time varies. If you are experiencing an emergency situation, contact Public Safety Office at 718-260-5555, open 24 hours every day, or call 911.