



## **Principal's Post**

**February, 2017**

### **ANXIETY**

*We live in an age of anxiety. This seems to be a time when uncertainty is a certain thing.*

The conflicts we face between having control, and not having control, over our lives and circumstances can create an atmosphere of tension and insecurity. There are many factors that contribute to this state: constant “busyness”, emphasis on succeeding, pressures to “keep up with the Jones”, an overload of news, information and entertainment, national and international events, just to name a few.

Human beings have a finely tuned nervous system. Our brains and nervous systems have evolved to respond to the events in the world around us. One feature of that response is a “fight or flight” mechanism. This trait signals the brain that danger is imminent and sets off a series of responses that spurs the body into action. There are many levels of intensity to the body’s responses. Because each person is unique, the intensity of response is different for each person. Two people can experience the same event: one will walk away and resume their regular activities; the other will not. That person may experience racing thoughts, sweating, heart palpitations, restless legs, shortness of breath and dizziness- an array of symptoms that stops them in their tracks.

When someone suffers an anxiety disorder, these responses are very intense and are often triggered by thoughts, rather than events. Thoughts of impending threats, real or imagined, bring on a fear response that can immobilize a person. Often keeping the person trapped within a vicious cycle of fearful anticipation leading to symptoms, leading to self-consciousness, leading to fight or flight behaviors that are meant to relieve the distress but only intensify the condition.

Anxiety disorders are prevalent across all strata of society. Many anxiety disorders develop in childhood. For some children, childhood, which is often seen as a time of free spirited, trouble free growth, can be fraught with tensions

and fears. We know that such fears are obstacles to learning: binding a child's ability to take risks and make mistakes; stifling curiosity; interfering with social interactions; strangling growth.

It is very important that we acknowledge anxiety in students. Anxious children need to know that we understand what they are experiencing. We want to reassure them that their symptoms are distressing but not dangerous. We want to help them recognize anxiousness rising in them and give them strategies to manage those symptoms.

Luckily, there are treatments for those who suffer anxiety disorders as well as a host of helpful strategies that anyone can learn to help manage anxiety. Techniques like breathing and meditation, movement and exercise can help alleviate anxiety. Parents are encouraged to use these strategies to help their children manage anxiety.

St. Max's teachers recently attended a workshop on *Classroom Strategies for Helping Anxious Students* sponsored by the Chester County Intermediate Unit's Behavior Specialists, Krista Kapczynski and Amy Fichter. Many of their recommendations, now being implemented in our classrooms, help ALL students because they promote a low stress, accepting classroom culture.

While we cannot control the uncertainty in the world around us, we can certainly give our children the tools to manage their reactions and cope with life's circumstances in healthy and productive ways.

More information about Managing Anxiety in Children can be found at these sites:

<http://www.worrywisekids.org/node/40>

<http://www.thehelpfulcounselor.com/18-coping-skills-strategies-for-children-and-teens/>

<http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/anxiety-factsheet.html> (school/classroom)

<https://www.anxietybc.com/parenting/parent-child>

Sources: <https://www.samhsa.gov/disorders/mental>

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/anxiety/home/ovc-20168121>

NOTE: I would like to thank **Krista Kapczynski and Amy Fichter** of the CCIU for providing their support in writing this Principal's post. They were most

generous in sharing Information and resources; as well as providing fact checking to ensure accuracy.