

Anxiety is usually a normal feeling

If you're feeling anxious about an upcoming test, that's normal, and it can make you study harder, according to a Philadelphia psychologist. But it can be a problem if you get too worried to focus on what you're studying.

"Anxiety is going to pop up," said Dr. Nicole McKelvey, pediatric psychologist at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children in an interview with the *Fit Fish*. "It's easy to feel anxious when we're in a world where a lot of things are brought to our awareness very quickly."

While some anxiety is normal for most people, it can become a concern if the feeling is so big that it prevents you from doing things you'd like to do, she said. For instance, you may want to play with a friend who has a dog that scares you and makes you



Illustration by Franklin Reilly

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Learning how to play can benefit health

You may not realize it, but the next time you're in the schoolyard playing with your friends you're doing a lot more than just enjoying games or running around. You're learning valuable lessons.

"Kids' work is to play. And while they're playing, they're working. They don't feel like they're working, but they are," says Tia Mathisen, executive director of Playworks PA, in an interview with the *Fit Fish*.

Playworks is a national organization that partners with schools and community organizations to increase opportunities for kids to have physical activity and safe, meaningful play.

Behind the shouts and laughter of the playground, Tia said, kids' "brains are working, their bodies are working, their energy, their social capital is growing. They learn when they should pull back from a challenge. They learn how to exist in space. They're building muscles. They're building their heart. They're learning how to socialize."

Playing games together outdoors helps kids connect with each other, get valuable exercise, and learn teamwork, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP) website. Having fun is important for kids' health, says the AAP.

The School District of Philadelphia's new student wellness policy means that daily recess is required for all students. Tia (who goes by her first name) praises the new policy.

She's thrilled about it because she believes that "children have the right to play; it's deeply connected to their humanity, their growth, and even our success as a society."

Games matter because they create connection and they provide a space for joy in a kid's life, Tia says. Group activities are important because they can teach you things like teamwork, following the rules, communication, and empathy, according to her

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Handling anxiety

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so uncomfortable that it's hard to visit your friend. There are ways for you to handle those feelings, Dr. McKelvey said.

"Learning how to manage that anxiety when you go to your friend's house allows you to still be able to play and hang out with your friend and not worry as much about the dog," she said.

Sometimes people need support from healthcare professionals like Dr. McKelvey to manage anxiety and deal with their feelings.

During the interview, Dr. McKelvey answered additional questions about anxiety. Her answers have been lightly edited for length.

Q: How can anxiety affect a child's mental health?

Dr. McKelvey: Lower levels of anxiety can be helpful. It can help you study for a test or prepare for a speech. Some types of anxiety can make things harder. If you're anxious about social situations and meeting new people, it might make it hard for you to make new friends, and then that would make you lonely and impact your mental health.

Q: How can anxiety affect a child's physical health?

Dr. McKelvey: Our body has systems that work together. If you're having social anxiety all day every day, your body can get really tired. It could cause stomachaches or cause you to go to the bathroom. Anxiety can cause tension in muscles or your neck.

Q: What is the impact of anxiety on education?

Dr. McKelvey: When you're feeling really anxious, it's hard to concentrate [on what the teacher or group members are saying]. That can make it hard to get



Illustration by Claire Stewart

good grades. It can be really stressful for a student. It's when we struggle to manage anxiety that it impacts our education.

Q: What are some strategies to reduce anxiety?

Dr. McKelvey: We start simple and then get bigger. Things like deep breathing and relaxation can be really helpful for managing immediate anxiety.

Long-term strategies are more challenging. We do something called exposures. This means facing your fears. If you're afraid of dogs, we start small, maybe by looking at a picture of a dog and then a video of a dog snarling. We build up to a dog being in the room with you.

Sometimes therapy is not enough and that is OK. It just means our brains and bodies need extra help. Some kids and adults need to take medicine to help their brains deal with anxiety. Medications and therapy work best together.

Learning to play in a respectful manner

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organization's website, playworks.org.

Tia says that Playworks uses a few models for its approach to schools. The one used at Alexander Adaire School is a "coach model." A coach comes to the school, works with classes individually, and then helps with recess so that fewer conflicts and injuries happen. At Adaire, the coach oversees the weekly games period in which students play with their classmates.

"I think schools that offer Playworks recognize

that kids need recess," Tia says. Letting kids have free time outside is important because kids need to take a break from all the classroom learning. "I think playing games can impact relationships because having fun is good medicine," she says.

As an advocate for kids playing, Tia says joy is a feeling that should be spread around schools, and her group can help: "Playworks helps show how to solve conflicts and problems by playing games. It teaches things in a way that is fun and understandable."

Kids, she says, should have time to have fun just like any other humans. —By *Fit Fish* staff

Reporters appeal for a therapy dog

Dear Principal Jenkins,

It has come to our attention that getting a therapy dog for Adaire or merely bringing a therapy dog to school for a day would have major benefits. There are a plethora of reasons, but for the sake of your time, we will only list a couple. After gathering information from the Alliance of Therapy Dogs, we come to you with these three reasons:

1. Spending time with a dog can reduce stress.

According to the Alliance of Therapy Dogs, “For students or stressed-out kids who don’t own a dog, a therapy dog is a perfect substitute. They can spend time cuddling and interacting with the dog without having the responsibilities of a dog owner. Many therapy dog teams visit high schools and colleges during exam weeks to provide some stress relief.” During exam weeks, kids have elevated stress, so bringing in a therapy dog can help alleviate stress, so kids can perform better during testing.

2. Therapy dogs can help calm down children.

The Alliance of Therapy Dogs writes about “5 Ways Therapy Dogs Can Help Kids” on their website, “A visit from a therapy dog can encourage children who struggle to handle their emotions or stay still.”

The students will learn “that to have fun with their furry visitor, they need to be calm” and gentle. This shows that kids can learn to calm themselves down because if you act crazy around a dog, then the dog might feel threatened and be unsettled.

3. They can help children with autism.

The Alliance of Therapy Dogs says in an article that children with autism “often struggle to handle their emotions and deal with social situations, but therapy dogs can help them overcome these challenges.” This piece of evidence is compelling because a therapy dog could strengthen an autistic child’s ability to manage their emotions by letting them interact with an adorable dog and an understanding adult handler.

In summary, there are a multitude of reasons that getting—or even having a visit from—a therapy dog would bring positive results for different members of the Adaire student body. As a plus, the dog would also be cute. We highly recommend a visit from one of these dogs. It would help lots of kids and could change many different aspects of their lives and help their education in a noticeable way.

Sincerely,

James Cullen and Theodore Coudriet

Humor can give more than a laugh

Sixth-grade Adaire reporters in Room 202 recently held a Joke Day. They had been researching the topic of humor and its health benefits and wanted to put what they’d learned to the test.

Laughter can benefit your health by lowering your cortisol, a hormone that causes us to feel stress, according to Dr. Edward Creagan at the Mayo Clinic, a hospital and research institution. Laughter can also increase endorphins, hormones that tell our brain to feel happy, he said in an article.

“Positive humor also draws people together and strengthens the bonds in relationships,” according to the Anthem Healthcare website. “People who draw out your sense of humor help you keep worries in perspective and make you feel better about yourself,” the website says.

For Joke Day, students brought jokes they got from various sources like TikTok, Google, a joke book, friends or family, and some even made up their own. Before students told the jokes to the class, they wrote down how they were feeling at the beginning of class.

They wrote down their jokes and then told them to the rest of the class. Finally, they wrote down how they felt after sharing some laughs. Here are some of the reporters’ thoughts about humor.

I was feeling calm, a bit tired but not in a bad mood. And after, I felt pretty much the same, maybe a bit happier.

—*Claire Stewart*

Before: I felt very tired and kind of discouraged because I had five tests that week.

After: I felt a lot better because of the jokes.

—*James B. Cullen*

I felt pretty happy before I heard and told jokes. Afterwards, I was feeling a little less happy because my classmates did not get my jokes, but I was still in a pretty good mood.

—*Theodore Coudriet*

Book teaches how to handle a bully

You Can Be A Good Friend

(No Matter What!)

Written by Taraji P. Henson

Illustrated by Paul Kellam

In this book, Lil TJ is excited for her first day of school to make a million new friends. Instead, she meets a bully.

This book is about what to do when someone is being a bully, say reporters in Ms. Monson and Ms. Rivera's second-grade classes. The ending may surprise you.

Lil TJ's classmate, Beau, starts bullying her on the first day of school. He makes fun of her food. Her size. Her drawings. Her clothes.

"I noticed that the mean things Beau said to Lil TJ made her feel upset and filled her full of butterflies," said reporter Nolan Siegel.



When Beau makes fun of what Lil TJ does, it makes her sad at home and makes her nervous to go to school. Because of Beau, Lil TJ stops doing what she normally does. But then she gets help and encouragement from her family.

"I noticed the nice things her family said made her feel happy and full of joy again," said Nolan Siegel.

"I learned that it's not a good idea to be mean back to bullies. If you don't do it back, you might make more friends and that will be better for your health," said Robert Inacker.

Eight out of 14 students in Ms. Monson's and 17 out of 30 students in Ms. Rivera's class recommend this book.

—Review by Ms. Monson and Ms. Rivera's second graders; illustration by Cecilia Crowe, sixth grade

Taking action for a better world

The Big Beach Cleanup

Written by Charlotte Offsay

Illustrated by Katie Rewse

This book is about a girl named Cora who loves building sandcastles at the beach. But when trash keeps washing up on shore, she can no longer do the thing she loves.

Cora decides to do something about the trash. She starts cleaning up the beach herself, but there's too much trash. She's doubtful she can make a difference alone. So she starts to gather people to help clean the beach.

"I didn't like the part of the book when people were ignoring Cora when she asked for help cleaning the beach," said Sophie Ordway.

But Cora keeps trying, and soon people decides to help.

"This book is about becoming an activist," said Allesandra Malcolm.

Many reporters said this book is about working together to save the Earth. And others said it is also about what happens to our health when we do.

Aubrey Lalonde said, "Cora is trying to change the world for the better and that is also good for her mental health."

Brady Beacher added, "Sometimes doing good things like that makes you feel better."

"Cora was sad at the beginning of the story to see so much trash on the beach, but when she helped clean it up, she was happier," said Talya Whitson.

Fourteen of Ms. Felock's 25 third graders recommended this book for others to read.

—By Ms. Felock's third graders

Alexander Adaire Fit Fish

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The *Fit Fish's* faculty advisor is Ms. Olavage. Ms. Jenkins is the school principal.

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