

# Healthy Young Minds

A free publication of Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc. (MHANYS)

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A newsletter for educators, parents, and students about mental health in schools. This information is intended for reuse. Please give credit to



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[www.mhanys.org](http://www.mhanys.org)



## Under Pressure: *School Anxiety Reaches All-Time High*

Have our schools become pressure mills? Are high stakes testing and economic pressures creating a stressed out generation?

As policy makers debate Common Core and college affordability, teachers and students report increased anxiety in the classroom. The normal stresses of fear of failure and peer pressure are exacerbated by competition for prestigious or affordable college slots and high pressure Common Core testing.

Students are packing their schedules with extra classes, volunteer activities, school clubs and sports to help them compete for grades and impressive resumes for post-secondary education. Adding to the stress, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that beginning school before 8:30 am deprives students of needed sleep.

According to Thomas Huberty of Indiana University, up to 30% of students experience anxiety that can have significant negative impact on their ability to perform at an optimal level. <http://www.nasponline.org>

Anxiety causes real symptoms such as rapid breathing, sweaty hands, dry mouth, jittery feelings, sleeplessness, and blanking out during tests. Long term impacts

**Up to 30% of students experience anxiety that can have a significant negative impact on their ability to perform at an optimal level.**

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include depression, anxiety attacks, social withdrawal, and low self-esteem. Students often blame themselves for not being smart enough. Adaptation mechanisms may include “not even trying” or avoiding or even refusing to go to school. Last year there were widespread reports of student anxiety and students getting physically sick during the standardized testing season.

## **Reducing Stress: Parents and Educators Working Together**

Educators and parents can support students and reduce school anxiety. Teens and youth quickly pick-up on anxiety in adults in their lives. Teachers and parents can monitor their own anxiety and model techniques to reduce anxiety. They can help teens view difficulties as a challenge rather than a failure. When students succeed, teachers and parents can praise their efforts or their strategies, not their intelligence. Focus on the value of learning — not proving the worth of students through grades.

Before tests, parents can help students review and make sure they have time to relax and get a good night’s sleep. Teachers can prepare students by instructing them in study skills, test strategies, and by helping them review and practice. Teachers should be available to students during free periods or after school for individualized help. Tell students what to expect the day of the test, have extra supplies available, and remind the students that they are prepared and are likely to do well. Allow them time to relax, socialize, or share snacks before the test.



Relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, guided imagery, mindfulness exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, simple yoga poses, and listening to relaxing music can help.

Empower students by asking them what helps them relax. This lets them know that anxiety is a shared and normal experience and that there are ways to alleviate the problem. Simply acknowledging stress helps reduce the pressure that some students feel.



## **Mental Health First Aid**

**Helping Youth in Crisis or with  
Early Signs of a Serious Mental Health Problem**

Youth Mental Health First Aid is a training on what to do when a teen is in crisis or experiencing early signs of a mental health or addictions challenge. This eight-hour course designed for adults who regularly interact with adolescents has been shown to improve knowledge about mental health topics, reduce stigma, and increase first aid actions towards teens with mental health challenges. The training reviews typical adolescent development, introduces common mental health challenges and teaches a five-step action plan for helping young people in both non-crisis and crisis situations including suicidal behavior, self injury, trauma, and panic attacks.

For more information or course offerings, visit [mhanys.org](http://mhanys.org) or call 518-434-0439.

# Teaching Mental Health in Schools



It is well-documented that teaching about mental health in schools reduces stigma and bullying and encourages youth to seek help. Youth who seek help earlier have better outcomes and improved academic performance than those who go without help.

Mental health is one of the top health problems for children and teens. Over 200,000 New York children and teens, or one in five, have a mental health diagnosis. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for youth aged 15 to 19 in New York ([www.nyskwic.org](http://www.nyskwic.org)). More than 50 percent of students labeled with emotional or behavioral disorders drop out of high school and, of those who do remain in school, only 42 percent graduate with a high school diploma.

Despite the need for mental health education, New York State's health curriculum doesn't require the teaching of mental health. Health teachers often lack the resources they need to adequately address the subject.

## What needs to be done

Legislation is needed to encourage schools to teach students about mental health as part of the health curriculum. Two different bills have been introduced in the New York State Legislature to address this issue. One bill was introduced by Senator Rich Funke in the Senate and Assemblymember Aileen Gunther in the Assembly. A second bill has been introduced by the Education Committee Chairs Carl Marcellino, in the Senate, and Assemblymember Catherine Nolan, in the Assembly. The two bills take slightly different approaches to helping assure that school health curricula include mental as well as physical health. The Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc. (MHANYS) is working to ensure that legislation passes in 2016.

The New York State Education Department also must make resources available to help health teachers develop sample lesson plans. School mental health professionals should work with health teachers to develop class plans and provide information about how

students can get help for themselves and their friends, classmates, and families.

Mental health is an integral part of our overall health. Let's make sure that our schools have the support they need to educate our students about the full range of health topics that impact them. Let's make sure that our students know when to look for help and how to find it.



## MHANYS

The Mental Health Association of New York State, Inc. (MHANYS) and its network of 30 local affiliates work to promote mental health and recovery, encourage empowerment in mental health service recipients, eliminate discrimination, raise public awareness, and advocate for equality and opportunity for all.

MHANYS works to ensure available and accessible mental health services for all New Yorkers.

### MHANYS

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## Did you know?

### [Mental Health Facts for Teens](#)

- Twenty percent of U.S. youth reported that they suffered from a mental disorder with symptoms severe enough to impair their daily lives.
- Eight percent reported being severely impaired by an anxiety disorder.
- Nine percent are affected by ADHD. Boys are at a four times greater risk than girls.
- Three percent of U.S. youth have an eating disorder. Eating disorders are common in both boys and girls.
- Eleven percent of U.S. teens reported being severely impaired by a mood disorder.

Source: [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

### Tell us what you think!

We hope you find *Healthy Young Minds* helpful. MHANYS wants to know what you think. Please share your thoughts, suggest topics for future editions, or let us know who might like to receive a copy of *Healthy Young Minds*.

Send your comments to [info@mhanys.org](mailto:info@mhanys.org)

## RESOURCES

### MHANYS

Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc.  
[www.mhanys.org](http://www.mhanys.org)

### Youth in Transition

A website for transition age youth  
[www.youthnys.org](http://www.youthnys.org)

### NIMH

National Institute of Mental Health  
[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

### NYASP

New York State Association of School Psychologists  
[www.nyasp.org](http://www.nyasp.org)

### NYSUT

A Union of Professionals  
[www.nysut.org](http://www.nysut.org)

### Youth Power

Amplifying Youth Voice and Peer Advocacy  
[www.youthpowerny.org](http://www.youthpowerny.org)

## Transition Age Youth



[www.youthnys.org](http://www.youthnys.org) A new website for transition age youth and young adults, their families, friends and schools provides resources to support independence, improve overall well-being, support educational goals and community living for youth with mental health challenges. A project of MHANYS.