Test Anxiety and Test-Taking Strategies
Dr. Stokes, Associate Director, PsyD, MA, LPC-S
Counseling Center
Causes of Testing Problems

➢ LACK of PREPARATION
  ➢ Faulty study habits
  ➢ Cramming versus Reviewing
  ➢ Poor communication
  ➢ Unsophisticated test taking skills

➢ PREPARED but still having issues
  ➢ Poor sleeping & eating habits (caffeine, sugar)
  ➢ History of poor performance – learning issue
  ➢ Stress induced ANXIETY
What is Anxiety?

*General term for feelings that cause nervousness, fear, apprehension and worrying.*

- Anxiety is normal
- Anxiety is adaptive
- Anxiety is not dangerous
- Anxiety does not last forever
Test Anxiety

A physiological and psychological response to a perceived danger or threat.
Test Anxiety

Worry, uneasiness, or fear you experience before, during or after a test.
Symptoms of Test Anxiety

Physiological
- Upset Stomach
- Restlessness
- Sleep Problems
- Muscle Tension
- Headaches
- Back Pain

Psychological
- Confusion
- Memory Blocks
- Irritability
- Impaired Concentration
- Frustration
Two types of Test Anxiety

Anticipatory:
- Feelings of distress that happen while studying for or thinking about the exam

Situational:
- Feelings of distress that happen while taking the exam
What are the causes of test anxiety?

- Lack of preparation
- Fear of failure
- Past experiences
- Focusing too much on the outcome
- Comparing self to others
- Other stressors outside of school
- Bad experiences with taking tests
- Worrying about the future
- Poor study habits
- Lack of stress management skills
Understanding the Wave of Anxiety

“You can’t stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.”
— Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn
Gather as much information as you can

- Know as much as you can about your exams so you can study in a way that will help enhance your performance.

- Read your syllabus
  - Know test dates
  - How will you be graded?

- Find out from your instructor what is on the test
  - Is it a couple of chapters?
  - Is it comprehensive?
  - Is it multiple choice? Essay? Short answer?
  - How much time will you have on the exam?
  - Will it be in the same classroom? Or, somewhere else?
During the test:

- Read directions carefully
- Budget your test taking time
- Move, stretch & breath to relax
- Positive self talk!
- If you go blank, skip the question and go on, be sure to return to it, though.
- If other students start handing in their test, remember there is no prize for finishing first, just re-focus on your task.
After the test:

- List what strategies worked, no matter how small = building block to mastery!
- List what did not work or what continues to cause you distress
- Celebrate that you are on the road to overcoming this obstacle!
- Analyze returned test- rework missed problems; determine what type of questions you missed and work on your test- taking strategies.
Questions???
Relaxation Techniques

**Deep Breathing Exercise:**

- Sit up Right, Exhale
- Inhale, and fill your belly with air. Relax your belly muscles
- Keep inhaling, fill up the middle of your chest. Feel your ribcage and chest expand
- Hold your breath and exhale slowly
- Relax your ribcage and chest
- Relax your mind and facial muscles
- Repeat 2 more times