




CAREGIVERS' GUIDE TO ACCESSING SCHOOL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH ANXIETY

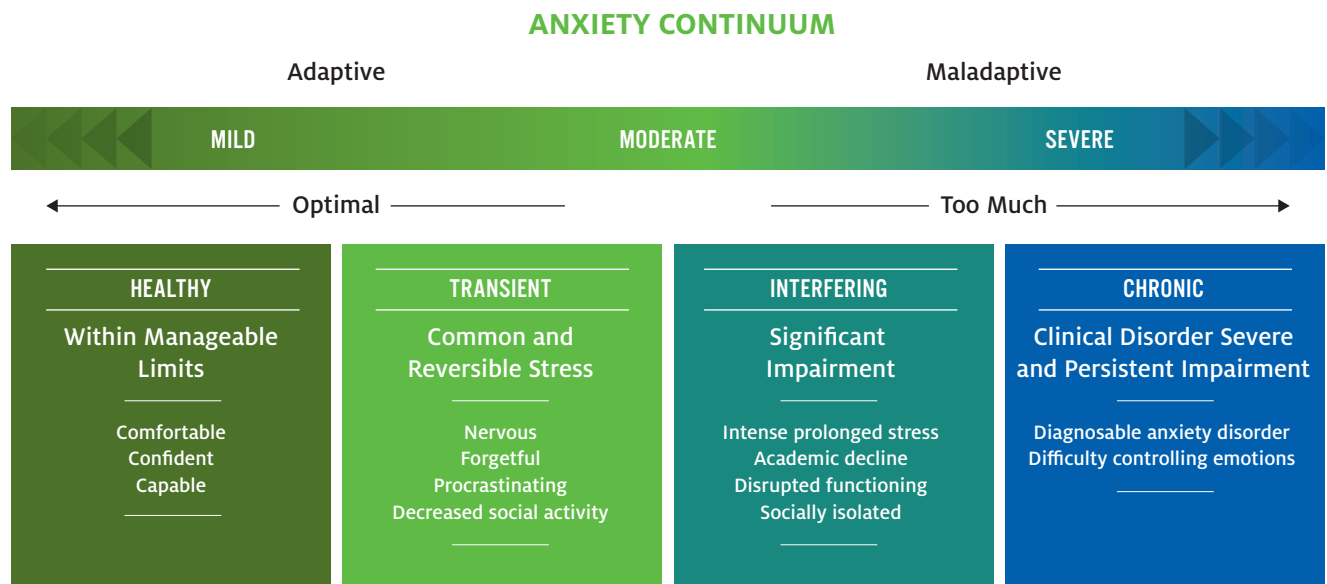
A photograph of a woman with dark hair hugging a young child with light hair. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter. A blue rectangular box is positioned in the lower-left area, containing white text. The text is arranged in two paragraphs: a main statement and a supporting sentence.

We believe that developing student resilience in the face of challenge is a vital life skill that contributes to student achievement and well-being.

When families and schools work together to address the physical symptoms, worrying thoughts, and avoidance associated with anxiety, we can teach students to face challenging and sometimes fearful situations with success and confidence.

MY CHILD HAS ANXIOUS THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS. IS THIS TYPICAL?

Feelings of anxiety, worry, or fear are a normal part of life and these occur on a continuum, as shown in the diagram below.



At the **mild end of the continuum**, feelings of anxiety can be adaptive or helpful. If we have a worrying thought like “I am not prepared for the test”, it can motivate us to study to become well prepared for the test. In this example, the worrying thought is adaptive because it mobilizes us to take action to face the feared situation. We become better prepared for the test, resulting in less worry and better test performance.

At the **moderate to severe end of the continuum**, the anxious feelings can lead to significant impairments in academic, social, emotional, or day-to-day functioning. In addition, in more severe anxiety, the emotional or behavioural response seems excessive or out of proportion to the feared situation.

A student may have an Anxiety Disorder if anxiety is a pattern causing persistent, functional impairment. Several types of Anxiety Disorders exist, impairing social, personal or academic functioning.

SYMPTOMS CHART

What does anxiety look like in students? Caregivers may observe the following symptoms:

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS	COGNITIVE SYMPTOMS	BEHAVIOURAL SYMPTOMS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recurring physical symptoms without medical explanation • Sweating • Flushed skin • Rapid breath • Trembling or shaking • Increased heart rate • Muscle tension • Sleep problems • Dizziness • Chest pain and discomfort • Nausea and vomiting • Irritable Bowels • Upset stomach • Headaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention difficulties • Performance on tests not matching ability • Difficulty speaking in groups or in class • Preoccupation with achievement • Concentration difficulties • Memory problems • Perfectionism in assignments • Fear of losing control • Difficulties of problem solving and academic performance • Rigid or sticky thinking • Worrying thoughts • Negative self-talk • Flat affect 	<p>Fight</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defiance or refusal to comply when asked to perform a task that causes anxiety • Irritability and mood symptoms <p>Flight</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoiding school, classes or tasks • Avoidance of any anxiety provoking situation <p>Freeze</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being “stuck”, indecisive, shutting down <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shyness • Social interaction difficulties • Need for sameness • Frequent need for reassurance

SHOULD WE BE SEEKING ADDITIONAL SUPPORT?



There are several ways in which the school, in partnership with your family and community supports, can help students. In addition, home-based strategies have been provided below.

HOME BASED STRATEGIES	
General Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be patient and be prepared to listen• Praise and reinforce effort, even if success is less than expected• Accept that mistakes are a normal part of growing up and that no one is expected to do everything equally well• Model appropriate self-talk and success language in the home• Maintain realistic, attainable goals and expectations for your child Do not communicate that perfection is expected• There will be setbacks. Model acceptance and start each day fresh• Balance your child's life demands including academics, social-emotional, and extra-curriculars, so that avoidance is not encouraged• Have a designated space at home to do school work that is clean, unoccupied, and quiet, in order to maintain consistent routines
Goal Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practice and rehearse upcoming events, such as giving a speech or other performance tasks• Share stories of people who experienced setbacks before success• Set short, mid, and long term goals that are realistic for where your child's mental health is at today, recognizing that these can change• Practice strategies provided by professional therapists, counsellors, and paraprofessionals
Problem Solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop anxiety problem solving strategies such as organizing materials and time, developing small 'self-talk' scripts and learning relaxation techniques when stressed.• Focus on breaking a task into small manageable chunks
Family/School Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Co-create with school staff a support plan for areas of concern identified• Discuss with school staff the use of coping and relaxation strategies• Develop a coordinated plan with teachers
Community Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Waterloo Region Family Network: wrfn.info• Family Compass Waterloo Region: www.familycompasswr.ca



IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS AND WOULD LIKE ADDITIONAL SUPPORT, PLEASE CONTACT THE SCHOOL AND SPEAK TO YOUR STUDENT'S CLASSROOM TEACHER AND/OR ADMINISTRATOR

ANXIETY APPS AND ONLINE SUPPORT



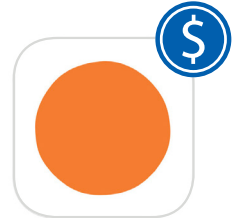
Virtual Hope Box



Mindshift



Pacifica



Headspace



Stop, Breathe, Think



Calm



Relaxing Sounds of Nature



Relax Melodies



Universal Breathing



Insight Timer



Breathe, Think, Do
with Sesame



Happify



Mind Yeti



DreamyKID



Smiling Mind

ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES

Cosmic Kids/Zen Den

<https://www.cosmickids.com/category/watch/>

GoNoodles

<https://www.gonoodle.com/>

Anxiety Canada

<https://anxietycanada.com/>

HOW DO I BALANCE SUPPORTING MY CHILD WHILE ENCOURAGING COPING STEP PLAN (FACING FEARS/ CONCERNS) AS A PART OF HEALTHY LIFE?

Fleeing or avoiding feared situations is a common behavioural response to anxiety.

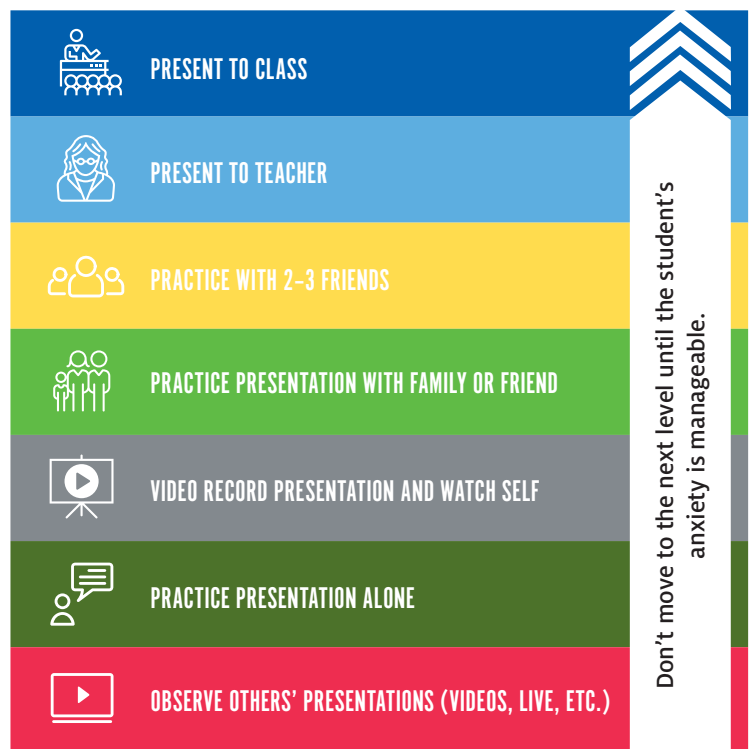
Avoidance reinforces anxious feelings and maintains anxiety, however, practicing a coping step plan reduces and alleviates anxious feelings.

A coping step plan involves overcoming fears or worries by taking small steps towards facing them. Students practice each step, beginning at the “easiest” situation, until their anxiety decreases to a manageable level. A coping step plan focuses on breaking a task into small manageable chunks in order for a student to reach their goals.

Below is an example of how a coping step plan may be used to address anxiousness regarding class presentations.

*EXAMPLE PLAN:

1. **Determine a goal:** e.g. presenting in front of class
2. **Determine a set of steps to gradually achieve the goal:**
 - a) Starting step: What can the student currently do (e.g. digitally record a presentation)
 - b) Next Steps: Incorporate components of the end goal (e.g. presenting to one person, presenting in an empty class, etc.)

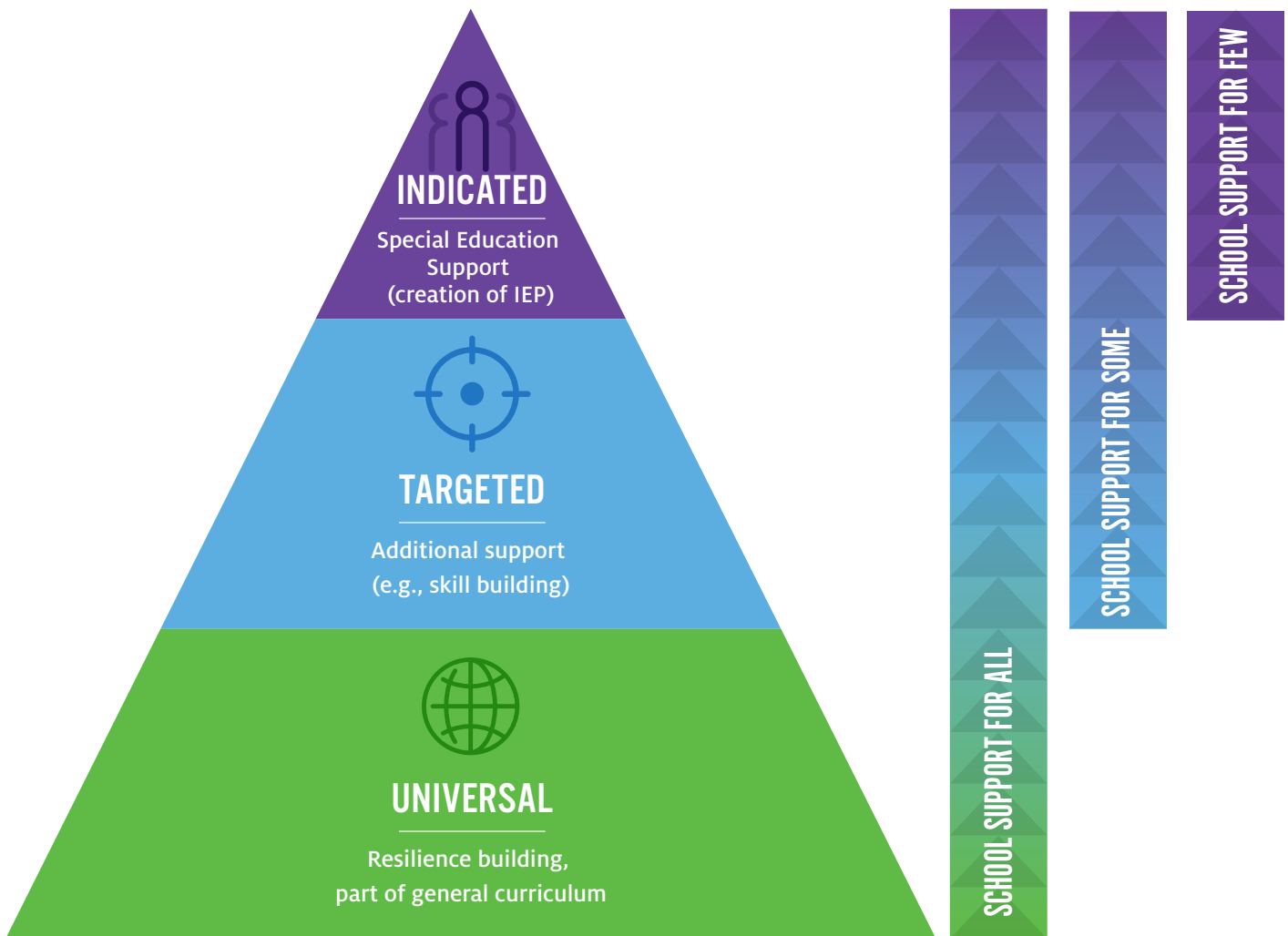


*Develop in consultation with the student (and family if applicable)

TIERS OF SCHOOL SUPPORT

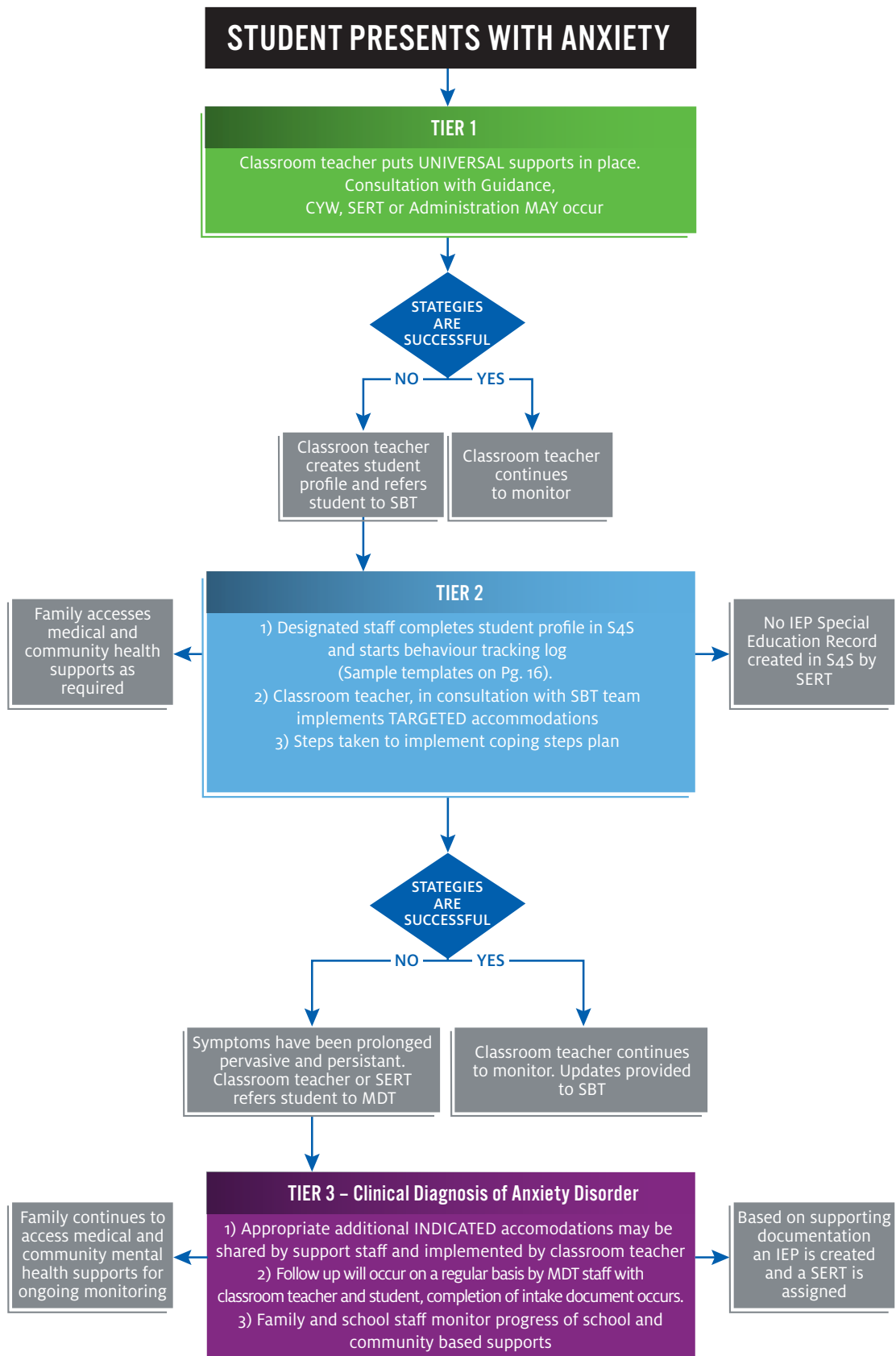
We use a tiered approach when supporting students with anxiety. There is a continuum of support ranging from:

- Universal supports (benefit the whole class/school)
- Targeted supports (prevention strategies and additional support)
- Indicated supports (clinical intervention/treatment)



Documentation is required in order for your child to access appropriate school supports . The more detailed the documentation, the better informed our school team will be in putting together a support plan for your child.

ANXIETY SCHOOL SUPPORT FLOW CHART





TIER 1: UNIVERSAL SUPPORT

All students benefit from skill building strategies that are incorporated into school-wide practices by classroom teachers.

School Response: Classroom teachers incorporate strategies to reduce anxiety, which may include instruction on test preparation, test taking, relaxation strategies, oral communication, time management, organizational skills, etc.



TIER 2: TARGETED SUPPORT

For students requiring more support, practicing small group or individual strategies will provide the opportunity to develop coping skills. These skills, along with a coping step plan, will help reduce anxiety.

School Response:

The School team determines the best support plan based on diagnosis from documentation. Additional school support staff may become involved to develop skill building strategies. Appropriate additional accommodations are shared with and implemented by classroom teachers.

Caregivers should consult the suggested home-based strategies chart. (Page 3)



TIER 3: INDICATED SUPPORT

For students who have a **clinical diagnosis** of an anxiety disorder, special education services and supports will be provided. Anxiety symptoms have been prolonged, pervasive and persistent and previous targeted strategies have been ineffective.

School Response:

School team determines best support plan based on documentation. Additional school support staff may become involved.

An IEP may be created for cases where anxiety results in academic impairment. The IEP will be reviewed regularly and follow up documentation may be requested.

Caregivers should consult the suggested home-based strategies chart. (Page 3)

For Targeted and Indicated Tiers of Support, Administrators (Principal/Vice-Principal) will call an in-school team of professionals together to support your child, once documentation has been provided to the school.

Documentation Examples:

- Psychiatric Assessment
- Psycho-Educational Assessment
- Medical report
- Medical Assessment/Note
- Psychological assessment
- Follow-up Letters
- Teacher Observations
- Health Information Form



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You can get more information about:

- Transition planning
- Accessing special education supports
- Other school and community resources

TERMS OF REFERENCE:

CYW: Child and Youth Worker

IEP: Individual Education Plan

MDT: Multidisciplinary Team

S4S: Special Education Database

SBT: School Based Team

SERT: Special Education Resource Teacher



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