

# A QUICK GUIDE: SUPPORTING ANXIOUS PUPILS

Strategies to help foster trusting relationships and calm classrooms.

## REDUCE UNCERTAINTY

Routine and predictability can help settle some pupil's anxieties. Keeping elements of the classroom routines the same, having set seating plans and providing advanced notification of any timetable changes can all help ease pupil anxiety by making the environment as predictable as possible.



## DIAL DOWN THE DEMANDS

When a pupil's anxieties are higher, compensate by dialing down the demands on them. A pupil in a highly anxious state is unlikely to learn effectively and by placing more demands on them you might exacerbate the anxiety.



## BE INDIRECT

Use indirect language to introduce questions and learning tasks to avoid addressing pupils directly.

"I wonder if we can..."

"Maybe we could investigate..."

"Let's see if we can..."

## BE PREPARED

Consider and plan how you will support a pupil who may be anxious. Research shows that we make better decisions when we consider responses prior to a situation occurring. You might prepare a choice of learning activities to give the pupil a sense of control but be aware that for some the extra choice can also be an extra demand.

## BE FLEXIBLE

Consider when/how you introduce learning tasks for a pupil who is anxious. You might allow extra processing time. Consider providing extra support by allowing partner work. Use humour or distraction techniques to diffuse anxiety inducing situations. Be flexible in how you manage behaviour, an anxious pupil is in a heightened state and needs support rather than sanctions.

## A TRUSTED ADULT

Research shows us that when a pupil forms a lasting relationship with a trusted adult, the outcomes for that pupil are much improved. This is particularly true for pupils with anxiety.

Invest time in forging a relationship. Talk to the pupil about their interests, check in on them to see how they are doing and be available for them when they need you.

## GRADUATED EXPOSURE

To overcome anxiety, a person needs to break the anxiety cycle by being exposed to the source of their anxiety. A young person needs to be supported through this gradually and sensitively by a trusted adult who can manage and adapt provision in response to the young person's needs. Through the process of graduated exposure, the pupil learns to manage their anxiety effectively over a prolonged period.

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