

- ▶ SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH ANXIETY..... 1
- ▶ SPOTLIGHT ON ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY..... 4
- ▶ DISABILITY RESOURCES..... 5

Supporting Students with Anxiety

Approximately thirty percent of the Job Corps population are students who have disclosed at least one disability. Many of these students exhibit symptoms of anxiety either as a result of functional limitations associated with their disability(ies), or as a result of a specific anxiety-related disability (e.g., social phobias, panic disorders, generalized anxiety disorders etc.). Some common anxiety symptoms include excessive worry, difficulty concentrating, feeling tired all of the time, unable to relax, easily scared/startled, headaches, muscle aches, unexpected pains, and even depression. Regardless of the cause/source of anxiety, the symptoms and associated limitations can significantly impede learning, memory, and overall functioning.



In the last decade, rates of anxiety-related disorders in young adults have steadily risen. Research points to several hypothesis about why these rates are on the rise—from external pressures to digital hyper connectivity to simply a greater awareness, and therefore, diagnosis, of mental health concerns. Individuals with disabilities often experience additional stressors associated with the functional limitations of their condition(s).

Understanding the specific triggers, challenges, and teaching/learning strategies to deal with anxiety alleviates frustration; provides opportunities for learning and retaining new information; improves test-taking skills/experiences; and reduces negative behaviors that students often exhibit when anxious and frustrated. Anxiety does not have to stop a student from achieving his/her goals during and after Job Corps.

Impact on Learning, Working and Independence

Anxiety often leads to poor academic and work performance, underachievement, procrastination, poor engagement in class and work, avoidance of tasks/assignments, high absenteeism, school drop outs, poor social interactions, sleep deprivation, substance abuse, decreased focus/attention, increased health issues, and many missed opportunities for advancement. In the most severe cases, anxiety can make even regular and daily activities such as bathing, cooking, shopping, or going outside incredibly difficult and can cause low self-esteem.



Supporting Students with Anxiety (cont'd)

Shifting from Deficits to Strengths

Teaching students how to cope with adversity and develop resiliency is key to managing their anxiety. When an uncomfortable situation arises, many young adults don't have the skills to deal with it on their own. Instead they worry, envision the worst, and shut down. It is important to teach them to overcome their anxiety, not to escape their triggers. Often, they just want to feel safe again. First, staff can help them recognize fears they have already overcome—shifting their mindset from failure and fear to strengthening self-regulatory skills such as prioritization, focus, and mental flexibility.

Moving towards a focus on strengths and small incremental accomplishments is a constructive step to reducing anxiety, fostering resilience, enhancing competence, and facilitating successful academic and career technical experiences for students. When developing an accommodation plan for students with anxiety, the Reasonable Accommodation Committee will want to consider instructional, environmental, testing, and behavioral accommodations that will support the student in using his/her strengths to manage anxiety in all areas of the program (e.g., academic, career technical, residential, work-based learning, transition, etc.).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Anxiety

Universal Design for Learning is a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn. UDL provides a way to prepare and respond to the functional limitations associated with disabilities including anxiety-related disabilities. By designing environments and tools with anxiety-related conditions in mind from the start, staff and students all benefit from proactive rather than reactive solutions. Some ideas include:

- Make your learning setting a safe place to make mistakes—
Create a culture where “not trying” is what should be avoided, instead of mistakes.
- Reinforce/praise the little steps—Give encouragement along the way, as students move towards the finish line.
- Build confidence—Let students know they have the ability to learn. Make a visual chart so that they can keep track of their accomplishments.



Other UDL-type strategies include the use of Assistive Technology (AT). AT can play a major role in anxiety-type solutions. Low tech AT such as electronic check lists, graphic organizers, and reminder devices provide immediate structure and feedback to support students with anxiety-related functional limitations. Other forms of AT include specific apps that help students with anxiety-related conditions such as stress management, self-regulation, excessive worry, focus/concentration, organizational issues, memory issues, and social challenges, etc. (*Refer to Spotlight on Assistive Technology section*).

Supporting Students with Anxiety (cont'd)

Functional Limitations and Accommodations

The following table outlines some common functional limitations and possible accommodations to support students with anxiety.

<p><u>Functional Limitation</u></p> <p>Difficulty making decisions</p>  <p><u>Accommodations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Provide Pro and Con lists➤ Provide advance notice of choices/decisions to be made for “think” time➤ Provide extended time on assignments, responses, tasks, tests➤ Reinforce independent decision-making	<p><u>Functional Limitation</u></p> <p>Avoidance</p>  <p><u>Accommodations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Break down larger assignments, tasks, and projects into smaller, separate parts➤ Reward or reinforce “small steps” toward completion of larger tasks, assignments, and projects➤ Provide checklists, completed graphic organizers, visual accomplishment charts
<p><u>Functional Limitation</u></p> <p>Focus, concentration, attentional issues</p>  <p><u>Accommodations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Provide checklists of daily tasks and assignments➤ Provide planners, calendars, graphic organizers, or timers to support focus➤ Provide small group setting for tests➤ Provide distraction-free work space➤ Allow the use of noise-reduction headphones➤ Provide mentor/buddy for assistance in creating priorities and support with organization or daily check-ins➤ Allow extended time for assignments, tasks, tests➤ Minimize the number of roommates in the dorm	<p><u>Functional Limitation</u></p> <p>Behavioral outbursts, irritability, or low frustration tolerance</p>  <p><u>Accommodations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Teach replacement behaviors and reinforce with praise, privileges, tangibles➤ Provide specific, positive feedback when student demonstrates appropriate coping strategies➤ Provide peer mentors or role models➤ Provide structure, predictability, and a calm work/learning environment➤ Allow the use of breaks for regrouping, calming➤ Allow the student a pass to access supportive adult (counselor, mentor, Center Mental Health Consultant, another instructor...) when behavior is escalating

Spotlight on Assistive Technology: Anxiety

Calm Down Now

The [Calm Down Now app](#) provides students with an interactive tool to help them stop panic and anxiety and begin to relax. It provides strategies for using relaxing sounds and positive affirmations to redirect focus from sources of anxiety and stress. Students can listen to guided relaxation and audios, and learn techniques for managing anxiety.



Headspace

The [Headspace app](#) supports anxiety-related challenges by teaching students how to use meditation techniques to reduce stress, focus more, and get better sleep. Students are able to complete different meditations and/or tasks designed to teach elements of calming. The app contains specific meditations directed at reducing sleeping problems, and increasing overall well-being.



Self-Help for Anxiety Management

The [Self-Help for Anxiety app](#) (SAM app) can help students understand and manage anxiety. Students can use the self-help techniques in this app to build a personal toolkit to help with their anxiety. The app provides a symptom tracker, educational articles and external links, relaxation techniques, and additional coping skills/practice for managing anxiety.



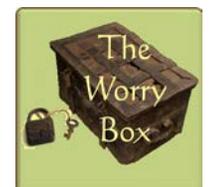
Stop Panic & Anxiety Self-Help

The [Stop Panic & Anxiety app](#) can help students learn to control panic and anxiety by using audio assistance to coach through severe anxiety and/or panic attacks. The app includes an “anxiety thought” diary to help learn to challenge fearful thoughts, as well as articles about panic, anxiety and cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT).



The Worry Box

The [Worry Box app](#) can help students who experience anxiety and worry. It teaches the user how to assess whether a worry they have is important or not, or something they can or cannot control. Students can learn how to identify irrational thoughts when faced with stress and anxiety, and be coached through exercises aimed at learning how to decrease negative thinking by “letting go” of the worry.



E-mail your comments or suggestions to:
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Disability Resources

Understood.org & Anxiety

[Understood.org: Stress & Anxiety](#) is a web page specifically designed to provide staff and students with ideas, strategies, and resources to manage stress and anxiety—particularly in learning settings. The page has links to learning and attention issues/solutions related to anxiety, the difference between typical anxiety and an anxiety problem, and several other links to anxiety-related challenges and support. Also visit [Classroom Accommodations for Anxiety](#) web page.

Sample Accommodations for Anxiety Handout

[Sample Accommodations for Anxiety Handout](#) is one in a series of Accommodations by Disability handouts designed to provide Job Corps staff with simple, low/no cost accommodations for various functional limitations related to a disability. The handout addresses functional limitations in the areas of handling stress and emotions, attendance issues, dealing with change and transitions, and working effectively.

Job Accommodation Network and Anxiety

[Job Accommodation Network and Anxiety Disorder](#) is a webpage designed to support staff and employers in providing accommodation ideas for people with anxiety disorders. The page also contains links to publications and articles regarding anxiety disorder, accommodations ideas by limitation and by work-related function(s).

Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST)

The [CAST website](#) offers extensive UDL resources and strategies.

Upcoming Webinars

- [Piecing the Puzzle Together: Developing Appropriate Supports and Services for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder \(ASD\)](#)
- [Introduction to Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\) Part 1](#)
- [Disability Coordinator Orientation Part 3: Other Disability Program Requirements](#)

Please check the [Event Registration](#) page (Note: Link only works inside of Citrix) on the Job Corps Community Web site for dates/times

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