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Fall 2021

National Disability Employment Awareness Month

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). Led nationally by the Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), NDEAM celebrates the contributions of workers with disabilities and educates about the value of a diverse workforce inclusive of their skills and talents. This year’s theme, “**America’s Recovery: Powered by Inclusion,**” reflects the importance of ensuring that people with disabilities have full access to employment and community involvement during the national recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.



What Can Your Center Do To Celebrate NDEAM?

- ▶ **31 Days of NDEAM:** Check out ODEP’s suggestions for daily ways to celebrate: [31 Days of NDEAM](#). Even in distance learning settings, ideas can be posted in virtual classrooms/platforms, web pages, social media, etc.
- ▶ **Hold a discussion:** NDEAM presents an opportune time to discuss the topic of disability employment with students; one easy way to do so is to use the [What Can YOU Do Campaign](#) ideas and materials.
- ▶ **Create a display:** NDEAM is a great time to freshen up bulletin boards (even online boards). Start by putting up this year's NDEAM [poster](#), which will be available in both English and Spanish. Include materials with positive images featuring people with disabilities in various community and employment settings.
- ▶ **Organize an online/virtual event:** Another option is to hold a disability-related event. Such an event might feature local disability service organizations and/or people with disabilities in various professions willing to talk about their jobs, interests, and experiences and activities for students such as a poster contest or disability awareness activities.



Earle C. Clements JCC 2020 NDEAM Virtual Classroom

Supporting Students with Anxiety

Approximately 37% of the Job Corps population are students who have disclosed at least one disability. Many of these students exhibit symptoms of anxiety either because of functional limitations associated with their disability(ies) or because 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 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, working, memory, and overall functioning.



In the last decade, rates of anxiety-related disorders in young adults have steadily risen—particularly during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Research points to several hypotheses 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 fear and 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 dropouts, 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.



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. 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.

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, issues with task completion</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 workspace➤ 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>Self-management, self-control, 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 to access supportive adult (counselor, mentor, Center Mental Health Consultant, another instructor...) when behavior is escalating

Spotlight on Assistive Technology

Anxiety and Mental Health Apps

MyLife Meditation

[MyLife Meditation](#) (formerly known as Stop, Breath & Think) is a meditation and mindfulness app that offers daily wellness check-ins and suggests activities personalized around how the user feels. Students can learn to maintain perspective, reduce stress, and improve overall mental health and sleep through breathing exercises, guided meditations, journaling, and other self-reflection activities.



Nature Sounds Relax and Sleep

[Nature Sounds Relax and Sleep](#) app provides users with a calming audio backdrop. The app includes six different looping nature sounds, which include ocean sounds, thunder, bird sounds, rain, water sounds, etc. Students can set sleep timers and alarms, use white noise generators, and set the sounds as ringtones. The app encourages users to listen to the tones for relaxation and stress management.



Breath2Relax

[Breath2Relax](#) is a portable stress management tool that provides detailed information on the effects of stress on the body. It includes instructions and practice exercises to help users learn the stress management skill called diaphragmatic breathing, which has potential to decrease the body's "fight-or-flight" (stress) response, and to help with mood stabilization, anger control, and anxiety management.



AntiStress, Relaxing, Anxiety, and Stress Relief Game

[AntiStress, Relaxing, Anxiety, and Stress Relief Game](#) provides free anti-stress calming games (i.e., bubble popper, bubble wrap, fidget spinner, color therapy, etc.) designed to help users with stress relief by performing simple activities in the games—the goal of each game is to complete a simple, repetitive, and calming task to relieve anxiety. The games feature 3D brain exercises and relaxation, different mind toys, relaxing sounds, controls to play with 3D fidget toys, and different relaxation "toy missions."



Regional Disability Coordinators

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Disability Resources: Anxiety

Job Corps Disability Website: Anxiety Resources

[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.

The [Anxiety Disorders Fact Sheet for Students](#) is one-page handout designed to provide Job Corps students with anxiety-related disorders information on the definition and types of anxiety disorders, what it means to have an anxiety disorder, how students with anxiety can help themselves, and referral information for support.

Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA)

The [Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#) provides information on education, training, and research for anxiety, depression, and related disorders. Features include a therapist directory, blog posts, tips to manage anxiety and stress, monthly webinars, and an online peer-to-peer support group. A specific resource page, COVID-19 Anxiety, was recently added to provide tips and strategies from ADAA mental health professionals, as well as personal stories of triumph, blog posts, and videos on how to mitigate against increased anxiety.

Job Accommodation Network (JAN) and Anxiety Disorder

Job Accommodation Network is a free comprehensive resource and Job Corps partner that provides guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues. [Job Accommodation Network and Anxiety Disorder](#) is a web page 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, and accommodation ideas by limitation and by work-related function(s).

Understood.org and 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 the [Classroom Accommodations for Anxiety](#) web page.



Upcoming Webinars

- Disability Coordinator Orientation Part 3
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

To register:

- Go to [WebEx](#)