

Anxiety/Irritation with making COVID 19 adjustments for the classroom

The Counseling Center appreciates the potential stress for faculty and staff, caused by learning new teaching pedagogies and service deliveries. To this end, the Counseling Center continues to share documents and video clips with everyone and would like to offer more advice about coping with, dealing with, and/or living with the anxiety.

Anxiety is contagious; it is human nature to become anxious when you are interacting with someone who is anxious. Compared to animals, humans take this experience to a whole new level, because our brains are easily distracted with the past and the future. Dogs, for example, tend to not experience a lot of stress because they pretty much live in the present. But humans can not only experience anxiety, but then become more anxious because they start to worry about being anxious, and then worry about worrying about being anxious. Few of us have the clarity and control of a Zen Master; instead of just accepting our anxious feelings without reacting to them, we tend to start trying to understand our anxiety and often times make things worse for ourselves.



This is particularly true when we encounter anxious students in our classes. Some students, when anxious, can seem to be angry, arrogant, or disrespectful. Some students, when anxious, can come across as needy, dependent, even helpless. But we need to remember that “how they come across” is our perception and not necessarily their intention. Remember Yoda telling us that anger comes from fear. An anxious student can trigger in us feelings of being judged, questioned, or dismissed.

It is so important in high stress situations to not ignore what you feel but to also sit with those feelings and not immediately react. An anxious student can trigger anxiety in an anxious faculty member who then responds in a way that is perceived by the student to be critical or dismissive, which just feeds the anxiety monster further.

Find/use your Grandparent voice

One technique I like to use when I am in high stress situations is to listen more to my “grandparent” voice and less to my “parent voice”. I know I am stereotyping here but parents tend to react to their children’s anxiety by trying to teach a lesson, correct behavior, or enforce existing expectations about self-control. Grandparents, stereotypically, tend to rely on empathy and patience. They don’t perceive the child’s anxious behavior as a problem as much as a temporary experience.

Granted, there is a code of conduct for students and I am not suggesting we tolerate aggressive and/or disrespectful behavior. But we do need to take the pressure off ourselves in these times and trust that behind the angry statements, the complaints, and the frustration we see students who are just anxious.

Trust the process

Let students know that you are aware of their concerns and that you are receptive to their questions. As time goes by, they will come to trust the process and system you have created for your classroom. I mentioned by father-in-law in a previous video clip. He is the one who used to say “Don’t fight the water”. He used to also say that the kids will be okay if the parents don’t panic. Trust your process in the classroom. Welcome open expression but also invite students to own their anxiety and to know that with each day they will see how this change in instruction will work. If someone will let me be mad without correction or judgement, it is easier for me to get over my anger. As your students see that you too are accepting your anxiety, but not reacting immediately to it, they will follow your lead and learn how to “get through” hard times.

REMEMBER TO CHECK OUT OUR “COPING” PAGE: <https://www.wku.edu/heretohelp/resources/coping/>

Written by Dr. Karl Laves, [Licensed Counseling Psychologist](#) | Associate Director, WKU Counseling Center

