



Grounding Plan for Test Anxiety

A nervous-system informed guide for students

Testing anxiety is not a sign of weakness. It's a sign that your nervous system perceives something as high stakes.

Use this guide in 3 phases:

- Before a test (preparation phase)
- During the test (regulation in action)
- After a test (recovery & perspective)

For parents: This plan works best when it is collaborative. Invite your child to personalize it.

PREPARATION PHASE

Active recall reduces anxiety by building confidence through evidence. Try these study habits for mastery of materials:

- Develop practice questions
- Teach the material out loud to others
- Write summary pages from memory
- Use flashcards with spaced repetition

Anxiety surrounding school is one of the most common and treatable challenges in childhood and adolescence



31% of adolescents meet criteria for anxiety disorder



Up to 40% of students report testing anxiety



Over 60% of teens say school is their top stressor

5 MINUTE REGULATION RESET

Try this practice to signal safety to the brainstem and improve cognitive flexibility before and during scheduled study time. Be sure to practice this habit before an exam to be able to use it during a test.

Begin by sitting with both feet firmly on the floor and press your feet firmly into the ground for 10 seconds. Roll your shoulders slowly about 5 times. Close your eyes, and follow the steps below.

INHALE

4
seconds

PAUSE

2
seconds

EXHALE

6
seconds

PAUSE

2
seconds





HELPFUL PHRASES WHILE STUDYING

Self-talk is an important way to signal to our brain, even within our subconscious, that we are capable of success beyond our anxiety.

Try these phrases to combat negative thinking:

“I can do one small section at a time.”

“Progress matters more than perfection.”

“This is uncomfortable, not dangerous.”

“I am allowed to learn at my pace.”

“Effort is within my control. Outcomes are not.”



*Your brain consolidates information during breaks and rest.
Be sure to incorporate both within your study schedule.*

NIGHT BEFORE A TEST

The night before a test is about stabilization, not cramming. Sleep supports recall more than any extra late-night studying could ever do.

WHAT HELPS	WHAT HURTS
Light review only	Staying up late
Lay out clothes & pack bag	Doom-scrolling
Organize materials	Comparing study time with friends
Go to bed at a consistent time	Catatrophizing about results

Considerations to prepare for an exam



Limit social media use



Nourish your brain with a healthy meal



Prioritize sleep above studying



THE MORNING OF A TEST

Focus on body stability.

- ✓ Protein rich breakfast
- ✓ Hydration
- ✓ Light movement or stretching
- ✓ 3 minute breathing reset



DURING A TEST

It is normal for anxiety to rise when the test begins. Expect to experience the following:

- ⚠ Increased heart rate
- ⚠ Feeling extra warm or going cold
- ⚠ Shorter breathes
- ⚠ Mind going blank

If your mind goes blank:

- ★ Pause
- ★ Slow your exhale
- ★ Press your feet into the floor
- ★ Skip the question (if you can)
- ★ Answer an easier question first

REGULATION IN ACTION

It is most important to use what you've practiced during studying while actually taking the test. Remember to focus on these key habits to keep yourself grounded during a test.



Pause and feel your feet on the floor



Roll your shoulders gently, unclench your jaw



Slow your breathing and use a grounding phrase



AFTER A TEST

Many students struggle most after an exam. This is where anxiety can spiral. They often spend time ruminating on:

- 🕒 Possible mistakes
- 🕒 Questions they were unsure about
- 🕒 Worst case outcomes

Avoid post-test comparison conversations

RECOVERY & PERSPECTIVE

Instead of focusing on how you did, try to highlight how you feel now that the test is over.

After an exam, be sure to prioritize the following activities for the rest of the day:

Move your body

Eat nourishing food

Doing something regulating not academically related

Celebrate finishing!



HELPFUL REMINDERS

- Your worth cannot be measured by one exam or quiz
- There are many paths forward no matter the outcome of this test
- Your effort can continue to be controlled for future exams

CONSIDERATIONS

If the following symptoms are causing intense disruption for you and your family, consider beginning therapy to support you.

- Panic attacks
- Avoidance of attending school
- Persistent sleep disruption
- Perfectionism causing shutdown
- Emotional withdrawal and isolation



Seek support early. Prevention is powerful.


**Virtual support,
real results**


**Developmentally
informed care**

**Prevent burnout
or crisis early**

**Navigate high
stress seasons**

Call for a free consultation

 (805) 506-5165

 caitlin@carenurturegrow.com



Care Nurture Grow