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Classroom Discussion Guide

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome and Introduction	1
Guidelines for Educators leading an in-class discussion	1
Discussion Guide	2
Responses to Frequently Asked Questions	4
Anxiety Tip Sheets (3 tip sheets - can be distributed to audience)	6
Tip Sheet 1: How to Help a Friend with an Anxiety Disorder	7
Tip Sheet 2: Managing Anxiety at School	8
Tip Sheet 3: 12 Definitions and Tips for Anxiety	9
Additional Activities for Schools:	11
Teacher-Driven Classroom Discussion Guide & Corresponding Clips	11
Peer-Driven Classroom Discussion Guide	13
Contact Us	15

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WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Angst is an iNDIEFLIX Original documentary, designed to raise awareness around anxiety. The film includes interviews with kids, teens, educators, experts, parents and a very special interview with Michael Phelps.

The goal is to start a global conversation about anxiety and mental health. Most importantly we hope the film will help people identify and understand the symptoms of anxiety disorders and encourage them to reach out for help. Above all, we want to give hope - Anxiety is 100% treatable!

Angst screens in schools, communities and theaters around the world, as well as directly to families in their homes. The film is widely available to the public only through communities in order to encourage conversation and connect to resources so we can truly make a difference.

For additional help and resources that are specific to your area, look at the ‘Resources’ tab on your screening dashboard, or [click here](#). This has been put together by the California Department of Education and the Catalyst Center to connect people to local information and help.

If you would like to read, watch or listen more widely about anxiety, [these resources](#) are a helpful start:

Guidelines for Educators leading an In-Class Discussion

Announce to your audience before the film: “Angst is 43 mins long and there will be a discussion and Q&A afterwards (depending on classroom time). Please get involved in this - the filmmakers created Angst to help break the stigma around anxiety and open up the conversation around mental health. We know that there is power in watching as a community, power to change, and permission to talk about it.”

We suggest circulating index cards and pencils for people to ask questions, or open up the chat function if you’re showing the film virtually. It’s a great way to allow people to ask a question and maintain anonymity. Collect the cards / copy the chat questions post-screening for use in the discussion. You can also include the student survey included in this packet to encourage students that might need help but are afraid to ask.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

- Have you, or anyone you know, ever felt the negative effects of an anxiety disorder? It's really common – the most common mental struggle that people have to deal with (in a classroom setting, raise hands, so students can see how many people have been affected with anxiety).
- Did you identify with anyone in the film? Why?
- What surprised you about anxiety in the film?
- What was your biggest takeaway from the film?
- Who would you contact at school or at home if you or someone you know needed help?
- Do you have someone to go to within your friend group for support? Would it be hard to reach out to them? What do you think might hold you back? Is there anything you can think of that would make it easier?
- Why do you think it's so hard to talk about anxiety and our mental health when it is experienced in some way by every human?
- In what ways do you think you could support someone who experiences severe anxiety? Do you think you know what to look out for? What questions could you ask to show that you're concerned / you care?
- Can you remember some of the signs our bodies can give us when we are experiencing extreme anxiety? (*ie: heart starts racing, start to sweat, want to avoid/escape, etc.*) What are some tools we can use when we are experiencing those signs of anxiety? (*Grabbing ice cubes, using the stress-breath, snapping*) Think about your own plan of action for dealing with anxiety if or when it arises and write it down. Think about what works for you; what you enjoy doing when you take a break
- In the days of early humans, anxiety played a positive role; it kept us alive when there was a threat (*e.g. a caveman being aware of a lion nearby*).
 - What sorts of things could be triggering anxiety for us in modern times? (*e.g. social media, breaking news, negative self-talk, etc.*)
 - How can we address dealing with these triggers? Could you come up with a plan of action to help find moderation (e.g. take a break from social media apps, say a positive affirmation every time walk under a doorway, write gratitudes before going to bed, etc)

- What are some situations at school that can create anxious feelings?
 - E.g. Covid-related: social anxiety on coming back to in-person school after such a long break, anxiety over mask wearing and lingering risk of transmission, anxiety about how much schooling you've missed and being behind
 - E.g. in general: classroom presentations, applying for college, grades, who to have lunch with, friendship uncertainty).

- Talk through how you can prepare for and address these situations by pre-planning, discussing with friends, breaking down the issues into manageable chunks, finding a teacher 'mentor' and checking in with school administration for ideas and support.

In closing, direct students to the resources page as a starting point to explore anxiety further:

[California Department of Education / Catalyst Center help and resources](#)

[iNDIEFLIX Information Library on Anxiety](#)

For Educators: Re-emphasize the importance of reaching out and getting help, from a friend, a family member or a teacher, and make sure students have the school contact. Depending on the age of the students, you can direct them to the National Suicide Prevention Hotline, telling them: "If you or someone you know is in crisis, call 911, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255, or text the Crisis Text Line 741741. They are free and have trained professionals ready to help you or someone in need."

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

We want to make sure you have the resources you need to lead a healthy discussion. We have included some audience questions from previous Angst screenings we think you might find interesting.

The following questions were answered by Cathy Cassani Adams, LCSW, Chicago/Zen Parenting Radio

Why is medicine not mentioned in the film?

The filmmakers explained that the people in the film didn't mention medication. The core of the movie is really about that we are "built" to cope with the challenges of anxiety – that within the challenge of anxiety, we have innate coping tools that can help us manage what we are experiencing (breathing, breaks, counting, asking for help, even the use of ice cubes...). In some situations people are so deeply anxious and so in a "hole" that they need a "ladder" just to get to the point of finding these innate coping tools. In these situations, medication can be really helpful, because the med allows the person to climb out just enough to reach for an innate coping tool. And sometimes meds are used alongside coping tools to deepen a practice. There are times when clients ask for medication, but then choose not to explore other ways to cope/manage what they are experiencing. In these cases the medication can become a band-aid, because the core issues are not being addressed and innate coping tools are not being utilized. We are lucky to have meds available for when they are needed, and for some, they can be the difference between life and death. But for most, if used, they should be used as a tool to access what we already innately have available to us – they are a ladder to reach a solution rather than the entire solution.

Why is it important to name 'anxiety'?

The more we normalize words and not shy away from them, the more we are capable of having honest conversations about how we are feeling. But we should be careful of our tone/body language when we talk about anxiety, because if we are using the word and then looking/sounding afraid, we are doing the exact opposite of what we are hoping to do (normalize/validate). So it takes a lot of self-awareness to become comfortable with anxiety, what it is, what it means, and how one can cope – so that conversations can be grounded and calm rather than filled with fear.

What tools can we use to manage everyday anxiety?

I am a mindfulness teacher, so I appreciated this question. I talked about meditation (but also used the words stillness, quiet, and calm as synonyms so people don't get too caught up in the word "meditate"). Daily stillness/meditation can strengthen the mindfulness muscle, which means creating some space between stimulus (like a feeling of anxiety) and reaction (becoming more anxious about feeling anxious). A meditation/stillness practice can help us RESPOND, rather than REACT. We can practice noticing a feeling and then choosing to breathe through it, rather than react to it. Anxiety will still show up, that's part of being human, but being mindful means we can decrease the pressure of the feeling, or sit with the feeling until it passes (rather than getting more anxious about feeling anxious).

Daily meditation/stillness is like "working out" this mindfulness muscle everyday, so then we can use it in present time when something anxiety provoking actually occurs. Compare dealing with anxiety to running a marathon – to run a marathon, we need to exercise our bodies on a daily or weekly basis so we are ready to perform during the race. A meditation/stillness practice is exercising the brain by noticing and breathing through thoughts – then when an anxiety-provoking situation arrives, we can actually "perform" what we've been practicing. Other ways to practice mindfulness – breath work, yoga, walking meditations, visualizations. Anything that helps the brain "practice" calming down.

A little girl asked about how to manage her panic attacks. I told her that the only thing she needs is her breath – that her thoughts or feelings may not be clear, but if she can remember to breathe, she will slow down every part of her body and mind. It may not "stop" it immediately, but it will keep it from getting worse and help ground her. I talked with her (and her mom) for a long time after the movie – we talked more about things that preceded the panic attacks and how they could work together to decrease the anxiety before they took hold (the little girl admitted to being a perfectionist with homework, and this would make mom anxious and annoyed, and then it would just escalate, etc...).

ANXIETY TIP SHEETS

With the help of our experts we've rounded up some tips on anxiety support.

Often, those who experience extreme anxiety feel ashamed and suffer in silence but the good news is that there is hope. Anxiety disorders are highly treatable. The following three Tip Sheets will give guidance on:

- How to help a friend with an anxiety disorder
- Managing anxiety at school
- Definitions and tips for handling the different manifestations of anxiety

Fact: Anxiety disorders are treatable.

Fact: Neuroplasticity of the brain is real. You can change the way you think about something. You can rewire your brain to positivity.

Fact: Distraction allows your amygdala (fight-or-flight part of the brain) a break. It can be helpful to distract your mind and give yourself some space for a short period, but prolonged isolation can lead to avoidance of anxiety producing situations which reinforces the negative thought process.

5 Ways to Support Your Teen's Mental Health

- 1** Validate your teen's emotional pain
- 2** Educate yourself about how the body reacts to anxiety
- 3** Create an environment that encourages facing fears
- 4** Model vulnerability "it's ok to not be ok"
- 5** Consider extra help from professionals

For more resources and information, please visit: www.adaa.org

ADAA ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

Tip Sheet 1: How to Help a Friend with an Anxiety Disorder

Having supportive and understanding friends is an essential component to recovering from an anxiety disorder. How can you help?

Educate yourself - Understanding what your friend is going through will help you better support them. It will also help alleviate frustrations that you may have about his or her behavior.

Be supportive - Encourage your friend when he or she is having a tough time and be empathetic to what he or she is going through. Be respectful but do not support avoidance of stressful situations.

Don't try to change your friend - Modify your expectations of how you want your friend to be and accept your friend for who he or she is.

Communicate - Be sure to listen with a nonjudgmental attitude. Help him or her find treatment. Sometimes it's hard to take the first step alone. Be supportive and encourage your friend to get help.

Encourage - Encourage your friend to confront stressful situations and support them through the experience, rather than avoiding anxiety-provoking situations. Avoidance can actually make the anxiety disorder worse.

Be fun - Sure it's good to have someone to talk to, but your friends need you to keep the fun going. Help make them laugh and relax.

Tips powered by TeenMentalHealth.com

[Click here](#) to find more reading materials, as well as podcasts, videos and links to anxiety-related websites. [Click here](#) to access state-specific resources and help

Tip Sheet 2: Managing Anxiety at School

Be Specific: Address your stress inducing thoughts and label them concretely. Make a list at the end of each workday and evening (at home) with the labeled stressors and an action plan of completion. Even if the items of stress are not task oriented in nature, it is beneficial to label them and write them down (for example, “I’m super-stressed about this test; Strategy: don’t avoid it; make a plan of exactly what you’re going to do to prepare and when, and stick to it!”)

Take a Break and Distract: If you feel your thoughts becoming clustered and overly emotional, or the beginning stages of anxiety increasing, get up and move for 5-10 minutes. Take your thoughts and body to a new location, even briefly, to grab a drink in the lounge or hallway, listen to music for a moment. Distracting your thoughts will allow your brain to function in an organized and efficient manner.

Don’t Isolate (for long): It can be helpful to distract your mind and give yourself some space for a short period, but prolonged isolation can lead to avoidance of anxiety producing situations, which reinforces the negative thought process. Do what you fear, be it networking socials or assertively stating your idea in a meeting.

Model Emotional Honesty and Reach Out: Let your coworkers, and loved ones know if you are feeling stressed, create an environment where all emotions are labeled and acknowledged. Address your needs.

[Click here](#) to find more reading materials, as well as podcasts, videos and links to anxiety-related websites. [Click here](#) to access state-specific resources and help

Tip Sheet 3: 12 Definitions and Tips for Anxiety

Some anxiety is normal and natural, occurring in children, teens and adults every day. Anxiety is generally defined fear that is future-oriented, while phobias are specific, exaggerated fears. Anxiety becomes problematic when it begins to interfere with everyday life.

1. There are many different types of anxiety disorders, and they are one of the most common forms of mental illness. They include:
 - **Panic Disorder**, which involves physical symptoms of anxiety as well as fear of having another panic attack.
 - **Social Anxiety** in which people avoid social situations (i.e., public speaking).
 - **Specific Phobias**, or intense fear of specific objects (i.e., snakes).
 - **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder**, which involves thoughts (obsessions) that tend to be unwanted and intrusive (i.e., maybe there are germs on my hands), and create anxiety, after which the individual engages in compulsions, or actions designed to reduce that anxiety (i.e., hand washing).
 - **Generalized Anxiety Disorder**, or excessive fear related to several things.
 - **PTSD** (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) involves exposure to an extremely traumatic event that could result in death or serious injury, followed by a re-experiencing of the event, increased arousal, and avoidance of things that remind the person of the event.
2. There are three parts to anxiety: What I think (cognitions); What I feel (physical sensations), and What I do (behaviors). Helping people break down and verbalize these distinct thoughts, feelings, and behaviors helps them understand and face their fears.
3. Our bodies have a natural, physiological, way of coping with fear. A specific set of sensations occurs when we're anxious, including pounding heart, shortness of breath, dizziness, and sweating. This set of symptoms, called the fight or flight response, is designed to help us avoid danger, but sometimes works more like a faulty smoke alarm. Helping teens understand these natural sensations in their bodies without overreacting, and showing them how quickly things can return to normal can help give them control over their feelings of anxiety.
4. Facing fears and anxiety can teach an individual that they are stronger than they think they are, that they can face something that they thought was insurmountable, and decreases those fears in the long term. Avoiding fears actually increases the chances that they will turn into a problem.

5. Excessively reassuring someone who is anxious that everything will be okay may backfire when trying to help them cope with anxiety. Instead, empathize that it's natural to feel anxious, and focus on helping them through their feeling so that they can successfully face their anxiety. Avoiding activities because of fear can lead to increased anxiety because it reinforces the false concept that anxiety makes the activity too scary or difficult. For example, if someone is anxious about having a panic attack while driving, and therefore is encouraged not drive, they learn that driving must be dangerous, because otherwise, why would everyone be discouraging driving?
6. Fears, phobias, and anxieties can be successfully treated with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which helps teens change their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This is a short-term (6-16 session) weekly type of therapy that teaches an individual to become his or her own therapist. The cognitive piece helps people identify their fear as excessive, and as something they can overcome by focusing on, and then changing, specific irrational thoughts that lead to anxiety.
7. Behavior therapy for anxiety often relies on the concept of Exposure Therapy, which focuses on helping an anxious person face their fears in a controlled environment. This may involve helping someone with a fear of public speaking give a speech in front of a few people, and then a larger group, and finally, a target audience. The goal of Exposure Therapy is to help an individual learn that they can feel anxious but that they can still live their lives.
8. Medication for anxiety may be an option as well. The most typical types of medication prescribed for anxiety are called Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors, or SSRIs.
9. The best thing you can do for someone with anxiety is help them face their fear. If you're experiencing symptoms of anxiety, think about how you can tackle your fear head on, possibly in small steps.
10. You can also help reduce anxiety through changing "self-talk", a part of CBT where people learn to identify the thoughts that they have that perpetuate their fears. Instead, try and identify what you're really worried about, and whether it's likely to happen.
11. Praise and reward yourself for facing tough situations. Be liberal with support if you know someone who is struggling with anxiety – even if the fear is irrational, it's difficult to face your fears. Any small step in the right direction should be encouraged.
12. Finally, take care of yourself! If you're feeling anxious, make sure you're managing your base stress levels by exercising, eating right, and getting enough sleep. All those factors can play a part in making anxiety worse as well.

by Regine Galanti, Ph.D. Director, Long Island Behavioral Psychology

[Click here](#) to find more reading materials, as well as podcasts, videos and links to anxiety-related websites. [Click here](#) to access state-specific resources and help

TEACHER-DRIVEN CLASSROOM DISCUSSION GUIDE & CORRESPONDING CLIPS

The following classroom clips and corresponding discussion questions can be leveraged as a classroom follow up to a school screening of the Angst film or as a stand-alone lesson. The 4 chapters of the discussion can be fit into 1 class period (50 mins), or it can be separated out by chapters over several class periods if the educator would like to spend more time discussing each topic.

Clip 1: Anxiety 101 - <https://vimeo.com/325095674/9d1fa7976d>

1. What are some signs our bodies can give us when we are experiencing anxiety? (ie: heart starts racing, start to sweat, want to avoid/escape, etc.)
2. One of the therapists in the clip mentions the ‘Amygdala Hijack Phenomenon.’ How can anxiety ‘hijack’ our brains? (ie: the amygdala takes over and tries to override our prefrontal cortex)
3. How do you think the amygdala served a purpose since the days of early humans? (ie: a caveman being aware of a lion nearby)
4. What sorts of things could be triggering our amygdala in modern times? (ie: social media, etc.)
5. What are some situations at school that may create anxious feelings? (e.g. classroom presentations, test taking, applying for college, grades).

Clip 2: Distraction - <https://vimeo.com/325095875/dd1dca0889>

1. Why is distraction helpful when you are feeling very anxious? (e.g. takes you out of the amygdala so can be in your rational, prefrontal cortex)
2. What are some tips you can use to bring calm to your body when feeling anxiety?(e.g. snapping fingers, holding ice, listening to music, flipping hands, picturing calm place, etc)
3. In the last section we talked about some stressful situations at school that may create anxious feelings (e.g. Covid transmission, classroom presentations, applying for college, grades). Now, let’s apply some of these tips to those school situations (e.g. doing the stress-breath before a presentation)

Take a Break, Reboot & Jump Back In

Clip 3: Avoidance - <https://vimeo.com/325096232/9933521bac>

1. Why is it important to jump back in after taking a break and not avoiding a situation when you are feeling anxiety? (avoidance gives anxiety power, so being capable gives us back our control)
2. What are some things we can do to give ourselves a short break?
3. How can you have a friend help you when you are feeling tempted to avoid due to anxiety?

It Gets Better, So Start Talking!

Clip 4: Michael Phelps - <https://vimeo.com/325096415/667d48dcab>

Michael Phelps says 'It's ok to not be ok. "What do you think he means?
Why do you think talking to someone about your anxiety symptoms would be helpful?
Who would you contact at the school if you or someone you know needs help? Would you like someone to reach out to you to check in on you or someone you know?

PEER-DRIVEN CLASSROOM DISCUSSION GUIDE

The following guide is to be leveraged as a classroom follow-up discussion to a school screening of the Angst film. At the beginning of the class, the teacher can break the class up into small groups with one student representative volunteering for each group. The student representatives will read aloud the discussion questions to their small groups and gather their group's answers to later share to the class at the end of the discussion period. Student-led, this exercise is meant to foster solidarity, empathy and idea sharing amongst the students, leading to tangible solutions and individualized action. The survey at the end also helps to identify those students in more immediate need of help (silent sufferers).

1. *Educator Open*

Explain that today's class will consist of a discussion around the Angst movie. Share 3 facts about anxiety.

- a) If you are human you experience anxiety at times in response to stressful situations.
- b) Anxiety is treatable!
- c) The first thing we can do to make our anxiety symptoms better is to start talking about it. So we are doing that today!

Share that the class is going to do an exercise that will lead to ideas for managing their anxiety responses to stressful situations. They will also be able to create their own personal action plans for easing their anxiety as it shows up in their lives by setting personal intentions.

2. *Break into Peer-led Groups*

The teacher breaks the class up into small groups, selecting a volunteer student leader (or could select by choosing randomly). Each small group gets scraps of paper and a bowl.

3. *Peer Group Discuss Questions* (approx. 20 mins)

Teacher keeps track of time and suggests when to move onto the next question. Allow at least 5 minutes per question for group discussions. The student representative for their group reads aloud the question to their group and gathers their responses.

Question 1: What are some signs our bodies can give us when we are experiencing anxiety? Go around the group and each student shares some signs they feel when they are experiencing anxiety. The leader writes down sample symptoms (ie: heart starts racing, start to sweat, want to avoid/escape, etc).

Question 2: What are 3 stressful situations that can cause you to feel anxious feelings? (e.g. the situation with Covid, classroom presentations, applying for college, grades, meeting new friends). The student leader asks everyone in their group to write sample situations that cause them to feel anxiety down on a scrap of paper and throw them in a hat/bowl. The leader then reads aloud each scrap of paper to the group. Chances are that there is a lot of overlap – many people share the same fears – although many think they are suffering alone

Question 3: What are some ideas for the anxious situations shared? What are some tips you can use to bring calm to your body when feeling anxiety? (e.g. snapping fingers, holding ice, listening to music, flipping hands, picturing calm place, etc.) Talk amongst the group about each situation and ideas that could help calm anxiety. The group leader will write down the calming ideas shared.

Question 4: Why is it important to jump back in after taking a break and not avoiding a situation when you are feeling anxiety? (e.g. avoidance gives anxiety power, so being capable gives us back our control). Discuss as a group what would happen if habitually avoid the anxious situations shared? What would happen if jump back in and push past the fear?

4. Peer Representative Shares (approx. 5 -10 mins)

Each peer representative for each group comes up and shares out loud as teacher writes ideas shared down on the board for all to see.

5. Set Personal Intentions – Individual Anxiety Plan (approx. 10 mins)

1. The teacher passes out an index card and has students write for themselves at their desk, their top 3 stressful situations that create anxiety for them.
2. Then ask them to leverage the shared ideas captured on the board to set an intention to actively address each one of their top 3 stressors the next time the situation arises.
3. Have students write on the index card one person they know they can talk to when feeling a lot of anxiety. Can be an adult in their lives, a close friend or a teacher at school. There is someone!

Suggest that each student keep the index card somewhere they can easily find and refer to when stressful situations arise: in their binder, in their calendar, on a picture in their phones, etc.

CONTACT US

Spread the word. Believe change is possible.

These screenings bring kids, parents, and educators together to talk about this universal issue, share personal stories, and provide resources and tools. There is power in solidarity. The more you share, the more we connect. Share this film in your community because watching it alone on your couch does not create the same effect as watching it with others.

Interested in additional screenings? We also have films to help students deal with social media balance and cyber-bullying. Our film on race and racism will be available from January 2021. Please visit: indieflix.com/education to find out more

You can also check out our 18-episode 'Angst: It Gets Better' series at watch.indieflix.com. Each 10-15 minute episode walks through young people's lives from age 10-24, showing that no matter how dark things might seem, they always get better. There are a lot of other inspiring things to watch there too, so enjoy browsing!

Connect with us!

- Twitter - @indieflix and @indieflixceo
- Facebook Pages - "IndieFlix" and "Angst: Raising Awareness Around Anxiety"
- Hashtags: #AngstMovie #IndieFlix
- Tag us and we will repost!

Questions? Feel free to call us: 323 940-3549 | Or get in touch at info@indieflix.com.

Stay happy and healthy,

Team iNDIEFLIX