

Introduction

As a school counselor, school social worker, or school-based mental health professional, you may offer this group curriculum if there are multiple students experiencing anxiety. Small group counseling is a beneficial service as it lets students know that they are not alone in their experience and allows often-understaffed schools to serve more students with evidence-based practices.

In a world where rates of anxiety are increasing and trending younger, providing youth with the skills to understand and manage these emotions is a necessity. Giving children strategies to build a positive relationship with their emotional world and cope with big feelings will improve their self-concept and ripple out to other parts of their lives and interpersonal relationships.

This small group counseling curriculum consists of ten to twelve thirty-minute lessons to help students learn these necessary skills. Our goals with this curriculum are to:

- **Help students manage their anxiety, not fully eliminate it.** It is not realistic to think that all the stressors that cause anxiety can be removed. Instead, when students learn to manage their feelings and experiences, their anxiety should naturally decrease over time. So rather than try to avoid experiences and situations that may create anxiety, teach students effective strategies they can use when they feel anxiety.
- **Create space for students to share their feelings without judgment.** Listening is an important form of communication with students. Validate their experiences without minimizing or exaggerating them. Allowing students to hear others share similar feelings and experiences builds a network of support and understanding.
- **Empower and encourage the student to face their feelings and use their new skills to endure and overcome moments of anxiety.** Discuss students' situations and help them generate specific strategies for managing their feelings. Praise their efforts, even if they are not always successful. Give them opportunities to practice skills in a safe environment and provide actionable feedback. The support and encouragement they experience in the sessions often extend beyond the group.

This small group counseling curriculum can be used with elementary to middle school-aged students who are struggling with anxiety. Most of the lessons focus on general anxiety. However, some lessons focus on understanding specific types of anxiety as well. This group will focus on building skills related to understanding and normalizing anxiety, its connection to the brain and body, different types of anxiety, and, perhaps most importantly, strategies to manage anxiety when it occurs. This curriculum recognizes the unique ways in which each student learns, emphasizing that there is no singular 'correct' way to embrace these ideas.

The strategic design of these group sessions allows students to empathize, connect with others, and translate their new knowledge into practice. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA®)-aligned curriculum contains an introductory lesson, ten core anxiety management lessons, and a final closing lesson. Facilitators have the flexibility to include the initial and final lessons as part of the core lessons if they have extra time.

You will find a range of essential resources in the book's concluding pages. These consist of permission and completion letters, attendance logs, a group expectation form, and a Certificate of Completion.

You will also find Pre- and Post-Group Surveys to measure the success of the lessons and templates. You can use these to share the results with stakeholders. Moreover, this workbook provides a comprehensive small group action plan that will integrate effortlessly into your ASCA® evaluation document and facilitate a seamless transition from planning to assessment.

Practical and applicable, the activities provided are suitable for small groups and do not require additional materials. You do not need supplies beyond pencils, a whiteboard or chalkboard, markers or crayons, and scratch paper; you will not need to spend hours prepping materials before meeting with your students.

Everything you need is included!

See page 91 for information on Downloadable Resources.

What's Included?

Anxiety Management Group Lesson Plans: Comprises ten lessons and all necessary documents to conduct these small group sessions. Following the overview of the lesson curriculum, you will find supporting documentation to develop a small group within the school setting.

Mind Map: Provides an illustrated diagram of the skills and concepts related to the lesson. To help students make connections between what they are learning. Students should begin each lesson by considering the meaning of the specific skill. It is optional to write these, but visuals are helpful for many students. Some have found it helpful to draw the Mind Map on the board, or drawing a tree with the concept written on the trunk and the related words on the fruit on the tree.

ASCA® Standards: Each lesson includes success criteria for the learning target.

Lesson Introduction: At the start of each lesson, we will introduce a concept and explain it to provide clarity for the upcoming story.

Circle Time Questions: This section has three optional questions for the facilitator to start the conversation. These questions allow students to deepen their understanding of the topic and build community by discussing and sharing their experiences.

Story Time: Provides stories related to the topic that should be read aloud to help students understand the concept.

Coloring Sheets: Allow students to visualize the lesson topic. Students can color the sheet while the facilitator shares the initial story after the lesson is complete or take it home with them.

Discussion Questions: Students can discuss the questions posed to help them process their beliefs on the subject.

Skill Practice: Allow students to share how they would apply the concepts of the lesson, giving them each a chance to answer one question.

Additional Activities: Provides activities to help students practice and apply the lesson concept.

Closing Considerations: Provides an opportunity to review the concept and ask students to reflect on their new experience with the material.

Would You Rather? Game: Provides an opportunity for students to consider what they would “rather” do related to the lesson’s topic. The facilitator can cut out the cards and let students discuss or read aloud while students move from one side of the room to the other to communicate their preferred answer.

Accompanying Group Documents

Small Group Action Plan Guide: Provides the necessary information required to complete the ASCA® National Model’s Small Group Action Plan.

Permission Form: The permission form is used to gain the permission of the student’s caregivers for the child to attend the Anxiety Management Group.

Group Expectations: Basic expectations for the group process. The form has space for the facilitator and group to collaborate on adding additional expectations to fit their group.

Group Attendance Form: This is a blank form that allows the facilitator to track which students attended each session and what topics were discussed.

Group Attendance Form (Example): This form is an example of how to best utilize the group attendance form.

Pre- and Post-Group Survey: Provides an opportunity for students to share what they know of the concepts before and after they have completed the curriculum.

To measure the progress of students who participate, use the same assessment for both the Pre-Group and Post-Group Survey. Administer the Pre-Group Survey during the first group session, before instruction and practice opportunities for new skills or knowledge.

At the end of the group sessions, administer the Post-Group Survey. Compare the results of both assessments to identify areas of knowledge and skills gained as well as areas that need further instruction. Then calculate the average score of the pre-survey and post-survey to determine the percentage of improvement by subtracting the pre-survey average from the post-assessment average and then dividing the result by the pre-survey average. Use this pre-survey average improvement to measure the students’ progress effectively.

Percentage of Improvement Formula:

$$(\text{Post-Group Total} - \text{Pre-Group Total} / \text{Pre-Group Total}) \times 100 = \text{Percentage of Overall Improvement}$$

Example:

$$(44 \text{ Post-Group Total} - 31 \text{ Pre-Group Total} / 31) \times 100 = 41.94\% \text{ Overall Improvement}$$

Review school and student data to determine who should attend the group. This includes behavior referrals, attendance data, and achievement metrics to identify at-risk students. The impact of the small group intervention is demonstrated when strategically selecting students and closely monitoring their academic, attendance, and behavior data. Be sure to share the assessment of the intervention with your school counseling advisory council.

Post-Group Survey Results: The survey shows one way to share your data with your interested parties. Remember, we want to make sure that we use graphs and charts as they show our data, which is often more impactful than a paragraph of text. Use whatever platform you prefer to show your data but be sure to complete the data following the group and then share with your counseling program’s stakeholders.

Post-Group Survey Results (Example): The survey shows what your data might resemble following the completion of the groups. You can use this form to share your data.

Certificate of Completion: Present students with a certificate to congratulate them on completing the curriculum.

Anxiety Management Group Completion Letter: Letter written to the caregivers of students that highlights the skills and knowledge addressed during the group. Provide students with their certificate and their Anxiety Management Group Completion letter during the last lesson.

Additional Materials: You will need to make copies of the pre- and Post-Group Survey surveys and print the Coloring Sheets for each participating student. You might also print and cut the “Would You Rather?” game or facilitate that activity verbally. Additionally, you might want to have a whiteboard or chalkboard accessible for group brainstorming. We recommend having crayons or colored pencils readily available on the table for those who wish to complete the coloring sheet. It might also be helpful to have some fidgets accessible for your students during their group session.

Good luck with your group! We hope you have a fantastic experience supporting your students with anxiety!



Introductory Group Session

Directions and Overview

Conducting this introductory session is recommended but not required, as the content covered here can easily integrate into the first core Anxiety Management Group lesson. Once you have identified students to participate in the group and confirmed they have permission from caregivers, determine the activities based on the students' needs.

Directions: We recommend that you meet with the students to complete this introductory group session before conducting the first core lesson. You will start by welcoming all the students to the group. Explain to the students that the purpose of the group is to:

- understand what is happening in our brains when we feel anxiety;
- learn to identify the things that trigger our anxiety so that we can work to prevent some of our anxiety; and
- learn coping skills to help us when we do feel anxiety.

Make sure to instill hope for gaining new knowledge and having fun together!

Survey: If administering a Pre-Group Survey, do as part of the first group session. It is not necessary to assess each group session. Instead, conduct assessments at the beginning and end of the group experience. Feel free to adapt or use your own assessments to meet your program needs. The questions in the Pre- and Post-Small Group Surveys are designed to test for both knowledge gained and how the students have applied the knowledge they learned in the group.

Depending on the grade level of the students in your group, you may select three to five questions from the Pre- and Post-Group Surveys instead of having them complete the full assessment. Choose questions that align with your goals for the group. Using the same questions for the Pre- and Post-Group Surveys is best practice and allows you to measure growth for each student. Additionally, you may present the questions in a manner appropriate for your students and group dynamics (paper, electronically, etc.).

Introductions: Help your students get to know one another by asking them to share their names, something about themselves, and what they hope to learn from the group. They can also share one unique fact about themselves. Feel free to adapt other creative introduction activities. For example, ask each student to introduce themselves as a superhero using their name and what superpower they would like to have. Remind students that all answers should be appropriate for school. As the group leader, be sure to participate as well. Explain that during each session, they will be asked to share a high and low for the week or check-in using the weather to represent their emotions. Offer to practice that check-in now.

Icebreaker Activity: Choose from one of the icebreaker activities below (or select one of your own). The activity should provide an opportunity for all students in the group to participate and learn more about each other, building a stronger group dynamic.

- **World's Worst:** Have each student choose a profession they think they would be the worst at doing. As students share with the group, brainstorm something the world's worst _____ would say. For example, the world's worst dentist might say, "Please take a bag of candy from the toy chest as you leave!"

- **Autobiography:** Have each person sum up their life in one sentence. They can also choose a movie, book, or song that reflects their autobiography.

Explain the Group Format: Review the group meeting schedule and procedures for attending (Will students report to the counseling office? Will they receive a pass on the day of the group? Etc.). Explain that, in each meeting, you will discuss the lesson topic, hear a student story, and then answer questions. Discuss the logistics of what they will do while you are reading; they will be eating (if it is a lunch group) or completing their Coloring Sheet. Explain that they will practice skills introduced in the lesson and play a “Would You Rather?” game. Finally, explain that at the end of each session, they will be asked to give a one-sentence overview of what they have learned and make a plan to practice that lesson topic throughout the week.

Review Group Expectations: Print a copy of the Anxiety Management Group Expectations. Review the expectations together with the students and answer questions as they arise. Ask the students what other conditions are important for everyone to feel safe and able to learn together. (Avoid using the word “rule” to prevent the experience from seeming punitive.) Take time to collaborate with your group to determine whether you need to modify or add expectations. Once the group has identified appropriate expectations, allow students to ask questions and then come to a consensus on the group norms.

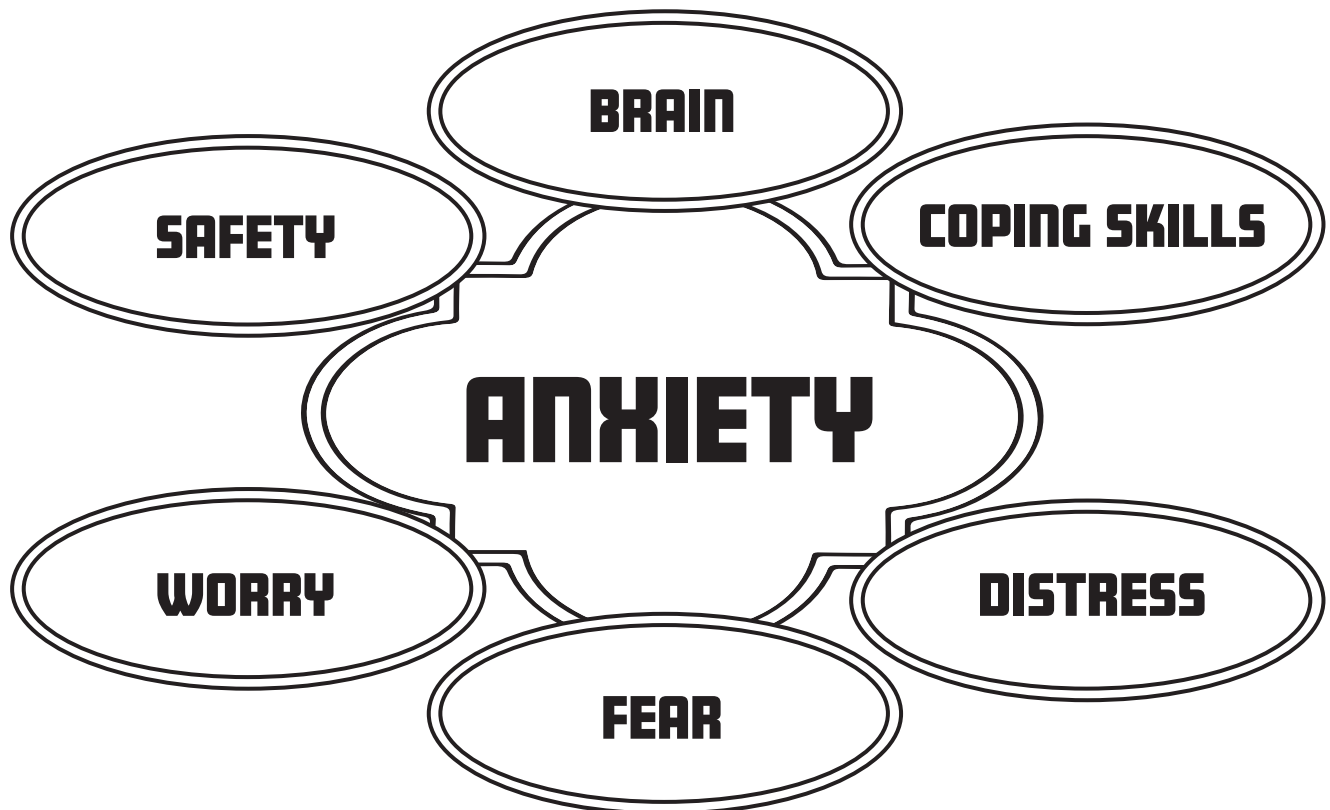
Group Conclusion: Allow students to ask any final questions about the group. Ask each student to summarize the information they learned from this lesson into one sentence. Students may share with partners or the group. Remind students of the Group Norms, particularly about not repeating what was shared in the group, and the time and date of the next meeting. Be sure to thank them for their participation.

Note to Facilitators: You can customize the material to fit the needs of your group. If your students are not yet readers, you can read the “Would You Rather?” game questions aloud and request that students move to different sides of the room to show their answers. Students can write their responses to questions instead of sharing them aloud or break into smaller teams to discuss. Some facilitators may choose to incorporate traditional games into the lessons if they have longer session times. Remember, the workbook is just the framework, but you will bring it to life!

IS ANXIETY NORMAL?

MIND MAP

On the board, draw a mind map and ask students to consider the meaning of *Anxiety*.



ASCA® STANDARDS

- **B-SMS 6.** Ability to identify and overcome barriers
- **B-SS 2.** Positive, respectful, and supportive relationships with students who are similar to and different from them
- **B-SS 3.** Positive relationships with adults to support success
- **B-SS 9.** Social maturity and behaviors appropriate to the situation and environment

DIRECTIONS

- Prior to the first group, be sure your students have completed the Pre-Group Survey. Complete a brief check-in with your students by asking them to share a high and low for the week or by using the weather to represent their emotions.
- Review the Group Expectations.
- Read the Lesson Introduction and ask the Circle Time Questions before reading the Story and asking the Discussion Questions. Students can work in pairs to craft their responses or share with the whole group.
- Complete the Skill Practice, “Would You Rather?” game, and Additional Activities as time allows.
- Be sure to complete the Closing Considerations with each session.

Definitions:

- **Anxiety** is the excessive concern about a potential triggering event or perceived threat to one’s safety. That safety can be physical, emotional, or social.
- To **cope** is to deal appropriately with something difficult.

LESSON INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is a normal part of life. When we feel worried or nervous, it is our body’s way of letting us know that we may not be safe or that we are getting ready to do something that we care a lot about.

However, when we feel high levels of worry that cause us physical and mental distress, these feelings can impact what we want or need to do. We may be experiencing what is considered a high level of anxiety that requires more support and intervention, which could include counseling and/or medical support.

Many people will experience high levels of anxiety sometime during their school-aged years. It is important to recognize these symptoms and learn skills that help us manage these feelings so we can cope during difficult times. It is also very important to know it is okay to have these feelings and to reach out to trusted adults for help and support when we feel overwhelmed.

CIRCLE TIME QUESTIONS

Ask students to reflect and share their answers to the following questions with the group.

- Can you think of a time in your life when you have experienced anxiety?
- When was a time you had difficulty coping?
- When was a time that you were able to cope successfully?

STORY TIME

Hand out coloring sheets and crayons or markers to younger students while the facilitator reads the story, if desired.

You are Not Alone

Donnell had always been a nervous person, but he was especially nervous on the first day at his new school. His mind fired off question after question. What if his new teachers were not nice? What if he did not like his classmates? What if he did not have a good view of the board from his seat? What if he did not find friends? In the past, he was able to get the answers to all his questions pretty quickly, but this year was different.

He had been in school for two months, but he was still so nervous every single day he almost did not want to go to school anymore. Every day it felt like there were 100 more unanswered questions that popped into his head, and some of them did not seem to have answers. I mean, how was anyone supposed to answer, “What if something bad happens tomorrow?” This had never happened to Donnell before, and it filled him with confusion (which made him worry more!). Everything just felt like it was too much. The worst part was that it did not seem like any of his classmates were nervous at all, which made him feel like there must be something different and wrong about him.

One afternoon, as Donnell was nervously trying to decide where to sit for lunch, another student came up to him. She seemed so confident; Donnell was getting nervous just looking at her.

“Hi, I’m Amelia. I’m new to this school. And honestly, I have no idea where to sit for lunch and it’s got me so stressed. Maybe we can sit together?” she said.

Donnell could not believe his ears. She did not look stressed at all!

“Of course,” Donnell stammered. “I am new too and was stressed about where to sit. Sometimes it’s so hard to make a choice.”

Amelia gave a wide smile.

“Right? Well, at least now we can help each other.”

Donnell breathed a sigh of relief. He still had many unanswered questions, but at least he had the answer to one of them: *Am I the only stressed one in this school?* Even though he was still nervous, it was nice to know he was not alone.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Was Donnell having normal anxiety or high levels of anxiety? What evidence from the story supports your opinion?
- What was something that helped Donnell?
- What could Donnell have done that would have made his anxiety worse?
- What other ideas do you have that might help Donnell better cope in the future?

SKILL PRACTICE

Ask students how they might apply what Donnell learned about everyone having anxiety, giving every student a chance to answer one question. Skill practice can be adapted to allow students to answer in pairs or record their answers on the worksheet.

How might you (or someone else) cope with anxiety:

- When you think that you are the only one who is anxious?
- When you are in an uncomfortable situation with a person you know?
- When you are around strangers?
- When someone does something that upsets you?
- When you are not sure the reason you feel anxious?
- When your anxiety is unexpected?
- When it seems like the amount of anxiety you are feeling is bigger than is normal?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- Break the students into pairs and have them take turns role-playing a person with symptoms of anxiety and a calm person. How can they tell when their role-play partner is anxious versus calm? Have them list the differences they notice. Each student should have the opportunity to role-play both dispositions.
- Have students think about the concept of, “You are not alone,” specifically in the context of having anxiety. Give them the opportunity to reflect on the fact that having at least some anxiety is a universal experience. They can draw, journal, or talk with a partner about how it feels knowing that everyone experiences anxiety. If there is time, they can share.

CLOSING CONSIDERATIONS

Anxiety is a normal part of life, and if we are not able to cope effectively, it can get in the way. It is important to understand that even if you do have bigger anxiety than others, you are not alone. It is also important to take steps to help yourself manage your anxiety and cope with stress.

Ask students to summarize the content of the lesson in one sentence. Students may share their answers either with a partner or the whole group. Ask students to notice times this week when they observe someone else being anxious or if they feel anxious themselves.

“WOULD YOU RATHER?” GAME

Playing the “Would You Rather?” game is a fun and engaging activity for students to develop their critical thinking skills. Students will reflect on their experience, evaluate their options based on their preferences, and reflect on the opinions of others, providing a different perspective and strengthening their sense of connection to one another.

WOULD YOU RATHER?

Copy and cut out the questions for small groups to discuss, or have students stand in the center of the room and move towards one side or the other to show their vote for either option as the facilitator reads the questions aloud.

**WOULD YOU RATHER
GO TO A NEW SCHOOL
OR STAY IN THE SAME SCHOOL?**

**WOULD YOU RATHER
TRY A NEW HOBBY OR
KEEP THE SAME HOBBY?**

**WOULD YOU RATHER
ASK QUESTIONS OR KEEP YOUR
QUESTIONS TO YOURSELF?**

**WOULD YOU RATHER
TELL SOMEONE YOU ARE STRESSED
OR WAIT FOR SOMEONE
TO ASK?**

**WOULD YOU RATHER
KEEP YOUR WORRIES TO YOURSELF
OR WRITE THEM DOWN?**

**WOULD YOU RATHER
FEEL ALONE OR FEEL
LIKE YOU HAVE SUPPORT?**



***Anxiety is something that is part of me,
but it is not who I am.***

EMMA STONE