



**Module Title**  
***Addressing Fear and Anxiety***

Social Emotional Learning Curriculum

**SEL Topic:** Self Awareness

**Level:** High School

**Module at A Glance**

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Lesson Overview	About Fear and Anxiety	Teacher Activity Guides	Teacher Tools	Quiz

**Lesson Objectives**

Students will be able to differentiate between fear and anxiety and be able to utilize techniques for managing both fear and anxiety.

**Activity Snapshots**

This lesson incorporates the following activities, information and Teacher Tools.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Activity Type</b>	<b>Approx. Time</b>	<b>Resources and Materials</b>
Activity 1: What is fear and anxiety?	KWL Brainstorm Discussion	5 – 10 minutes	About Fear and Anxiety Student Instructions Activity Definitions Chart paper and markers Teacher Tools The Amygdala, K.W.L chart and Fear and Anxiety
Activity 2: Breathing Exercise for Managing Anxiety	Breathing Exercise	5 minutes	About Fear and Anxiety Student Instructions Activity Definitions
Activity 3: Overcoming Anxiety Exercise	Whole Group or Pairs Discussion	5-10minutes	About Fear and Anxiety Student Instructions Activity Definitions

**Description/Intent:**

In this module, students will gain an understanding of fear and anxiety and to be able to define both concepts. Students will also be able to practice important techniques for managing fear and anxiety in their everyday lives.

**Applications & Benefits:**

Anxiety is a common yet debilitating experience for many students, especially revolving around tests and schoolwork. Feeling fear and anxiety negatively impacts many aspects of a student's life such as school performance, social situations, family life, etc. Learning how to manage and reduce anxiety is a useful skill not only for school, but also for everyday life. The goal of this module is to introduce students to the concept of fear and anxiety so they can recognize when they are experiencing these reactions and to be able to manage them appropriately.



## About Fear and Anxiety

### Defining Fear and Anxiety

#### **What is fear?**

Fear is a biological response that is enacted when you experience a perceived physical threat. Fear is how your body physiologically responds to a threat whether it be real or fabricated. When fear is enacted it lights up a region in the brain called the amygdala, which creates a phenomenon called “fight-or-flight.” This reaction prepares your body to either “run” from the threat or to “fight” the threat which usually will be accompanied by a release of hormones, elevated heart rate, perspiration, and other physical reactions.

#### **What is anxiety?**

Anxiety is the psychological response to an anticipated threat or internal conflict with an unpredictable outcome. Like fear, anxiety has physical responses. However, it is primarily a psychologically based reaction with **chronic** physical side effects. Anxiety is characterized by feelings of nervousness and intense worry. Some of the physical responses of anxiety include elevated blood pressure, breathing, and heart rate.

#### **What is the Difference?**

How is anxiety different from fear?

Fear is the result of a real, known threat to your safety, while anxiety is the way your body reacts to a perceived threat or internal conflict. Anxiety is a response to uncomfortable or unknown stimuli and may affect your comfort level but will not affect your physical safety.

#### **What is the Amygdala?**

The amygdala is a small section of the brain located near the Hippocampus that regulates emotions and memory. The amygdala is primarily known for its relationship with fear due to early psychological studies that showed how fear can be conditioned. While this is true, the amygdala is also responsible for many other emotions and reaction processes.

#### **Module Rationale:**

Managing fear and anxiety is **crucial** for students to be successful in academic and other life endeavors. Not surprisingly, negative emotions such as fear and anxiety have adverse effect on our physical health, memory and brain functioning. For example, test anxiety is one of the most common anxiety inducing debilitations for students and affects millions of children and teens around the world. Research shows that, text anxiety interferes with attention and performance. Anxiety can severely cripple a student’s ability to perform well in school. Giving students the tools that they need to be able to recognize when they are experiencing anxiety and fear, and how to manage both feelings, are very important for their overall health and wellbeing.

*HS 6 SA Module: Addressing Fear and Anxiety*

*SELENA - Social Emotional Learning Enhancement Application*

*LAST UPDATED: February 10, 2020*

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### **Feedback to Students**

Remind students that anxiety is very common and that they are not alone with their struggles. It is common for students to believe that some of us are alone with our thoughts and feelings. Acknowledge that there will always be someone to talk to about their struggles with fear and anxiety and how utilizing the proper coping mechanisms will give them a great source of comfort and reassurance. Tell students to be patient with themselves. You can remind them that anxiety has only recently been a concept that is discussed. Everyone struggles with some level of anxiety, including adults.

### **Helpful Tips**

- Fear and anxiety are two separate feelings but are often expressed interchangeably. Be patient with students who have a harder time grasping the concept of anxiety and fear. Be ready to repeat definitions and explanations more than once.
- Anxiety can be a sensitive concept for a lot of students. Be understanding if some students are having a hard time discussing the topic.
- Communicate that no fear is invalid. Students can feel comfortable in the classroom by realizing that their feelings are important and valid.
- Feel free to share some of your fears with the class so that they understand that adults can experience fear and anxiety too.
- If students are uncomfortable or not ready to talk about their fears, don't put them on the spot. Everyone deals with situations differently. Encourage them to share, but don't force it.

### **Teacher Feedback**

Please provide insights on any adjustments made regarding the actual use of the content. Feel free to share your thoughts, suggestions, and constructive criticism. Email your feedback to: [info@mylearningtools.org](mailto:info@mylearningtools.org)



## Activity #1: What is Fear and Anxiety?

### Teacher Instructions

Carefully read pages 2 and 3 that describe the basics of fear and anxiety. Make the Student Instructions for Activity #1 and the images for the Teacher Tool: The Amygdala accessible for students (via projector, hand copies, online host, etc.). Make copies of Teacher Tool: KWL, or have students create their own KWLs using notebook paper.

Prepare the whole group materials, a pre-drawn KWL chart and markers.

### Definitions

#### **What is fear?**

Fear is a biological response that is enacted when you experience a perceived physical threat. Fear is how your body physiologically responds to a threat whether it be real or fabricated. When fear is enacted it lights up a region in the brain called the amygdala, which creates a phenomenon called “fight-or-flight.” This reaction prepares your body to either “run” from the threat or to “fight” the threat which usually will be accompanied by a release of hormones, elevated heart rate, perspiration, and other physical reactions.

#### **What is anxiety?**

Anxiety is the psychological response to an anticipated threat with an unpredictable outcome. Like fear, anxiety has physical responses. However, it is primarily a psychologically based reaction with physical side effects. Anxiety is characterized by feelings of nervousness and intense worry. Some of the physical responses of anxiety include elevated blood pressure, breathing, and heart rate.

### Activity

Assess students’ prior knowledge of fear and anxiety. Ask students to create a “K.W.L.” (what I know, what I want to know, what I have learned) chart. There is a sample template for the K.W.L chart located in the Teacher Tools section. Ask students to fill out the “K” column of the chart with what they might already know about fear and anxiety.

Ask students to share what they already know with the class. As you do, clarify any misconceptions and discuss the appropriate definitions of fear and anxiety. The definitions are located separately on Teacher Tool: Fear and Anxiety so that students can share their honest initial thoughts. Share some of the science of the amygdala and Teacher Tool: The Amygdala with them. Have students add to their own “L” section if they began with a misconception. Write shared student responses on the group KWL chart in the “K” section.



Once students have completed the “K” column, ask them what they want to know more about regarding fear and anxiety and have them write their response in the “W” column. Ask students to share their opinions on this science of the amygdala and what interests them about its relation to fear. After the group discussion, allow students some time to add again to the “L” section of their chart with some things they learned from the lesson.



## Activity #2: Exercise for Reducing Anxiety

### Teacher Instructions

Carefully read pages 2 and 3 that describe the basics of positive psychology. Make the Student Instructions for Activity #2 accessible for students (via projector, hand copies, online host, etc.).

This activity is centered around relaxation and clearing the mind. Relaxation can be enhanced by dimming or turning the lights off, playing soft music, and using lavender scents.

### Definitions

#### **What is Diaphragmatic Breathing? Why is it important to practice?**

Diaphragmatic breathing is a relaxation technique that allows you to channel all of your focus on breathing. This is an effective technique for managing anxiety because it simulates parasympathetic nervous system breathing. A factor of anxiety is feeling like you have no control; utilizing diaphragmatic breathing will allow you to gain that sense of control back and to be able to relax and clear your mind as soon as you begin the exercise. Tell students that this is a healthy and simple way to reduce their anxiety when they start to recognize the onset of their anxiety induced symptoms.

### Activity

As you are able, create a calm and relaxing environment in the classroom. Tell students to place themselves in a comfortable position. Once they are settled tell them to close their eyes and place their hand on their stomach. Direct them to inhale for five seconds, lifting their diaphragm/belly, then exhale for 5 seconds. Tell them while they are breathing to focus all of their attention on their breathing.

Repeat these steps for a few minutes and discuss afterwards how this breathing exercise helped students relax. This is an easy activity that can be practiced anywhere and is a simple and effective way to quickly manage symptoms of anxiety.

Using a meditation recording is also another very useful tool to help stage a relaxing environment. Located in SELENA, there are a number of audio exercises dedicated to mindfulness and meditation. For a sample, see SELENA-Audio Exercises.



## Activity #3: Overcoming Fear and Anxiety

### Teacher Instructions

Carefully read pages 2 and 3 that describe the basics of fear and anxiety. Make the Student Instructions for Activity #3 accessible for students (via projector, hand copies, online host, etc.) Decide if you'd like this activity to be done as a while group or in pairs.

### Definitions

#### **What is systematic desensitization?**

Systematic desensitization is a therapeutic method to help people overcome their fears in a non-invasive way. This method is a form of exposure therapy that allows people to be exposed to their fears without actually being physically exposed to them. This is an actual technique used by therapists as an introduction to full exposure for people to overcome their fears. This activity is **not** systematic desensitization, it is simply derived from the concept and demonstrates how confronting your emotions can be helpful with overcoming fear and anxiety.

### **Helpful Tips**

- This activity requires students to think about feelings that might trigger unpleasant memories or feelings. You must be patient with students and reassure them that those are common responses. Tell students that if a memory is making them uncomfortable, they can move onto another scenario.

### Activity

This activity demonstrates how common and maladaptive the act of avoidance is as a coping mechanism. This activity is designed to have students recognize that it is better to confront their emotions instead of avoiding them. This can be done as a group discussion or in pairs. Below are some example scenarios depicting a scene that might be anxiety inducing. The goal is to have the students respond to the scenario with ways they can approach the scenario without avoiding the situation all together. This practice will help guide them to see how looking at a situation from a different perspective can be really useful and applicable in multiple daily activities.

<u>Situations</u>	<u>Healthy Approaches to the Scenario</u>



<p>Your exams are fast approaching and you are dreading having to take them.</p>	<p>Recognize in yourself that this type of situation can cause anxiety. Procrastinating and not studying, i.e. avoiding this situation, is not the proper way to cope.</p>
<p>A new friend invited you over and they have a large Great Dane dog. You are fearful of dogs because of an unpleasant experience.</p>	<p>Prepare yourself by talking to your friend about your fear. Ask questions about the dog, such as how to approach it, how to pet it, what it likes and doesn't like. Becoming familiar with the dog will help give you confidence to interact with it, rather than avoiding it. Be self-aware and know your limits.</p>
<p>You have to give a class presentation in a week. The topic is new to you and your crush is in the class as well.</p>	<p>Recognize in yourself that this type of situation can cause anxiety. Find ways to prepare yourself, such as practicing your presentation for a family member.</p>
<p>You are in the car with a friend and they are texting while driving. You are afraid that they aren't paying attention to the road.</p>	<p>This can possibly be both a fearful and an anxiety inducing situation if you don't like confrontation. To address the fear, tell your friend that texting while driving isn't safe. Tell them that you don't feel safe in the car with them. Remind them that no text is that important. Offer to send any texts for them while they focus on driving. If they don't listen to you or brush you off, plan to call another friend or adult to pick you up at your destination so that you don't have to ride with that friend again.</p>

You can use these examples or your own to facilitate a group discussion and ask the students for their thoughts or opinions on each scenario. If you are using this activity for partner work, allow the students 3-4 minutes of discussion in order for a well-developed conversation to take place.

Something to keep in mind, please do not force students to share if they are feeling uncomfortable with the material, this exercise is just to demonstrate healthier coping methods as opposed to avoidance.

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## **Student Instructions Activity #1: What is Fear and Anxiety?**

### **Brainstorm**

What comes to mind when you think of fear? How about anxiety?

Write what you already know about fear and anxiety in the “K” column of your chart.

### **Share and Discuss**

Share what you wrote. How do your initial thoughts compare? Add any new information to the “L” section.

### **Brainstorm Again**

In the “W” column write what you want to know more about.

### **Take a Look**

Researchers found that there is a correlation with the amygdala and your body’s reaction to fear. The amygdala is a tiny part of the brain that is responsible for managing a range of emotions and also regulating memory.

### **Reflect**

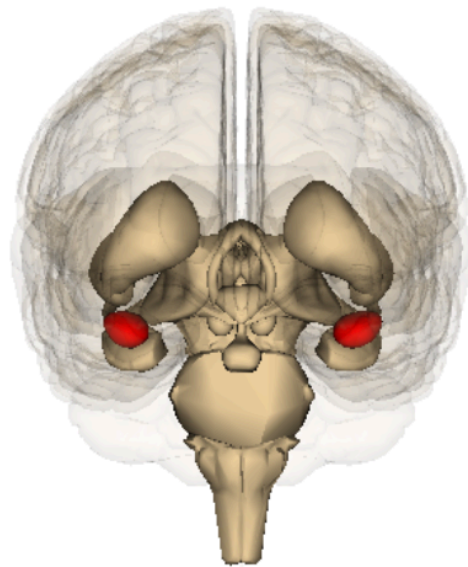
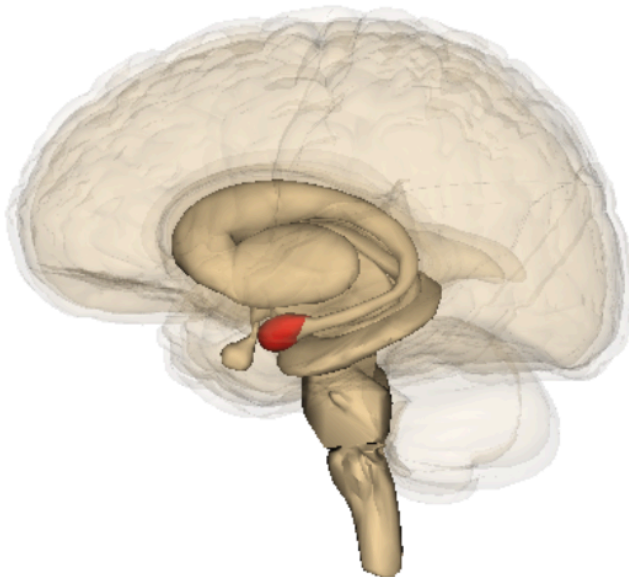
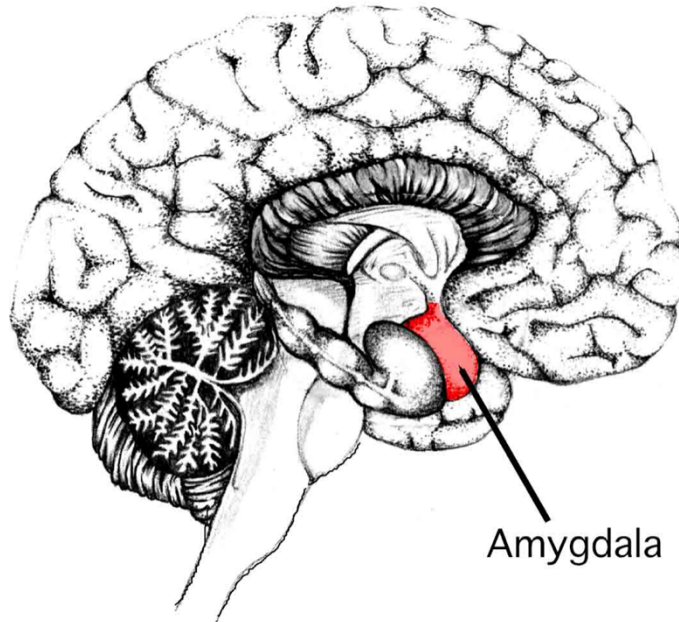
Now that you have learned more about fear and anxiety, write in the “L” column of your chart some things you have learned or found interesting.

### **Fascinating Details**

Research shows that over 40 million adults each year experience anxiety. If you have ever experienced anxiety, just know you are not alone.



# The Amygdala





## K.W.L

***What is fear? Anxiety? What are some ways people experience these topics in their everyday lives?***

**K.**

What do you **know** about fear and anxiety?

**W.**

What do you **want** to know more about fear and anxiety?

**L.**

What did you **learn** about fear and anxiety?



## **Fear and Anxiety**

### **About Fear**

- Fear is a biological response that occurs when you experience a real or perceived threat
- Fear is a response to a threat to our physical safety.
- Fear alerts us to danger.
- Fear involves a physiological response.
- Fear activates the amygdala, a region of your brain responsible for perceiving such emotions as fear, anxiety and sadness, and for controlling aggression.
- The amygdala controls your “fight or flight” reactions.
- The amygdala stores memories of events that cause these emotions, so we are able to recognize them in the future.
- Our reactions to fear may include sweating, elevated heart rate, and elevated blood pressure.

### **About Anxiety**

- Anxiety is a psychological response to an anticipated threat or unpredictable outcome.
- Anxiety has physical responses similar to fear.
- Anxiety is characterized by nervousness and intense worry.
- Anxiety may affect your comfort level but will not affect your physical safety.



## **Student Instructions Activity #2: Exercise for Managing Anxiety**

### **Define**

#### **What is Diaphragmatic Breathing? Why is it important to practice?**

Diaphragmatic breathing is a relaxation technique that allows you to channel all of your focus on breathing. This is an effective technique for managing anxiety because it simulates parasympathetic nervous system breathing. Diaphragmatic breathing can help you regain a sense of control in a anxiety inducing experience.

### **Practice**

- Get in a comfortable position in your chair.
- Try to calm your mind and think of a relaxing place.
- Focus all of your attention and energy on your breathing.
- Place your hand on your belly.
- Inhale for 5 seconds, lifting your belly.
- Exhale for 5 seconds.
- Repeat this pattern for a few minutes.

### **Discuss**

How does focusing on your breathing make you feel? Did it make you feel more relaxed?

### **Apply**

This breathing technique is a very simple method for reducing the symptoms of anxiety. You can utilize this method wherever you are. It is something that is great to practice even when you just want to feel more relaxed!

### **Just for Fun**

*“Calmness of mind is one of the beautiful jewels of wisdom”*



## **Student Instructions Activity #3:**

### **Engage**

#### **Why is it important to learn how to understand what we are experiencing?**

Anxiety and fear are two very common experiences that millions of people have all of the time. It is important to understand when you are experiencing these things so that you can understand the best way to manage them. Being able to manage fear and anxiety will allow you to have a deeper understanding of your own emotions and allow you to have a better perspective on your own thoughts and actions.

### **Brainstorm**

What are some situations that you avoided because you were too scared or anxious to face them head on?

### **Discuss**

Think about the scenario. What is a healthy way to approach that situation, without avoiding it?

### **Reflect**

What did you learn from facing your fears and anxieties?

### **Share**

Was this the first time you've thought about the way you have handled difficult situations?

### **Apply**

If you are experiencing feelings of nervousness or worry about a situation, just remember it's better to confront it than to avoid it. You can practice breathing techniques to help reduce your anxiety before confronting the situation.



## Quiz

1. What is one difference between fear and anxiety?
  - a. Fear is primarily a physical response and anxiety is a psychological response.
  - b. Fear may produce a headache while anxiety may produce an elevated heart rate.
  - c. Fear can occur in everyone, but anxiety only occurs in adolescents and adults.
  - d. Fear is more common than anxiety and is more difficult to address.
  
2. Which of the following is a characteristic of anxiety?
  - a. Feelings of nervousness and worry
  - b. Elevated blood pressure
  - c. Increased respiratory rate
  - d. All of the above
  
3. Why should we try to manage our anxiety?
  - a. Managing anxiety with breathing techniques will help you inhale more oxygen.
  - b. Managing anxiety allows us to have a deeper understanding of our emotions and become more confident in our abilities.
  - c. Managing anxiety makes us more tolerable to others that don't experience it.
  - d. Managing anxiety allows us to devise justification for avoiding certain situations.