Anxiety Disorders

Definition: While anxiety is a normal reaction to stress and can be beneficial in some situations, an Anxiety Disorder involves excessive fear or anxiety that is out of proportion to the situation and hinders ability to function normally. The term includes generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, agoraphobia, social anxiety disorder, separation anxiety, and specific phobias.

Symptoms of an anxiety disorder:

- Ongoing worry and tension
- Restlessness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Physical symptoms such as palpitations, sweating, trembling or shaking, chest pain, nausea (these symptoms can be so severe that a person may believe they are having a heart attack)
- Persistent fear of a specific situation or activity, such as an exam
- Extreme fear of public speaking or meeting new people

How to help in the classroom:

- Scaffold work so that students can take small steps to approach anxiety-provoking assignments or situations
- Encourage students to talk to you about their anxiety so you can realistically discuss situations to alleviate some of the fear
- Encourage self-care: healthy eating habits, consistent exercise, regular sleep
- Encourage relaxation procedures such as deep breathing or targeted muscle relaxation
- Allow students to take unobtrusive breaks as needed to alleviate stress
- Allow students to sit where they feel most comfortable—perhaps by a door or in the back without people behind them
- Allow students to utilize quiet fidget gadgets such as spinners or cubes to alleviate stress
- Find alternatives to verbal class participation or presentations if at all possible
- Refer students to resources on campus such as Counseling and DSP