

Reduce Anxiety and REACH for Success

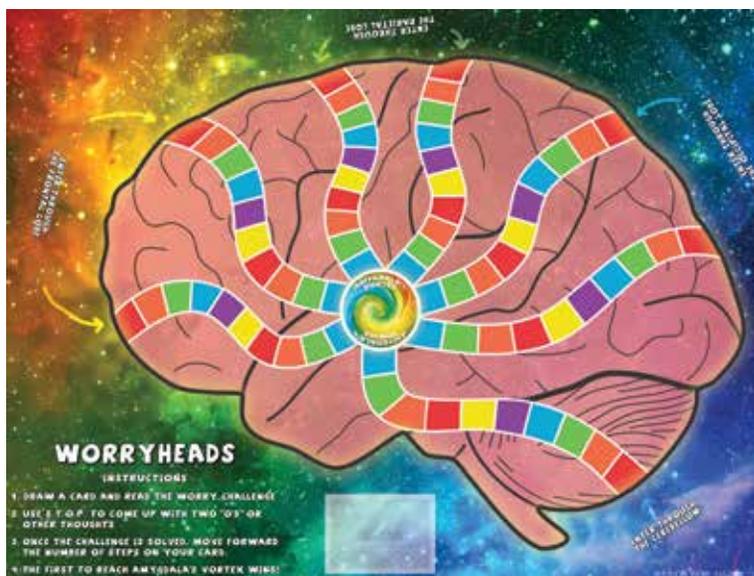
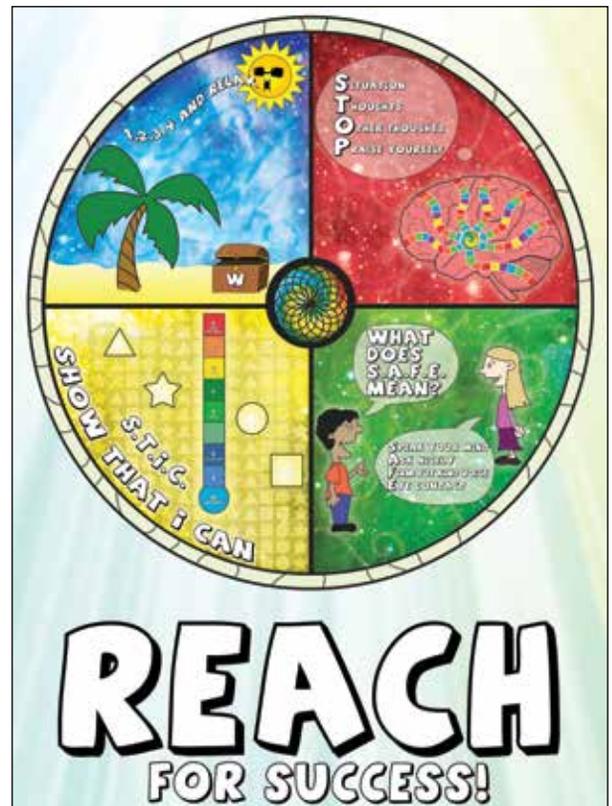
CAN WE PREVENT AND REDUCE significant anxiety in students in grade three through six? REACH for Success (REACH for short) teaches children in that age group how to prevent, reduce, and cope with higher than average anxiety symptoms at school, on the playground, and at home.

Program developers will start offering REACH to schools that already implement the PAX Good Behavior Game in summer 2017. Studies show PAX GBG to be an effective tool for improving time on-task and self-control skills among young school-age children (see *Attention Magazine*, August 2014). When bundled together, PAX REACH for Success may represent a new approach for helping children impacted by both attention-related challenges and anxiety.

Components of the program

REACH is comprised of six twenty- to thirty-minute weekly lessons. Lessons are provided in a group format, with groups generally ranging from four to six students.

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All lessons are conducted at school. Teachers help determine the best time of the day for students to participate. Teachers also learn about specific anxiety-reducing strategies that the children are learning so they can help the children practice these strategies in class.

The children are not designated for participation based on a diagnosis or other label. REACH is intended for any child needing to learn effective coping strategies to prevent and reduce anxiety. The program can be effectively implemented by a number of different school staff, including trained teachers, school counselors, school social workers, or school psychologists. Little to no time is required of school administrators.

The six lessons involve simple, fun, interactive games and activities. Children learn relaxation strategies, strategies to prevent and reduce worrying, strategies for facing and overcoming fears, strategies for assertively but kindly communicating with others, and strategies for anticipating and successfully coping with anxiety-provoking

situations. These strategies are drawn from decades of cognitive and behavioral research evaluating how to best treat and prevent child anxiety. Parents are provided with materials to help the children practice the strategies at home.

All program components, including its six-lesson curriculum, are described in detail on the REACH website. You can learn about these components by participating in a free, self-paced online training. Written and video instructions are provided on how to introduce the program to a school, how to implement its lessons, and how to help evaluate its success. A more advanced online training provides actual materials for implementing the program.

Promising initial results

REACH is the brainchild of Armando Pina, PhD, an associate professor at Arizona State University whose studies have advanced our understanding of effective treatment practices for childhood anxiety. Ryan Stoll, an ASU graduate student and member of the REACH team, helped to design, develop, and implement REACH in Phoenix elementary schools. He says that children enjoy participating in the program and generally find the games and activities fun and interesting. They also learn to support each other in implementing the different anxiety-reducing strategies.

Studies of the REACH program's effectiveness are ongoing, according to Ryan, and the initial results are promising. A controlled study across seven schools showed that children improved significantly in self-regulation, emotion expressivity, social skills, and reductions in worries. The greatest reduction in anxiety was for kids who were most anxious to begin with, followed by kids who were moderately anxious. This is encouraging, says Ryan, because children who are most anxious are benefiting from the program faster. Parents highly approve: 96.4 percent felt that REACH taught their children coping skills, 94 percent found the coping skills to be helpful, and 96 percent felt their children were happy to take part. Since this study, twenty-five more Arizona schools have adopted the curriculum.

Ryan also observes an absence of stigma associated with the program. This is a particularly important observation, as some experts in the field note that the stigma associated with various childhood mental health challenges can be more painful to bear than the actual challenges. 📍

FOR MORE INFO

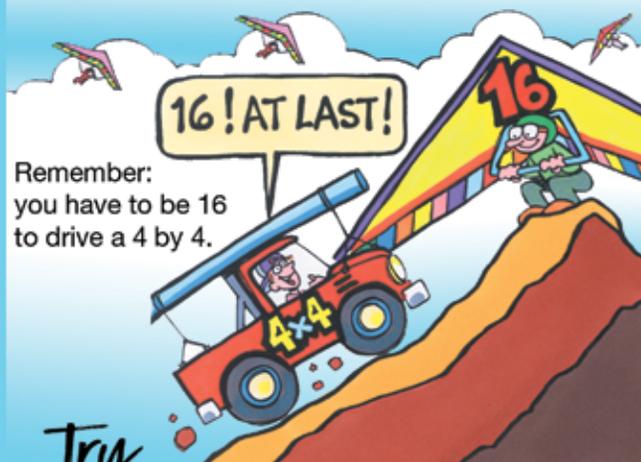
Visit <http://drarmandopina.org/reach> to learn more about REACH, additional online training options, implementation guidelines, and scientific findings related to childhood anxiety.

More information is available at <https://ce.asu.edu/continuing-education/courses/education-health-medicine-society-culture/reach-pax-gbg> on how to integrate REACH into schools currently implementing PAX GBG and how to become a certified PAX REACH partner.

Visit <https://ce.asu.edu/continuing-education/other-openings/13189/13194> to learn more about advanced training options.

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