



# Tests, Stress and Today's Student

Fostering Well-Being In Tweens and Teens

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# Stress and Wellness

- *“My stress stresses me out to the point where I’m too stressed to deal with stress.”*

*Instagram Post*

- *The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another.*

*William James*

- *“Anxiety is the handmaiden of creativity.”*

*T.S. Eliot*

# Agenda

- > What is stress and anxiety?
- > Yerkes-Dodson Law
- > A few sobering statistics
- > Why is this particularly relevant now?
- > A Developmental Perspective
- > Fostering adaptability through parent modeling
- > Tips for students and parents in coping with stress
- > Some Resources
- > Conclusions
- > Q & A



# Some Definitions

➤ **Eustress**

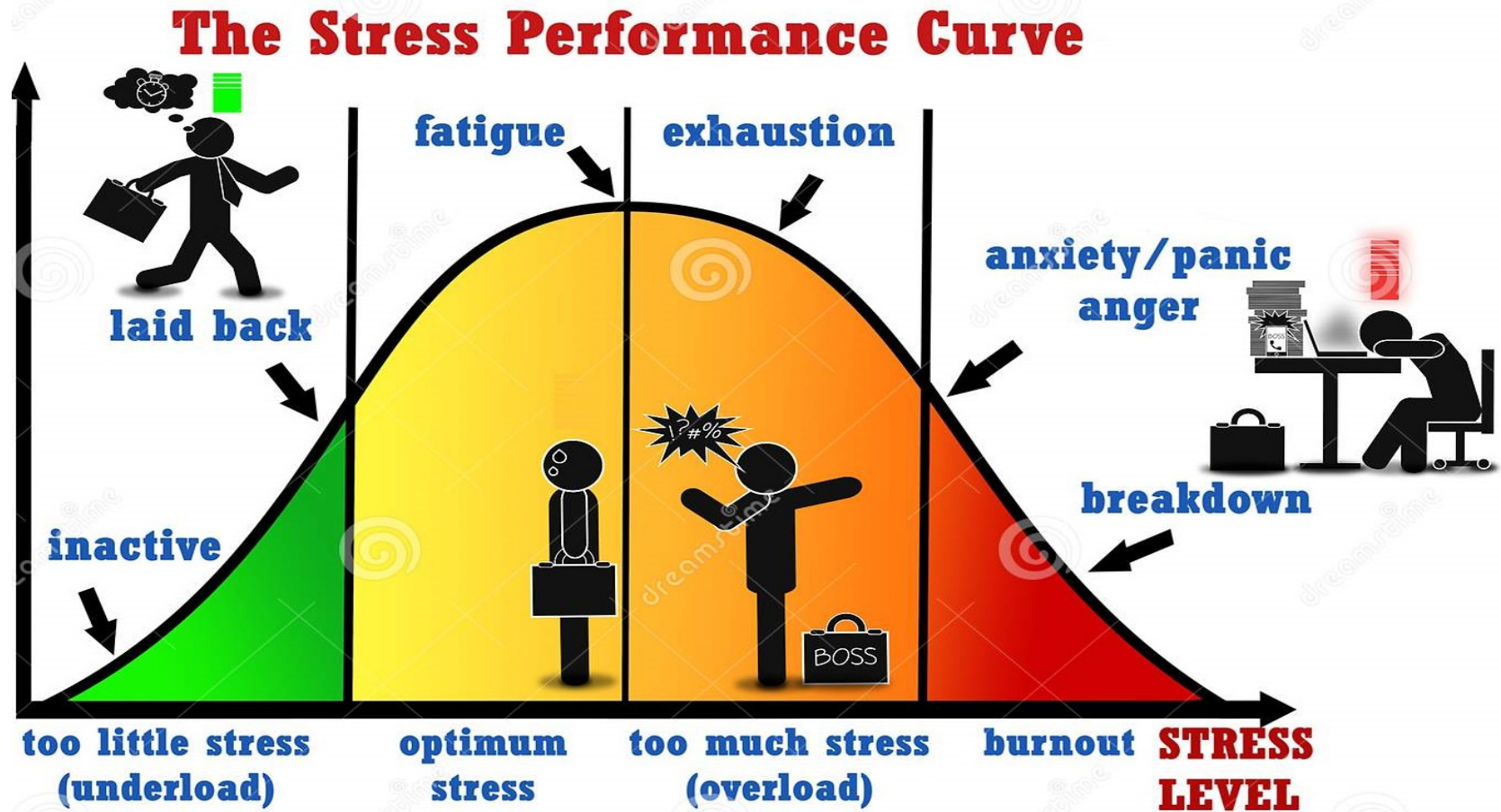
➤ **Distress**

➤ **Anxiety**

- The body's alarm system
- Cognitive, physiological and behavioral components



# Yerkes-Dodson Law



# Why is this important now?

## **Several recent studies have documented a marked increase in reported cases of anxiety in children and teens:**

- Nearly one in three 13 – 18-year-olds meet criteria for an anxiety disorder (Centers for Disease Control, 2017).
- 30% of Wilton High School students report “above average” levels of anxiety and depression (Dr. Suniya Luthar, 2017)
- 2016 study of undergrads: 34% report test stress; 25% meet criteria for test anxiety (Amer. College Health Association)
- 30 – 52% of high school and college students experience test anxiety “often” or “almost always” (2008, NIMH)



# Test Anxiety in Action



*“I dreamed I was being chased by  
a giant standardized test.”*

# What is Going On?

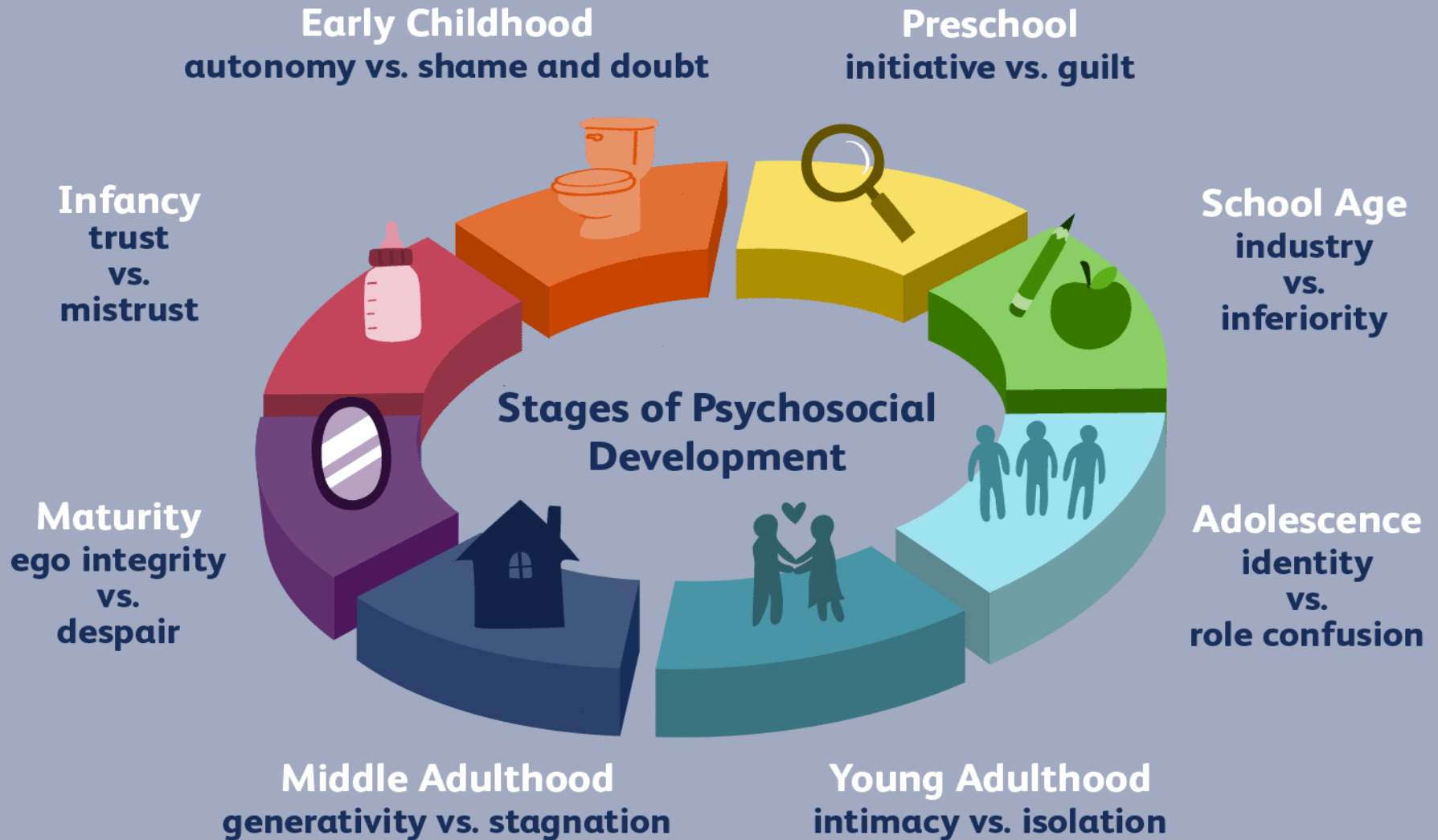
## The Heterogeneity of Test Anxiety

*“Some may have poor study or test-taking skills; some may be anxious because they have low intellectual ability; some tend to be perfectionist overachievers and will be dissatisfied with anything less than a perfect score; while others are anxious because they fail to meet social expectations or fear parental punishment. —*

Zeidner (2014, p. 586)



# Psychosocial Developmental Model



# Symptoms and Some Warning Signs

- Symptoms of Test Anxiety:
  - Excessive sweating; nausea and stomach ailments; tachycardia; shortness of breath; headaches; feeling lightheaded; difficulty thinking clearly
  
- Warning Signs
  - Loss of appetite; prolonged depressed affect; hopelessness; nightmares; apathy; threats of harm to self or others; body image distortion; running away; strange thoughts

# Adaptability is:

The human capacity to face, adjust to and ultimately learn from life's experiences and challenges.

**FLEXIBILITY**

**RESILIENCE**

**SELF CONTROL**

It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent. It is the one that is most adaptable to change.

Charles Darwin  
*naturalist, geologist and biologist*

# Modeling Adaptability Through Self-Care

- > Acknowledge the bumps in the road
- > “First, put on your own oxygen mask...”
- > Focus on what you can control
- > “Stay Present” – Mindfulness!
- > Take time to relax
  - + Take some “ME” time
  - + Regular sleep, exercise, diet
  - + Pick your “turn off” time
- > Socialize (safely)
- > Put things in Perspective
- > Turn to others for help



# Ways to Reduce Test Stress Before Tests

- **Physiological/Psychological Interventions**
  - Rest, exercise, diet
  - Learn relaxation techniques and cognitive strategies
  - Study during peak energy times
  - Learn about the stages of Anxiety
  - Learn proper self-talk strategies
- **Behavioral Interventions (Prior to Test)**
  - Learn good study habits
  - Learn memory strategies
  - Reward yourself
  - Learn self compassion

# Ways to Reduce Test Stress During Tests

- Behavioral Interventions (During the Test)
  - Practice proper breathing and relaxation
  - Listen carefully to directions
  - Ask questions if you don't understand
  - Preview the test and do the easiest first
- Psychological Interventions
  - Practice positive self talk
  - Recall past successes
  - Put the test in perspective – combat irrational beliefs
  - Reward yourself



# Top Ways Parents Can Support

- Provide a good diet: eliminate sugars, stimulants
- Schedule in down time
- Encourage regular exercise
- Do not overemphasize perfectionism (in yourself or your child)
- Set a reasonable schedule
- Understand and respect your child's way of learning
- Seek out therapy if needed
- Model balance

# Some Resources

## BOOKS

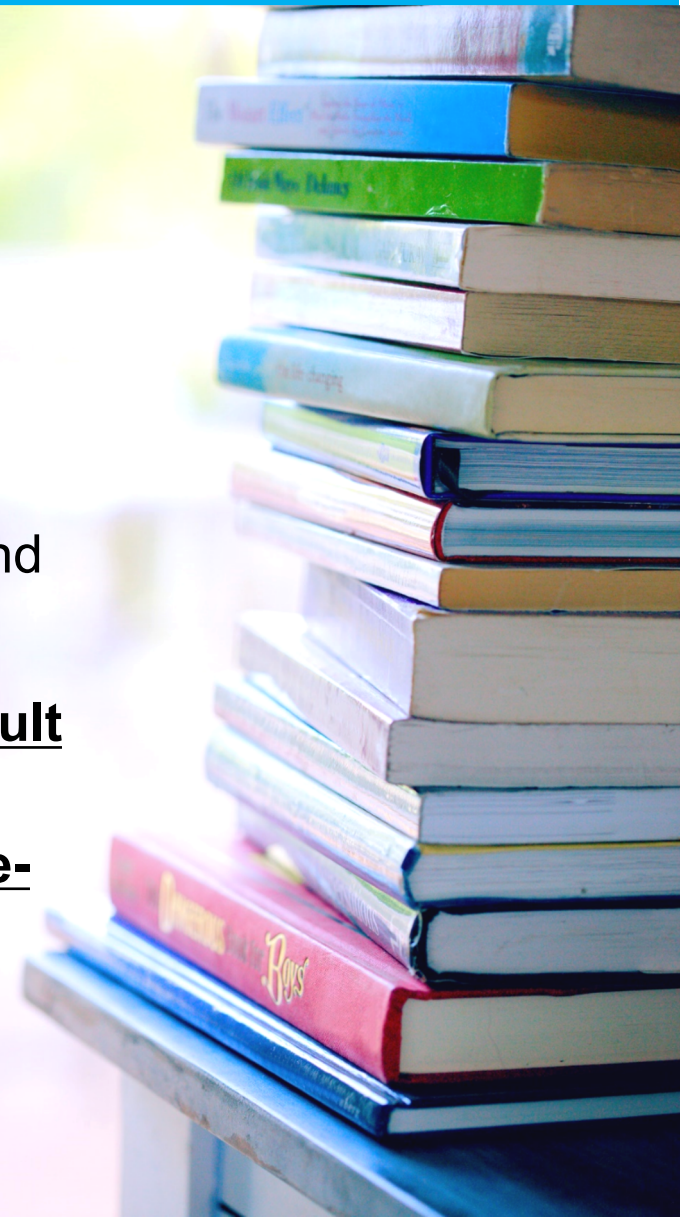
- “Crush your Test Anxiety” *by Ben Bernstein*
- “Permission to Feel” *by Marc Brackett*
- “Building Resilience” *by Kenneth Ginsburg*
- “Test Anxiety” *by Moshe Zeidner*

## APPS

- Headspace; Stop, Breath, Think; Smiling Mind

## WEBSITES

- <https://www.hagerstowncc.edu/sites/default/files/documents/11-test-anxiety-tips.pdf>
- <https://positivepsychology.com/resilience-activities-worksheets/>



# Some Conclusions

Stress is inevitable

Stress is not a bad thing

> Stress management = resilience

Support reasonable goals

Focus on what you can control

Model calm and balance

Be positive

Self care and self compassion are the keys!

It's not stress  
that hurts us;  
it's our  
reaction to it.

Hans Selye  
*19<sup>th</sup> century physician*

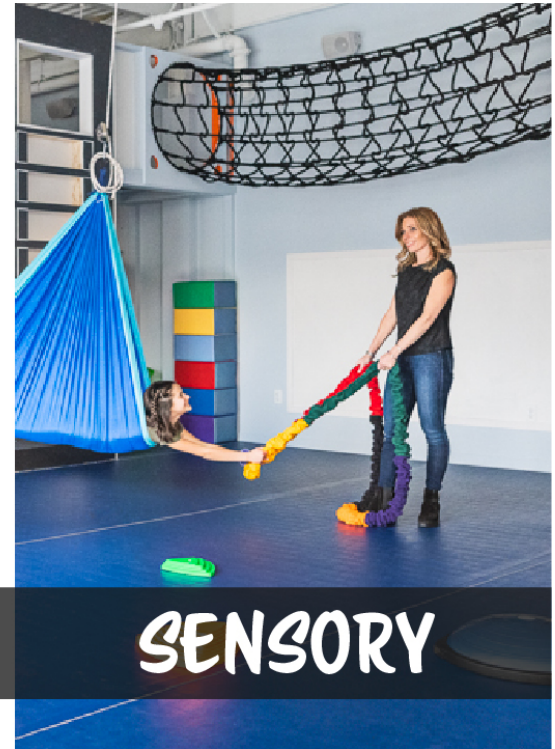
# Sasco River Center: Who We Are



**TESTING**



**THERAPY**



**SENSORY**

Sasco River Center is a collaborative and multidisciplinary center  
for evaluation & treatment of developmental concerns  
Merger of Sensory Kids & The Southfield Center for Development  
Locations in Darien, Stamford & Wilton

# Questions and Answers

