

LESSON PLANS!

UNCERTAINTY AND PERFORMANCE ANXIETY LEVEL 1

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

To help young people become more aware of their reactions to the uncertainty associated with performance anxiety.

- Better managing performance anxiety
- Improving self-esteem
- Fostering optimism and resilience

 **SKILL**

Self-care

 **RECOMMENDED
LEVEL**

All secondary levels

 **DURATION**

60–80 minutes

Warm-up activity: 15 minutes

Preparation phase: 20 minutes

Implementation phase: 20 minutes

Exit ticket task: 5 minutes

SECONDARY OBJECTIVES (QEP)

Constructing identity

AREAS OF STUDY

Personal development

SUBJECT-SPECIFIC SKILLS

Communicating orally in a variety of ways

TRANSVERSAL SKILLS

Intellectual

- Taking advantage of information
- Exercising critical judgement
- Using creative thinking

Personal and social

- Realizing your potential

Communication

- Communicating in an appropriate manner



MATERIALS

- Texts for the Jules and Alice situations
- Quiz for all students
- IWB or blackboard with chalk
- 1 pad of small sticky notes (such as Post-its)

INFO:

BASIC THEORETICAL CONCEPTS ABOUT UNCERTAINTY.

HUMAN BEINGS AND UNCERTAINTY

We all know students who constantly doubt their ability to succeed, even though they may actually be quite successful. They are constantly looking for reassurance, ask many questions, have trouble making choices, over-prepare for assessments or procrastinate on assignments, paralyzed by anxiety.

Why does this happen?

There may be a link with their ability to tolerate uncertainty. Generally speaking, human beings don't like uncertainty, even though it can occur in every aspect of life. For young people, school is definitely a source of uncertainty. At the beginning of every school year, there are new courses, exams with content they don't know and evaluations with unknown results, despite clear instructions.

THINGS THAT TRIGGER UNCERTAINTY



Newness, unpredictability and ambiguity are three triggers for feelings of uncertainty.

When a student takes on a new activity or task for the first time, they have no point of comparison. For example: developing a bad cold two days before an important exam, taking a pop quiz, running into obstacles in a group assignment, etc.

Ambiguity can often be perceived in instructions, remarks or comments that seem unclear to them.

WHEN DISCOMFORT BECOMES AN ALLERGY

For some students, uncertainty can be completely intolerable; this is known as an allergy to uncertainty. These students are acute detectors of uncertainty and tend to readily envisage disasters, and have trouble functioning in unclear or ambiguous situations or moving forward when they are unsure of themselves.

ACTIONS AS INDICATORS OF THE RELATIONSHIP TO UNCERTAINTY

There are two main modes of reaction that students may have to make things more definite and, at the same time, lower their anxiety: braking mode and overreaction mode.



BRAKING MODE: I FREEZE WHEN I'M NOT SURE

- I put off my studying, my homework, my work
- I avoid doing certain things if I'm not sure of the outcome
- I question my choices
- I can't make up my mind, it always takes a long time
- I get scattered, starting various tasks but not finishing any of them
- I feel defeated for not doing certain things



OVERREACTION MODE: I BECOME AGITATED WHEN I'M NOT SURE

- I need to be reassured by teachers, friends, my parents
- I look for a lot of information before I start a task
- I want to do everything myself to make sure it will be done right
- I double-check what I'm doing
- I take several steps at the same time to reassure myself
- I make decisions quickly because choosing makes me feel stressed

ALL OF THESE BEHAVIOURS,

although they look different from the outside, serve **the same purpose:** **enhancing their feeling of certainty and reducing their anxiety.**

DOES SEEKING CERTAINTY REALLY WORK?

Unfortunately, all of these behaviours are not enough to fully eliminate uncertainty, and it forces students to constantly start over.

If a student avoids a new activity or task for fear of failing, they feel relieved at the time, but they're only postponing the discomfort.

Each new situation will generate anxiety and they will maintain the belief that if they had tried, they would have failed. In a similar vein, when a student always turns to their teacher for reassurance about what they should do, they perpetuate the idea that they can't trust their own judgement, that they have probably misunderstood the instructions and made a mistake. The final situation is that if a student over-prepares for exams, they maintain the idea that they would probably not have performed as well if they had not studied so much.

IT IS IMPORTANT

to disabuse your students of these erroneous beliefs to prevent them from needlessly wasting energy and to help them have more faith in their abilities.

OBJECTIVE OF THE ACTIVITIES

In this **Level 1 lesson**, we help students become aware of their behaviours in the face of uncertainty and make them see that their actions are not helping them reduce their anxiety.

We suggest that you then do the **Level 2 activity** to prepare your students to deal with uncertainty



ACTIVITÉ D'AMORCE

15 minutes



STEP 1:

Give students [Sheet 1](#) a few days before your activity on uncertainty.

Just tell them that this is a text to read and that you will be discussing it in class soon to talk about anxiety.

STEP 2:

Introductory activity to foster student attention and interest.

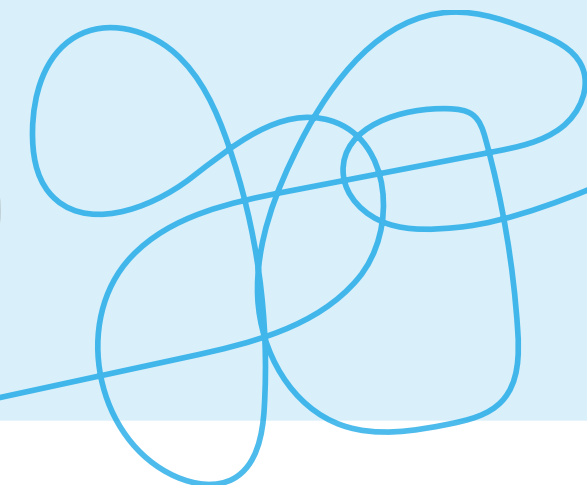
Begin the discussion by going back to the reading and the introduction to the Jules and Alice texts with the following situation:

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS:

**You were given two short situations to read for today.
I will show them to you again on the board and give you a few minutes to look over them if needed.**



Let the students reread the situations and begin the discussion with a show of hands.

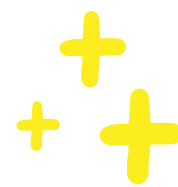


SHEET 1:

Alice and Jules both have to write an opinion piece for their French class. Alice is very nervous. Despite the teacher's instructions, she feels like she needs to check that she has understood.

She writes to her teacher for clarification. It seems like she has to wait forever for the reply. She then texts her friend to check that she understands the assignment and to see if she's on the right track. She also does more reading than necessary to prepare for her writing. Nevertheless, she is plagued with questions: "How far should I go in giving my opinion? Are my arguments strong enough? Are my ideas original enough? Is my essay too long? Or too short?"

Jules is also fretting about this assignment. He really wants to find a "good" topic. However, he questions every idea, never sure if it's the "best" choice. As a result, days go by and Jules still hasn't started working. Each time he settles down to begin writing, he is overcome with doubt. He does everything but work on the assignment: video games, snacks, even cleaning his room! Even though he is doing other things, the assignment is constantly on his mind and his anxiety remains. The day before the deadline, he finally sits down at his desk and starts writing about the first topic he had thought of. Suddenly, he starts to panic over the limited time he has left and spends part of the night writing his paper.



TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS:

Do any of you recognize yourselves in Alice or Jules?

Do you ever act the same way?

What do you think Alice and Jules are trying to do?



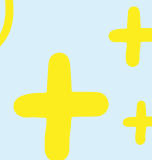
Ask the students for their comments and stories, without forcing them to respond.

They will slowly become aware of their own anxiety and need for certainty and realize that they're not alone in behaving this way.

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS:

Let's get back to Alice and Jules.

What did you notice about their reactions or behaviours?



Make two columns on the board for **"Jules' behaviour"** and **"Alice's behaviour."** Write the various student responses on the board.

For example:



JULES' BEHAVIOUR

- ➔ Procrastinating
- ➔ Playing video games
- ➔ Going to get snacks
- ➔ Cleaning his room



ALICE'S BEHAVIOUR

- ➔ Double- and triple-checking
- ➔ Sending the teacher an email
- ➔ Texting her friend
- ➔ Over-preparing (extra reading)

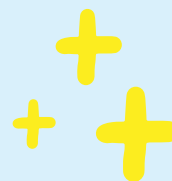
STEP 3:

Introduce the two modes of behavioural reactions to uncertainty.

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS:

Did you know that there are two main modes of behavioural reactions to uncertainty?
“Braking mode” and “overreaction mode.”

Alice and Jules couldn’t avoid them!
Jules is in braking mode, and Alice is in overreaction mode.



Write these 2 modes above each of the response columns on the board:

BRAKING MODE



JULES' BEHAVIOUR

- ➔ Procrastinating
- ➔ Playing video games
- ➔ Going to get snacks
- ➔ Cleaning his room



OVERREACTION MODE



ALICE'S BEHAVIOUR

- ➔ Double- and triple-checking +++
- ➔ Sending the teacher an email
- ➔ Texting her friend
- ➔ Over-preparing (extra reading++)



TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS:

We can see that Alice is more in overreaction mode:
she needs to look for guarantees and certainties.

As for Jules, he is more in braking mode:
he can't make up his mind and postpones his assignment.

QUIZ: IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITY

20 minutes



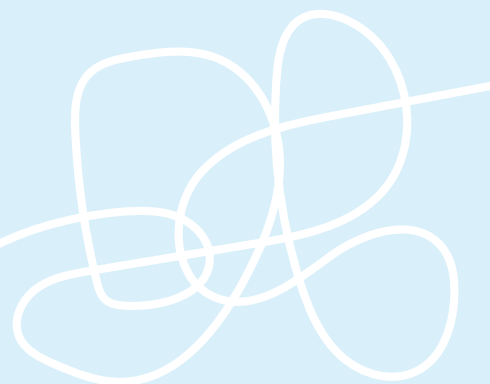
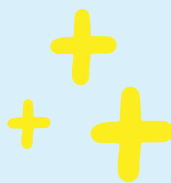
Give students a quiz with sentences that summarize these two modes of reaction to uncertainty.

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS:


To learn how to identify your own reactions to uncertainty, I suggest that you take this quiz to help you make a personal assessment.

Circle the points associated with the following sentences only if you feel they describe your behaviour well.

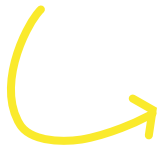
At the end, add up all the points and you will get your final score and the pattern that matches it, either the overreaction mode or the braking mode.



“WHEN I FEEL UNSURE, I TEND TO...”

	POINT 
Need to be reassured by teachers, friends, my parents	1
Put off my studying, my homework, my work	0
Look for a lot of information before I start a task	1
Avoid doing certain things if I’m not sure of the outcome	0
Want to do everything myself to make sure it will be done right	1
Question my choices	0
Double-check what I’m doing	1
Have a lot of trouble making up my mind—it always takes a long time	0
Start various tasks but don’t finish any of them	0
Get scattered, taking several steps at the same time to reassure myself	1
Feel defeated for not doing certain things	0
Make decisions quickly, even impulsively, because choosing is stressful or because I’m afraid the situation will get worse	1

TOTAL



Add up your points.
The higher your score, the more likely you are to be in overreaction mode. That means you tend to get agitated and repeat actions when you’re not sure. The lower your score, the more likely you are to be in braking mode. That means you tend to freeze up when you feel unsure.



You can have a brief discussion following the quiz, but it is important to give students the option of sharing their thoughts or not.

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS:

Do you recognize yourself in this desire to make things more definite in the school setting (assignments and exams, for example)?

Do you tend to be more in braking mode or overreaction mode?

Or a bit of both depending on the situation?

The idea here is to introduce the behavioural reactions to uncertainty, as well as the intensity of these reactions.

EXIT TICKET TASK (IN CLASS)

5 minutes



TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS:

There are only a few minutes left before the end of our workshop.
I'm going to give you a sticky note.
Please write down one thing that you learned or enjoyed in today's workshop on the sticky note.

This will give me an idea of your impressions.

Don't write more than 7 words.
You can just write down a few key terms that are important to you.
When you finish, please stick the note on my door frame, and then you can leave.
You can write your name on it or not.

Give each student a sticky note.



I hope this discussion will help you become more aware of your reactions to uncertainty.

Remember: our only certainty is that there is no certainty.

We can move forward even if we don't know exactly how things are going to unfold!

DISCOVER

ALL OUR TOOLS AND LESSON PLANS in our School Toolkit to help young people develop good mental health.



TO HELP YOUR STUDENTS deal with uncertainty, look at the Level 2 sheet



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