



Stress and Anxiety in American Students

Three practical tools from Olympic Sports and research to teach high ability students to manage stress and anxiety.





The biggest causes of diagnoses at schools

It's not hard to imagine that stress and anxiety may be the biggest causes of diagnoses and treatment in American schools and colleges¹. The main consequences of stress and anxiety with students include increased drop-out rates, decreased academic performance, issues with social functioning, and even suicidal behaviors.

Grades?

a great source of anxiety

- Two out of three students feel worried about grades, even well-prepared to take exams.
- Students mention that stress and anxiety are the main variables that impact their academic performance.
- Various studies registered that learners with higher anxiety were the ones with lower achievement rates.



What strategy can parents and teachers adopt to help talented children and teens deal with anxiety and stress?



SELF- REGULATION

Different authors in the talent development field believe students should learn how to develop self-control to cope with the stresses of academic life in talent development programs.

- Students cannot reduce the stresses of exams, grades, and other stressors that are part of their school trajectory.
- However, students can learn how to cope with them and reduce their anxiety levels.



NBA Athletes receive psychosocial support to learn how to perform under pressure.

Researchers suggested we should translate techniques used with high-performance athletes to schools to teach gifted and talented students how to cope with anxiety.

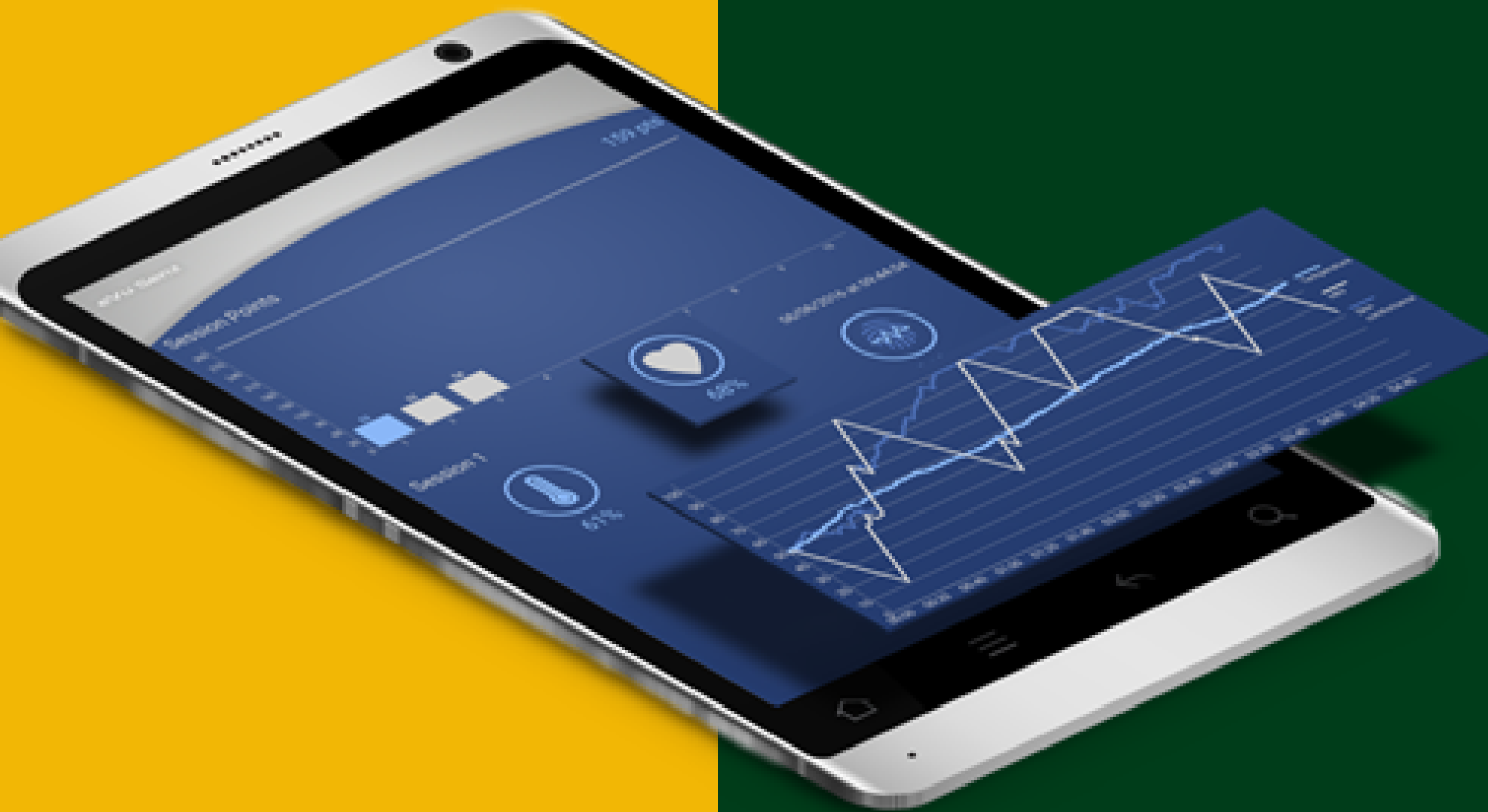
Good News

- Teachers in the United States are not trained to po help students cope with anxiety and stress.
- But, there have been encouraging advancements in education.



PARENTS & TEACHERS MAY HELP

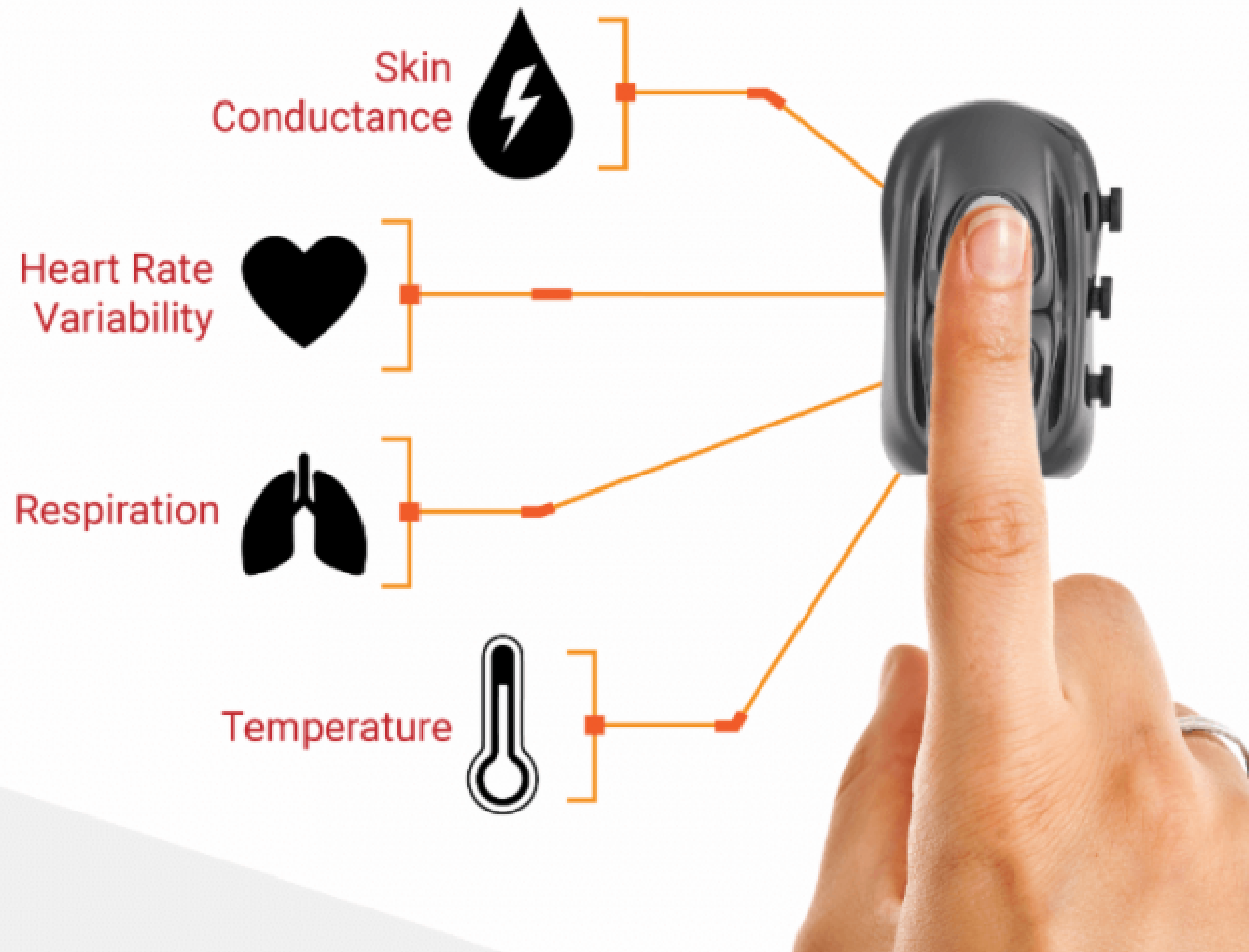
- Research supports the notion that parents and teachers play a crucial role in helping children and teens regulate their stress levels.
- Programs at schools and colleges have shown promising results in teaching students how to control stress and anxiety.



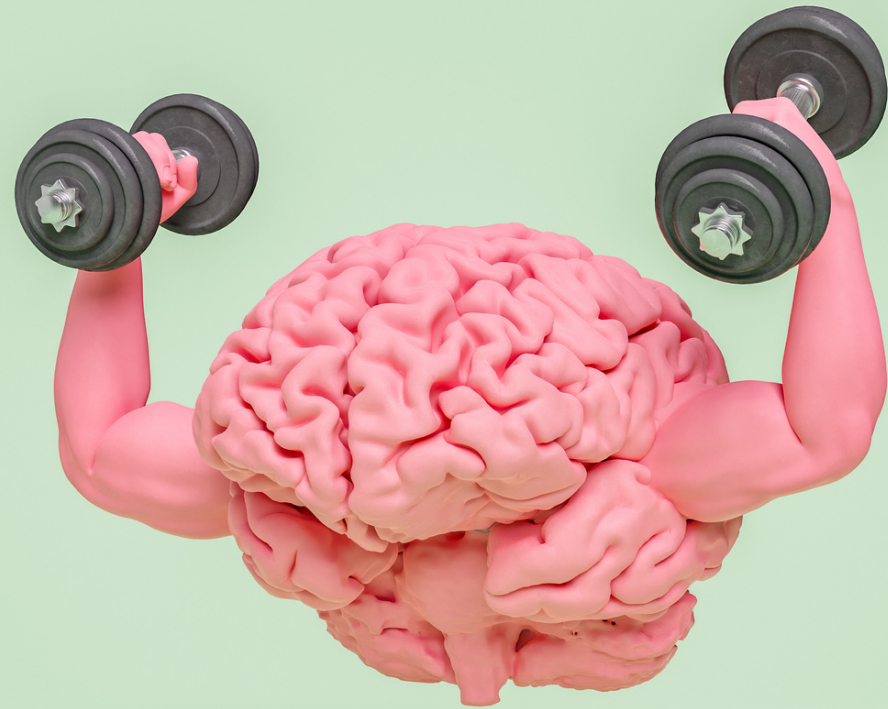
Biofeedback wearables

- To further aid parents and teachers in teaching gifted children how to cope with stress and anxiety, a physiologically based method called biofeedback has emerged as a potential solution.
- Biofeedback offers a unique approach that can help parents and teachers better understand how to guide gifted children effectively.

Biofeedback



- The word biofeedback describes techniques that use electronic instruments that can help people understand and train their bodies' physiological activity.
- People can use it for performance and clinical improvement purposes.
- It may teach us how our **behaviors, muscle tension, and even thoughts** affect our stress and anxiety.
- Better: it may teach us what to do to reduce those responses.



RESEARCH ABOUT BIOFEEDBACK

- With talented individuals may guide you to teach students how to control stress.
- Simple exercises associated with biofeedback might help people control stress and anxiety responses in talent development programs in sports and education.

What is the theory behind biofeedback?

We can train our autonomic functions using our breathing patterns, muscles, and thoughts.

If we learn how to control them, we may also learn how to increase and decrease functions associated with stress and anxiety.

Our Experience

We have documented how Olympic-level athletes could control their anxiety responses and perform at a high level in competitions, like the Rio 2016 Olympic Games.

These athletes and students used respiratory control, muscle tension control, and thought control exercises.





Biofeedback DEMONSTRATION

Translating tools

- We translated these tools to school settings and applied with honors students.
- All how honors students in our study learned how to increase stress control in 6 weeks.



Lets' Practice

We will practice 3 fast tools used by our athletes and honors students that might help you teach people how to control stress.

with or without biofeedback

You will learnr:

- ✓ The physiological sigh
- ✓ Schultz relaxation
- ✓ 4-step thought-control technique



Physiological Sigh



Schultz Relaxation



4-step Thought-Control Technique

Physiological Sigh

Instruct children to

- Inhale twice the length of time than they exhale. They may choose how long it takes since the rate 1:2 is constant.
- Exhale more strongly than inhale. This means simply, that children should inhale lightly and exhale vigorously.
- Focus on expanding their bellies (rather than their chests) when they breathe, using diaphragmatic breathing.
- Practice it for just a few minutes until they master it.



Physiological Sigh

- Apply the physiological sigh in situations when children feel they are tense in their everyday lives (when they are playing video games, studying, etc.).
- Normally, you should expect that one or two, no more than three physiological sighs will be enough to slow your children's arousal fast.



- After, at home applications they may transfer this respiratory pattern to exams and other stressful school-related moments.

Schultz Relaxation

- Before starting, keep external stimuli to a minimum. Children should wear comfortable clothing.
- First, have the children sit or lie comfortably. For example, they can sit in an armchair with the head, back, and extremities supported. They may lie down with their head supported, and legs seven inches apart (toes pointed outward). Their arms should be positioned at their sides (without touching their body).
- Next, direct the children to scan their bodies with their minds to make sure that the position they chose is tension-free.



Schultz Relaxation

- Direct the children to close their eyes for the entire exercise.
- Next, ask them to take a deep breath. Once they breathe out, tell them to send a mental command to their feet to relax, using their “mind’s voice.”
- After the children do the last two steps with their feet, ask them to repeat both steps with their legs, torso, arms, hands, shoulders, neck, and head.
- When students finish mentally relaxing their whole bodies, ask them to open their eyes.
- You may guide your children through the exercise with your voice the first time they do it. Remember to use a calm tone of voice and to speak softly and with a low-volume voice.

4-step

thought-control technique

- First, ask your children to identify and stop any negative thoughts (for instance, stop thinking of grades or people's judgment).
- Next, tell them to use the physiological sigh twice or three times.
- Third, direct your children to think about something that makes them relaxed, or look at something that makes them tranquil, which is not related to the negative thought (some children may look at their watches, while others think of a tranquil place they like to visit).
- Finally, direct them to get back to the task they were doing before starting the thought-control exercise (for example, keep working at a difficult homework assignment).

Bonus hint about this four-step thought control intervention: children need time to practice it before using it with high-stake exams or oral presentations. So, be sure to help your child to train this technique at home before transferring it to school situations which might involve their performance (e.g., tests and exams).





STUDENTS CANT AVOID THE STRESSES OF ACADEMIC LIFE

However, evidence has shown that at one point the ability to cope with anxiety will be a psychosocial factor associated with higher grades and better well-being.

BUT YOU CAN HELP THEM

Developing effective coping mechanisms for stress and anxiety is a crucial skill for high-ability students. Studies have shown that learners in gifted and talented programs generally exhibit better stress management compared to students in regular classes. But, they still require guidance on how to navigate and control stress and anxiety.

Parents and teachers can play vital roles in helping children acquire these essential skills.



PROVIDE GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Engage in open communication with your children, listen to their concerns, and provide them with guidance on managing stress. Encourage them to express their emotions and offer reassurance and understanding.

USE ANXIETY COPING TOOLS

- Introduce your children to various stress management techniques such as deep breathing exercises (like the physiological sigh), mindfulness (or the four-step thought control tool I introduced to you in this article), relaxation, biofeedback, or engaging in physical activities. These tools might help children relax, regain focus, and reduce anxiety.

CONSIDER PROFESSIONAL HELP

- Consider professional help if needed: If your family is deeply concerned about the ongoing impact of stress and anxiety on your children, it is highly recommended to seek assistance from qualified professionals. They can offer specialized support and guidance tailored to your children's specific needs.

questions?

