



"Get a Grip" on Competition

Competition can be a good thing, because it can make everyone perform just a little better. But taken too far, competition can lead students to feel unnecessarily overwhelmed. If you feel overwhelmed, remember you are only human. In fact, one out of three college freshmen feels overwhelmed, and many high schoolers feel overwhelmed by achievement stress. You can get the proper grip on competition—not too tight, not too loose—by following these recommendations.

Overcoming Achievement Stress

A simple way to feel challenged and not overwhelmed is to use the **Fourth R in education—Relaxation**. By relaxing before a test or competition, you can really "show what you know," and even enjoy it. Taking the edge off can actually give you the edge when trying to do your best.

Practicing the Fourth R

Using the Fourth R boils down to the simple ABC's: **A**ttitude, **B**reathing and **C**hoices.

Attitude: Believe in your ability. You can learn anything new if you put your mind to it. Confidently say to yourself "I know I can..." Convert bad stress into good stress just by thinking about it differently. Instead of saying, "I feel so stressed out," just say, "I am so excited about the chance to..." Athletes commonly consider

"butterflies in their stomach" as excitement. Finally, remember to keep things in perspective; no school test or competition is a matter of life or death.

Breathe Right. In order to calm down, slow down your breathing. The most basic relaxation-breathing instructions are contained in the number sequence 2-4-6. Here's how it goes. Breathe in through your nose to the count of two (one-thousand one, one-thousand two); breathe out through your mouth to the count of four (one-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three, one-thousand four); then repeat this sequence six times. If you have any medical concerns (for example, asthma) have your parents ask your doctor if this "relaxation breathing" is OK for you.

Choice: Choose to control your study time.

Studying is the key to success on tests and assignments. In general, it is better to study a couple hours after school, several days a week, rather than cram several hours into a couple days just before a test or assignment. Cramming is very stressful. Having a regular time and place to study is important. Keep your study area free from noise and distraction. If necessary, have someone take your calls during your study time so you are not interrupted. Once you develop a good habit of time management, you can apply it to other areas of your life (learning a sport, preparing for a competition).

Use a large calendar planner to write down your assignments or major tests. Keep this calendar visible (put it up on the refrigerator, a bulletin board, or the door to your room). Reward yourself for sticking to your daily and weekly study schedule. For a daily reward you might choose to engage in your favorite activity for an hour. If you stick to your weekly schedule, then you might, for example, go to a movie.

You are the future, and the future is in your hands. Using the **Fourth R** will win you success in any endeavor.

—Dr. Ron Rubenzer

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