

Supporting **your** Teen **with** Fear of Public Speaking

Does your teen worry for days or weeks before a presentation or performance, imagining all the things that can go wrong? Before and during a presentation, do they experience shaking, blushing, sweating, nausea, dry mouth or a quivering voice?

Your teen is not alone: public speaking is one of the most common fears for people of all ages. People who seem relaxed and confident when they speak publicly have often just learned to use their fear to improve their performance.



What's going on?

- Fear of public speaking is considered a form of social anxiety. The underlying fear is worry about judgment by others.
- A common fear is of having your mind going blank when public speaking. This “brain freeze” is caused by the brain’s response to stress hormones.
- Other physical responses, like shaking hands or voice, dry mouth, difficulty breathing and a racing heart, can make public speaking even more distressing (especially when we focus on them).



How you can help

You are nervous because you want to do well, not because it's going to go badly. Even the best speakers get nervous, but they use their nerves to share their enthusiasm about the topic. Try to think about your nerves in a more positive light – as excitement about sharing what you know (or just excitement about the relief of having it done!).

Your classmates are on your side. Think about a time when you saw a nervous classmate present. Did you think less of them, or did you mostly feel empathy for them? Remember that your classmates are probably feeling anxious too. They're probably not paying attention to your every word because they are thinking about their own presentation.

Most of your anxiety is not visible. You may feel like your nervousness is obvious. Your classmates probably can't tell how anxious you are, so fake it till you make it! You are the only one who knows how nervous you are on the inside.

Your nerves will settle as your presentation progresses. Anxiety is often worst right before you start. Most people find that once they get started, their anxiety begins to decrease and they feel steadier and more confident as they continue.

Tell someone. Let your teacher, school counsellor, parent or a friend know that you're nervous about speaking in front of others. Sometimes talking about your nerves can make them easier to overcome. You'll probably hear that other people have felt the same, and you might just receive some helpful advice!

Be prepared. Practise delivering your speech several times before your actual presentation. Use gradual, concrete steps, like doing your speech in front of a mirror, videotaping it, and then doing it in front of a small group to help you gain confidence. Recruit family, friends or even your pet for an audience! See this [Presentation Rehearsal Checklist](#) for more prep ideas.

Visualize confidence. Visualize yourself calmly delivering your presentation with confidence. Elite athletes use this strategy to improve their performance in competitions. Acting as if you are confident can often help you feel more confident.

Find a friendly face. When you're giving your presentation, look for a friend, a classmate or an adult in the audience who seems friendly. Imagine that you are speaking only to that person.

Set realistic expectations. Public speaking is hard to master. Even experienced speakers like politicians and actors make mistakes. Instead of trying to give a perfect speech, remind yourself that mistakes will happen. Talk yourself through it with phrases like, "If I lose my place, I will calmly scan my notes and then continue," or "Small mistakes are going to happen and won't ruin my presentation."

Use relaxation techniques beforehand. It's helpful to regularly take time to calm down and relax in the days leading up to your presentation. Search YouTube for "calm breathing exercises" or download phone apps with guided relaxation tracks. During your presentation, take a few of these calm breaths and remind yourself that you are safely connected to the ground, which is firm and steady beneath your feet.



Some final thoughts

- Encouraging your teen to use these tools will help them build their public speaking confidence. Being a confident public speaker is a valued skill in many types of work.
- Don't forget to celebrate your teens' efforts, even if they are a small step. (To find out more, see the EASE at Home 8–12 resource [Encouraging Your Teen to Face Fears](#).) Consider planning a small celebration to acknowledge their bravery and show that you're proud. Let your teen choose something that will feel like a reward (for example, ordering in their favourite meal, or planning a fun activity to end a stressful day).