

How high-stakes standardized testing is harming our children's mental health

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Test stress in children is reaching unprecedented levels.

- Recent research shows that more than **33%** of US elementary and secondary students experience some test anxiety, up from 10-25% in past decades. (1, 2, 4, 5, 14)
- A 2009 study in Michigan found that **11 percent** of children studied reported severe psychological and physiological symptoms tied to the assessments. (3)
- A 2013 peer-reviewed study found greater test anxiety about the NCLB assessment than about typical classroom tests, and that 25 percent of students studied reported severe psychological and physiological symptoms tied to the assessments. (3)
- A study in England, which has a similar focus on high-stakes testing, found a **200% increase** in counseling sessions related to exam stress between 2013 and 2014. One agency found an increase in suicidal thoughts related to exam stress. (6)
- The number of ADHD diagnoses has ballooned – from 5% in early 1990s to **11%** in 2013. Researchers found a correlation between states with the highest rates of ADHD diagnosis and laws that penalize school districts when students fail. (7, 8)
- Overall, the rate of ADHD diagnosis has increased by **22 percent** in the first 4 years after No Child Left Behind was implemented. (7)

Anecdotal evidence about the damage to our children is overwhelming.

- Parents, teachers, administrators, school and private mental health professionals report student nausea, dizziness, crying, vomiting, panic attacks, tantrums, headaches, loss of bowel or bladder control, near-fainting, sleeplessness, refusal to go to school, “freaking out,” meltdowns, depression, suicide threats and suicide attempts. (9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 20, 25)
- Many child mental health professionals have called the misuse and overuse of standardized tests “**child abuse.**” (15, 17)

Overtesting may be harming our most vulnerable children the most.

- Urban high school students spend as much as **266 percent more time taking standardized tests** than their suburban counterparts do. (source: ascd.org)
- Most special needs students are required to take the same tests even if they are not capable of doing the work and have no chance of passing, a devastating experience. (21, 22, 23, 24, 25)
- While some 10% of children overall may highly test-anxious, one study found the prevalence of high test anxiety among African American elementary school children to be as high as **41%**. (source: Turner, Beidel, Hughes, and Turner 1993)
- “No excuses” schools that claim disciplinary and academic success with low-income students may instead be creating “**toxic stress**” that stunts students' emotional and intellectual growth. (26)

Test stress actually makes learning harder and test results unreliable.

- Prolonged stress can profoundly undermine learning, mental health and brain development in young people. (34)
- Studies using Magnetic Resonance Imaging technology indicate that chronically stressful conditions correspond with selective atrophy in the human brain. (source: <http://brainconnection.brainhq.com/2000/07/12/tests-stress-problems-for-students/>)
- When test anxiety reduces students' test scores, it becomes a factor that could threaten the relevance of any conclusions about academic progress. (33, 35)