

Anxiety in students: what we learned from the pandemic?



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WHO IS THIS BOOKLET FOR?

This booklet is designed for teachers who want to understand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and are looking for ways to support and guide their students in their daily school life.

Do you remember what the beginning of the pandemic was like in schools?

To help visualize the impact on students, **let's meet Bia.**

In early 2020, Bia had a typical school routine: she went to class, hung out with friends, and made plans for the future.

When the first news about the virus broke, she felt uneasy, but she couldn't imagine how much her school and social life would change. Little by little, she began to feel her body tensing up and her mind filling with worries.

With the arrival of COVID-19 came isolation, remote classes, missing her friends, the fear that someone in her family might get sick, and difficult news every day.





Bia began living in a constant state of alert, unmotivated to study and anxious, unable to relax. Over time, cases declined and in-person school routines began to return. Even so, her teachers noticed that something about Bia still wasn't right.

In the classroom, she seemed distant, remained tense, and struggled to stay focused on activities, as if she were still bracing for a threat.

Understanding this scenario helps you, the teacher, recognize that what students felt during the pandemic — and still feel today — is the result of a long and very difficult period.

**And that deserves
care and attention!**

Let's recap what happened?

2019

DEC:

First cases in
Wuhan, China.

2021

JAN:

Start of vaccination

MAR:

highest number of deaths
recorded in the country

APR:

Gamma variant

JUL:

Delta variant

DEC:

Omicron variant

2020

FEB:

First case of COVID-19
in Brazil

MAR:

WHO declares a pandemic;
social isolation; mask-wearing
and rise in cases

2023 2024

MAY:

pandemic slows
down – end of public
health emergency

2022

easing of restrictions;
vaccine booster shots

2025 2026

post-pandemic;
emotional hangover

What happened?

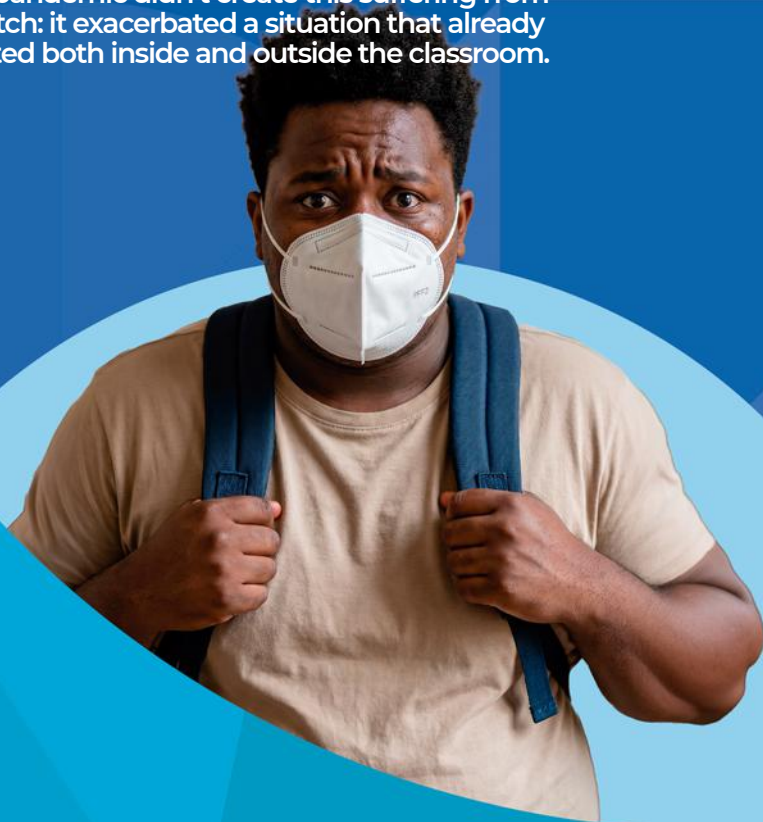
Understanding the past

Even before the pandemic, Brazil already had high rates of anxiety, and this included young people who were deeply concerned and under pressure about the future.

When COVID-19 hit and schools closed, everything became even more difficult. Isolation, the loss of daily social interaction, changes in routine, and uncertainty about the future took a heavy toll on teenagers' emotions. They began to feel more insecure, tired, and unable to relax.

in other words,

the pandemic didn't create this suffering from scratch: it exacerbated a situation that already existed both inside and outside the classroom.



A mental health pandemic as well:

what have we seen, and what do we still see?

When we think of COVID-19, we usually think of the virus and masks. But there was something very important that also marked this period:

the pandemic's
impact on students'
mental health.



Bia started worrying all the time — she even worried about worrying too much. Her racing mind, trying to handle everything at once, ended up increasing her anxiety symptoms. Even when the situation began to improve, those feelings didn't disappear overnight. Bia realized that, even as the school routine returned to normal, the anxiety still surfaced. To this day, many teenagers feel this way. **This shows us that the pandemic didn't just affect that moment, but that it may have left scars that are still part of the reality in the classroom.**

What do studies show?

1

The absence of the school environment:

The suspension of classes deprived young people of one of their main social networks. Distancing from friends and feelings of loneliness worsened students' mental health.

2

Factors that intensified anxiety:

1.Excessive screen time, disrupted sleep patterns, and the challenges of remote learning exacerbated anxiety symptoms.

3

Things didn't end overnight:

For many people, it took time for their bodies to realize that the danger had subsided, and anxiety persisted even as cases began to decline and vaccines became available.

4

People are affected differently:

Women and young people were among those who felt the emotional impact of the pandemic the most, experiencing higher levels of anxiety.

5

The body feels it too:

Palpitations, sweaty hands, and trouble sleeping were common during this period. It was as if the body were constantly trying to protect itself from a threat.





What have we learned?

The pandemic was one of the most difficult times we've faced, but it also taught us some important lessons. **One of the main lessons?**

Taking care of the mind is just as important as taking care of the body!

The way we face difficult situations makes all the difference! Resilience — our ability to adapt to the toughest situations — served as a shield against anxiety. With her teachers' close attention, Bia began to realize that ignoring her emotional distress wasn't helping, so she started to:

Respecting her own pace: understanding that readjusting to in-person classes took time helped reduce self-pressure and calm her mind in the face of difficulties and the volume of coursework.

Resuming habits and hope: Bia returned to simple hobbies that brought her joy, such as board games. She became involved in school activities again, began planning her future once more, and focused on her dreams — a strategy that helped her cope with anxiety.

Support network: school once again became a space for connection. Talking openly with teachers and classmates was essential for Bia to feel supported and reduce her anxiety symptoms.

Important reminder:

These lessons are not a thing of the past. The support and strategies that helped Bia during that time remain relevant today and are important allies for teachers in facing classroom challenges!

Looking to the Future

We must not let the period we are living through fade into collective oblivion. The pandemic has left emotional scars that may still be present in students' daily lives. Remembering what happened is a way to validate what adolescents have experienced and **prepare us to better support them in the future.**

The pandemic has taught us that mental health care must be part of the school environment, not just in times of crisis. This involves strengthening public policies, expanding access to mental health services, encouraging open dialogue in the classroom, and promoting mutual care between educators and students in daily life.



What to do?

Notice changes in routine: be on the lookout for signs of extreme fatigue, demotivation, or difficulty concentrating, and help the student respect their limits.

Offer a welcoming ear: showing that you care and providing a safe space for the teenager to talk about how they feel helps them organize their thoughts and relieve tension.

Seek information and support: learning more about anxiety helps you better handle situations in the classroom. In addition to this booklet, there are other resources that can help educators better understand anxiety and find practical support strategies.

Explore more resources





Seeking Support

If anxiety has been disrupting the student's school routine and you feel they need more help, it is important to advise the family to seek professional support.

You can recommend services such as:

- Psychology teaching clinics (usually free);
- Your city's community health centers;
- CAPS (Psychosocial Care Centers);
- CRAS;
- Psychologist in the municipal school system.



Let's review what we've learned in this booklet?

- 1** Symptoms of anxiety can arise or intensify during times of prolonged uncertainty, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2** Lack of motivation, difficulty concentrating, sleep disturbances, or living in a constant state of alert are important signs that a student needs care.
- 3** Offering a welcoming ear, respecting the pace of readjustment, and strengthening the support network at school make all the difference in coping with anxiety.
- 4** As a teacher, you don't have to handle everything alone: just like Bia, many young people still carry emotional scars from the pandemic. Your attentive eye may be the first step in helping them, but if you sense the need, guide them toward seeking a mental health professional.

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