

NEUROCOGNITIVE OUTCOMES, MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS, AND SCHOOL SUPPORTS: HOW CAN I HELP MY SCHOOL AGED CHILD WITH CHD?

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OUTLINE

- Common Neurocognitive and academic challenges in kids with CHD:
 - Attention
 - Processing
 - Executive functioning
- Emotional and Behavioral health:
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
- When should I consider neuropsychological testing?

INATTENTION, PROCESSING SPEED,
EXECUTIVE DYSFUNCTION, AND
MENTAL FATIGUE

INATTENTION

- Difficulty sustaining focus during lessons or independent work
- Appears “daydreamy,” mentally checked out, or easily distracted
- Misses instructions, especially multi-step directions
- Inconsistent performance (knows it one day, not the next)
- Needs frequent redirection to stay on task
- Work is often incomplete or rushed



SLOW PROCESSING SPEED

- Takes longer than peers to start and finish work
- Struggles to keep up with classroom pace or note-taking
- Needs extra time to answer questions, even when they know the answer
- Performs better on untimed than timed activities
- Becomes overwhelmed when information is presented quickly
- Accuracy drops when asked to work faster



EXECUTIVE DYSFUNCTION

- Difficulty getting started on tasks without adult prompting
- Trouble planning, organizing, or breaking work into steps
- Frequent incomplete, missing, or late assignments
- Poor time management (works slowly, rushes at the end, or misjudges time)
- Becomes overwhelmed by multi-step or open-ended tasks
- Requires ongoing external structure, reminders, or check-ins to function independently



MENTAL FATIGUE

- Noticeable decline in attention and efficiency as the day goes on
- Increased irritability, emotional sensitivity, or frustration later in the day
- More frequent off-task behavior later in the day
- Needs more breaks or adult support to complete work
- Work quality deteriorates throughout the day despite effort
- Greater difficulty with complex or multi-step tasks in the afternoon



Inattention:

- Is my child missing information because they aren't focused — or because the environment is asking more attention than they can realistically give?
- When my child is interested or working one-on-one, does their attention improve significantly?



Executive Dysfunction:

- Does my child know what to do but struggle with getting started, staying organized, or finishing without support?
- How much adult scaffolding does my child need to plan, prioritize, and manage tasks compared to peers?

Slow Processing Speed:

- Does my child understand the material but struggle when they are expected to work quickly or keep up with the pace?
- If time pressure were removed, would my child's accuracy and confidence improve?

Mental Fatigue

- Does my child's performance or emotional regulation noticeably decline as the school day goes on?
- Is my child working harder than peers just to maintain the same level of functioning?

ACADEMIC SKILLS

A lot of these challenges are rooted in the challenges described above, but they may still need more targeted help.

READING: DECODING VS COMPREHENSION

- Your child might read words accurately (decoding) but struggle to understand what they read (comprehension).
- Comprehension:
 - Trouble answering questions about a story, forgetting details, needing things read multiple times, or getting frustrated with reading assignments.



MATH: PROBLEM SOLVING

- Children may do fine with single-step calculations but have difficulty when a problem requires multiple steps or concepts.
- Struggling to keep numbers in mind, skipping steps, making errors despite knowing the procedures, or anxiety about math tests.



WRITING: PLANNING, ORGANIZATION, AND FATIGUE

- Even if your child has good ideas, getting them down on paper in a logical way can be challenging.
- Writing assignments can take much longer, and the child may become tired or frustrated partway through.
- Short or incomplete responses, messy or disorganized writing, frequent revisions, or resistance to writing tasks.



Reading:

“Does my child understand what they just read, or do they just read the words?”

“Do they struggle to remember or summarize a story?”

Math:

“Can my child solve a problem in their head while keeping all the steps straight?”

“Do they get stuck when a problem involves more than one operation?”

Writing:

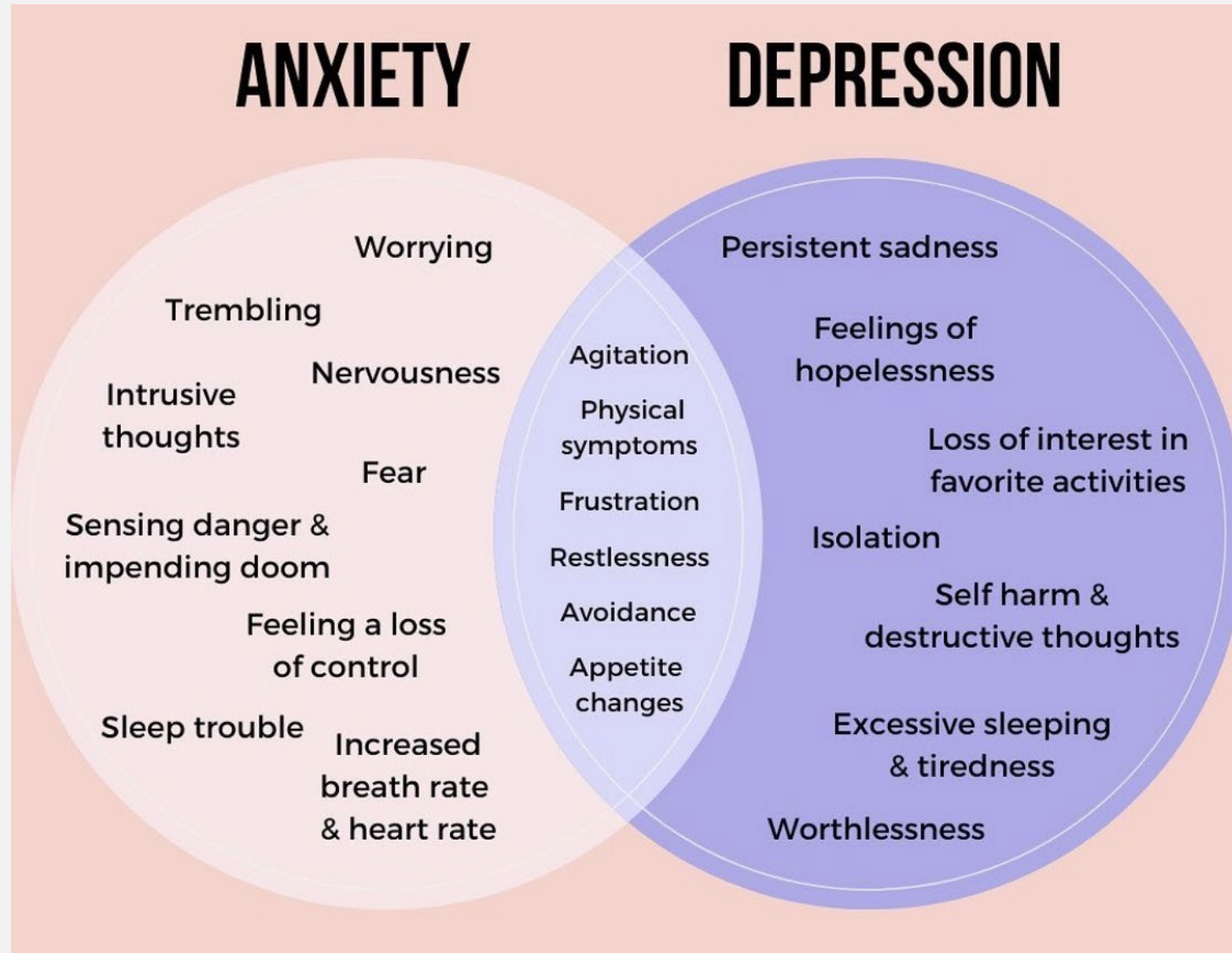
“Does my child struggle to start writing or organize their ideas?”

“Do they get exhausted halfway through homework or essays?”



MENTAL HEALTH: DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, AND BEHAVIOR

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MOOD, ANXIETY, AND BEHAVIOR DISORDERS

“Has my child’s mood, worries, or behavior changed so much that it’s affecting school, friends, or family life?”

“Does my child seem sad, irritable, or on edge most days — not just once in a while?”

“Am I spending more time trying to calm, comfort, or manage my child’s emotions than feels typical for their age?”



WHY DO KIDS GET NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING?

WHY TESTING?

- It is hard to see if someone has a disorder or disability without testing.
- If they do have a disorder or disability, testing helps us see which ones.
- It can identify strengths.
- It can identify recommendations for treatment, accommodations, and support.

WHAT IS NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING LIKE?

- Clinical Interview
- Several hours long.
- Typically done using “brain games.”
- Measure thinking skills like:
 - IQ
 - Language
 - Attention
 - Executive functioning
 - Nonverbal reasoning
 - Memory
 - Processing speed
 - Learning (reading, writing, math).
- Feedback session
- Written report



HOW DO NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL
TEST RESULTS HELP?

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- **Educational planning**

- Linking results to IEPs, 504 plans, classroom supports.
- Translating test results into practical accommodations (examples: extra time, visual supports, structured routines).

- **Behavior and emotional health**

- Understanding frustration, anxiety, depression, and behavior. How does this impact daily life?

- **Family and home strategies**

- Building routines that support attention and organization.
- Supporting independence while scaffolding weak areas.

HOW CARDIAC CONDITIONS CAN AFFECT SCHOOL

- Fatigue or low stamina
- Need for rest breaks or modified activity
- Medication during the school day
- Absences due to medical appointments

WHY SCHOOL PLANNING MATTERS

- Keeps students safe throughout the school day
- Ensures staff understand medical needs
- Supports learning and participation
- Reduces stress for families and students

504 PLANS AND IEPs

- 504 Plan: **accommodations** for access
 - How material is taught
- IEP: **specialized instruction and services**
 - What is taught
 - OHI
- Eligibility based on school impact
- Request in writing

COMMON SCHOOL SUPPORTS

- Rest breaks and flexible scheduling
- Modified physical education or recess
- Extra time for assignments or tests
- Flexible deadlines
- Access to the school nurse
- Use of technology
- Breaks during the day

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

- Share medical updates with the school
- Identify a point person at school
- Plan ahead for transitions
- Encourage student self-advocacy when appropriate

FINAL THOUGHTS

- Every cardiac child is different
- Planning supports safety and success
- Collaboration leads to the best outcomes
- You are not alone
- You are part of the decision making team

RESOURCES

- WI Facets – [Special Education Resources For Children Wisconsin | WI FACETS](#)
- Wisconsin Statewide Parent Educator Initiative WSPEI [Special Education Publications | WSPEI](#)
- Special Healthcare in Plain Language [ho2_spec_ed_in_plain_language.pdf](#)
- Understood.org [Understood - For learning and thinking differences](#)
- CHW- EAPP Program [Educational Achievement Partnership Program | Children's Wisconsin](#)