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Webinar On

Coping with Exam Pressure and Anxiety

Date: 7th February 2026, Saturday

Organised By

**Odisha School Education Programme Authority
(OSEPA), Bhubaneswar**

**In Collaboration with
UNICEF Odisha**

Technical Partner



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About the Partnership:

The **Odisha School Education Programme Authority (OSEPA)**, under the **School & Mass Education Department of the Government of Odisha**, in collaboration with **UNICEF Odisha** and the Identity Foundation Trust, conducts specialised webinars for higher secondary school students. These sessions are designed to equip students of Grades 9 and 10 with essential life skills, psychological resilience, and emotional competencies required for academic success, career advancement, and overall well-being. The initiative focuses on developing students' capacity to understand themselves, manage their emotions effectively, and build meaningful relationships.

About the Webinar Series:

The **Odisha School Education Programme Authority (OSEPA)**, Government of Odisha, successfully organised the eighth (8th) session of its webinar series on the theme **“Coping with Exam Pressure and Anxiety”**. This session focused on helping students understand exam stress as a normal experience and equipping them with practical strategies to manage anxiety, overthinking, and performance pressure.

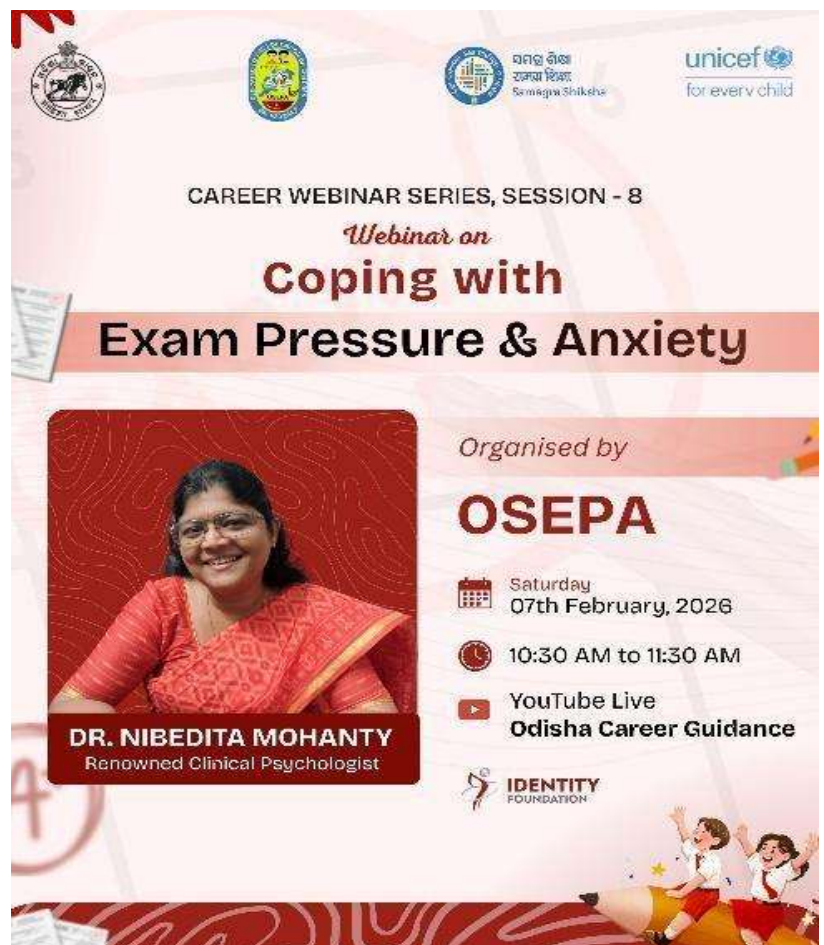
Students of Classes 9 and 10, along with teachers from secondary schools across the state, participated actively, sharing concerns and questions related to headaches, fear of failure, screen addiction, and parental expectations. The webinar highlighted the importance of healthy routines, reduced mobile use, supportive communication from parents and teachers, and simple techniques like breathing exercises to stay calm and focused.

About the Resource Person:

Dr. **Nibedita Mohanty** is a distinguished mental health professional with over 10 years of experience, specialising in child and adolescent mental health and parenting. With an M.Phil. in Counselling and Clinical Psychology from SCB Medical College, Cuttack, she is currently pursuing her Ph.D. She is also serving as a life member of the Indian Psychiatric Society and a state member of the Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyan Committee (NMBA). She has been conducting mental health awareness sessions for the government departments as well for the past few years.

Welcome Note by the Moderator:

Mr. Subham Mohapatra, Project Lead of the School-to-Work transition intervention, set the context of the webinar by welcoming the resource person, students and teachers. He also advised the students to listen to the resource person more carefully, as she will address the real-life challenges faced by the students during the exams. He also



The poster is for the 'CAREER WEBINAR SERIES, SESSION - 8' titled 'Webinar on Coping with Exam Pressure & Anxiety'. It is organized by OSEPA. The resource person is Dr. Nibedita Mohanty, a renowned clinical psychologist, shown in a red sari. The event is scheduled for Saturday, 07th February, 2026, from 10:30 AM to 11:30 AM, as a YouTube Live session on Odisha Career Guidance. Logos for the Government of Odisha, OSEPA, and UNICEF are at the top. The Identity Foundation logo is at the bottom right, along with an illustration of children.

emphasised that adhering to the discussed steps can assist students in managing their wellbeing. Along with the welcome note, the moderator urged the students and school teachers to put forth all their queries and concerns.

Understanding Exam Pressure & Anxiety:

Stress as a Normal Response:



Dr. Mohanty began by explaining that stress is a normal, natural response of the brain. Whenever it encounters pressure or a challenging situation, even a thoroughly prepared student may struggle during an exam. She emphasised that students, parents, and teachers often perceive stress as a complete negative, requiring elimination instead of understanding and managing it. In reality, she clarified, a certain

degree of stress is actually helpful, as it sharpens attention, heightens alertness, and boosts motivation to perform well.

She further pointed out that being completely free from stress in an exam context is neither realistic nor desirable, because such a state can lead to overconfidence, casual attitudes, and complacency. Instead of aiming for zero stress, she encouraged students to recognise and maintain an optimal level of stress that energises them without overwhelming them, reframing stress as a signal to prepare and focus more effectively rather than as an enemy.

When Stress Turns Harmful & Distress:

When stress is not managed well or continues over a long period without healthy coping strategies, it can intensify and turn into distress. In this state, the brain may feel “blocked” or frozen, making it very difficult for a student to think clearly or organise their thoughts. Even if they studied diligently, they may panic or feel helpless during exams. As distress increases, it adversely impacts not only exam performance but also daily functioning, including homework completion, classroom concentration, and the execution of routine tasks, thereby diminishing overall well-being and self-confidence.



Exam Pressure and Anxiety: Definitions and Dynamics:

Understanding Exam Pressure

Exam pressure, as defined by Dr Mohanty, refers to the external and internal burdens or pushes that students encounter before and during examinations. This pressure does not come from a single source; rather, it is created by a mix of outside expectations and inner fears.

On the external side, students often feel weighed down by parental demands to achieve certain marks or to “not fail”, by teachers’ expectations, by peer competition, and by constant social comparisons with classmates or relatives.



Internally, students place heavy pressure on themselves through rigid self-expectations, such as “I must score 95% or more”, and through worries about disappointing parents and teachers. This is further intensified by self-doubt and negative self-talk, such as repeatedly thinking, “I am not good enough” or “I will forget everything in the exam.” Together, these external and internal forces combine to create a high-pressure environment that can strongly affect a student’s confidence, emotions, and performance.

Exam Anxiety and Performance Anxiety:

Dr Mohanty explained exam anxiety as an emotional state that disrupts clear thinking during examinations, calling it an “emotional task” that interferes with the intellectual task of studying, understanding, and recalling information. Students experiencing exam anxiety are often overwhelmed by repetitive “what if” thoughts, such as “What if I cannot write?” or “What if I fail?”, which increases their fear and self-doubt. Even after preparing, they may fear they can't recall answers in the exam hall and feel like their mind has gone blank.



Causes of Exam Pressure and Anxiety:

Dr. Mohanty highlighted that exam stress and anxiety stem from multiple, interconnected factors that reinforce one another.

- **High parental expectations:** Parents sometimes overestimate their child’s abilities and pace of learning, using comparisons such as “Everyone is getting 90–95%; why can’t you?”, which creates a persistent sense of inadequacy.
- **Teacher and school pressure:** Expectations are often framed purely around marks, not effort or individual progress, which narrows the definition of success.
- **Peer comparison:** Constantly comparing oneself with friends or toppers fuels self-doubt and feelings of inferiority.

- **Fear of disappointing others:** Students fear letting down their parents and teachers, which adds emotional burden beyond academic performance.
- **Fear of failure and past results:** Previous experiences of lower-than-expected marks may lead to deep-rooted beliefs such as “I am not good enough”.
- **Poor study habits and overload:** Irregular study routines, last-minute preparation, a heavy syllabus, coaching, and frequent tests together intensify perceived pressure.
- **Lack of sleep and unhealthy routine:** Sleep deprivation weakens concentration and memory, directly aggravating anxiety.
- **Excessive screen time:** Overuse of mobile phones and social media fragments attention, reduces effective study time, and generates guilt, which further elevates stress.

Symptoms of Exam Pressure and Anxiety:

Dr. Mohanty described symptoms across four domains, encouraging students and teachers to recognise these as signals that anxiety is active.

Physical Symptoms:

Dr. Mohanty highlighted that anxiety often shows up through clear physical signals, and recognising them early can help students seek support.

Key physical symptoms include the following:

- **Headaches** that arise or worsen around exams or study time.
- **Rapid heartbeat or palpitations**, especially before tests or while contemplating results.
- **Excessive sweating**, even without heat or physical exertion.
- **Stomach discomfort**, such as pain, nausea, or a feeling of tightness.
- **Muscle tension**, particularly in the neck, shoulders, or back.
- **Persistent fatigue**, feeling drained despite light physical work.
- **Sleep problems**, including difficulty falling asleep, frequent waking, or unrestful sleep.



She encouraged teachers and parents to treat these not as “excuses” but as real indicators that exam anxiety is active and needs compassionate attention.

Emotional Symptoms:

Emotional symptoms of exam anxiety often appear as noticeable changes in a student’s feelings and reactions. These may include increased irritability or sudden bursts of anger over small issues, as well as constant overthinking and worry about exams or the future. Students may experience feelings of hopelessness, expressed through thoughts like “Nothing will work; I can’t do it”, which reduce motivation and confidence. Frequent mood swings, shifting quickly from feeling fine to feeling upset, are also common.

Some students may have crying spells or feel emotionally overwhelmed without clearly knowing the reason behind it. Together, these emotional shifts signal that anxiety is disrupting the student’s ability to manage and regulate their emotions effectively and that they may need empathetic support, reassurance, and guidance from adults rather than criticism or dismissal.



Cognitive (Thought-related) Symptoms:

The cognitive symptoms of test anxiety mostly show up in how students think and process information. They may find it hard to maintain focus, get easily distracted, or feel their mind keeps wandering when they try to study. At times, the mind may suddenly go “blank” during study or in the exam hall, even for topics they revised recently. Forgetfulness becomes common, especially for material learned just a short time ago.

Alongside this, students may experience persistent negative thoughts, such as "I will definitely fail" or "I am not capable," which weakens confidence and motivation. These unhelpful thought patterns directly interfere with effective revision, clear thinking, and overall exam performance.

Behavioural Symptoms:

Behavioural symptoms of exam anxiety are often visible in a student’s daily actions and routines. Common signs include persistent procrastination, such as repeatedly saying “I’ll study tomorrow” and delaying work. Students may begin to avoid study sessions altogether or revise much less than planned. Many turn to increased screen time, scrolling reels, or social media for short-term escape, which further reduces productive study hours.

Anxiety can also lead to withdrawal from friends and family, resulting in reduced social interaction. Eating habits may become irregular, with students either skipping meals or overeating junk food as a way to cope. These patterns show that anxiety is influencing behaviour in ways that can harm both well-being and academic performance.



Practical Strategies and Recommendations:

Throughout the webinar, Dr. Mohanty shared several practical strategies to help students convert stress into a constructive force rather than a hindrance.

Breathing Exercise and Mindfulness:

To help students settle into the session and introduce a simple coping tool, Dr Mohanty guided them through a brief two-minute breathing and mindfulness exercise. Students were first invited to gently close their eyes and bring their attention inward. They were then asked to focus on their breath slow, deep inhalations followed by equally slow exhalations, while noticing the natural rhythm of breathing. As they continued, students were encouraged to observe the sense of calm that arises in the body and mind, allowing scattered thoughts to settle and attention to return to the present moment.

She also recommended practicing this exercise three to four times a day, particularly before and during exams, as a practical way to reduce anxiety, steady emotions, and enhance concentration and focus during study and in the examination hall.

Focusing on What You Can Control:



Dr Mohanty highlighted that managing exam anxiety begins with choosing where to place one's attention. She explained that students have two main options: they can either "attend to anxiety" or "attend to studies". When students dwell on anxious thoughts, such as fear of failure or "what if" scenarios, the anxiety intensifies, often resulting in panic, a blank mind, and uncomfortable physical symptoms.

In contrast, when they gently shift their focus back to studying and revision, the brain starts receiving clear signals of effort and progress. Over time, this reduces anxiety and builds confidence, because the mind feels more in control and prepared. Her core message to students was simple yet powerful: "Where we focus, that grows," so it is important to consciously nurture helpful, study-orientated focus rather than feeding anxious thoughts.

Effective Use of Stress:

Dr. Mohanty encouraged students to view moderate stress not as an enemy but as a useful signal that it is time to organise themselves better and revise more effectively. Instead of panicking, students can treat this stress as a reminder to create a realistic schedule, prioritise key topics, and systematically revise what they have already learned.

She emphasised that, close to the exam, the focus should shift from covering new chapters to consolidating existing knowledge through revision, practice papers, and quick reviews. She also shared that if someone tries to load the brain with large amounts of new information at the last minute, it confuses

memory, increases anxiety, and prevents students from using their preparation optimally in the exam hall. By channelling stress into structured planning and revision, students can feel more in control and confident.

Regulating Mobile and Screen Use:

The speaker placed strong emphasis on limiting mobile and screen use in the weeks and days leading up to examinations. She advised students to effectively “lock away” their phones from the time when the exam period begins until all papers are completed so that their attention remains fully on studies rather than on constant notifications and distractions.



She further appealed to teachers and parents not to hand over mobile phones casually during this time and to clearly explain to students why this restriction is necessary for their benefit. In her view,

continuous scrolling on social media and watching reels severely disrupts concentration, breaks the flow of learning, and can undermine even strong preparation if not kept under control.

By reducing screen time, students can protect their focus, retain what they have studied, and approach exams with a calmer and more organised mindset.

Healthy Routine: Sleep, Food, and Study Habits

The resource person also stressed that a healthy daily routine is just as important as syllabus completion for doing well in exams.

- Firstly, it is crucial for students to obtain sufficient sleep each night, as it aids in the consolidation of previously learned material and maintains emotional stability and control.
- Second, she advised following a consistent study timetable instead of last-minute cramming so that the brain can revise, retain, and recall information more effectively.
- Third, she stated that students must consume balanced, regular meals to prevent tiredness, weakness, and loss of concentration during study hours and in the examination hall.

Good sleep, organised study habits, and healthy food all work together to make a strong base for mental health and cognitive performance. This helps students stay calm, focused, and alert during the exam period.

Role of Parents and Teachers:

The resource person repeatedly emphasised that parents and teachers play a decisive role in either intensifying or easing exam pressure for students. She urged parents to set realistic expectations that match the child’s current learning level and pace instead of constantly comparing them with school toppers or high-scoring peers. Recognising and appreciating genuine improvement; for instance, praising a child who has moved from 40% to 50% is crucial for building self-confidence and a sense of progress.

She also highlighted that schools and teachers should actively collaborate with parents through meetings and orientations to discuss practical measures such as limiting mobile phone use during exam periods,

creating a quiet and supportive study environment at home, and using encouraging language. The focus, she stressed, should shift from purely mark-oriented pressure to emotional support, constructive feedback, and motivation so that students feel guided rather than judged.

Key Takeaways:

From the webinar, the following key messages emerge:

- **Stress is normal; anxiety is manageable:** A certain level of stress is natural and can sharpen performance. The goal is to manage stress so it doesn't become distress or performance anxiety.
- **Exam pressure has many sources:** Parental and teacher expectations, peer comparison, fear of disappointing others, poor study routines, lack of sleep and high screen time all contribute to exam pressure. Recognising them helps address them more effectively.
- **Anxiety manifests in multiple ways:** physical (headache, fast heart rate), emotional (irritability, overthinking), cognitive (blank mind, negative thoughts) and behavioural (procrastination, increased screen time) symptoms are all signals that anxiety needs attention.
- **Focus, routine and support are the antidotes:** simple practices like breathing exercises, regular revision of known material, strict control of mobile usage, healthy sleep and food, and supportive communication from parents and teachers can significantly reduce exam anxiety and improve performance.

Conclusion

The 13th session of the Career Webinar Series, “Coping with Exam Pressure and Anxiety”, provided higher secondary students in Odisha with a clear, practical and empathetic roadmap to manage exam-related stress. Through Dr. Nibedita Mohanty’s explanations and exercises, students were encouraged to view stress not as an enemy but as a signal that can be channelled positively with the right strategies.

By integrating mental health insights with the broader career guidance frameworks of DHSE, UNICEF, and the Identity Foundation, the webinar strengthened the state’s approach to holistic student development, recognising that academic success and emotional well-being are deeply interconnected. This session sets a strong foundation for continued work on student mental health, resilience, and the supportive involvement of families and schools in the examination journey.

Queries from Ground:

Student’s Name	Queries	Response
Parbati Mohapatra	How to manage & reduce stress during the exam?	Managing stress during exams requires a balanced approach to preparation and well-being. Start by creating a realistic study plan that breaks subjects into smaller tasks and avoids last-minute cramming. Take short breaks between study sessions to relax your mind. Ensure you get adequate sleep, healthy food, and regular hydration, as these help maintain concentration and energy. Practice deep breathing, light exercise, or meditation to calm anxiety. Stay positive and focus on your effort rather than fearing results. Discuss

		doubts with teachers or friends to reduce pressure. Finally, remember that exams are just one part of learning, and maintaining confidence and a calm mindset can greatly improve performance.
Anchalika high school, Jamgaon	Can't sleep at night properly! What should I do?	If you can't sleep properly at night, try improving your sleep routine and daily habits. Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day to train your body clock. Avoid using mobile phones, laptops, or watching TV at least 30–60 minutes before sleeping, as screen light affects sleep. Try relaxing activities such as reading a book, listening to calm music, or deep breathing. Avoid heavy meals, caffeine, or tea late in the evening. Regular exercise during the day can also improve sleep quality. Keep your room quiet, dark, and comfortable. If sleep problems continue for many days, consider speaking with a doctor or counsellor.
Chitta Ranjan Panda	How can I achieve my target after 10th grade ?	To achieve your target in Class 10, start by setting clear goals for each subject and creating a daily study plan. Break your syllabus into small, manageable portions and revise regularly. Focus on understanding concepts rather than memorising. Practise previous years' question papers and sample tests to improve speed and accuracy. Pay special attention to weak subjects and seek help from teachers whenever needed. Maintain consistency and discipline in your study routine. Take short breaks to stay refreshed and avoid burnout. Ensure proper sleep, healthy food, and limited distractions such as excessive mobile use. Stay positive, believe in your abilities, and keep working steadily towards your goal.
Snehamayee Sahoo	How to manage overthinking? And how do we regulate our minds?	To manage overthinking and regulate your mind, start by becoming aware of your thoughts without judging them. When negative or repetitive thoughts appear, pause and take slow, deep breaths to calm your mind. Try to focus on what you can control in the present moment instead of worrying about uncertain outcomes. Writing your thoughts in a journal can help clear mental clutter. Practicing mindfulness, meditation, or light exercise daily can improve mental balance. Keep yourself engaged in meaningful activities and limit excessive screen time.

Talking to a trusted friend, teacher, or counselor can also help. With regular practice, your mind gradually learns to stay calm and focused.

Attendance Details:

District Name	School Count	Class IX		Class X		Total Student Count
		Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
ANGUL	145	3315	3648	2440	2931	12334
BALASORE	19	528	508	302	276	1614
BARGARH	5	75	152	70	165	462
BHADRAK	77	1832	1848	835	754	5269
BOLANGIR	21	380	573	254	380	1587
CUTTACK	115	2082	2292	1094	994	6462
DEOGARH	13	183	216	144	218	761
DHENKANAL	39	935	1004	520	543	3002
GANJAM	65	1835	2096	900	1126	5957
JAGATSINGHPUR	117	1970	2029	1305	1259	6563
JAJPUR	30	713	785	575	605	2678
JHARSUGUDA	17	454	377	358	306	1495
KALAHANDI	2	68	80	58	85	291
KANDHAMAL	9	114	216	77	203	610
KENDRAPARA	14	237	228	103	108	676
KEONJHAR	34	495	919	327	634	2375
KHORDHA	26	674	698	467	383	2222
KORAPUT	38	878	1148	914	1129	4069
MALKANGIRI	34	1020	1011	966	921	3918
MAYURBHANJ	95	1595	1934	1137	1457	6123
NABARANGAPUR	10	142	451	166	414	1173
NAYAGARH	123	2517	2360	1320	1437	7634
NUAPADA	3	119	48	60	36	263
PURI	31	609	751	416	528	2304
RAYAGADA	25	522	556	478	484	2040
SAMBALPUR	15	267	283	197	209	956
SONEPUR	16	332	442	219	272	1265
SUNDARGARH	70	1267	1615	1126	1533	5541
Total	1208	25158	28268	16828	19390	89644
Class Wise Total		53426		36218		
Gender-Wise Total		41986		47658		
Grand Total		89644				

Photos from the Ground:

