

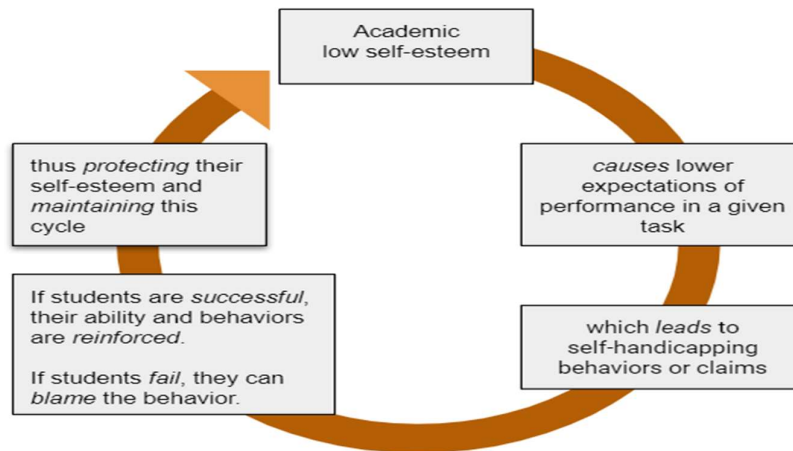
Self-Handicapping in the Classrooms

OSU Motivation in Classrooms Lab – Motivation Minute. September 2022

What is Self-handicapping and what causes it?

Oftentimes students might feel anxious or uncertain about their academic ability. As a result, they might seek to protect their self-esteem by creating impediments that may undermine their performance. Students use self-handicapping strategies as a way to prevent low performance from being attributed to their own ability.

What is the mechanism of self-handicapping?



What does self-handicapping look like and how do students manifest it?

Behavioral handicaps: Involve the creation of obstacles (i.e., procrastination, staying up late, not studying) that will reduce the likelihood of success, allowing the student to blame the obstacle rather than their ability.

Ana had an important assignment for the next day. However, she decided to go to a party the night before.

When she got a bad grade, she claimed it was because she must've stayed out too late at the party.

Claimed handicaps: Excuses (i.e., claim of test anxiety, illness, lack of time) students provide to serve as a reason for poor performance; they are claims that an obstacle existed.

Luis had his final math exam on Friday. However, that morning he reported tiredness and anxiety for the test without doing something to make his condition better. It's the third time he's reported these symptoms. When he failed the exam, he again said it was because of his anxiety, which is a false excuse.

How can teachers help students identify the factors they have control over?

- Prompt students to do self-affirmation by jotting down a list of educational values and goals.
- Encourage students asking for help from other peers or teachers.
- Provide example dividing assignments into stages (**S**pecific - **M**easurable - **A**chievable - **R**ealistic - **T**imely).
- Having honest conversation with students.

Resources

Schwinger, M., Wirthwein, L., Lemmer, G., & Steinmayr, R. (2014). Academic self-handicapping and achievement: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 106*(3), 744-761.

Siegel, P.A., Scillitoe, J., & Parks-Yancy, R. (2005). Reducing the tendency to self-handicap: The effect of self-affirmation. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 41*, 589-597.

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