**Language Anxiety**

Language Anxiety is the feeling of tension, fear, and apprehension associated with speaking, listening, and learning in another language. It presents in three different ways:

* Communication Apprehension
	+ I have difficulty expressing my thoughts and ideas in Anishinaabemowin. It’s hard for me to speak to and comprehend when fluent speakers are talking.
	+ I worry that other speakers will not understand me, or will not converse with me in Anishinaabemowin.
* Fear of Negative Social Evaluation
	+ I believe that I have to make a good impression on others when I speak Anishinaabemowin, and am afraid that I won’t.
	+ I feel that outsiders are listening to us speak in our language and judging us.
* Test Anxiety
	+ I am attending a course or doing an exam in Anishinaabemowin and fear that I won’t do well on the assessment pieces.

*If you identify with any of the following statements, you have experienced Language Anxiety:*

* I am afraid to speak Anishinaabemowin even though my skills are good enough to communicate. (I start shaking, or sweating, and may have a raised heart rate)
* I struggle to say a single word out loud even though I can construct perfect sentences in my head.
* The mere thought of saying something in Anishinaabemowin makes me feel scared and shaky.
* I avoid conversations with fluent speakers because I am afraid of being laughed at or assessed.
* I avoid conversations with other fluent speakers because I am afraid they will switch to English.
* I panic when I can’t express myself in Anishinaabemowin or when I don’t understand someone speaking it to me.
* I feel nervous and stumble when I try to say the simplest things in Anishinaabemowin.

5 Tips for Overcoming Language Anxiety

1. Give yourself time.

If you are a learner, don’t feel stressed about needing to learn at the same pace as other people. Don’t allow others to decide when you should start communicating. Practice listening, reading, and writing as much as you need to. Learning Anishinaabemowin is not a competition.

If you are a speaker, take your time getting comfortable using the language every day with other speakers and learners. Don’t allow others to decide your comfort level but push your limits as much as you can.
2. Change negative thoughts to positive thoughts.

If you are a learner, being trapped in negative thoughts will only fuel your anxiety. When you have a negative thought try writing it down and reflecting upon it. For example, take,

“I’ve been learning Anishinaabemowin for 2 years now and I’m still making so many mistakes. I’m never going to learn!”

And turn it into:

“I’ve been learning Anishinaabemowin for 2 years now and I managed to get my message across. I made mistakes but I communicated with success!

If you are a speaker, do the same thing! Negative thoughts will only hold you back from communicating with others and teaching learners.
3. Accept that it’s okay to make mistakes

Learners need to understand that in order to speak a language fluently, you need to start speaking a broken version of it. You will not be speaking like the first speakers without mistakes, practice, and multiple corrections. One of the great things is that the children you work with are also just starting to learn and you can take this learning path together.

Fluent speakers are then responsible for helping learners move from that broken version of the language into speaking fluidly. Laughing at a learner in this stage can be very damaging, so it’s important to remember to be kind and offer corrections gently. A good rule of thumb is to only laugh if the learner is laughing.
4. Change your learning method

For learners, there is no “best way” to learn Anishinaabemowin. Language learning is different for everyone and it is important to be open to trying new methods of learning. Language learning should be fun, and if you’re feeling anxious about it, you won’t learn as much. Try to figure out the easiest and most fun way that works for you!

Fluent speakers can change up their methods too and there are always fun ways to pass the language on.
5. Small steps first

Talking with a fluent speaker immediately after beginning to learn Anishinaabemowin can be a terrifying concept for anyone with Language Anxiety.

Take small steps – try to have conversations with other learners, practice words and phrases on your own, learn a new word or grammar skill every week.

You might also consider learning on other platforms. Memrise, YouTube, and Facebook are all great places to start seeking out new learning methods and ideas.

For fluent speakers, try having small conversations with the learners but keep your expectations at a reasonable level. When speaking to the children, try single words or small phrases and speak Anishinaabemowin then translate if needed.