

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of worry, fear, nervousness and apprehension. Every person experiences some level of anxiety as a part of life.. When faced with potentially harmful or worrying triggers, feelings of anxiety are not only normal but necessary for survival.

Anxiety becomes a problem when it disrupts your day to day life and prevents you from doing things you used to enjoy. Anxiety disorders occur when a reaction is out of proportion to what might normally be expected in a situation. The American Psychological Association (APA) describes a person with anxiety disorder as "having recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns." If you aren't sure if you or someone you care about is experiencing normal feelings of anxiety or severe anxiety that may need medical attention there are many resources to find your pathway to support. Start by talking about it and reaching out to a mental health care professional. You can also visit www.angstmovie.com for a list of resources.

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health complaint in the United States. As we see in the film, the kids and teens interviewed shared their different experiences with anxiety. Dr. Cora Bruener describes the additional physical symptoms that can accompany anxiety disorders, like chronic stomach or head aches. The APA classifies anxiety disorders into six main types. These include:

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD): creates chronic, everyday worry, sometimes consuming hours of a person's day. Can create physical symptoms of headaches and stomach aches.

Social Anxiety Disorder: more than shyness, a person with social anxiety disorder has intense fear over social interactions, causing them to withdraw and not participate. Often people who suffer from this are very concerned about being judged

Panic Disorder: characterized by panic attacks and sudden feelings of terror that sometime strike repeatedly and without warning. People experiencing a panic attack often mistake them for a heart attack because of the powerful physical symptoms including chest pain, heart palpitations, dizziness, sweaty hands, shortness of breath and stomach upset.

Phobias: We all have certain things or situations that make us uncomfortable or fearful. But a person with a phobia experiences strong, irrational fear over certain places, objects or events.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD): is an anxiety condition in which a person is plagued by unwanted thoughts, images or impulses (called obsessions) that he/she attempts to fend off or neutralize by performing compulsions (ritualized or repeated behaviors).

Separation anxiety disorder: This is characterized by high levels of anxiety when separated from a person or place that provides feelings of security or safety. Separation sometimes results in panic symptoms. It is considered a disorder when the response is excessive or inappropriate after separation.

Fact: Anxiety disorders are treatable.

Fact: Neuroplasticity of the brain is real. You can change the way you think about something. You can rewire your brain to positivity.

Fact: Distraction allows your amygdala (fight or flight part of the brain) a break. It can be helpful to distract your mind and give yourself some space for a short period, but prolonged isolation can lead to avoidance of anxiety producing situations which reinforces the negative thought process.

Tips for Managing Anxiety

- Distract yourself.

Text a friend	Listen to music
Read a book for 5 mins	Listen to the quietness of a room
Snap fingers back and forth	Try pushups or jumping jacks
Write your feelings in a journal	Focus on your breath

- Think of the logic of the situation.

Example from a teen in Angst: You have a test you are anxious about. You know you studied, you will get at least half right, this test will not define your future.

- Take your mind into a place where you feel safe and/or special. Such as...

The beach	A lake
A field	The mountains
Your room	A forest

- **Try Ice cubes in your hand.** This will take you out of your anxiety and panic. Your focus will be on the ice cubes and you will move from the fight or flight part of the brain to the frontal lobe, the more rational, thinking part of the brain.

- **Focus on looking at your hands and then focus on the floor.** Go back and forth- focus close up on your hands and then adjust your focus to the ground. This will help shift the brain into another place.

- **Don't avoid.** Rise and fall in the perceived threat.

- **Talk to someone.** Let your loved ones know if you are feeling stressed. Talking about it helps you reframe your concern and increase your opportunity for support.

If you're unsure whether your anxiety has reached a level of being unhealthy, reach out to a mental health professional. Visit AngstMovie.com for resources like websites, videos, books, find a therapist and more...

Angst

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR MANAGING ANXIETY

Some anxiety is normal and natural, occurring in children, teens and adults every day. Anxiety is generally defined fear that is future-oriented. Anxiety becomes problematic when it begins to interfere with everyday life.

1. There are three parts to anxiety: What I think (cognitions); What I feel (physical sensations); and What I do (behaviors). Helping people break down and verbalize these distinct thoughts, feelings, and behaviors helps them understand and face their fears.
2. Make a list at the end of each day and evening (at home) with the labeled stressors and an action plan. Even if the items of stress are not task-oriented in nature, it is beneficial to label them and write them down. For example, "I am worried about an upcoming presentation. Plan to talk with teacher and practice with a friend." "I feel sad about missing Jessica's party and it makes me want to eat lunch alone."
3. Model emotional honesty and reach out: Let your parents, teachers, friends, and loved ones know if you are feeling overly stressed and ask for their support.
4. Our bodies have a natural, physiological, way of coping with fear. A specific set of sensations occur when we're anxious, including pounding heart, shortness of breath, dizziness, and sweating. This set of symptoms, called the fight or flight response, is designed to help us avoid danger, but sometimes works more like a faulty smoke alarm. Helping teens understand these natural sensations in their bodies without overreacting, and showing them how quickly things can return to normal, can help give them control over their feelings of anxiety.
5. If you feel your thoughts becoming clustered and overly emotional, or the beginning stages of anxiety increasing, get up and move for 5-10 minutes. Take your thoughts and body to a new location, even briefly, to grab a drink, listen to music for a moment, take a walk. Distracting your thoughts will allow your brain to function in an organized and efficient manner.
6. Don't isolate for long. It can be helpful to distract your mind and give yourself some space for a short period, but prolonged isolation can lead to avoidance of anxiety producing situations, which reinforces the negative thought process. Do what you fear, be it attending socials or assertively stating your idea in class.
7. Facing fears and anxiety can teach an individual that they are stronger than they think they are, and that they can face something that they thought was insurmountable, and decreases those fears in the long term while avoiding fears actually increases the chances that they will turn into a problem.
8. Excessively reassuring someone who is anxious that everything will be okay may backfire when trying to help them cope with anxiety. Instead, empathize that it's natural to feel anxious, and focus on helping them through their feeling so that they can successfully face their anxiety. Avoiding activities because of fear can lead to increased anxiety because it reinforces the false concept that anxiety makes the activity too scary or difficult. For example, if someone is anxious about having a panic attack while driving, and therefore is encouraged not drive, they learn that driving must be dangerous, because otherwise, why would everyone be discouraging driving?
9. Fears, phobias, and anxieties can be successfully treated with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which helps teens change their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This is a short-term (6-16 session) weekly type of therapy that teaches an individual to become his or her own therapist. The cognitive piece helps people identify their fear as excessive, and as something they can overcome by focusing on, and then changing, specific irrational thoughts that lead to anxiety.
10. Behavior therapy for anxiety often relies on the concept of Exposure Therapy, which focuses on helping an anxious person face their fears in a controlled environment. This may involve helping someone with a fear of public speaking give a speech in front of a few people, and

then a larger group, and finally, a target audience. The goal of Exposure Therapy is to help an individual learn that they can feel anxious but that they can still live their lives.

11. Medication for anxiety may be an option as well. The most typical types of medication prescribed for anxiety are called Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors, or SSRIs.
12. You can also help reduce anxiety through changing “self-talk”, a part of CBT where people learn to identify the thoughts that they have that perpetuate their fears. Instead, try and identify what you’re really worried about, and whether it’s likely to happen.
13. Praise and reward yourself for facing tough situations. Be liberal with support if you know someone who is struggling with anxiety – even if the fear is irrational, it’s difficult to face your fears. Any small step in the right direction should be encouraged.
14. Finally, take care of yourself! If you’re feeling anxious, make sure you’re managing your base stress levels by exercising, eating right, and getting enough sleep. All those factors can play a part in making anxiety worse as well.

By Regine Galanti, Ph.D. Director, Long Island Behavioral Psychology

HOW TO HELP A FRIEND WHO HAS ANXIETY

Having supportive and understanding friends is an essential component to recovering from an anxiety disorder. How can you help?

- **Educate yourself** - Understanding what your friend is going through will help you better support them. It will also help alleviate frustrations that you may have about his or her behavior.
- **Be supportive** - Encourage your friend when he or she is having a tough time and be empathetic to what he or she is going through. Be respectful but do not support avoidance of stressful situations.
- **Don’t try to change your friend** - Modify your expectations of how you want your friend to be and accept your friend for who he or she is.
- **Communicate** - Be sure to listen with a nonjudgmental attitude. Help him or her find treatment. Sometimes it’s hard to take the first step alone. Be a good support and encourage your friend to get help.
- **Encourage** - Encourage your friend to confront stressful situations and support them through the experience, rather than avoiding anxiety-provoking situations. Avoidance can actually make the anxiety worse.
- **Be fun** - Sure it’s good to have someone to talk to, but your friends need you to keep the fun going. Help make them laugh and relax.

Tips powered by TeenMentalHealth.com

