

# Understanding Anxiety

There are three parts to anxiety (or worry as we often call it), physical feelings, thoughts and behaviours.



## Physical Feelings:

At the time we are feeling worried we may notice:

- Dizziness
- Sick feeling in the stomach
- Tightness in the chest or shoulders
- Sweating
- Shaking
- Fast heart beat
- Short breath and difficulty breathing
- Needing to go to the toilet
- Feeling like crying

When a lot of these feelings happen all together it is called a "Panic Attack".

When someone feels anxious over a long period of time they can:

- Feel restless
- Feel easily tired
- Have difficulties concentrating
- Have difficulties sleeping
- Feel tense
- Feel irritable / grumpy

## Thoughts:

Thoughts play an important role.

Some thoughts that come with worry are:

- Thinking something really bad is going to happen
- Fearing losing control or going crazy
- Fear of dying or being really unwell
- Lots of negative thoughts including "I can't do this".

## Behaviours / Actions

- People respond in different ways to 'anxiety' including:
- Freezing
- Crying
- Getting angry / grumpy.

Avoiding the thing that makes you anxious (avoidance) is a common response. **AVOIDANCE** - stops the worry at the time, but it can mean we end up missing out on things, and we never learn that we can be stronger than the worry. Avoidance lets the worry win!!

## Some types of anxiety:

Although everyone gets worried at times it becomes a problem when the worry, won't go away. Worry that won't go away often leads to avoidance and a loss of pleasure in life.

### Panic Disorder

Worry that gets out of control (panic attacks) can lead people to avoid situations and places. When this happens people are said to have a phobia.

### Phobias

Take many forms and can be a fear of:

- Certain animals
- Injections and blood
- School
- Parties and social situations
- Lifts
- Buses

### Worry can take other forms, examples are Separation Anxiety Disorder

Excessive worrying about separation from home or main caregivers.

### Generalised Anxiety Disorder

Excessive general worry that is difficult to control and doesn't go away.

### Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Recurrent intrusive thoughts or impulses that lead to compulsive behaviours to decrease the worrying.

### Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Excessive anxiety experienced following trauma of some kind.

Feeling anxious does not mean we are going mad and worrying excessively is in the majority of cases, a learned behavior. People can become very anxious after experiencing trauma of some kind, for example, being beaten up. Anxiety is a feeling everybody experiences at sometime in their life and it is only a problem when it gets out of control. The good news is that we can learn to control anxiety instead of letting it control us! Psychologists and counsellors who have been trained to help people deal with anxiety can help.



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