

Anxiety

What Is Anxiety?

Transcript

Student: Hello? Are you even listening?

Narrator: Feeling stressed occasionally is part of life, but sometimes worries grow and keep growing. Sometimes it feels like it's impossible to turn them off and these worrying thoughts are all you can think about. You might start to feel sick and unable to manage other priorities. It becomes difficult keeping up with everything else going on in your life.

Victoria: Anxiety and worry, this is something that affects everyone on a daily basis. Everyone will have anxiety at some point in their lives. It might be right through to getting on the school bus, through to taking exams. It might be even feeling anxious being in the classroom environment. Everybody's different, so we all feel anxious in different situations.

Narrator: Anxiety can seem overwhelming, but there are lots of ways to manage it. The first step is being able to recognize what brings it on in the first place.

Sometimes anxiety is focused on a particular object, place, or situation. A fear of heights, touching something unclean, being somewhere unfamiliar or among crowds of people, saying goodbye to your parents to come to school, speaking in front of other people, taking an exam. Occasionally your feelings in a situation becomes so overwhelming that you'll notice a strong physical and emotional reaction. Any situation can become a stressful one if you get stuck thinking about how it could all go wrong. Concentrating on all the worst case scenarios is the first step into a four-part trap.

Victoria: So they may have thoughts like, "Oh, I don't know anyone in my class. I don't know my teacher." They may have thoughts, "I may not like it. I may not be able to do my subjects or to pass my exams." So that will be their interpretation or their thoughts surrounding that particular event. And so those thoughts may produce anxiety and feelings of fear and worry about how they're going to cope in that situation. So that would be their feelings, which would then impact their behavior.

Narrator: Once you start thinking this way, your feelings, physical reactions, and behaviors tend to match those anxious thoughts. Through the anxiety, you might start to feel quite bad about yourself, as you interpret the situation on an emotional level.

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Asha: You might start to criticise yourself and actually think that you're a failure or that you need to man up. So you might have real difficulties, as well, with your own thoughts.

Narrator: It might feel like dread. Something bad is going to happen, it will be a complete disaster. Along with these changes in your feelings, your body gets the message that something bad is really happening and it reacts. It could be headaches, nausea, a tight chest, sweaty palms, your heart beating fast, feeling dizzy or light-headed.

Naturally, you want to do something to make these anxious thoughts and feelings stop. The actions you choose to take will be what keeps you in the cycle of worry, or what ultimately breaks you out of it. All these feelings and sensations connected to worrying can change the way someone behaves when they're dealing with anxiety. You could notice it in yourself, or your friends or siblings. Behavior such as not wanting to eat or avoiding school, being upset more than usual or crying. But ultimately these behaviors will keep you stuck in that trap.

You might notice when those first negative thoughts begin in certain situations, or you feel your muscles beginning to tense up. If you can recognize anxiety right at the start, then you can begin to manage it early. Pay close attention to the situations that cause you stress. Write down your thoughts, what was going on in your body, and what was going on around you at the time. Then next time, you can start to relax yourself when you notice the same things happening again.

Anxiety feels a bit different to everyone, and the ways to manage it are also going to be different for each person. You need to find what works for you. Try relaxing your body, concentrate on a muscle, deliberately tense it and then relax it. Do this gradually with your whole body, starting with your forehead. Frown and release. Squint your eyes closed and relax. Relax the muscles in your cheeks, your jaw, and keep going through your body. Another way to relax your muscles is to focus on your breathing. You can also use this with mindfulness.

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Victoria: So there are specific mindfulness meditations that you can do if you're feeling quite anxious. And that's literally just focusing your attention on your breathing. So just noticing how your body's feeling as you're breathing in. So breathing in fully, deeply. As you're breathing in, you might notice that your chest is rising and as you breathe out your chest falls.

Narrator: Creating something physical to help you keep calm can be useful as well. Maybe it's a box containing all your favorite things or some special objects that make you feel happy. You could even imagine a peaceful place in your head where you can go and not to take your stress with you.

Some people prefer to write when they're feeling anxious. Getting the thoughts out of your head and into a journal can be a relief as they're contained in one place and you don't need to carry them around with you. It can also make it easier for you to decide if the negative thoughts you're having actually make sense.

Asha: So if you start to notice and recognize that you're feeling anxious more than usual, remember it is normal to feel anxiety but once it starts to cause you distress and start to impact things like your school and your home life, things that you can do is actually capture those thoughts. So kind of challenge your own thoughts and say, "Actually that is not true."

Narrator: Look out for those anxious thoughts that come to you over and over again and tell them you're not going to listen. You might imagine a character telling you all the worst case scenarios and try to balance them out with a more positive perspective. And of course, if you're having trouble catching your negative thoughts, you can always reach out for some help.

Victoria: Well the first thing to do would always be to tell someone you trust. Sharing is caring. Just being able to voice how you're feeling can really go a long way from taking the thoughts from inside your head outside, where someone else can give a little bit of perspective or someone can help you with those thoughts.

Narrator: There are lots of ways to work through anxiety. Recognizing the signs is the first step to dealing with it. Find a method that works for you and remember that you don't have to face it alone.