

Anxiety Management Techniques

Expect and Allow Anxious Feelings: Try not to feel surprised, disappointed, or angry at yourself when anxious thoughts and feelings arise. Remember, you are sensitized. Your thoughts and feelings, while disturbing, are not dangerous. If you allow these feelings to come, and try to function with them, they will soon dissipate. If you fight them, or focus your energy on trying to get rid of them, your anxiety level will take more time to come down.

Identify Your Anxiety Level on a Scale of 0 to 10. Zero means you are feeling no anxiety. Ten means are at a level of panic. The scale goes no higher than 10. (You cannot be at a level of 15 or 20!) Identifying and recording your anxiety level makes you an active participant in learning to manage your anxiety, while establishing a baseline against which you can measure your progress.

Monitor Your Anxiety Levels: Observe your anxiety level as it rises and falls in relation to what you focus on. Watch your level rise as you try to rid yourself of anxious feelings. Watch it fall when you accept and allow these feelings. Your level will fall even if you do nothing more than wait and let time pass. Once you get into the habit of identifying your levels and watching them change, you will be pleasantly surprised to find how relatively infrequently really high levels occur, and how briefly they last when they do.

Anchor Yourself in the Present. The present is your safest harbor. Stay there by concentrating on "what is," rather than "what if?" Don't get ahead of yourself. Describe your surroundings, talk to someone, count backwards from 100 by threes, make anagrams out of the signs around you, do a relaxation exercise, add the license plate numbers on the car in front of you, do abdominal breathing, read, sing, listen to the radio, take out these techniques and reread them. Don't get stuck in your future-oriented imagination. Stay in the here and now.

Don't Plan Your Escape: Planning Your escape tends to intensify anxious thoughts and feelings. It projects you out of the present and into the future where you are most subject to catastrophic thoughts and disturbing feelings. Rather than immediately following your old impulse to avoid and flee, try instead to cautiously stay in contact with what frightens you, while practicing your skill at fear management.

You Can Function Well with High Levels of Anxiety. Try not to be so hard on yourself, nor so perfectionistic. You can function well, although somewhat less efficiently, even with high levels of anxiety. You are not likely to scream, faint, or do the embarrassing, outrageous, or dangerous things you sometimes picture in your mind. Remember that anxiety is disturbing but not dangerous. Take comfort in the fact that while you may be feeling shaky, inner anxiety is rarely apparent to others, and you probably appear poised and in charge of yourself.

Catch Your Disturbing Thoughts as They Occur. "What if this elevator gets stuck?" is a thought. A thought of this kind will produce fear levels because you are sensitized. Even though such thoughts may be fleeting and barely noticeable, they can startle and frighten you all the same. Try to identify such thoughts as they occur, before your fears become intense. Once

you recognize it as *only a thought*, you can begin to focus on comforting realities in the present, such as, "the elevator seems to be operating properly right now," or, "there is sufficient air to breathe in any elevator," or, "I have skills now to better manage my anxiety levels no matter what happens to the elevator."

Separate Thoughts from Feelings. Thought is internal speech-what we tell ourselves. Feelings are made up of sensations experienced in some part of the body. "I feel I can't breathe" is really a thought, which may follow the feelings of tension in your neck, throat, and chest. The *thought* "I feel I can't breathe" makes the *feelings* of tension *seem* dangerous, and starts a series of scary future thoughts. Instead, try to say to yourself something like, "Although I feel that I can't breathe, I know that this is just a thought that *seems* scary because of the tension in my body. I know that my breathing will take care of itself automatically, so I can concentrate on using my skills to help bring my anxiety down."

Find the "Trigger" to Your Panic Spiral. Despite what you might sometimes feel, your panics do not come from "out of the blue." In truth, they come from a rapid interplay between thoughts and feared feelings. It sometimes *seems* the panics come from "out of the blue" because you do not become aware of the spiral until your fear level gets very high. Try to learn to identify the "trigger" to this spiral, so you can begin to manage your fear when your number is a one or two, *before* it increases to a high level. It is much easier to turn off this fear spiral at low levels than at high levels.

Stay inside yourself. Your tendency may be to think for others, to imagine how they perceive you. If you find that you are "looking" at yourself through the eyes of others around you, it is a sign that you are getting outside of yourself. Try to pay attention to how others look to you, and not to how you might look to them. Try not to imagine what they are thinking of you. Chances are you are much more critical of yourself than anyone else would be.

Remember to Take Care of Yourself. Define and limit your job. Don't try to manage the whole world. That will only exhaust you, as well increase your feeling of being overwhelmed. If it's your job to be a passenger, stop flying the plane or driving the bus. Let the pilot take care of the plane, and let the driver take care of the bus. Your job is to take care of yourself. Make yourself comfortable, monitor your anxiety level, and do manageable things in the present.