



Supporting Young People to Take Charge of Their Mental Health

Anxiety

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is the feeling of intense fear and panic inside us. Most people will feel anxious when faced with difficult and stressful situations in life, such as exams at school – it is a perfectly understandable and common reaction. Often, once a stressful period of time comes to an end, we feel calmer and less anxious again. But sometimes these painful emotions continue, and we may find ourselves feeling greater levels of fear and panic more often than other people. At this point they may develop into anxiety disorders. Anxiety tends to be constant, whereas stress comes and goes.

Typically, anxiety disorders present themselves in one of three ways:-

- Generalised panic disorder (GAD) – we will likely feel anxious most of the time and find it heavily impacts our day-to-day lives
- Panic attacks – We may suffer with unpredictable and very intense attacks of anxiety, with feelings coming on suddenly and reaching a peak within ten minutes. Physical symptoms are very common when suffering a panic attack, like feeling short of breath, having a racing heart beat and chest pains, and feeling like we are going to die, making them very frightening
- Phobias - When we suffer phobias our anxiety tends to be focussed on one particular issue. It might not seem like something to be feared by other people, but we can still be anxious and nervous about it, causing us to actively avoid it. Types of phobia include agoraphobia (a fear of going outside and in crowds), emetophobia (fear of vomit or vomiting), and social phobia (fear of meeting new people).

What causes anxiety?

Anxiety can be caused by several factors including:

- individual family history
- our genes
- suffering from pre-existing physical or mental health problems

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- suffering trauma as children or in our teens

When does anxiety become a problem?

Anxiety becomes a problem when it begins to impact on our day-to-day lives, and it may stop us doing the things we once enjoyed. Anxiety can cause several debilitating emotional and physical symptoms that make coping with it a real battle for many of us. Some to look out for are:

- feeling worried all the time
- we may be unable to concentrate
- feeling excessively tired
- being really irritable with others
- sleeping poorly
- feeling increasingly depressed
- loss of appetite
- actively avoiding things that make us anxious
- overwhelming need to seek reassurance from others and feeling dependant on them

Many of us who suffer with anxiety find it crippling and this can make us feel ashamed that we are 'unable to cope'. In reality there is nothing to be ashamed of, but this way of thinking leads many of us to try and hide our anxiety from those around us, meaning we can become very isolated.

Techniques to help manage anxiety

Avoidance is a common coping strategy for those of us who suffer from anxiety; whilst we might feel this protects us, the truth is it only serves to increase our fear, creating a vicious cycle from which it's hard to break free. Therefore, however hard it might feel, learning to face our fears gradually will give us the most benefit in the long term:

- Taking up a new class or hobby gives us goals to aim for and takes us out of our comfort zone – this can have a positive effect on our self-esteem and confidence. Some options include self-defence classes, dance lessons, creative writing courses or team sports

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- Deep breathing and relaxation techniques, whilst they might make us feel a little selfconscious, can help us regain some control so that we feel less like we are being ruled by our anxiety – books, CD's and courses are available widely in shops, schools and public libraries and online
- Exercise is great for us all, and especially beneficial if we are experiencing a difficult time emotionally because it releases feel-good chemicals, called endorphins, in our brains, is a healthy distraction, can increase our social interaction with other people and boosts confidence – an excellent and largely free coping strategy
- Complementary therapies can be helpful for those of us suffering from anxiety because they can help focus and relax our busy minds. Some good examples to try are yoga and meditation.

Getting further help

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, our anxiety can overwhelm us and we need more help with managing it than just dealing with it alone. We can:

- talk to a trusted friend/parent/carer or teacher
- speak to our doctor about our feelings
- be referred for counselling or other appropriate treatments – counselling is confidential and you'll work with a trained counsellor to look at your issues and work through them in your own time and in a safe environment. No one needs to know you attending counselling if you don't wish them to.

How can No5 help?

Learning to effectively channel anxieties can make life feel much more manageable and much less fearful. Severe anxiety can lead to depression and physical health problems. These can become longer-term issues so it is important to talk to somebody about it if things are becoming too much to handle. Here at No5 we offer free, impartial and confidential support to young people aged 11-25. Come and talk to us – counselling is about listening to, and helping YOU to work through your problems and find more effective ways of dealing with life's issues, in a caring, trusting environment

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