

Understanding Anxiety Disorders

The blog on our website (same title) has more information, especially in links-go to carnamentalwellness.org/blog

Definitions

Anxiety itself, like the kind you might feel right before a test or a big public speech, is entirely okay and a normal part of life that doesn't necessarily require a response such as a therapist or medications. However, anxiety *disorders* are very real and all too common, and must involve out-of-proportion fear or worry which hinders the person's ability to function normally.

Here's a basic overview of several different types of anxiety disorders:

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

- persistent and excessive worry that interferes with daily activities
- may be accompanied by physical symptoms, such as restlessness, feeling on edge or easily fatigued, difficulty concentrating, muscle tension, or problems sleeping
- often the worries focus on everyday things such as job responsibilities, family health, or minor matters such as chores, car repairs, or appointments

Panic Disorder

- the core symptom is recurrent panic attacks, an overwhelming combination of physical and psychological distress
- symptoms of panic attacks include:

- Palpitations, pounding heart, or rapid heart rate
- Sweating
- Trembling or shaking
- Feeling of shortness of breath or smothering sensations
- Chest pain
- Feeling dizzy, light-headed, or faint
- Feeling of choking
- Numbness or tingling
- Chills or hot flashes
- Nausea or abdominal pains
- Feeling detached
- Fear of losing control
- Fear of dying

Panic attacks may be expected, such as a response to a feared object, or unexpected, apparently occurring for no reason, and they may occur with other mental disorders such as depression or PTSD.

Phobias, Specific Phobia

- excessive and persistent fear of a specific object, situation, or activity that is generally not harmful. Patients know their fear is excessive, but they can't overcome it.
- fears cause such distress that some people go to extreme lengths to avoid what they fear
- Examples are public speaking, fear of flying, or fear of spiders

Agoraphobia

- fear of being in situations where escape may be difficult or embarrassing, or help might not be available in the event of panic symptoms
- fear is out of proportion to the actual situation and lasts generally six months or more and causes problems in functioning
- The individual actively avoids the situation, requires a companion, or endures with intense fear or anxiety.
- A person with agoraphobia experiences this fear in two or more of the following situations:
 - Using public transportation
 - Being in open spaces
 - Being in enclosed places
 - Standing in line or being in a crowd
 - Being outside the home alone

Social Anxiety Disorder (previously called social phobia)

- significant anxiety and discomfort about being embarrassed, humiliated, rejected, or looked down on in social interactions
- Individuals will try to avoid the situation or endure it with great anxiety (such as public speaking, meeting new people, or eating/drinking in public)
- causes problems with daily functioning and lasts at least six months.

Separation Anxiety Disorder

- excessive fear or anxiety about separation from those with whom he or she is attached
- the feeling is beyond what is appropriate for the person's age, persists at least four weeks in children and six months in adults, and causes problems functioning
- may cause persistent worry about losing the person closest to him or her, reluctance or refusal to go out or sleep away from home or without that person, or nightmares about separation
- Physical symptoms of distress often develop in childhood, but symptoms can carry through adulthood. (All of the above is APA)

Statistics

"In any given year the estimated percent of U.S. adults with various anxiety disorders are:

- *specific phobia: 8% to 12%*
- *social anxiety disorder: 7%*
- *panic disorder: 2% - 3%*
- *agoraphobia: 1-2.9% in adolescents and adults*
- *generalized anxiety disorder: 2%*
- *separation anxiety disorder: 0.9% - 1.9%*

Women are more likely than men to experience anxiety disorders." (APA)

7% of children aged 3-17, and 10% of children aged 12-17, have diagnosed anxiety.

38% of these children also have behavioral problems, and 32% also have depression.
(CDC)

What to do if you are feeling these things:

- DON'T self-diagnose (decide by yourself that these apply to you and you are therefore depressed);

Instead, seek help from the resources in our hotlines packet on our website

Momentary help:

- Check out our "Meditation" blog/packet

- "Emotion, which is suffering, ceases to be suffering as soon as we form a clear and precise picture of it." (Frankl 74) - Use the emotion wheel, pictured below (we suggest printing it out if you'd like), whenever you're feeling a certain way. Instead of just saying "I feel sad", identify a specific adjective that describes how you're feeling, such as "empty" or "isolated". Research shows that identifying emotions is also imperative to dealing with stress. Try to make this a habit every time you're feeling any intense emotion.

