



ANXIETY

ANXIETY IN THE WORKPLACE

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK 2023

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What is “Anxiety”?

You’ve probably heard the term “anxiety disorder” many times, but what does it actually mean? Anxiety disorders are common mental health issues defined by persistent and excessive feelings of worry and fear. Whilst for many people, occasional feelings of anxiety can actually be beneficial, perhaps incentivizing them to study for that upcoming exam or prepare for that job interview; for those with anxiety disorders, symptoms such as panic, rumination and disassociation can have a debilitating impact on the person’s daily life.

Anxiety disorders are reported to be the most common mental health issue worldwide, with the World Health Organisation reporting that approximately 1 in 13 people have been diagnosed. Moreover, a recent Workplace Health Report found that 60% of UK employees are experiencing concerningly high levels of anxiety, whilst anxiety, stress and depression account for more than half of long-term absences from work.

Symptoms of Anxiety Disorders:

The term “anxiety disorder” encompasses a diverse range of anxiety conditions, including those detailed below. As a result, anxiety can manifest differently depending on the condition and the individual. However, common symptoms of anxiety disorders may include:

Psychological symptoms:

- Feeling persistently worried or nervous
- Low mood
- Difficulty sleeping
- Inability to concentrate
- Feeling consistently on edge or unable to relax
- Needing reassurance from others
- Experiencing a sense of impending danger
- Excessive concern about the opinions and judgement of others
- Derealisation: a form of disassociation whereby you feel disconnected from the world around you
- Depersonalisation: a form of disassociation where you feel disconnected from yourself

Physical Symptoms:

- Increased heart rate and/or heart palpitations
- Fast, shallow breathing or hyperventilation
- Nausea
- Lack of appetite
- Excessive urination
- Headaches
- Gastrointestinal issues
- Fatigue



What are the most common types of anxiety?

There are many different anxiety disorders, below we briefly outline a few of the most common:

Generalised Anxiety Disorder: GAD is thought to be the most common anxiety disorder and is defined by persistent and immoderate worry about a variation of factors, rather than one specific trigger.

Panic Disorder: Panic Disorder is defined by recurrent panic attacks whereby your body experiences severe psychological and physical symptoms in response to fear, often occurring unexpectedly. Panic attacks can cause symptoms such as shaking, hyperventilation, nausea, heart palpitations and dizziness. Whilst panic attacks can feel immobilizing, they are not physically dangerous.

Social Anxiety Disorder: Social anxiety pertains to a severe fear before, during and after certain social situations. An individual with social anxiety disorder may worry about being laughed at, humiliated or judged in front of others and may feel high levels of panic when in large groups, around those they don't know well or in unfamiliar social situations.

Phobias: Phobias cause individuals to experience excessive fear about a situation, creature, place or object. Whilst many people experience mild fear of things such as spiders or heights, those with clinical phobias feel an overwhelming need to avoid all contact with the source of their anxiety in order to prevent panic. The most common phobias include claustrophobia (fear of enclosed spaces), emetophobia (fear of vomiting), arachnophobia (fear of spiders) and acrophobia (fear of heights).

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder: OCD is defined by two primary symptoms- obsessions and compulsions. Obsessions are repeated, unwelcome and often distressing thoughts, images and urges which can cause severe anxiety. Compulsions are repetitive activities performed to reduce the anxiety invoked by the compulsion- for example, repeatedly checking that a door is locked or repeating a specific phrase internally.

Anxiety at Work:

For many people, work serves as a considerable trigger that sparks symptoms of anxiety. You may find yourself excessively worrying about your perceived performance, burnt out by an excessively demanding schedule or overwhelmed by constant social situations posed by meetings and coworker conversations. You may find yourself struggling to focus, freezing up in meetings, fighting physical symptoms of anxiety, dreading the workday or even experiencing panic attacks related to work.

Talking about mental health at work isn't always easy. A study by CIPD revealed that 85% of employees still believe that there is a stigma attached to discussing mental health at work, whilst 58% wouldn't feel comfortable discussing mental ill-health with their manager. It's common to worry about how this conversation may impact your working relationships or career growth. Yet creating an open dialogue about your mental health with your manager can be vital in ensuring that you have the support needed to thrive inside and outside of the workplace. We've compiled three tips to make tackling the taboo around workplace mental health a little easier:



1.)Decide who you want to tell and how much information you want to give. It's entirely up to you how much information you want to disclose and to whom. For instance, you may not wish to share the personal circumstances which have exacerbated your mental health concerns, but do need your workplace to know how your mental health is impacting your working life. Similarly, you may wish to tell the human resources department about your health, but do not wish for this to be discussed with your supervisor or colleagues.

2.)Think about support you may need. In order to ensure your employer can best support you with your mental health, it can be useful to think about measures that may be helpful to you at this time. Maybe you need to adjust your working hours or reduce your workload? Perhaps remote working may be beneficial or you're wondering how to access professional support? Many companies implement employee assistance programs (EAPs) which outline available resources to support employee wellbeing. It's also okay if you don't know what help you need right now. Try to be as honest as possible with your employer about the areas you're struggling with so that they can help you strategize suitable support.

3.)Know your rights. The Equality Act (2010) protects disabled people, including those with a mental illness, from unfair treatment. A mental illness is considered a disability when it has had a long-term impact on your normal day-to-day activity. In this instance, your employer has a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments for you to avoid disadvantage. These adjustments may include changes to your work environment, time off for treatment or changes to working hours. To find out more about the Equality Act (2010) visit: <https://www.gov.uk/when-mental-health-condition-becomes-disability>

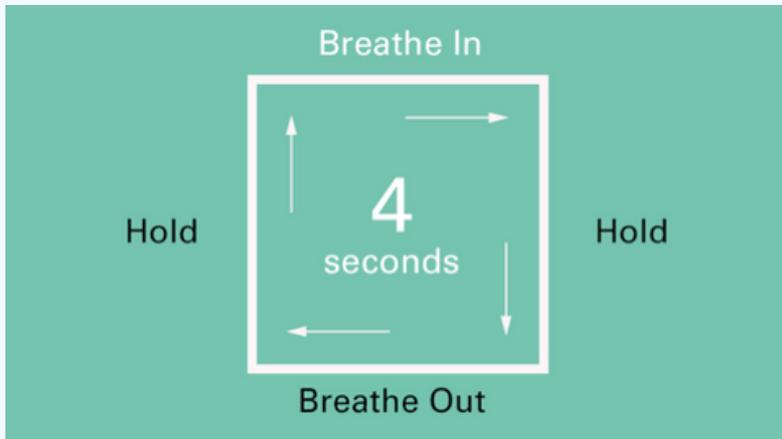
Coping Skills to Manage Anxiety at Work:

When managing your anxiety, both inside and outside of the workplace, it's useful to have a collection of evidence-based tools that you can call on when you begin to feel your panic levels rise. We've compiled a list of coping strategies, based on cognitive behavioral science, which can help you to take control of your anxiety levels and remain present in the current moment:

1.)Breathing Exercises.

When we're anxious, our sympathetic nervous system kicks into fight-flight-mode, often leading us to experience physical symptoms of panic including shallow breathing or a racing heart. Deep breathing and breath control enables us to combat this response and signals to your brain that there is no danger present. Breathing exercises are not only effective, but can be implemented at any time or in any place.

Box breathing allows you to regulate your breathing and heartrate by inhaling for 4 counts, keeping your lungs full for 4 counts, exhaling for 4 counts and allowing your lungs to remain empty for 4 counts. This process is then repeated until you feel an increased sense of control over your anxiety levels.



1.)Challenging Irrational Thoughts

Anxiety can make even the most irrational thoughts feel very believable. For example, the thought “I’ll perform terribly in this meeting” may lack evidence but still significantly affect how you feel. The next time you notice an anxious thought creep in, ask yourself “what evidence do I have to support this thought?” and “what evidence do I have to dispute this thought?”. You may also want to question the thoughts that add to your anxiety by asking yourself “Is my thought based on facts or feelings?”, “What’s most likely to happen?” or “What would I tell a friend if they were experiencing the same thoughts?”.

2.)Create an after-work routine.

Dealing with anxiety can be challenging and often exhausting. You may have had to contend with anxious thoughts all day or find yourself bringing work worries home with you. Creating an after work routine enables you to process the challenges of the day, recognise your achievements throughout the day and allows your body to release some of the stress that has built over the previous hours. We’d encourage you to turn off your phone or silence your notifications during this routine to prevent becoming distracted by work-related stressors. The perfect after-work routine will look different for everyone however try to identify activities which enable both your mind and body to feel restful. Here are a few ideas you may wish to try:

-Journaling: Journaling is a great way to process the difficulties of the day and begin to recognise the things you have achieved and are grateful for. Try the journal prompt “What three things am I proud of today and what is one thing I can do to look after myself tomorrow?”.

-Meditation: Research illustrates that 60% of people notice a decrease in anxiety following meditation and 83% of people experienced an increase in sleep quality and duration after meditation. Apps such as “Headspace” and “Calm” are a great place to start or you can utilize free platforms such as Youtube for a variation of guided videos.

-Connect with others: Whether you live alone or in a busy family home, it’s often easy to go through the day without having a meaningful and intentional conversation with others. Try to schedule in time to speak to a friend or family member in the evening (either in person or over the phone) to reflect on each person’s day together. Studies have shown that regular social support helps to alleviate anxiety, improve emotional regulation and increases resilience to stressors.



For more information:

Reducing the stigma around anxiety in the workplace can often feel daunting. You don't have to do that work alone.

AMH Works aims to break down the taboo surrounding workplace mental health and promote employee wellbeing through specialized workplace mental health training. Qualified trainers deliver a range of prevention and early intervention workshops using best practice models in wellbeing to promote conversations and support for mental-ill health at work. Our training programmes include:

Men's Mental Health and Personal Resilience discusses the unique challenges and barriers men face in managing their mental health. This course utilizes evidence based strategies to build resilience, combat stress and promote positive mental health.

Mindful Manager equips managers with skills, knowledge and confidence to address employee mental ill-health in the workplace and proactively contribute to the development of a healthy, resilient workplace.

Mental Health Awareness develops an understanding of mental ill-health and the skills needed to effectively and sensitively support employee and personal well-being.

Stress Awareness identifies common stressors that impact on an individual and provides practical advice on how to reduce the negative effect of these.

Personal Resilience focuses on how individuals can improve their own wellbeing and increase resilience, as well as introducing practical tools and strategies which provide participants with the skills and ability to cope with everyday life and work pressures as well as significant life events.

Burnout & Rest identifies the causes and stages of burnout, raising awareness of preventative approaches to avoid burnout and ways we can effectively incorporate rest into our routines.

Safetalk will prepare you to identify persons with thoughts of suicide and connect them to suicide first-aid resources.

Mental Health First Aid enhances understanding of mental ill-health and develops skills, motivation, knowledge and confidence in offering help to individuals with acute mental ill-health.

Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) will enable people in a position of trust to recognise risk and learn how to intervene to prevent the immediate risk of suicide.