

# Working Together

NEWSLETTER

June 2023

## Does the dread of a new workweek take over your weekends?

By Lauren Houston

Maybe you find your mood plummeting when Sunday evenings or Monday mornings roll around? Feelings of stress and anxiety take over your working days as you try to fathom how you'll get through a seemingly never-ending to-do list or tackle another daunting meeting.

You are not alone. Analyzing the prevalence and impact of workplace anxiety on UK employees, The Workplace Health Report revealed that 76% of employees experience moderate-high levels of workplace anxiety, with 73% stating that their stress and anxiety is primarily caused by their workload.

It is not always easy to tell whether you're experiencing workplace anxiety, or symptoms of an anxiety disorder. However, the former is most common when your worries and symptoms solely pertain to work.

For instance, on your days off you notice that your anxiety decreases. Other symptoms of workplace anxiety include:

- Feeling anxious in the mornings prior to work, but better in the evenings
- Experiencing physical symptoms, such as nausea or tense muscles, when talking about work or performing work tasks
- Struggling to maintain the motivation and focus to perform your duties
- Feeling overwhelmed frequently throughout the workweek



## Tactics for overcoming workplace anxiety:

### Identify your triggers

The triggers of workplace anxiety aren't always obvious. Instead, it may be helpful to record fluctuations in motivation, mood and anxiety throughout the working day. Doing so can help you to identify patterns and triggers, building a clearer picture of environmental factors which may lead you to feel overwhelmed. Once you understand what contributes to your workplace anxiety, you can begin to strategize which techniques may help to keep it at an even keel.



### Take micro-breaks

Once you are able to pin point the times at which your anxiety is higher, it can be useful to schedule in short breaks during these times to allow yourself to de-escalate anxiety. For example, prior to an anxiety-provoking meeting, you may find it helpful to spend 1-3 minutes practicing "box breathing". This breathing technique 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.

### Put your thoughts on trial

Catastrophizing is common in those who struggle with workplace anxiety. You may find yourself wondering if your boss' request for you to pop into their office this afternoon indicates your imminent dismissal. Or perhaps you envision yourself completely freezing up when presenting in an important meeting. Whilst these "what if" scenarios can feel daunting, it's important to remember that the worst case scenario is rarely the most likely scenario. To deescalate this anxiety and begin to rationalize your thoughts, it can be helpful to engage in an exercise known as a "thought trial". During a thought trial, you are encouraged to examine the evidence for and against your anxious thought. For instance you may ask:

- Has this worst case scenario ever happened to me before? What evidence do I have to support the belief that it will happen now? What evidence do I have against this belief?
- If a loved one was experiencing these anxious thoughts, what would I tell them?
- What is most likely to happen in this situation?

Putting your thoughts on trial provides an opportunity to disengage from emotional thinking and instead engage in rational thinking. If you find this exercise difficult at first, don't be discouraged-it takes practice! You may wish to carry a small notebook with you in order to implement this as a written activity.

### Be kind to your mind:

Anxious thoughts can be draining to deal with and often come alongside self-deprecation and self-criticism. In these moments, practice being kind and understanding towards your emotions.

You may start by simply labelling your emotions. For instance, "I'm feeling overwhelmed right now, and that's okay". You may then respond with an affirmation which enables you to feel grounded, calm and confident. Some people find it helpful to practice affirmations out loud, keep a list of helpful affirmations in their phone or start each workday with a new positive statement. Examples of positive affirmations include:

- "My best looks different every day and I am content with that"
- "My worth is not defined by my to-do list"
- "I can do anything, but I can't do everything"
- "I will let go of what I cannot change and do my best with what I can"
- "I am allowed to rest"

### Take 5

When you find yourself beginning to worry about upcoming deadlines or becoming anxious about your manager's perception of you, try the 5-4-3-2-1 technique to bring you back to the present moment. This technique simply involves taking a few moments to name:

5 things you can see

- 4 things you can hear
- 3 things you can feel
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

## Accessing support for your mental health

In some instances, you may find that you need further support to manage your mental health. If you notice symptoms such as trouble sleeping, low mood, anxiety, changes in appetite or an inability to enjoy daily tasks, you are not alone.

### Speak to your GP

When you talk to your GP about your mental health they'll listen, give you advice and introduce you to a mental health service they think will be most helpful to you. These services may come from your GP surgery, a large local health centre, a specialist mental health clinic or a hospital.

### Lifeline

A free 24/7 crisis response helpline service for those experiencing distress or despair. Lifeline is there to help 24 hours a day and can be contacted on: 0808 808 8000

### AMH New Life Counselling

Provides free, high quality counselling services across Greater Belfast. Further information can be found at: <https://www.amh.org.uk/new-life-counselling/>

Details of further support services and helplines can be found at: <https://helplinesni.com/>

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