



How to Cope with Anxiety

A Self Help Guide for
Students and Parents

Part One: Accepting Anxiety

We all hate being anxious. It's a horrible feeling, it feels overwhelmingly disturbing, and understandably, we try to keep it at bay by avoiding anything that might make us anxious, or by doing things that help us feel safer in those situations where we feel anxious.

IF YOU'RE NOT WILLING TO HAVE IT, YOU WILL.

Look at this sentence. What does it mean? "If I'm not willing to be anxious, I **will** be anxious?" What does that mean? Our mind might say:

"Hmmm. So if I'm not willing to be anxious, I will be anxious. I hate being anxious, so I guess I could give it a try. I'll try to be more willing to feel my anxiety so I won't be anxious"

Okay. But if you decide you could be willing to be anxious, in order to get rid of the anxiety, then *you're not really willing* to be anxious, and that will result in feeling more anxious!

Read it again!

It sounds weird, not right. Yet it seems that it's true. If you are only willing to feel anxiety because you hope that by being willing to feel it, it will reduce your anxiety, *then it cannot work*. That is not the same as being willing to feel your anxiety.

Anxiety is normal. We all feel it. We will all continue to feel it at times.

To help start practising willingness to accept anxiety:

- Notice when you start to feel the normal body response to unhelpful thoughts
- Don't struggle or fight with the feelings and thoughts, just let them be
- It will pass

JUST NOTICE - This is just a normal body response to unhelpful thoughts. It will pass.....

Part Two: Identifying Your Triggers

What or when are the times when you are more likely to get anxious? If you can see the patterns, then maybe you can predict that this may make you anxious and then actively do something different when you know this might happen.

- Certain places?
- Certain people?
- Anytime, anyplace?
- See certain things?
- Hear certain things?



Make a list of all of the things that have or are likely to make you anxious. These can be situations thoughts or feelings. Then rate how anxious they do/have made you feel on a scale of 1-5 (1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest).

List Of Things That May Trigger My Anxiety	Scale 1-5

Part Three: Doing Things Differently

Avoiding situations and using safety behaviours helps to maintain our anxiety over the long-term, then it makes sense that learning to confront it might be uncomfortable in the short-term, but will help us take control and helps us feel better over time.

Make a plan to gradually do the things you normally avoid. For instance if you normally avoid going out to big social events then start with a small event where you feel more comfortable, with few friends you feel comfortable with. Whilst it will feel uncomfortable, you will learn that you can enjoy these events, and that the anxious feeling does go away.



Make a hierarchy of fears. If you have a fear of particular types of places (e.g. lifts), then you could start by listing different particular places (smaller, bigger lifts, taller etc). You could start by standing next to a lift for a couple of minutes each day for a couple of weeks, then slowly build up to standing in the doorway with the doors open, then to getting in the lift without the doors closing, then to letting the doors close before opening them again, then to going up one floor etc. You can use breathing techniques or self-talk (challenging your unhelpful thoughts and repeating more realistic thoughts) to get you through these times.

Part Four: Learn How to STOPP

Notice when you start to feel the first signs and symptoms of anxiety and put the STOPP plan into place. If you catch the anxiety early and manage it you will start to change how you feel and prevent yourself from feeling completely overwhelmed by difficulties

Stop and Step Back

- Don't act immediately. Pause.



Take a Breath

- Notice your breath as you breathe in and out.



Observe

- What am I thinking about?
- What am I focusing on?
- What am I reaction to?
- What am I feeling in my body?



Pull Back: Put in some Perspective

- Zoom out!
- See the bigger picture
- Is this fact or opinion?
- Is there another way of looking at this?
- What would someone else say about it?
- How does this affect others?
- What advice would I give a friend in this situation?
- How important is this situation right now?



Practise what works

- Consider the consequences
- What's the BEST thing to do?
- Do what will help the most!

