

# FIVE Guidelines for Coping with Anxiety



I'm often asked by friends and family for steps to help them or their kids overcome anxiety. This is a great question, but hard for me to give general advise on. Overcoming anxiety is very personal and often elusive work. With that said, here's my best attempt to get your headed in the right direction.

## JUST A FEELING

Anxiety is a feeling. It is not possible to pick and choose what emotions we feel. Accept that feeling anxiety is a part of life. Peace and contentment are that much more satisfying knowing what the other end of the spectrum feels like. Maybe even start to look at the positives that come into your life because of anxiety (like motivating you to eat healthy, call the dentist or clean the bathroom).

## ANXIOUS ABOUT ANXIETY

Sometimes it is our very efforts to avoid feeling anxious that fuels our anxiety. Consider this. Are your attempts to avoid feeling anxiety causing more anxiety? Are you anxious about feeling anxious? If so, one way to stop this cycle is to identify and become comfortable with anxiety. I liken emotions to a wave in the ocean. It is much more enjoyable if we learn to "ride the wave" rather than fighting it!

## SELF-SOOTH

I spend a lot of time teaching my patients to self sooth. Is the voice in your head compassionate, nurturing and calming? If not, work on this. Watch and learn from others and maybe even find a mentor or therapist to learn from. Become a calming presence for yourself. There are lots of tips online now about self-compassion and self-care. Most of my clients who are new to self-soothing are really worried they will over-indulge; a therapist can be really helpful as you walk this line.

## ANXIETY CANNOT BE IGNORED

Anxious events are cumulative. Picture yourself like a cup of water—water is the stress in your life. If your day-to-day stress level is almost to the top of the glass, there is not much room to go before the cup is overflowing. One stressful incident and you are dripping everywhere. Work on lowering your daily stress level through proactive techniques. Build in meditation, healthy eating, exercise, journaling, regular bed times and therapy to your daily and weekly routine. This gives you room to handle the stressful events of the day.

## LETTING GO OF CONTROL

My last tip is to look at your relationship with control. I believe that specific anxieties are like a psychic leak in the finely crafted infrastructure of the fortress of control. There is a technique I use called "planned worrying". I tell my patients to plan a time to be anxious about life for about 10 minutes a day. This gives the emotions an "out", relieves pressure and the specific anxiety lessens.

I would recommend finding a professional therapist to help you work through your anxiety. Certainly, a trained therapist will speed up your healing process. The sooner you can make peace with anxiety, the sooner your anxiety will take its proper seat as just another feeling no less or more important than any other of your marvelous emotions!



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