

ANXIETY

Anxiety is a complex emotional state with far reaching effects on our behaviour. It can be manifested in four ways; in our thoughts, behaviour, physical and/or biological reactions, and our feelings.

Anxiety is often described as a vague fear of something threatening which can persist even in the absence of a specific threat. This feeling is very similar to fear except that fear is a realistic reaction to an actual threat.

So the main difference is that fear is a reaction to a real and specific danger, whereas anxiety usually does not have an obvious cause. It is this vagueness of anxiety that makes it so difficult to diagnose.

Not being able to explain why we feel as we do creates an extremely uncomfortable state.

We have all experienced anxiety at some time in our lives and it is more than likely that we will continue to experience it to some degree.

Therefore, to keep our reactions within normal bounds and ensure our wellbeing, it is important that we learn the most effective ways to cope with anxiety when it does occur.

Anxiety is not something you master; you learn to live with it - to cope with it. As long as we live, grow, strive, and remain '*open to the possibility of change*', there is going to be some anxiety involved - that's healthy!

HELPFUL COPING STRATEGIES

1. Self-acceptance

When you can accept yourself as you are right now and let go of all your self-criticisms, then you can direct all your energy towards growth and change.

2. Knowing your own body

Understanding what happens to you personally when you get tense and anxious. Where does anxiety show itself - in your thinking, in your muscles or in your general health (headaches, ulcers, back pain, stiff neck etc.)?

Look after your body because it is closely connected with your mind. Some people hold tension in their muscles - neck, shoulders, jaw, face, back etc. Planned physical activity, gentle or vigorous can help to keep your muscles free from unnecessary tension.

3. Meditation

Meditation is a relaxation technique that helps you to focus on your own inner awareness. It allows your mind to slow down and helps to bring your concentration into the present.

Anxiety and the stress that comes along with it, often happens because we are either thinking negative thoughts about the past or worrying about the future.

4. Breathing

When you are tense, your breathing becomes shallow and irregular; your heart rate often accelerates which can trigger all your anxiety-related responses. When you breathe deeply, more oxygen gets into your bloodstream and then into your muscles which will help your body to relax.

Breathing is the easiest of our physiological systems to control. If you can breathe the deep, slow breath inherent in relaxation, then you can trigger the rest of the characteristics of the relaxation response.