

# If I Have Anxiety, What do I Do?

## KEY TRIGGERS and HOW TO HELP

- Trigger: Avoidance
  - The limbic system interprets avoidance as confirmation of the threat
  - Avoiding the feeling increases the feeling
  - Both thoughts and actions
  - Procrastination vs laziness
- What We Can Do
  - Be open and honest about avoidance
  - Push through the anxious feeling. Feelings aren't dangerous!
  - Gradual or early exposure
- Trigger: Our Beliefs
  - It's not whether the threat is real, but what we believe is real
  - If we believe the threat is real, the limbic system strengthens the fight flight or freeze response
- What we Can Do
  - Don't trust our feelings/fears/impulses
  - Intentionally engage our executive function and focus on facts
  - Focus on what you know and believe, not what you feel
- Trigger: Cognitive Distortions
  - The brain rewires to over-exaggerate threats.
  - Overly negative expectations combined with a feeling of dread
  - It lies to you to protect you!
- What We Can Do
  - Recognize distortion patterns: Don't believe them!
  - Court Case: You judge the facts!
  - Choose our beliefs, don't feel them
  - Possible vs. Probable

## The Acceptance Approach

- Anxiety is Normal...particularly in a pandemic!
- Become comfortable with and accept uncertainty
- Hard things in life are expected...Trust yourself to overcome the challenges you will inevitably experience

### **Other Anxiety Triggers**

- Social Media
  - The Problems
  - Unrealistic Comparisons
  - More ambiguity and misunderstandings
  - Poor Social Support
  - Replacement of real-world interactions
- What You Can Do
  - Encourage and seek “real world” relationships
  - Recognize social media’s impact on anxiety and self-esteem
  - Limit exposure (both amount and type)

### **Other Anxiety Triggers**

- Expectations
  - Expectations that are too high
  - Expectations that don’t fit our gifts/personality
  - Expectation that emphasize our performance vs. our character
- What you can do
  - Failure is no longer a four-letter word...
  - Redefine success
  - Success becomes being mentally healthy, balanced, giving effort, etc..
  - Not about what you do, but who you are
- Communication Styles
  - We can unintentionally communicate stressfully
  - Emotionally, negatively, fearfully, with urgency
- What You can Do:
  - Learn how to communicate with someone who is anxious. Ask them!
  - Low emotion, low stress
  - Ask permission to discuss
  - Understand before you fix! Ask questions...

- What do you feel...what do you think
- “What are you afraid of happening?” “Why would that be so bad?”
- Negotiate, share control, reduce the “should”
- Help them find their own solution
  
- Influence of Others
  - Threat-oriented view of the world
  - Focus is on avoiding problems as primary coping strategy
  - Expectations=Anxiety Level
  - Unintentionally communicating lack of self-sufficiency
  - Too much help = “You are fragile”
  - Allowing/encouraging to avoid problems = “You can’t handle it”
  
- What You Can Do
  - Talk about the opportunities and potential positives to come
  - Less about avoiding threats, more about confidence in handling them
  - Parenting Goal: They CAN handle whatever challenges come

Final Thoughts...

Self-Help Anxiety Resources for Children, Adolescents and Adults: [anxietycanada.com](http://anxietycanada.com)

Treating anxiety is complex, and difficult to do on your own. If you or a family member is becoming dysfunctional in social, work, or school settings, or unable to enjoy life...consider professional help.