

# How to Support Someone With Anxiety



## What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is the body's natural response to stress. Everyone experiences anxiety from time to time, but chronic anxiety can interfere with your quality of life.

Anxiety feels different for everyone. It's a feeling of overwhelming fear or apprehension about what will happen next and happens to us all.

Anxiety symptoms can last for a long time, or come and go.

Most of us are used to a level of certainty, routine and predictability which gives us a sense of security. For people who live with anxiety the ongoing COVID-19 situation will be particularly difficult. That sense of security has been shaken in many ways.

## Things to Consider

If your client says they are feeling anxious, here are some ways you can support them over the telephone:

- Give the person space and time to talk.
- Call them by their name.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Listen carefully. Allow the person tell you how they feel.
- Keep calm and reassure the person as you listen.
- Be kind. Try to understand how they are feeling.
- Do not try to talk over the person - wait for a 'natural' break before speaking and pause, using silence, before you speak to slow down the pace of the conversation.

**NB. Always get help from someone more experienced if you need it.**

If the person is very anxious, suggest a breathing exercise before you start.

### Say this:

**"Focus on your breath in and out. Notice how your body moves as you breathe. Breathe in through your nose and out through your nose x 3 times. Breathe in your nose hold for 3 seconds and then breathe out through your mouth."**

If the person is already receiving mental health care, they should contact their mental health team to discuss how care will continue, and to update their safety and care plans.

### Say this:

**"Tell me how you are feeling. I would like to understand better so I can help you."**

(This is important. Allow the person time to talk and this will give them relief from the feelings they are holding on to)

**“Thank you for sharing that with me. So you feel anxious/lonely/stressed...”**

(Let them know you are actively listening by repeating back key points of what they say)

**“If I have missed anything please tell me.”**

(Pause)

**“It sounds like you're having a tough time.”**

(Using empathy like this will validate the person's experience, helping them feel understood. Remember to pause for a few seconds after each statement)

**“In the past when you felt like this what did you do to?”**

(This coaching tool is useful for helping people find their own solutions and resources )

**“How do you feel about trying those things again?”**

(Asking ‘open’ questions – where the answers can’t be yes or no – is a good way to stimulate constructive conversation)

If the person mentions they used previously substances to calm down emphasise that you want them to focus on developing healthy strategies that will be to their long-term benefit

**“It’s perfectly natural to feel a little unsettled. However, there are some practical steps you can take”**

(Refer to section 4, pages 6-7 in Resource Pack “Providing Effective Emotional Wellbeing Support for People Who are Self-Isolating”).

**“I hope this has helped. Would you like me to send you some further information on support services and advice on managing anxiety?”**

(Refer to section 4, page 9-11 in resource pack “Providing Effective Emotional Wellbeing Support for People Who are Self-Isolating”)

If the person needs more help and self-care is not working for them, say this:

**"I am concerned about you and I think it would be good to link you with a local service who can help you better than I can. Can I have your permission to call (GP, health care professional, helpline such as Lifeline) and get them to call you back?"**

If the person is agreeable

**"Thank you (name). I will make the call and someone will call you back"**

**"I will check in with you again tomorrow. Is that OK with you?"**

## If someone is having a panic attack

If you are concerned that the person is in need of urgent medical attention, you must call emergency services on 999 immediately.

The person will be very frightened. Remain very calm, speak slowly and tell them this:

**"I think you are having a panic attack and I am going to try to help you".**

**"I am here for you"**

**"Can you sit down in a quiet place and breathe slowly and deeply in and out as I count?"** (you count to 10 very slowly)

**"How do you feel now?"**

Stay with them on the phone until they start to feel better.

You should never encourage someone to breathe into a paper bag during a panic attack. This isn't recommended and it might not be safe.

NB: It can be really challenging supporting someone who is anxious or panicking. Take care of yourself first so you can help others.