

What Anxiety Doesn't Want You to Know

Lisette Alder, MS, LMFT

Sharp Mesa Vista Hospital

I. What is Anxiety?

- a. Intense, excessive and painful uneasiness of the mind and body over a possible or impending ill.
- b. Two criteria must be met for anxiety to present:
 - i. Overestimation of perceived danger
 1. Thinking someone will be mad at me, someone won't like me, someone will think negatively about me, I won't get through this, I won't be enough
 - ii. Underestimation of perceived control
 1. There is nothing I can do about it, it is all outside of my control, I wish this wasn't happening
 - iii. We believe there is danger and that we cannot cope with it

II. Causes of Anxiety

- a. Internal Factors: negative thoughts, avoidance, low self-esteem
- b. External factors: work problems, interpersonal relationships, major life changes

III. Symptoms of Anxiety

Emotional	Physical	Cognitive	Behavioral
Nervous Afraid Overwhelmed Lonely	Restless Chest pains Increased HR GI Distress Shortness of breath Lightheaded Dizzy Vertigo Sweating Cold Tingling	Narrow focus Attention is self-focused Catastrophizing Exaggeration Overgeneralization Filtering (ignoring positives and magnifying negatives) Ruminating Obsessing Perseverate	Avoidance (escape, running away, smoke, drink, oversleep) Procrastinate Perfectionism Attempt to control Overeat Isolate Withdraw

IV. What is the purpose or function of anxiety?

- a. Protection
- b. Motivation
 - i. Anxiety tells us we need to act, to get safe or prepared. When we feel anxious to a helpful level and act, we get prepared, and the anxiety diminishes
- c. Communicate with ourselves
 - i. Anxiety provides us with information about situations as a signal
 - ii. "Listen to your gut"

- d. Communicate with others
 - i. A source of connection
- V. Action urge of anxiety
 - a. Action urge: Innate, biologically hardwired response, not necessarily what you want to do
 - i. Automatic — not a choice
 - ii. How you respond behaviorally is a choice
 - b. Avoid or procrastinate
 - i. Avoid by withdrawing, isolating or escaping
 - ii. Procrastinate by distraction
- VI. What Makes Anxiety Worse
 - a. Perfectionism
 - i. What will people think? What am I afraid of?
 - ii. If I look perfect, live perfect, I can avoid criticism, blame or ridicule
 - iii. “We struggle with perfectionism in areas we feel most vulnerable to shame.”- Brene Brown
 - b. Shame
 - i. “Intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore, unworthy of love and belonging.”- Brene Brown
 - ii. You can’t really love yourself yet. You’re not _____ enough.
 - c. Disconnection
 - i. “How we deal with shame is by disconnecting; some of us move away by silencing ourselves. Some of us move towards by seeking to people-please, and some of us move against by being aggressive.”- Dr. Hartling
- VII. How to Manage Anxiety
 - a. Our goal is not to get rid of anxiety; we want to learn how to not be afraid of it.
 - i. We can look at anxiety as a stop light with the red level at the top, yellow in the middle, and green at the bottom — each level requiring a different approach.
 - 1. Green and yellow zone (1-6): Helpful levels signaling to lower
 - a. Active relaxation and mindfulness: diaphragmatic breathing, progressive muscle relaxation (PMR), guided imagery
 - b. Cognitive techniques — What control do you have in the situation?
 - c. Exposure
 - 2. Red zone (7-10): Unhelpful high levels of anxiety
 - a. Distraction: 54321, name game, ABC game, serial 7’s, rainbow game
 - b. Show up as you are with one trustworthy person
 - i. Who has earned the right to hear my story?
 - c. Join Communities — Find support groups or social activities that you enjoy
 - d. Professional Consultation — Seek help from a licensed clinician if needed