



STUYVESANT HIGH SCHOOL'S SPARK PROGRAM



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UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY DISORDERS

I. What Is Anxiety?

- **Anxiety is a normal reaction to stress.** It helps one deal with a tense situation **i.e.** in the office, studying hard for an exam, keeping focus on an important speech etc. In general, **it helps one cope. But when anxiety becomes an excessive, irrational dread** of everyday situations, it has become **a disabling disorder.**

Major Types of Anxiety Disorders

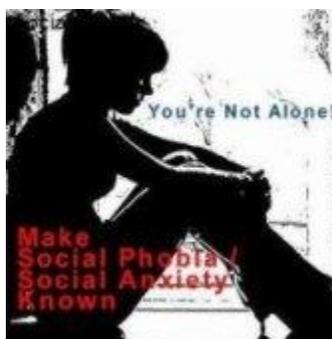
- (1) **Generalized Anxiety Disorder:** GAD is an anxiety disorder characterized by chronic anxiety, exaggerated worry and tension, even when there is little or nothing to provoke it.
- (2) **Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder:** OCD is an anxiety disorder and is characterized by recurrent, unwanted thoughts (obsessions), and/or repetitive behaviors (compulsions). **Repetitive behavior** such as hand washing, counting, checking or cleaning are often performed with the hope of preventing obsessive thoughts or making them go away. Performing these so-called “rituals,” however, provides only temporary relief and not performing them markedly increases anxiety.
- (3) **Panic Disorder:** Panic disorder is an anxiety disorder and is characterized by unexpected and repeated episodes of intense fear accompanied by physical symptoms that may include chest pain, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness or abdominal distress.
- (4) **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder:** PTSD is an anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to a terrifying event or ordeal in which grave physical harm occurred or was threatened. Traumatic events that may trigger PTSD include violent personal assaults, natural or human – caused disasters, accidents, or military combat.
- (5) **Social Anxiety or Social Phobia:** Social Anxiety, or Social Phobia Disorder, is an anxiety disorder characterized by overwhelming anxiety and excessive self-consciousness in everyday social situations. Social phobia can be limited to only one type of situation — such as a fear of speaking in formal or informal situations, or eating or drinking in front of others — or, in its most severe form, may be so broad that a person experiences symptoms almost anytime they are around other people

II. Signs & Symptoms

- (1) **Generalized Anxiety Disorder:** Fatigue, headaches, hot flashes, irritability, muscle aches, muscle tension, difficulty swallowing, sweating, trembling and twitching.
- (2) **Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder:** Fear of contamination (germs/dirt); fear of causing harm to self or others; superstitions (lucky or unlucky). repeatedly checking things over and over; order and symmetry etc.
- (3) **Panic Disorder:** Individuals with panic disorder have feelings of terror that strike suddenly and repeatedly with no warning. Heart pounding, difficulty breathing, profuse sweating, weak, faint or dizzy, hot/cold flashes, body numbness and tingling sensations and fear of dying to name a few.



- (4) **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder:** People with PTSD have persistent frightening thoughts and memories of their ordeal and feel emotionally numb, especially with people they were once close to. They may experience sleep problems, feel numb or detached, or be easily startled.
- (5) **Social Anxiety or Social Phobia:** People with social phobia have a persistent, intense, and chronic fear of being watched and judged by others and being embarrassed or humiliated by their own actions. Their fear may be so severe that it interferes with work or school, and other ordinary activities. Physical symptoms often accompany the intense anxiety of social phobia and include blushing, profuse sweating, trembling, nausea, and difficulty talking.



III. Coping Mechanisms

1. **Dealing With Your Anxiety:** If your anxiety is a direct result of lack of preparation, consider it a normal, rational reaction. **However,** if you are adequately prepared but still panic, “blank out,” and/or overreact, your reaction is not rational. While both of these anxieties may be considered normal (anyone can have them) it is certainly helpful to know how to overcome their effects.
2. **Preparation Can Help:** Preparation is the best way to minimize rationale anxiety. **Consider the following:**
 - **Avoid “cramming” for a test.** Trying to master a semester’s worth of material the day before the test is a poor way to learn and can easily produce anxiety. This is not the time to try to learn a great deal of material.
 - **When studying for the test,** ask yourself what questions may be asked and try to answer them by integrating ideas from lectures, notes, texts, readings etc.
3. **Changing Your Attitude:** Improving your perspective or approach can actually help you enjoy studying and may improve your performance. Don’t overplay the importance of a grade – it is not a reflection of your self-worth nor does it predict your future success. **Some suggestions:**
 - **Remind yourself** that the most reasonable expectation is to try and show as much of what you know.
 - **Remind yourself** that a test is only a test (there will be others).
 - **Avoid thinking of yourself** in irrational, all-or-nothing terms.
 - **Reward yourself** after a test or completed project.
4. **Don’t Forget The Basics:** Individuals tend to neglect basic biological, emotional and social needs. To do your best, you must attend to these needs.

IV. Some Useful Resources

- **Anxiety & Panic Attacks**
www.anxietypanic.com
- **Anxiety & Panic Disorder Guide**
www.webmd.com
- **Anxiety Disorders Association**
www.adaa.org
- **Social Anxiety Disorder**
www.mayoclinic.com