

Anxiety Management Tips

The prevalence of anxiety issues is in about 40 % of the population. Most people keep it to themselves and suffer in silence. At extreme levels anxiety is debilitating and challenging to deal with on your own.

When an anxiety event occurs the following happens;

- Thoughts can race and are very difficult to control.
- The amygdala signals the adrenal gland to release protective hormones called Cortisol, which moves blood away from rational brain.
- This hormone is released to the bloodstream in 8 milliseconds before the rational brain can take control.
- Cortisol blocks the rational brain (higher order thinking) from processing more positive thoughts.
- Anxiety at this level is an extreme physiological fear response to imagined thoughts. The fear is real.
- Breathing becomes shallow, oxygen levels are reduced in the blood stream, making it very hard for the person to regain control.
- Heart rate increases, jitters, shaking, nausea, cramping, and complete panic at extreme levels. This is due to very high levels of cortisol.

What not to do;

- Telling someone suffering an anxiety attack to “get a grip” won’t work because they have no access to rational thought. Anxiety is happening before conscious thought can be employed.
- Just telling them “you will be fine” is nice, but again it won’t relieve the symptoms.
- Don’t tell them its all in your head, the emotional response is very real.

What to do;

- Try and get the person’s attention and get them to take deep breathes. Increasing breathing establishes blood flow to Left pre-frontal cortex and rational thought.
- Distraction is good, removing the anxiety provoking stimulus until the the cortisol levels return to normal levels.
- Try and get them in the present moment, remind them where they are and it is safe, use a basic rational activity, walk with them, do this dishes etc... slowly the hormones levels will drop and the person will start to feel better.
- Offer reassurance, get them thinking about what they want to do next.
- Distraction is useful to avoid the anxiety provoking thoughts.

To prevent anxiety;

Have a plan to deal with anxiety provoking stimulus, see a therapist to learn thought challenging methods, gradual exposure while the person stays in rational thought allows the emotional brain to recode the anxiety provoking stimulus. Music, Audio books are an effective distraction technique which helps manage anxiety levels.

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