



# the MIND reader

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## Overcoming Your Worst Fears

### Overview of Common Anxiety-Related Disorders

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#### GENERALIZED ANXIETY

Involves recurring fears or worries, such as about health or finances, and a frequent and persistent sense that something bad is just about to happen. Symptoms include chronic worry/anxiety, feeling keyed up, easily fatigued, difficulty concentrating, irritability, and poor sleep.

#### PANIC DISORDER

Involves sudden, intense and unprovoked feelings of terror and dread. Symptoms include chronic panic attacks as well as strong fear about when and where the next panic attack will occur, restrict life activities.

#### SOCIAL PHOBIA

Involves intense anxiety about social situations where there may be scrutiny by others, such as meetings with unfamiliar people, having conversations, and performing in front of others.

(regardless of value) due to perceived need to save and distress associated with getting rid of them. Possessions accumulate to a point that compromises intended use and causes significant impairment in areas of life.

#### OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD)

Persistent, uncontrollable and unwanted feelings or thoughts (obsessions) and routines or rituals (compulsions) which are used to try to prevent or stop anxiety. Examples of common compulsions include washing hands or cleaning house excessively for fear of germs, or checking work repeatedly for errors.

#### SPECIFIC PHOBIAS

Involves intense fears about certain objects or situations. Specific phobias may involve things such as encountering certain animals and flying in airplanes. (Continued on page 4)

#### HOARDING

Persistent difficulty discarding possessions

*Nothing in the affairs of men is worthy of great anxiety.*  
- Plato

### IN NEXT ISSUE:

#### INTELLIGENCE:

What is it and what does it mean?

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## “CONTROLLING” Your Anxiety By Mark Russell

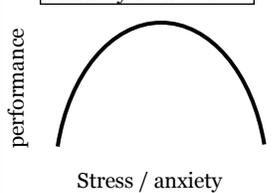


Control is one of those intangible concepts that you cannot quite put your finger on when you have it but you become acutely aware when it is missing from the picture. In terms of anxiety, virtually nothing can increase your heart rate or feed those racing thoughts like feeling out of control. How, then, do you counter those feelings when you cannot control the situation? If you are truly out of control in a situation, then you have to consider what you *can* control. While a situation may be unpleasant or difficult, how we choose to respond remains within our control. Learning to identify and regulate our emotions can return a sense of self-control in the midst of an out-of-control situation. Events may elicit certain emotional responses: anger, joy, sadness, etc. The initial reaction may be unconscious and feel inflicted upon us. However, we can choose what we do with that

emotional response and how it impacts us. If this is a new concept, allow yourself time to learn. Pay attention to your thoughts and emotions. Recognize when an emotion is brought on by a situation. At this point, you have a choice. Will this emotional response feed your anxiety or help calm it? If it is helpful, let it continue. If not, know that you can choose to not let it control you. Emotions belong to you, not vice versa. The world may feel like it is falling apart, but you can choose to not let your emotions get the better of you.

\*\* This is not typically a simple task to learn, so seeking help with this is very common!! \*\*

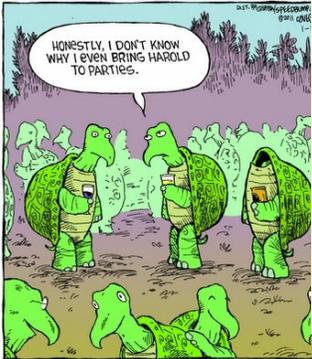
Anxiety Bell Curve



If you ever took Psychology 101 in school, you might remember the “bell curve” of optimal anxiety. In a nutshell, too much or too little anxiety in a given situation leads to poorer performance, and a moderate level of anxiety helps to motivate performance. If you have a tendency to get too anxious, you probably are already aware that you need to find strategies to manage your anxiety. However if you don’t get any anxiety, then you may actually not be maximizing your potential. I would advise that you work yourself up some moderately anxiety-provoking thoughts to give your motivation and attentional fortitude a boost.

“The unintuitive rule of thumb is that if you choose to accept that anxiety in life is a given, you will actually find yourself becoming less ruled by it.”

-Dr. Sheri Fluellen



Transient developmental fears (eg, fear of the dark) are generally normal and do not interfere with normal functioning or result in long-term developmental difficulty. However, studies show a small group of children who are identified in first grade with significant symptoms of anxiety have a correlation with significant impairment in reading and math achievement 5-6 years later. The average onset of school refusal is age 10.3 years.

**Separation anxiety** is a fairly common anxiety disorder that consists of excessive anxiety beyond that expected for your child's developmental level, ongoing for at least 4 weeks.

A history of symptoms and problems should be given from multiple people, such as parents, teachers and coaches. Also a screening for depression should be completed (to rule out depression as the sole cause of the problems). The onset and development of separation anxiety as well as its context can help establish the diagnosis. It can be stimulus-specific, spontaneous, or anticipatory. Identifying whether social or family reinforcers are present are also important.

Some impairment in your child's functioning may be indicated by the following signs: avoidant behavior that restricts daily life;

reluctance to fall asleep without being near the primary attachment figure; tantrums when separation is imminent; nightmares about separation-themes; homesickness when away from primary caregiver; frequent physical symptoms such as abdominal pain. The average age of the start of separation anxiety disorder is age 7.5 years.

Separation anxiety is often the precursor to school refusal in three-fourths of children with separation anxiety disorder.

## Sleepless in Seattle (or anywhere, really)

By: Mark Russell

One of the most common symptom of anxiety is racing thoughts (that feeling that your brain just cannot shut off). Racing thoughts are especially distracting when trying to fall asleep. Here are a few ways to combat racing thoughts and help you get more sleep.

- **Do something logical.** Having racing thoughts is actually a creative process. Doing something logical like a crossword puzzle or Sudoku before bed engages the logical part of our brain which can pull you out of the whirl of thoughts from your day.
- **Don't stay in bed.** This may sound counterintuitive, but you want your body to be conditioned to ONLY sleeping in your bed. If you cannot sleep, do not stay in bed. Get up and do something else until your body is ready for sleep again.



- **Get out of your head.** Racing thoughts often keep racing because you feel that you might forget or that you need to solve whatever the problem is immediately. Write down thoughts that are bothering you. They will be there when you wake up and can be dealt with more effectively.
- **Read.** Reading is a very healthy form of distraction. You are able to leave your racing thoughts behind and immerse yourself in the story. However, if you are the type that cannot put a book down once you start reading, this may not help you get more sleep!

## Life Consistency

By: Sheri Fluellen

Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but only empties today of its strengths.

- Charles Spurgeon

Getting a handle on anxiety can be done through focusing on just symptom relief. Also consider that something deeper might be going on. One thing that can cause a lot of distress in life is when your actions are not consistent with your values and goals. We may not even realize when this happens, but we sure do feel the emotional tug-of-war. It could be something as significant as feeling your job really isn't a good fit with your personality or being in a romantic relationship with someone who has very different values than you and you feel that you are compromising. It could be something less obvious, like feeling overwhelmed with life in general when a simple solution could be to realign your time with your values such as spending less time working at home at night and giving an extra 30 minutes of snuggle time to your kids. Two good questions that I am continually asking myself are: 1) Is my time and energy spent in accordance with my priorities and values? 2) Is my time and energy spent in accordance to what I will still care about when I am on my death bed and reflecting back on my life? (I will even go so far as to ask if I am focusing on things that have eternal significance)

## Sheri's Simple Theory of Good and Bad Anxiety.

By: Sheri Fluellen

(Although I have titled this article "simple theory", the reality is that I don't think there is any simple theory or explanation for human behavior. This is more about just weeding out many of the intricacies and finding some universal truths and application.)

I surmise that at least 99% of the earth's population either has had or will experience anxiety. Most fundamentally, we feel anxiety any time that our current state of being is challenged by ourselves, by others, or by our environment. Although it is normal to experience anxiety, many people have come to deem "anxiety" as a negative emotion or state of being, thereby working very hard to avoid the experience of anxiety. But is anxiety really "bad"?



First let's take an objective, neutral, and unemotional look at anxiety. I said that anxiety is when our current state is challenged. If you were never challenged in any way by anyone (including yourself), you would never have any growth. You would not increase your knowledge, you would not make any friends or new relationships, and you would not have

any goal attainment. In reality it is virtually impossible to avoid anxiety at some level, and there is often a very functional and "good" reason for anxiety. People that are most successful in life (and I'm not just talking about financial success) take risks, but even very calculated risks have unknown factors and anxiety imbedded in those decisions.

So the next question begs to be asked. What is the difference between good and bad anxiety? One single important factor is also a subjective one: the outcome of the anxiety. If the anxiety is compelling you to be a better person, then that's good. The anxiety is working as a motivator and convicting you into positive change. If the anxiety is more than you can handle, causing you to just giving up, or making you feel worthless and incompetent, then consider that the anxiety is bad. Since outcome of anxiety is subjective, what is more than I can handle is going to look differently than what is more than you can handle. However, the great thing about humanity is that we can learn. Over time, you can learn how to handle more anxiety than you can currently, thus turning "bad" anxiety in "good" or productive anxiety.

While this is a simplistic way of understanding anxiety, it is a good place to start. Here are the questions to ask yourself. 1) Can the anxiety I am feeling help propel me to greater things or a better state of being? If yes, then feel the anxiety and let it do its job. 2) If the anxiety is more than I can handle, then I should do what I can to lessen the anxiety or circumstances causing the anxiety. 3) If the anxiety is more than I can handle, I should seek the help of trained counselor to better understand if I need to learn to tolerate anxiety more for growth, or if there is more emotional baggage going on that needs to be dealt with. Remember this: the number one thing that will KEEP (good or bad) anxiety around is avoidance. So avoiding your anxiety will not get you where you want to be.

Anxiety is the hand maiden of creativity. - T. S. Eliot



## What Is A Panic Attack? By: Sheri Fluellen

**Panic Disorder** is an anxiety condition that about 1 out of every 75 people might experience. It usually appears during the teens/early adulthood, and while the exact causes are unclear, there does seem to be a connection with major life transitions that are potentially stressful: graduating from college, getting married, having a first child, and so on. There is also some evidence for a genetic predisposition; if a family member has suffered from panic disorder, you have an increased risk of suffering from it yourself, especially during a time in your life that is particularly stressful.

A **panic attack** is a sudden surge of overwhelming fear that comes without warning and without any obvious reason. It is far more intense than the feeling of being "stressed out" that most people experience. **Symptoms** of a panic attack include: racing heartbeat, difficulty breathing, feeling as though you "can't get enough air", terror that is almost paralyzing, lightheadedness or nausea, trembling, sweating, chest pains, hot flashes or sudden chills, tingling in fingers or toes, and fear that you're going to go crazy or are about to die. A panic attack is also marked by the following conditions: it occurs suddenly, without any warning and without any way to stop it, the level of fear is way out of proportion to the actual situation (or sometimes it's completely unrelated), and it passes in a few minutes (although it can continue to recur for hours). A lot of people have panic attacks on occasion so just having a panic attack doesn't mean you have panic disorder. A key distinguisher is the number of attacks and an accompanying persistent fear of having future attacks. A panic attack is not dangerous, but it can be terrifying, largely because it feels "crazy" and "out of control". Physical and psychological causes of panic disorder work together. Although initially attacks may come out of the blue, eventually the sufferer may actually help bring them on by responding to physical symptoms of an attack. That is why the most effective treatment of panic disorder addresses both the mental and physical aspects. (2)

## Overview of Common Anxiety-Related Disorders (continued)

### POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

Involves continual anxiety reactions to triggers from previously experienced traumatic event(s). Reactions can include (but not limited to) distressing memories, flashbacks, dreams/nightmares, physical reactions, prolonged psychological distress, and avoiding anything that triggers or might trigger a memory.

### ACUTE STRESS DISORDER

Involves anxiety reactions to a recent traumatic event. This is often a precursor to PTSD.

### AGORAPHOBIA

Involves significant anxiety with and avoidance of situations that occur outside of home, such as using public transportation, being in open spaces (e.g. parking lots, marketplaces), being in enclosed spaces (e.g. theaters, shops), being in a crowd, or being outside home alone.

### SEPARATION ANXIETY DISORDER

Involves developmentally excessive anxiety about being separate from those whom the individual is attached to. Symptoms can include excessive distress when anticipating separation or actually separated, worry about losing the attached figures, fear of being alone, reluctance to go to school, nightmares, and physical complaints.

### SELECTIVE MUTISM

Consistent failure to speak in social situations where there is an expectation to speak, despite speaking in other situations.

### SUBSTANCE/MEDICATION-INDUCED ANXIETY DISORDER

Panic attacks or significant anxiety that is reasonably caused by a substance/medication. Substances can include alcohol, caffeine, illegal drugs, prescribed medications.



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- (1) Adapted from an article by Bettina E. Bernstein, DO
- (2) <http://www.apa.org/topics/anxiety/panic-disorder.aspx?item=1>