

“MY FRIEND ANXIETY”



Guide to Managing Anxiety

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Chapter 1—Meet Anxiety

Before I jump into managing Anxiety, it is important we spend time getting to know more about our friend, Anxiety. The first step to managing anxiety is being able to know when our anxiety shows up. When anxiety shows up, we find ourselves feeling worried and fearful about a situation which is stressful to us. You may also notice yourself feeling overwhelmed. You might also notice a faster heartbeat, sweating, and changes in your breathing, speaking, and thoughts. Anxiety is our body's way of telling us that we feel unsafe, not secure, and uncertain about a particular situation or experience. Anxiety's job is to keep us safe from potential danger and that danger can be emotional or physical. Which means everyone experiences and has their own friend anxiety. Your anxiety may show up before a test, when meeting new people, and when something scary happens like a natural disaster or pandemic. Sound familiar?

Anxiety lives in a primitive part of our brain and its only assignment is to protect by informing us of potential threats by using our body. Until Anxiety recognizes you understand and can handle the situation, Anxiety will not chill out. Think of Anxiety like a friend, parent, older sibling, mentor, teacher, or someone who cares about you and wants to see you be ok. Often, they direct and redirect you by providing guidance over and repeatedly, even if you do not want to hear it. However, when you demonstrate to them by handling a situation, they usually will let go and stop offering guidance because they now know you can handle it. Your friend Anxiety is not any different.

Exercise #1

Now that we know a bit about anxiety, I want you to take a moment to make up your own character, person, or thing to represent your friend anxiety based on your own experiences. If your anxiety were a person or thing, how would it look? How would it behave? How does it handle situations? even it does not handle situations well.

Now, for some of you, you may not consider anxiety a friend just yet, it's ok were still getting to know one another and have a few more places to go. The next chapter we will discuss how to identify when you notice your own anxiety showing up.

Chapter 2— Look Who Showed

Triggers

Noticing What Situations Anxiety Shows Up

In Chapter 1, we met our friend, Anxiety. We learned how to tell when anxiety is around. In chapter 2 we will focus on identifying what situations lead Anxiety to show up. When these situations occur, it causes your Anxiety (signs of anxiety) to show up. These situations are stressors, we call triggers. Identifying your triggers is step 2 to learning to manage anxiety. In order to manage anxiety, it's helpful to know what happens before anxiety shows up.

Sometimes when feeling anxious it is hard to recognize what happened before in that moment. Noticing triggers when overwhelmed with Anxiety likely won't happen if you haven't already identified them before. Remember what I said in Chapter 1 about anxiety being on a mission to protect? Well, this is when anxiety is in full protect mode and you have no idea what to say or do for Anxiety to chill out. We'll have to

wait until feelings of anxiety pass and come up with a plan for the next time. The best time to identify your triggers is when you are calm, relaxed, and in a place to think clearly. This is when we must do our investigation.

Exercise #2

It can be helpful to take out a sheet of paper and write down all the times you noticed yourself feeling anxious in the past. If we were on Instagram, we would be scrolling through your feed and noticing all the photographs with Anxiety in them. We want to write down as many details as possible. What was going on when Anxiety showed up? Who was around? Where were you? What time of day was it? What types of conversations were you having? What feelings did you have? What signs of anxiety did you notice? After you have written all those things down, I want you to group information. Identify themes or where Anxiety shows up the most. For example, if you notice each time, you are taking a test and anxiety shows up, when you have given a speech in front of your class or when a bully is around. I also want you to rate your experiences. 1 being not anxious at all and 10 being emergency help! The higher the number, the more unsafe, uncertain, and unsecure we feel. Anxiety triggers are not all the same. Some triggers we can manage and get Anxiety to take a break. However, the higher the trigger is on our scale the more unsafe and uncertain we feel and the

more assistance we need to help Anxiety take a break. The assistance we need is coping strategies.

Chapter 3 — You Got It!

Coping with Anxiety Triggers

We have made it to our destination on our journey to managing anxiety. Let's review what we have done so far. In chapter 1, we met our friend Anxiety. We learned how to recognize when Anxiety is around or when we are feeling anxious. In Chapter 2, We learned about triggers, which are stressors which often lead our friend Anxiety to show up. In chapter 2 we also learned how to recognize our triggers by observing when and where our Anxiety shows up for us. Lastly, in chapter 2, and where we will continue in this chapter, we rated our anxiety triggers. As discussed in chapter 2, sometimes we need more assistance to help our Anxiety take a break. This assistance are called coping strategies. Coping strategies are going to be what we use to reassure Anxiety You Got It! You can be in control now.

How Do We Cope with Anxiety Triggers?

Just like everyone has their own friend named Anxiety. Each person's anxiety is unique and different. As discussed in chapter 2, we first must identify what your triggers are, which may not be the same for everyone. Even if the triggers are similar, no two people are exactly alike, what works for someone else may work for you or it may not. Coping strategies are your way of showing Anxiety you are the boss. Coping strategies help you feel safe and secure. Coping strategies also help you calm down when feeling overwhelmed. Ask yourself with each trigger you have identified what might help you to feel powerful and in charge in those situations? Do that! For example, if you are speaking in front of a class and you struggle with public speaking. You might say I wish I was more prepared or felt more confident. A suggestion would be to practice your public speaking. The more prepared you feel the less anxious you feel. The more confident you will be giving your speech. If you are worried about a big test, you might say I wish I felt more prepared, or I don't want to fail. I encourage you to study, pair up with a classmate to study with, share your concerns with your teacher and request more information. If you turn assignments in late and struggle balancing everything, I encourage you to get organized by scheduling each responsibility. Prioritize things by level of importance and focus on one task at a time.

Lastly, remember to take care of yourself. Taking care of yourself is being healthy physically and emotionally. The more you take care of yourself the more relaxed you feel and the more prepared you'll be able to manage stressors. It's a lot easier to manage a trigger when you are not stressed. Make sure you are eating, sleeping, and exercising adequately. Think of something you enjoy doing, places you like going, or activities which help you feel relaxed. Laughing, meditation, journaling, listening to music, talking to supportive people and spending time with friends are a few methods to help relax. In the event you continue to struggle with anxiety, it could be helpful to share with an adult and if possible, speak to a mental health professional.