HOME DISCUSSION GUIDE

Managing Anxiety

Meaningful Discussion Templates

How To Help A Friend

Definitions and Tips
Why Talk About Anxiety?

According to The National Council for Behavioral Health©, mental health can be hard to talk about, and sometimes it is hardest to talk about with the people we’re closest to, like family members.

Often, those who experience anxiety, mild or extreme, feel ashamed and confused and they suffer in silence. The good news is it does not have to be this way! Anxiety in all its forms are manageable and treatable.

Viewing Angst is a great start to building awareness around anxiety and ways to manage it. Once awareness is discovered we can define where we want to move forward and what kind of relationships we want to build. In this clear identification of what we want, we can step into creating results that serve us and those we love in healthy, life changing ways.

What Do We Know About Anxiety?

**TRUE:** Anxiety disorders are treatable.

**FALSE:** Anxiety disorders are a choice.

**TRUE:** The ability for the brain to change throughout one’s life (Neuroplasticity) is real. Over time, you can change the way you think about something. You can rewire your brain to positivity.

**FALSE:** There is one clear way to defeat anxiety and it works for everybody.

**TRUE:** Distraction allows your amygdala (fight-or-flight part of the brain) a break. It can be helpful to distract your mind and give yourself some space for a short period, but prolonged isolation can lead to avoidance of anxiety producing situations which reinforces the negative thought process.

**FALSE:** Anxiety is easily identifiable, and presents itself the same way for different people.
Home Discussion Exercise:

Having an initial conversation about mental health is hard, but with every uncomfortable conversation, we address stigma, break down barriers, and help those closest to us. We ultimately create more trusting relationships both in, and outside, the family.

**Discussion 1:** Each family member shares personal signs when they experience anxiety. *(Does not have to be extreme, can be items like being nervous before a presentation)*
**Discussion Starters:** heart starts racing, start to sweat, want to avoid/escape

**Discussion 2:** What sorts of things could be triggering our amygdala (fight-or-flight part of the brain) in today’s times?
**Discussion Starters:** social media, News, etc.

**Discussion 3:** Family members share 3 stressful situations that cause anxious feelings.
**Discussion Starters:** classroom presentations, applying for college, grades, work meetings, where to sit for lunch, performance evaluations, parent-teacher conference, entering a classroom / room, having THIS conversation, etc.

**Discussion 4:** Michael Phelps says ‘It’s ok to not be ok.” What do you think he means?
**Discussion Starters:** It is OK to feel sad, It is OK to talk about mental health

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**The Power of Meaningful Conversation**

Set up an atmosphere for the family to have a deep conversation, one that you may have never experienced together before.

Be the model of sharing authentically, vulnerably and honestly. Start with your own ah ha’s about your life’s journey with anxiety.

-What I realized about me during the film...

-What I realized about how I have been with you (with anxiety) is...

Once you start with no preconceived thoughts on how it will go, you will offer an opening. Allow the conversation to evolve, do your best to listen with intent to connect, leave judgement out. Their truth is their reality, it may make no sense to you, it doesn’t have to.

**Only listen, do not offer solutions or attempt to ‘fix’ the situation.**
Supporting and Understanding Friends is an essential component to recovery. Try to keep these 6 key points in mind when trying to be a good friend to someone living with anxiety.

**Awareness:**
Understanding what your friend is going through will help you better support them. It will also help alleviate frustrations that you may have about his or her behavior.

**Be There:**
Encourage your friend when he or she is having a tough time and be empathetic to what he or she is going through. Be respectful, but do not support avoidance of stressful situations.

**Communicate:**
Modify your expectations of how you want your friend to be and accept your friend for who he or she is.

**Don’t try to change them:**
Be sure to listen with a nonjudgmental attitude. Help him or her find treatment. Sometimes it’s hard to take the first step alone. Be supportive and encourage your friend to get help.

**Encourage:**
Encourage your friend to confront stressful situations and support them through the experience, rather than avoiding anxiety-provoking situations. Avoidance can actually make the anxiety disorder worse.

**Fun:**
Sure it’s good to have someone to talk to, but your friends need you to keep the fun going. Help make them laugh and relax.
Tips For Managing Anxiety

Be Specific: Address your stress inducing thoughts and label them concretely. Make a list at the end of each workday/school day and evening (at home) with the labeled stressors and an action plan of completion. Even if the items of stress are not task oriented in nature, it is beneficial to label them and write them down (for example, “Concerned about my daughter’s lack of interest in school”. Plan – take her for a drive or to the park, leave phones at home and begin a conversation.) (For students: “I am worried about an upcoming presentation”. Plan – talk with a friend, teacher or counselor.)

Take a Break: and Distract - If you feel your thoughts becoming clustered and overly emotional, or the beginning stages of anxiety increasing, get up and move for 5-10 minutes. Take your thoughts and body to a new location, go outside, or grab a glass of water. Listen to music for a moment. Distracting your thoughts will allow your brain to function in an organized and efficient manner.

Don’t Isolate: (for too long) - It can be helpful to distract your mind and give yourself some space for a short period, but prolonged isolation can lead to avoidance of anxiety producing situations, which reinforces the negative thought process. Do what you fear, be it networking socials or assertively stating your idea in a meeting.

Practice Emotional Honesty:
Reach out to friends/family who have your back, the ones who will support you being healthy, happy, and hopeful. Let them know if you are feeling stressed and label and acknowledge all emotions. Allow your circle to lift you, support you.
Anxiety is normal and natural, occurring in children, teens and adults every day. Anxiety is defined fear that is future-oriented, while phobias are specific, exaggerated fears. Anxiety becomes problematic when it begins to interfere with everyday life.

There are three parts to anxiety: What I think (cognitions); What I feel (physical sensations); and What I do (behaviors).

A specific set of sensations occurs when we’re anxious, including pounding heart, shortness of breath, dizziness, and sweating. This set of symptoms, called the fight or flight response, is designed to help us avoid danger. Helping teens understand these natural sensations in their bodies without overreacting, and showing them how quickly things can return to normal can help give them control over their feelings of anxiety.

Facing fears and anxiety can teach an individual that they are stronger than they think they are, that they can face something that they thought was insurmountable.

Excessively reassuring someone who is anxious that everything will be okay may backfire when trying to help them cope with anxiety. Instead, empathize that it’s natural to feel anxious, and focus on helping them through their feelings so that they can successfully face their anxiety.

Fears, phobias, and anxieties can be successfully treated with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which helps teens change their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This is a short-term (6-16 session) weekly type of therapy that teaches an individual to become his or her own therapist.

You can also help reduce anxiety through changing “self-talk”, a part of CBT where people learn to identify the thoughts that they have that perpetuate their fears. Instead, try and identify what you’re really worried about, and whether it’s likely to happen.

Praise yourself for facing tough situations. Be liberal with support if you know someone who is struggling with anxiety - even if the fear is irrational, it’s difficult to face your fears. Any step should be encouraged.

Take care of yourself! If you’re feeling anxious, make sure you’re managing your stress levels by exercising, eating right, and getting enough sleep. All those factors can play a part in making anxiety worse as well.
Types of Anxiety Disorders

**Panic Disorder:** Includes physical symptoms, as well as, fear of having another panic attack.

**Social Anxiety:** Avoiding social situations (i.e., public speaking, fear of rejection).

**Specific Phobias:** Intense fear of specific objects (i.e., snakes, heights).

**Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD):** Thoughts (obsessions) that tend to be unwanted and intrusive (i.e., maybe there are germs on my hands), and create anxiety, after which the individual engages in compulsions, or actions designed to reduce that anxiety (i.e., hand washing).

**Generalized Anxiety Disorder:** Excessive fear related to several things.

**PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder):** Exposure to an extremely traumatic event.

“YOUR FAMILY AND YOUR LOVE MUST BE CULTIVATED LIKE A GARDEN. TIME, EFFORT, AND IMAGINATION MUST BE SUMMONED CONSTANTLY TO KEEP ANY RELATIONSHIP FLOURISHING AND GROWING.”

-JIM ROHN

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