



Alderbrook School Pastoral Team
Wellbeing Guidance for Parents and Students

Support for Students experiencing
Anxiety or Panic Attacks



Advice For Students

What are anxiety and panic attacks?

- A bit of stress is normal and can even help to motivate you so that you perform better in an exam or competition. However, stress can set off the brain's in-built alarm bell system, which tells us something isn't right and that we need to deal with it or run away. Stress can become a regular sense of anxiety that stops us thinking about other things.
- When stress or anxiety is extreme we can feel panic, and that can temporarily stop us from being able to think properly or physically function in a normal way.

What are symptoms of anxiety or panic?

- Symptoms include feeling nervous all the time, feeling tearful, overwhelmed or out of control, trouble sleeping/concentrating, low appetite, irregular breathing, fast heartbeat, dry mouth, trembling, feeling unsteady, hot, faint, stomach cramps, needing the loo, sweating.
- You might start out just feeling generally anxious, and if you have these symptoms above it doesn't mean you definitely have an anxiety problem. But if any of them are affecting your everyday life, or they are severe, you should seek help.

What should I do about these feelings?

- Tensions that cause anxiety and panic can be calmed by deep breaths and logical thinking.
- Work out what strategies help you best, eg find a quiet place or somewhere you feel safe, count, or focus on something outside that will absorb you while you let the symptoms pass.
- **The most important thing you should do is tell someone you trust at home and/or school such as your Pastoral Manager about your feelings. Your GP can make referrals so you can get the right support.**

What will happen if I tell someone?

- Choose someone who will listen to you and help you to access support. School staff will simply be concerned for your health and wellbeing. We will not judge you or be impatient.

What can I do to help myself stop if I am anxious or having a panic attack?

- Release the pressure: breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, then release through your mouth for 8 seconds. Then remind yourself that everything will be OK.
- Move around, clench and unclench your fists, stretch and feel the ground under your feet.
- Be aware of 2 or 3 things you can see, hear, smell and feel – concentrate on each one.
- Have a drink of water and ensure you have eaten something.
- **The YoungMinds Crisis Messenger provides free 24/7 support across the UK if you are experiencing a mental health crisis - text YM to 85258.**

How can I change the way I feel longer term?

1. Work out what creates your worries and consider how to mitigate them: when you arrive, where you sit, who needs to know how you might be feeling, and how they can help you.
2. Get everything you need ready in advance, plan how you will cope with each part of your day and make a daily schedule that helps you feel in balance and control.
3. Keep a notebook where you jot down one thing you did well that day, carry affirmation cards, a photo that calms you or an object, memory or scent that helps you to feel calmer.

4. Relax through art, exercise, dancing or a stress ball. Learn a simple mindfulness technique like looking at an object while you slow your breathing down. Listen to music or use an App.

Advice for Parents

Why do young people feel anxiety/panic?

- Anxiety disorders are the most common mental ill health conditions among young people, affecting around one in six children/teenagers.
- Young people will be affected by a variety of anxieties as they grow - for example, separation anxiety in childhood and social anxiety in young and middle teens. These are not anxiety disorders unless they impact significantly on wellbeing and are debilitating.
- It is common for young people with a learning difficulty to experience anxiety or panic as they can find processing or expressing emotions in general to be particularly challenging.

What should I do if my child is anxious?

- Create structure and routine, particularly around eating and sleep.
- Point out what is safe and encourage discussion, keeping in mind their developmental level.
- Provide a non-judgemental perspective and remember that a young person who is anxious will focus on the negative information more than the positive. Encourage them gently.
- Encourage them to try alternative activities, listen to an app such as Clear Fear that will provide professional advice and strategies, show them online resources that will help them communicate with someone else independently via a helpline and empower themselves by absorbing constructive professional advice. The websites below have many practical ideas on supporting a young person with an anxiety disorder, and the Combined Minds App also has a range of tips you can have handy on your phone.
- Let the school know so that we can support them while they are in our care.

How do I help them manage feelings of panic?

- Help them plan for how to cope if they have a panic attack using the ideas above and/or make a self-soothe box of calming items they can carry discreetly and use when needed.
- Encourage them to identify someone they can tell who will help them wherever they are and ensure that person eg their Pastoral Manager knows how best to help them in the event they need support.
- Make sure they know that someone should stay with them to comfort and encourage them – the attack might last for 20-30 minutes.
- Encourage them to talk to that person rationally about how they are feeling, but if this makes them more panicky, then suggest they talk about other things instead: their favourite films, their pets and holiday plans – just like small talk at the dentist or doctors.
- If they have had a panic attack, they will probably be feeling unwell or nervous long after the attack has ended and they seem “well” again. Make sure they stay calm afterwards and let us know at school that they are unsettled.
- Remind them of how strong and brave they are, and make sure they know that they can always reach out to you or to a teacher/Pastoral Manager to talk if things are getting overwhelming.

- The Mix has a helpline 0800 808 4994 and they offer a webchat service or they can also text THEMIX to 85258.
- YoungMinds has a free parent helpline 0808 802 5544 that you can also call for advice on how to support your child.

External sources of help and advice about Anxiety/Panic

Apps to help manage anxiety/panic:

<https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/> contains numerous apps that tackle anxiety symptoms and feelings

<https://www.clearfear.co.uk/> mental health charity Stem4helps young people to manage their emotions

<https://combinedminds.co.uk> helps carers have a positive influence on a young person who is struggling

<https://www.headspace.com> offers a variety of meditation and wellbeing options

<https://www.smilingmind.com.au> helps users find a sense of balance

Stress:

<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/mental-health-advice-for-children-and-young-people/stress>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/stress-friend-or-foe/>

Anxiety/Panic:

<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk>

<https://stem4.org.uk/>

<https://nopanic.org.uk/>

Counselling support:

Kooth <https://www.kooth.com> online counselling for young people every day

Solar <https://www.bsmhft.nhs.uk/our-services/solar-youth-services/> call 0121 301 2730

Pause <https://www.forwardthinkingbirmingham.org.uk/services/13-pause> call 0300 300 0099

Some of the best general resources regarding health of young people:

Health For Teens <https://www.healthforteens.co.uk>

Mental Health advice <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/parents-and-young-people>

The Mix <https://www.themix.org.uk>

Teen Breathe is a magazine aimed at young people that is full of practical advice about feelings and how to practice mindfulness, available locally in WH Smith, Waitrose or subscribe online via

<https://www.teenbreathe.co.uk>