



Listen To Me

Self Help Part One

Part Four

Self Help Tips

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Anxiety – give in to it or control it?

Here are 12 tips for alleviating and overcoming anxiety:

1. Lack of control over your thoughts strengthens your anxiety. As negative thoughts get stronger and stronger, your anxiety gets stronger. You need to learn to control your thoughts.
2. Feelings and emotions fuel and strengthen anxiety. You need to learn some self discipline and control over your feelings, and you also need to develop emotional and mental detachment.
3. When you go to bed at night, and first thing when you wake up in the morning, think about the good things that are happening to you. There are always some good things happening, even if small and insignificant.
4. Start the day with several minutes of positive affirmations. Tell yourself how you would like your day to be. Use positive, cheering and motivating words.
5. Be busy, do something. By doing something you keep your mind off your anxiety. When you wake up in the morning start doing something right away, and keep busy all day. Cleaning the house, washing the dishes or working in your garden, reading, studying, meditating or exercising your body can help you keep your mind away from anxiety. Just sitting around and thinking about your problems and worries won't make them go away.
6. Set a goal and work everyday to achieve it. This action will direct your thoughts and feelings away from worries and anxieties, toward something more positive.

7. Talk about your anxieties to someone you trust. Talking about your anxieties and feelings often alleviate them and put them in the right proportions, provided you talk objectively, and with a real desire to reduce or get rid of your anxiety.
8. Exercising is a good way to keep from letting your fears overwhelm you. You can walk, do yoga or aerobics or any other sport.
9. Find reasons to laugh. This will bring light and happiness into your life and drive anxiety away. Watch comedies, be with happy and amusing friends or read something that makes you laugh.
10. Use positive words in your conversation and in your inner talk.
11. Affirm and visualize positive situations and events. Visualize a happy and positive solution to your problems.
12. If watching the news fills you with anxiety - turn off the TV! Limit the time you watch the news, and don't watch anything that may upset you before you go to bed.

Dealing with Flashbacks

What are flashbacks?

Anyone who has experienced sexual abuse, rape or any other traumatic event can experience flashbacks. Flashbacks are a memory of a frightening or painful experience, which occurred either in childhood or adult life. It tends not to be like an ordinary memory, but more a sudden and unexpected intrusion.

Flashbacks can be experienced as a single slide from a slide show, a snapshot or photograph that flashes repeatedly or like a video clip. A flashback can feel almost as real as when it originally happened and can also be as frightening.

Not everyone's flashbacks are visual. Some take the form of words and phrases or sounds that were heard in the past. They can be accompanied by intense feelings, e.g. shame, sadness, anger, or physical sensations known as 'body memories', which may have been felt at the time of the original abuse.

Flashbacks can happen at any time, anywhere and often occur without warning. They can be triggered by, the time of year or day, TV programmes, films, smells, words, phrases, songs, places, someone who reminds you in some way of your abuser, pictures, tastes, a particular feeling such as fear or anxiety, having sex or being intimate with your partner. These can occur instantly or sometime later.

Sometimes a flashback can occur in response to hearing voices that tell you to do things, e.g. harm yourself or someone else. Hearing voices can be very frightening. (www.mind.org.uk have good resources for those who hear voices.)

Ideas on how to cope with flashbacks

- Let yourself know that what you are experiencing is a flashback and that this is a normal reaction to the abuse you experienced. It may be useful to look around you and take note of what is happening in the here and now.
- Use objects and activities associated with being an independent adult to ground yourself during flashbacks. Most useful are things that you have or can do now which weren't available to you as a child, or when the abuse took place, e.g. holding car or house keys, typing on a computer keyboard, listening to music on headphones. Also useful is a 'first aid kit' (where a person collects a number of items that have good here and now associations to safe people, good memories and calming sensations).
- Try to associate to your immediate surroundings by feeling where your body makes a boundary with the chair and floor ('feel the arms of the chair against your arms and your feet on the floor') name things with your senses ('what can you hear that tells you are in the present?' 'name 5 things in this room that are green?'). A useful question for you to consider is 'Think of something that you know is real now that helps you to know that (event) is in the past, that you survived it and are safe now.'
- You may find it reassuring or grounding to carry a stone or something familiar and comforting in your pocket that you can stroke, hold or rub when a flashback occurs. Some people keep an elastic band around their wrist and 'ping it' to try and bring them back to the here and now.
- Try to breathe from your diaphragm (put your hand just above your navel and breathe so your hand is pushed up and down). This can help prevent a panic attack.
- If the flashback occurs whilst you are out and about try to get yourself to somewhere that you feel safe and secure.
- If you are wakened by a flashback, also known as a 'night terror', try to write it down, then go and have something warm to drink, watch some TV, listen to music or do something else that you find relaxing. It's often best not to try and sleep until you have been able to relax for a while.

- Keep a list of people you can contact in the event of experiencing a flashback.
- It may be useful to write the flashback down or tell it to someone you trust - though it can be very painful to speak about, talking it over with someone can help your healing.
- If you self-harm/injure in response to a flashback, try to take some precautions to minimise the longer term harm that you might do to yourself).
- It may be useful to try and identify if there is anything in particular that triggers your flashbacks. It may be useful in the short-term to avoid your triggers, although you can't always control when they occur.
- If you start experiencing a flashback while having sex with your partner you can stop and take time to relax. It's OK to take time out from the sexual side of your relationship to work through these memories if you need to. Your partner should respect your choice and support you.
- Do something that helps you relax, e.g. have a bath, listen to your favourite music after you have had a flashback.
- Remember flashbacks are a normal response to what you have experienced.

Flashback Halting Protocol

- Right now I am feeling

(describe your current emotion, e.g. 'terrified')

- And I am sensing in my body

(describe your current bodily sensations, e.g. 'pounding heart, tight chest', shaky legs)

- Because I am remembering

(name the trauma by title only- no details, e.g. 'being hurt by my mother')

- At the same time, I am looking around where I am now in

(the actual current year), here (name the place where you are)

- And I can see

(describe some of the things that you see right now, in this place),

- And so I know

(name the trauma by title only again, e.g. 'being hurt by my mother')

is not happening now or anymore.

Flashback Halting Protocol Adapted from: Rothschild, B. (2000) *The Body Remembers: The Psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment*, New York: Norton

Grounding and Safety Techniques

There are a number of grounding techniques that can be learned to decrease hyper-arousal and connect to the present. These include naming and listing things in the here and now and using as many senses as possible to reconnect to the present. What follows are some techniques that have proved useful to some survivors - it's important to find what works for you and you can adapt the techniques to fit you.

Finding Oases

Oases are activities that give a break from the trauma. They are activities that demand concentration and attention. Watching TV and reading do not usually work well as it is easy to wander into one's own thoughts.

Procedures that have not become automatic work best. These might include: gardening; following a pattern in embroidery or knitting; playing chess, solitaire or 'braintraining' games; learning a language; doing crosswords or jigsaws; creative writing; playing the piano. The value of an oasis will be recognised by a reduction in hyper-arousal and a quieting of internal dialogue.

Finding a Safe Place or Activity

A safe place is a form of anchor to reduce the stress of working with traumatic memories. Anchors can be used as 'braking' tools when the going gets rough.

A suitable anchor is one that gives relief (in body and emotion) and a sense of well-being.

It is preferable that an anchor is chosen from real life experience, so that positive memories in both body and mind can be accessed. It is useful to work with your counsellor to establish in advance an anchor that can be used when needed in trauma work.

A safe place or activity is a current or remembered experience of protection.

It should have associations of calmness and safety (as opposed to 'relaxing' - which can feel unsafe for people who have experienced trauma, or 'pleasurable' - which can be over-stimulating). It is preferable for the safe place/activity to be something real that is known

from life. This is because there will be somatic resonance in the memory - sights, sounds, smells, etc. which will be recorded as sensory memory traces and be highly accessible.

It is helpful to imagine the safe place/activity during times of stress and anxiety, or it can be used as an anchor, to reduce hyper-arousal during a therapy session.

Body Awareness

Employing our own awareness of the state of our body - our perceptions of the precise, co-existing sensations that arise from internal and external stimuli - is a very useful tool in trauma work. This is because consciousness of current sensory stimuli is our primary link to the here and now; it is also a direct link to our emotions.

Body awareness is about awareness of cues from the central nervous system. Body awareness (sensations) from exteroceptors originates from stimuli that have their origin outside of the body (touch, taste, smell, sounds, sights). Body awareness from interoceptors consists of sensations that originate on the inside of the body (connective tissue, muscles and viscera).

Moving

Separating past from present can be accomplished on a body level. During a flashback or trauma work getting up and moving (e.g. walking around or moving from one room to another) will help to reinforce the here-and-now reality that the trauma is no longer occurring. 'I could not move then, but I can move now.' Moving can also help to complete a sequence of impulses that were blocked at the time of the trauma (e.g. the impulse to run or push away).

Developing Muscle Tone

For many people with PTSD induced relaxation (e.g. relaxation exercises) will precipitate a trauma reaction, increasing hyperarousal and anxiety, risking flashbacks. For such people, building or maintaining muscle tension is preferable to relaxation. For many people, muscle tensing helps reduce unpleasant body sensations attached to the trauma - even to the point of enabling sleep.

This is not about aerobic exercise as elevated heart and respiration rates can be trauma triggers. Rather, it is slow, focussed, muscle building exercise that is beneficial. To be effective it must be done with body awareness - with attention given to body sensations generally and to the muscles being exercised specifically. Also, the exercise must stop at the point of mild tiredness in the muscle, while it is still a pleasant experience.

Developing muscle tone increases self-confidence and reduces feelings of vulnerability and hyperarousal. Muscle tensing can be used as an emergency measure when anxiety threatens to escalate into overwhelm or panic. Exercises that enhance sensations of calm, solidity and increased presence are beneficial. The idea is to build a positive experience of being in the body by developing musculature that can better contain hyperarousal and the full range of the emotions.

Simple toning exercises:

- Push-ups: these help build tone in the arms, chest and back. Begin by standing a few feet from a wall, leaning into it and pushing away. Gradually move lower and lower on the wall until there is enough strength to push up from stairs or the floor.
- Thighs: Sitting in a chair, place both feet flat on the floor. Press weight onto your feet just until you feel tension build in your thighs, then slowly release.
- Leg lifts in many directions also need no special equipment. Simple weights such as milk cartons, books, water bottles can be used for strengthening the front of the upper arms.

Strategies For Self-Soothing

Self-soothing activities are a source of decreased arousal, pleasurable sensations and calming feelings. They are characterised by: slow, gentle or rhythmical movements; softness in texture, tone and hues; quietness in volume. They include but are not limited to the following:

- Calming breathing
- Gentle holding and rocking
- Calming self-talk
- accessing calming sensations: e.g. warm baths and showers, warm drinks, soft textiles (blankets, bedsocks, soft toys, hot water bottles), calming music, soft lighting walking, gardening or swimming
- things that anchor a safe connection to the therapist, e.g. being encouraged to choose a stone or shell from the therapist's room to 'look after and bring back' to symbolise the continuing relationship

Rainy Day Letters From The Self

This is a strategy to increase self-acceptance and provide a reminder of progress.

When the person is in a hopeful, resourceful or self-accepting frame of mind they write themselves a letter or letters to be read when they are feeling low or despairing.

The letter is supportive and empathic and can suggest things to do to self-soothe.

It can remind the person of progress and that bad feelings pass.

Imaginary Containers

It can be useful to devise containers for difficult feelings and experiences between sessions.

Safes, vaults, trunks, locked libraries are useful images. It can also be useful to find an image for the material they wish to lock away. This helps to create some distance from the material so that it can be thought about and moved around, rather than feeling it is overwhelming or stuck inside.

'Write/Draw, Read, Destroy' Task

This can provide a powerful experience of containing, processing and ending something for those who are plagued by intrusive and repetitive thoughts, feelings, memories, sensations and images.

- On day 1 spend a set amount of time (an hour maximum - usually less) writing or drawing the distressing or disturbing material and then put it away and move to another activity.
- On day 2 (preferably in the same place, at the same time of day) read over or look at what you have produced and then destroy it.
- On day 3 start the procedure again as for day 1. You may produce new material or it may be a repeat of previous drawing or writing.

If you start to go into traumatic material during the day remind yourself that you can stop this because there will be a prescribed time later when you can allow yourself to attend to and express what is encroaching. This is a helpful exercise for establishing boundaries and distance between you and the experience. You will hopefully gain experience of processing, controlling and ending the effects of trauma as you move through the sequence of returning to what you have produced in order to think about it and then destroy it.

Many people try to get rid of intrusive traumatic material because it feels intolerable or overwhelming. This exercise provides an alternative approach where space and time is allowed for the trauma and in a way that the person is able to limit and control. It also provides the experience of returning to the trauma in 'small doses' in order to allow it to dissipate and integrate - which mirrors the therapeutic process.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a disorder that can develop following a traumatic event that threatens your safety or makes you feel helpless. Most people associate PTSD with battle-scarred soldiers – and military combat is the most common cause in men – but any overwhelming life experience can trigger PTSD, especially if the event is perceived as unpredictable and uncontrollable.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can affect those who personally experience the catastrophe, those who witness it, and those who pick up the pieces afterwards, including emergency workers and law enforcement officers. It can even occur in the friends or family members of those who went through the actual trauma.

Traumatic events that can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) include:

- War
- Rape
- Natural disasters
- A car or plane crash
- Kidnapping
- Violent assault
- Sexual or physical abuse
- Medical procedures (especially in kids)

PTSD is a response by normal people to an abnormal situation:

The traumatic events that lead to post-traumatic stress disorder are usually so overwhelming and frightening that they would upset anyone. When your sense of safety and trust are shattered, it's normal to feel crazy, disconnected, or numb – and most people do. The only difference between people who go on to develop PTSD and those who don't is how they cope with the trauma.

After a traumatic experience, the mind and the body are in shock. But as you make sense of what happened and process your emotions, you come out of it. With post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), however, you remain in psychological shock. Your memory of what happened and your feelings about it are disconnected. In order to move on, it's important to face and feel your memories and emotions.

Re-experiencing the traumatic event

- Intrusive, upsetting memories of the event
- Flashbacks (acting or feeling like the event is happening again)
- Nightmares (either of the event or of other frightening things)
- Feelings of intense distress when reminded of the trauma
- Intense physical reactions to reminders of the event (e.g. pounding heart, rapid breathing, nausea, muscle tension, sweating)

PTSD symptoms of avoidance and emotional numbing

- Avoiding activities, places, thoughts, or feelings that remind you of the trauma
- Inability to remember important aspects of the trauma
- Loss of interest in activities and life in general
- Feeling detached from others and emotionally numb
- Sense of a limited future (you don't expect to live a normal life span, get married, have a career)

PTSD symptoms of increased arousal

- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Irritability or outbursts of anger
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hypervigilance (on constant "red alert")
- Feeling jumpy and easily startled

Other common symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder

- Anger and irritability
- Guilt, shame, or self-blame
- Substance abuse
- Depression and hopelessness
- Suicidal thoughts and feelings
- Feeling alienated and alone
- Feelings of mistrust and betrayal
- Headaches, stomach problems, chest pain

Helping a loved one with PTSD

- Be patient and understanding. Getting better takes time, even when a person is committed to treatment for PTSD. Be patient with the pace of recovery and offer a sympathetic ear. A person with PTSD may need to talk about the traumatic event over and over again. This is part of the healing process, so avoid the temptation to tell your loved one to stop rehashing the past and move on.
- Try to anticipate and prepare for PTSD triggers. Common triggers include anniversary dates; people or places associated with the trauma; and certain sights, sounds, or smells. If you are aware of what triggers may cause an upsetting reaction, you'll be in a better position to offer your support and help your loved one calm down.
- Don't take the symptoms of PTSD personally. Common symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) include emotional numbness, anger, and withdrawal. If your loved one seems distant, irritable, or closed off, remember that this may not have anything to do with you or your relationship.
- Don't pressure your loved one into talking. It is very difficult for people with PTSD to talk about their traumatic experiences. For some, it can even make things worse. Never try to force your loved one to open up. Let the person know, however, that you're there when and if he or she wants to talk.

Psychological and Emotional Trauma

If you've gone through a traumatic experience, you may be struggling with upsetting emotions, frightening memories, or a sense of constant danger that you just can't kick. Or you may feel numb, disconnected, and unable to trust other people.

When bad things happen, it can take awhile to get over the pain and feel safe again. But treatment and support from family and friends can speed your recovery from emotional and psychological trauma. Whether the traumatic event happened years ago or yesterday, you can heal and move on.

Emotional and psychological trauma is the result of extraordinarily stressful events that shatter your sense of security, making you feel helpless and vulnerable in a dangerous world.

Traumatic experiences often involve a threat to life or safety, but any situation that leaves you feeling overwhelmed and alone can be traumatic, even if it doesn't involve physical harm.

A stressful event is most likely to be traumatic if:

- It happened unexpectedly.
- You were unprepared for it.
- You felt powerless to prevent it.
- It happened repeatedly.
- Someone was intentionally cruel.
- It happened in childhood.

Childhood trauma increases the risk of future trauma

Traumatic experiences in childhood can have a severe and long-lasting effect. Children who have been traumatized see the world as a frightening and dangerous place. When childhood trauma is not resolved, this fundamental sense of fear and helplessness carries over into adulthood, setting the stage for further trauma.

Childhood trauma results from anything that disrupts a child's sense of safety and security, including:

- An unstable or unsafe environment
- Separation from a parent
- Serious illness
- Intrusive medical procedures
- Sexual, physical, or verbal abuse
- Domestic violence
- Neglect
- Bullying

Emotional symptoms of trauma:

- Shock, denial, or disbelief
- Anger, irritability, mood swings
- Guilt, shame, self-blame
- Feeling sad or hopeless
- Confusion, difficulty concentrating
- Anxiety and fear
- Withdrawing from others
- Feeling disconnected or numb

Physical symptoms of trauma:

- Insomnia or nightmares
- Being startled easily
- Racing heartbeat
- Aches and pains
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Edginess and agitation
- Muscle tension

Reach Out To Your Childhood!

Your journey can be a long and hard one. It can be a sad, upsetting and scary journey to take, that journey where you Live to tell and tell to live.

Lots of people really feel sad, when they begin to think of what they have lost out on, and it can be really upsetting to know you missed some of the childhood fun that other young people experienced. So, here's some ideas for you to try, to help you have fun and to help you to feel the innocence of simple fun activities. Give them a try!!

Buy yourself an ice cream

Have a go on a swing

Kick up some leaves in the park

Make a sand castle on the beach

Draw a picture

Hug your teddy

Lie in the sun and feel the warmth on your face and body

Dance and sing to music (get that hairbrush out and sing your heart out!)

Go see a children's movie

Have a scoop of ice cream in some fizzy pop

Buy a comic

Blow some bubbles, you can even do it with washing up liquid!

The Power of Relaxation

Relaxation is our body's natural antidote to stress. When we feel stressed, our bodies can be flooded with chemicals which then prepare us for 'fight or flight'. In a real emergency situation where we really need to be alert, this is useful to us, but if someone is experiencing so much stress that these chemicals are always being activated, it wears down the body leaving you with much less energy and sometimes feeling less able to cope than you normally would.

Using relaxation techniques can bring your system back into balance. Relaxation techniques help you to deepen your breathing, reduce the stress hormones, slow down your heart and blood pressure rates and relax your muscles.

Research shows that relaxation can also increase energy and focus, help the body combat illness, relieve aches and pains, heighten problem-solving abilities, and boost motivation and productivity. Best of all- with a little practice - it is something we can all do for ourselves.

Deep Breathing for Stress Relief

Deep breathing is a simple, yet powerful, relaxation technique. It's easy to learn, and you can do it almost anywhere.

It's a quick way to get your stress levels in check. Deep breathing is the cornerstone of many other relaxation practices, too, and can be combined with other elements such as aromatherapy and music. All you really need is a few minutes and a place to sit up straight or stretch out.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation Sequence

Make sure you are sitting or lying comfortably, take off your shoes and make sure your clothing is nice and loose.

Take a few moments to relax and take some deep, slow, cleansing breaths, breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth.

When you feel ready to begin, focus your attention on your right foot, feel how it feels to you, slowly tense up all the muscles in your right foot, hold for a count of 10, or less if you can't manage to hold it to 10. Now relax your right foot, feel the tension flowing away and feel how your foot now feels more relaxed and loose.

Repeat this sequence for all the muscle groups in your body in an order similar to the example below:

Right foot
Left foot
Right calf
Left calf
Right thigh
Left thigh
Hips and buttocks
Stomach
Chest
Back
Right Hand
Right Arm
Left Hand
Left Arm
Shoulders
Neck
Face

When you have gone through every muscle group, you will have an idea of where you were most tense, and where you felt the most relief.

Complete the muscle relaxation by taking a few more deep breaths, and finish by ensuring you sit for a moment with your feet placed firmly flat on the floor to ground yourself.