

THE THERAPYWORKS

128 Newberry Ave. Libertyville, IL 60048 (847) 680-0272

MARK SOLOMON, PSY.D.
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST

email : tw-online@comcast.net
www.therapyworks-online.com

CAROL SOLOMON, PH.D.
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST

BEAT ANXIETY

What is an anxiety disorder?

It is essential to recognize a problem before you are able to improve it. Anxiety disorders are a group of problems that effect the lives of many people. Anxiety can become an illness, the same way a cold or the flu is an illness. Anxiety disorders are usually associated with problems in the areas of thinking, feeling, and behavior. Anxiety is not the same as "concern or worry", although people who have Anxiety disorders often feel very worried. When a person's emotions, thoughts and behaviors are stuck in patterns that lead to panic, intense or unremitting dread, or avoiding activities, relations, work or play, then a person is said to have an anxiety disorder.

Symptoms of anxiety disorder: Excessive worry/anxiety; feeling stressed, uptight or on edge; frequent anticipation of something dreadful happening; fears of going crazy or losing control; concerns about looking foolish or inadequate; frightening daydreams or fantasies; fears of physical illness or heart attacks; avoidance of "normal" demands and interests; behavioral agitation (restlessness); problems thinking/concentrating; recurrent discomforting thoughts; choking or smothering sensations; heart pounding (palpitations); feeling tired, weak or exhausted. Sometimes anxiety symptoms are quite sudden and intense (e.g. Panic Attack) and sometimes they are less intense but quite steady and longstanding (e.g. day in and day out nervousness).

How come people get anxiety disorders?

People are imperfect creatures; we all are likely to experience a variety of illnesses throughout the course of life. Many people believe that anxiety is caused by having unresolved conflict or trauma such as poor parent-child relations, a rocky marriage or excessive work demands. Although trauma or conflicts may contribute to a person being more likely to be anxious, it is very important to understand that they do not cause anxiety disorders. If you doubt this -- think of how many times that you or your friends have successfully managed a conflict or extreme challenge and not become overly anxious. If trauma or conflicts caused people to have anxiety disorders, then **all** people would become extremely anxious **each** time such an event occurred -- and that does not happen.

If you are anxious, it is important to consider biological and psychological aspects of anxiety. Biological reasons for anxiety can be divided into 2 categories. The first category has to do with characteristic temperament. From birth some babies are "minimally reactive" to things around them while other babies are "maximally reactive;" people who are very reactive to things around them tend to have higher levels of anxiety. The second category of biological anxiety involves people who are anxious because of chemical imbalances, or because they misuse alcohol/drugs. There are a variety of biological conditions that are associated with anxiety. Many people have heard of problems such as obsessive-compulsive disorder and hyperthyroidism. These are just

two types of biological problems that are generally associated with anxiety.

Psychological reasons for anxiety can also be divided into 2 categories. The first category involves anxiety associated with unresolved conflict. If personal conflict is suppressed or ignored, anxiety often occurs. For example, someone may feel highly anxious because they have not acknowledged and/or resolved a marital or parent-child conflict. Anxiety associated with unresolved conflict usually involves unexpressed feelings of anger. The second category of psychological anxiety involves faulty or unhelpful thinking. People get anxious when they become preoccupied by thoughts of harm or danger (e.g. getting hurt physically or emotionally; being rejected or humiliated; failing, etc.). Anxiety occurs when one suffers a loss of confidence to meet whatever challenges might arise -- not the other way around, as is often perceived (i.e. I would be more confident if only I were not so anxious). In essence, people get anxious when they do not effectively cope with "challenges or conflicts" that happen in life. Traumatic events or conflict situations do not cause anxiety, but if a person believes they are unable to handle these situations, then they may very well get undue anxiety. When people are involved in many traumatic or demanding situations, it becomes increasingly harder to keep handling them effectively. Eventually, people who experience lots of harmful and/or seemingly unsolvable problems often become anxious.

I am too anxious! -- What do I do about it?

A good start to "beating" anxiety is to get a thorough medical checkup and rule out any biological abnormalities. There are 2 reasons for starting with a good medical evaluation. First, the more biologically rooted your anxiety is the more likely that you will be helped by some kind of medical intervention. Second, if you rule out biology as the main reason for your anxiety, you can start feeling more confident that you will be able to beat your anxiety if you follow certain steps that will help you change your anxious thinking, feelings and behavior. Having a thorough medical checkup will also reduce any stress you might have from not "knowing" you have a clean bill of health from your physician, or understanding all about any physical problems that you do have.

Once you have determined that your anxiety primarily results from not being able to effectively handle certain situations in your life, it's time to "Beat Anxiety" by increasing your ability to solve problems and tolerate more and more challenges and anxious feelings. The more confident you become in your abilities, the less often you will feel anxious or avoidant. **Remember**, if you are in charge of yourself (your thoughts, feeling and behaviors) no person or situation can make you unduly anxious.

You will "Beat Anxiety" as you improve your emotional management skills, problem solving skills and self-control by using your FEELINGS worksheet to record your feelings each day, and your PROBLEM SOLVE and SELF-CONTROL worksheets to identify and record improved responses in conflict or demanding situations.

Feelings are like personal traffic signals; they reflect our perception of situations -- content (happy), discontent (sadness, anger) or uncertain (scared). When you keep track of how you feel (your signal), it makes it much easier to plan your reaction, and be in control of your reaction. When you do not keep track of your feelings, for whatever reason, you are apt to react in ways that are haphazard or out of control. If you are going to handle uncertain situations, it is important to know how you feel, and to recognize how you want to react. It is also important to learn from your mistakes -- learn to change a haphazard or poorly organized response into a more organized response that is planned and keeps you in control.

How do I use my feeling worksheet?

Your Feeling Sheet will help you to record how you feel, as little or often as you want to each day. Your Feeling Sheet, which you have permission to copy, reminds you of your basic feelings (**Happy, Sad, Scared and Mad**), and provides spaces for recording how you feel each day. It also provides spaces for recording your strongest feeling of the day, and your most common (overall) feeling of the day. It is recommended that you continue to use your feeling sheet, or keep track of your feelings on a calendar or in a diary, even after your anxiety and/or depression are gone. Look for patterns in your feelings, such as feeling worse in the mornings or on weekends. Also examine your feelings in different situations and pinpoint what types of situations you find most difficult to handle. Focus your problem solve and self-control efforts on these areas.

How do I use my Problem-Solve and Self-Control worksheets?

Your Problem-Solve and Self-Control worksheets are the most important tools for beating anxiety. These worksheets are designed to improve your problem solving ability and ability to control your thoughts, feelings and actions (self-control). However, using this sheet can also improve your family relations, interpersonal relations and success at work or in personal pursuits.

Your Self-Control worksheet will help you to adjust your thinking and behaviors, so you can better handle situations that you perceive as difficult or dangerous.

Complete your problem-solve worksheet by picking out one particular worry/concern and identifying at least 1 measure that you could take to help calm/relax yourself, learn more about the details of your worry/conflict, and improve your situation without avoiding it.

Complete your Self-Control worksheet by filling in the details of number 1 through 4. It does not really matter which order you use, although it is important to remember that anxiety comes from your unhelpful and uncontrolled thoughts and behaviors (reactions), rather than from the situations themselves. Thank goodness this is true, because you can learn to control your thoughts and actions, but you cannot control outside factors such as what other people say or do. **Remember**, people who have self-control, don't spend much time trying to control others. When you have completed 1-4, immediately take time to identify how you could have had more self-control by substituting more useful thoughts and behaviors. Go ahead, replace your original responses with your replacement responses -- HOW DO YOU FEEL -- BETTER!

It might help you to remember that unhelpful thoughts and behaviors are reactions that fuel problems and keep you feeling helpless. Helpful thoughts and behaviors are reactions that reduce problems and keep you feeling positive about your effort to make the situation as favorable as possible. Unhelpful thoughts and behaviors often focus on trying to control other people by putting them down or getting back at them. Helpful thoughts and behaviors generally focus on viewing the situation with humor and perspective, and focusing on how the situation might be improved by something you can do. Unhelpful thoughts and behaviors are often overly passive or aggressive. Helpful thoughts and behaviors are usually assertive. Here is an example that you might find useful:

Situation: My girlfriend/boyfriend called up to break a date; I'm sure they are going to break up with me.

Thoughts (**unhelpful**): They really don't like me, nobody really likes me, I can't stand being alone, What am I going to do now?

Behavior (**unhelpful**): Stay at home (withdrawal), have a few drinks, tried to ignore situation.

Feelings: Very anxious and upset.

Thoughts (**helpful**): It's nice when people are there for me, but there are going to be times that does not happen, I don't like being alone, but it has happened before and it will probably happen again -- I can take it, Let's see what I have on my list of things to do when my plans with others are canceled.

Behavior (**helpful**): Went out to see movie that my girlfriend/boyfriend really did not want to see, had some popcorn, informed my girlfriend/boyfriend that our dates are very important to me, and that I'm concerned when she/he breaks dates that were made in advance.

Feelings: Somewhat disappointed, but pleased with the way I handled the situation.

As you can see, you are capable of changing your thoughts and behavior. The more helpful thoughts and actions you make, the better you will feel. At first, you will probably have many unhelpful thoughts and behaviors to change. As you practice, however, you will learn to automatically use the helpful responses that you have been substituting for unhelpful responses in future situations -- This will lead you to "Beat Anxiety" and feel better and better.

Feelings Worksheet

Learn more about how you feel by keeping track “charting” your own feelings with this feeling sheet. Use the following rating system:

0 - A really rotten day (was it mostly angry, sad or scared)

1- A poor day (was it mostly angry, sad or scared)

2 – An OK day

3 – A good day (what were you happy about)

4 – A great day (what were you happy about)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Rate your overall feelings for the last 7 days on this scale:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Self-Control Worksheet

1. What happened/**The Situation**:

2. Thoughts (**unhelpful**):

5. Thoughts (**helpful**):

3. Behavior (**unhelpful**):

6. Behavior (**helpful**):

4. Feelings: (**Distressed**)

7. Feelings: (**Unstressed**)