



## Overview of Anxiety Disorders

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Everyone experiences levels of anxiety, but anxiety disorders are marked by excessive worry that interferes with everyday functioning. The *DSM-5* defines aspects of anxiety disorders for people as experiencing the presence of excessive worry about a variety of topics, which occurs at least 6 months, and is challenging to control. Anxiety disorders are common and are often coupled with sleeplessness, depression, panic attacks, racing thoughts, headaches or other physical issues. Anxiety can be a lifelong challenge that impacts all aspects of life. While it is important to recognize the severity and reach of anxiety, it is equally if not more important to know that anxiety is manageable.

### The Flow Between Mind and Emotions

Anxiety often presents as a battle in the mind for its impact on emotions. Have you ever been crippled by worry? Have you ever run from or avoided situations altogether due to excessive worry? Consider a situation such as awaiting an email from a job prospect or from a romantic suitor and being afraid to check your messages because you think that you will be rejected. The deadline for the job or date passes and you never opened the email. Instead, you deleted it so as to not have to face the prospect of being turned down. You feel relieved after having deleted the messages, but you certainly did not accept a new job or enjoy the date you had hoped for.

Whether you directly connect to the experience of avoiding email or if you avoid other things, places, or people, the recognition of thought as an important component to the experience of anxiety is helpful in understanding how to manage the disorder. In this case your mind was filled with negative thoughts of being rejected and as such you carried negative feelings of worry. This flow between thoughts and feelings is common for anxious people and understanding the flow empowers you to intervene in your anxious experiences.

### The Role of Counseling/Therapy in Managing Anxiety

Cognitive therapy can be helpful in managing anxiety as it creates space to work through the mental aspects of anxious experiences. At times the worries of an anxious person may be obvious and other times the worries are not so obvious.

Consider again the experience of avoiding an email: while it may be obvious that you are worried about being turned down for a job or date, it may be beneficial to think further about the experience in order to identify past encounters that inform the current degree of worry that you have.

Imagine that you avoid the email out of fear of being turned down and that you discover that you have never been rejected outright before. Instead, you have carried a long-standing belief that you simply are not good enough for certain jobs or certain romantic prospects.

These types of discoveries are powerful in directing therapy beneath the surface of experiences and to more deeply rooted issues that when explored, could allow for meaningful reframes of your experiences into helpful thoughts that lead to desirable feelings.

### **Outlook**

As a therapist who partners with people through their anxious experiences, I have held a strong positive belief in the possibilities for managing anxiety. I think of our work together as a grounded journey through your past and present experiences with the goal of establishing a freedom to feel and experience. Specifically, I work with you to accept feelings as real so as not to marginalize or ignore them. I also encourage the acceptance of levels of anxious feelings as humans are feeling-creatures and life could be a sad experience if lived without them.

I partner with you on a courageous journey through your thoughts, feelings, and experiences so as to ground them in truths that become the basis of any reframed thinking that occurs as a result of our work together. Reframed thinking, in time, can become a springboard for you to launch into living out scenarios that are typically crippling.

The idea of a journey is that the exploration along the way to the destination is important as, opposed to seeking the shortest and most straight-line path to the destination. So be patient with yourself through the process and recognize your growth points often rather than awaiting exclusively for some final mental or emotional growth measure. I sincerely hope that you will take a first step toward freedom by connecting with a caring mental health professional near you.

Warmly,

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