

Anxiety Resource Guide

A Practical Guide for Calming the Mind and Nervous System

Understanding Anxiety

Anxiety is not a weakness or a failure of coping. It is a protective response from your nervous system designed to keep you safe.

Your brain is constantly scanning the environment for potential threats. When something feels uncertain, overwhelming, or unsafe, your nervous system activates a survival response commonly known as **fight, flight, or freeze**.

For many people, anxiety develops when this protective system becomes overactive.

Instead of activating only in moments of real danger, the brain begins reacting to:

- **Uncertainty**
- **Social situations**
- **Future possibilities**
- **Memories of past experiences**
- **Internal worries or self-criticism**

When this happens, your body may stay in a prolonged state of alertness.

You may notice:

- **Racing thoughts**
- **Muscle tension**
- **Restlessness**
- **Difficulty relaxing**
- **Persistent worry**

From an Internal Family Systems perspective, anxiety often reflects a protective part of you trying to anticipate danger before it happens. This part is usually attempting to help, even if its strategy feels exhausting. Ironic, how the very strategy that was meant to help create a sense of control turned into the beast that you find yourself trying to battle on a daily basis.

Therapy helps you understand these protective patterns and build a greater sense of internal calm, clarity, and leadership from your core Self.

Signs You Might Be Experiencing Anxiety

You might relate to anxiety if you notice:

- **Persistent worry that is difficult to control**
 - **Overthinking conversations, decisions, or future events**
 - **Feeling tense or on edge much of the time**
 - **Difficulty relaxing or “turning off” your mind**
 - **Trouble sleeping because of racing thoughts**
 - **Avoiding situations that trigger stress or uncertainty**
 - **Feeling overwhelmed by responsibilities or expectations**
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Self-Assessment Reflection

Take a few minutes to reflect on the following questions.

You may want to write down your answers.

- **When do you notice your anxiety most strongly?**
 - **What situations tend to trigger your worry or tension?**
 - **What does your body feel like when anxiety increases?**
 - **What have you already tried to cope with these feelings?**
 - **What would feel different in your life if anxiety had less control?**
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Nervous System Regulation Exercises

1. Extended Exhale Breathing

Slow breathing signals safety to your nervous system.

Try this pattern:

- **Inhale slowly for 4 seconds**
- **Pause briefly**
- **Exhale slowly for 6 seconds**
- **Repeat for 2–3 minutes.**

Longer exhales help the body shift out of stress mode.

2. Grounding Through the Senses

When anxiety pulls your attention into the future, grounding brings you back to the present.

Name:

- **5 things you can see**
- **4 things you can feel**
- **3 things you can hear**
- **2 things you can smell**
- **1 thing you can taste**

This helps your brain reorient to the present moment.

3. Orienting to Safety

Slowly look around your environment.

Ask yourself:

- **“What tells me I am safe right now?”**
- **“What in my environment feels neutral or calming?”**

This helps the brain shift out of threat detection.

Practical Tools for Working with Anxiety

1. Externalize the Anxious Voice

Instead of thinking:

“I am anxious.”

Try noticing:

“A part of me feels anxious right now.”

This small shift helps create space between you and the anxiety.

You may even ask the anxious part:

- **What are you worried might happen?**
- **What are you trying to protect me from?**

Often, anxiety softens when it feels heard.

2. Limit Future Projection

Anxiety often focuses on imagined future problems.

When you notice this happening, ask:

“Is this happening right now?”

If not, gently return your attention to what is actually present.

3. Scheduled Worry Time

Set aside **15 minutes per day** to write down worries.

Outside that time, when worry arises, remind yourself:

“I will think about this during my worry time.”

This helps retrain the brain to contain worry instead of letting it spread throughout the day.

Mini Worksheet: Anxiety Pattern Awareness

Trigger Situation:

What I Felt in My Body:

Thoughts That Appeared:

What I Did in Response:

What I Might Try Next Time:

Preparing for Your First Counseling Session

Starting therapy can feel unfamiliar, and that is completely normal.

Before your first session, it may help to reflect on:

- **What led you to seek support now**
- **Situations where anxiety shows up most strongly**
- **Changes you would hope to experience over time**

You do not need to explain everything perfectly.

Therapy is a space where we explore things together at your pace.

How to Get the Most Out of Therapy

Therapy works best when it becomes an active process of exploration and practice.

Helpful approaches include:

- **Being open about what feels difficult**
- **Sharing feedback about what is helpful or not helpful**
- **Practicing skills between sessions**
- **Allowing time for change to unfold gradually**

Progress in therapy rarely happens all at once. It tends to happen through many small moments of insight and growth.

Recommended Books and Apps

Books

The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook — Edmund Bourne

Self-Compassion — Kristin Neff

The Untethered Soul — Michael Singer

Apps

Insight Timer

Calm

Headspace

Closing Encouragement

Anxiety often develops because your mind and body have been working very hard to protect you. With the right support, it is possible to develop a different relationship with these protective patterns.

Over time, many people experience:

- **Greater emotional calm**
- **More flexibility in stressful situations**
- **A deeper sense of internal confidence**

Change does not happen overnight, but it is absolutely possible.