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Understanding Anxiety

WHAT IT IS AND MEASURES TO REDUCE IT.

Topics

- ▶ Anxiety – What is it?
- ▶ Nerves vs. Anxiety – Knowing the difference
- ▶ Anxiety Disorders
- ▶ Influencing factors
- ▶ Symptoms
- ▶ How to reduce nerves and anxiety
- ▶ Thinking outside the box – Ideas to discuss
- ▶ Summary



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What is it.....

Anxiety is a normal, if unpleasant, part of life, which can affect us all in different ways and at different times. Whereas stress is most often linked to a specific external factor (or factors), those experiencing anxiety are not always aware of the cause.

- -The BPS (2021)

Stress and anxiety are a natural part of the fight or flight response and the body's reaction to danger. The purpose of this response is to ensure a person is alert, focused, and ready to deal with a threat.

- -Barrell (2020)

Which is it?

Everyday Anxiety

Anxiety Disorder

Worry about paying bills, landing a job, a romantic breakup, or other important life events	Constant and unsubstantiated worry that causes significant distress and interferes with daily life
Embarrassment or self-consciousness in an uncomfortable or awkward social situation	Avoiding social situations for fear of being judged, embarrassed, or humiliated
A case of nerves or sweating before a big test, business presentation, stage performance, or other significant event	Seemingly out-of-the-blue panic attacks and the preoccupation with the fear of having another one
Realistic fear of a dangerous object, place, or situation	Irrational fear or avoidance of an object, place, or situation that poses little or no threat of danger
Anxiety, sadness, or difficulty sleeping immediately after a traumatic event.	Recurring nightmares, flashbacks, or emotional numbing related to a traumatic event that occurred several months or years before

Is it Nerves or is it Anxiety?

- **Length of time:** Nervousness ends when the nerve-wracking situation is over. Anxiety is persistent. It never goes away.
- **Intensity:** Being nervous doesn't prevent you from doing those things you're afraid of. Anxiety can prevent you from doing something you enjoy and make it difficult to focus and go about your day.
- **Focus:** Nervousness is a response to something specific, while anxiety is vaguer. You may feel anxious but can't pinpoint what you're anxious about.

- Ankrom (2021)

Types of Anxiety Disorders

- ▶ Generalised anxiety disorder. You feel excessive, unrealistic worry and tension with little or no reason.
- ▶ Panic disorder. You feel sudden, intense fear that brings on a panic attack. During a panic attack you may break out in a sweat, have chest pain, and have a pounding heartbeat (palpitations). Sometimes you may feel like you're choking or having a heart attack.
- ▶ Social anxiety disorder. Also called social phobia, this is when you feel overwhelming worry and self-consciousness about everyday social situations. You obsessively worry about others judging you or being embarrassed or ridiculed.
- ▶ Specific phobias. You feel intense fear of a specific object or situation, such as heights or flying. The fear goes beyond what's appropriate and may cause you to avoid ordinary situations.
- ▶ Agoraphobia. You have an intense fear of being in a place where it seems hard to escape or get help if an emergency occurs. For example, you may panic or feel anxious when on an airplane, public transportation, or standing in line with a crowd.
- ▶ Separation anxiety. Little kids aren't the only ones who feel scared or anxious when a loved one leaves. Anyone can get separation anxiety disorder. If you do, you'll feel very anxious or fearful when a person you're close with leaves your sight. You'll always worry that something bad may happen to your loved one.
- ▶ Selective mutism. This is a type of social anxiety in which young kids who talk normally with their family don't speak in public, like at school.
- ▶ Medication-induced anxiety disorder. Use of certain medications or illegal drugs, or withdrawal from certain drugs, can trigger some symptoms of anxiety disorder.

Worrying about the 'WHAT IF'

Chand and Marwaha (2020) review:

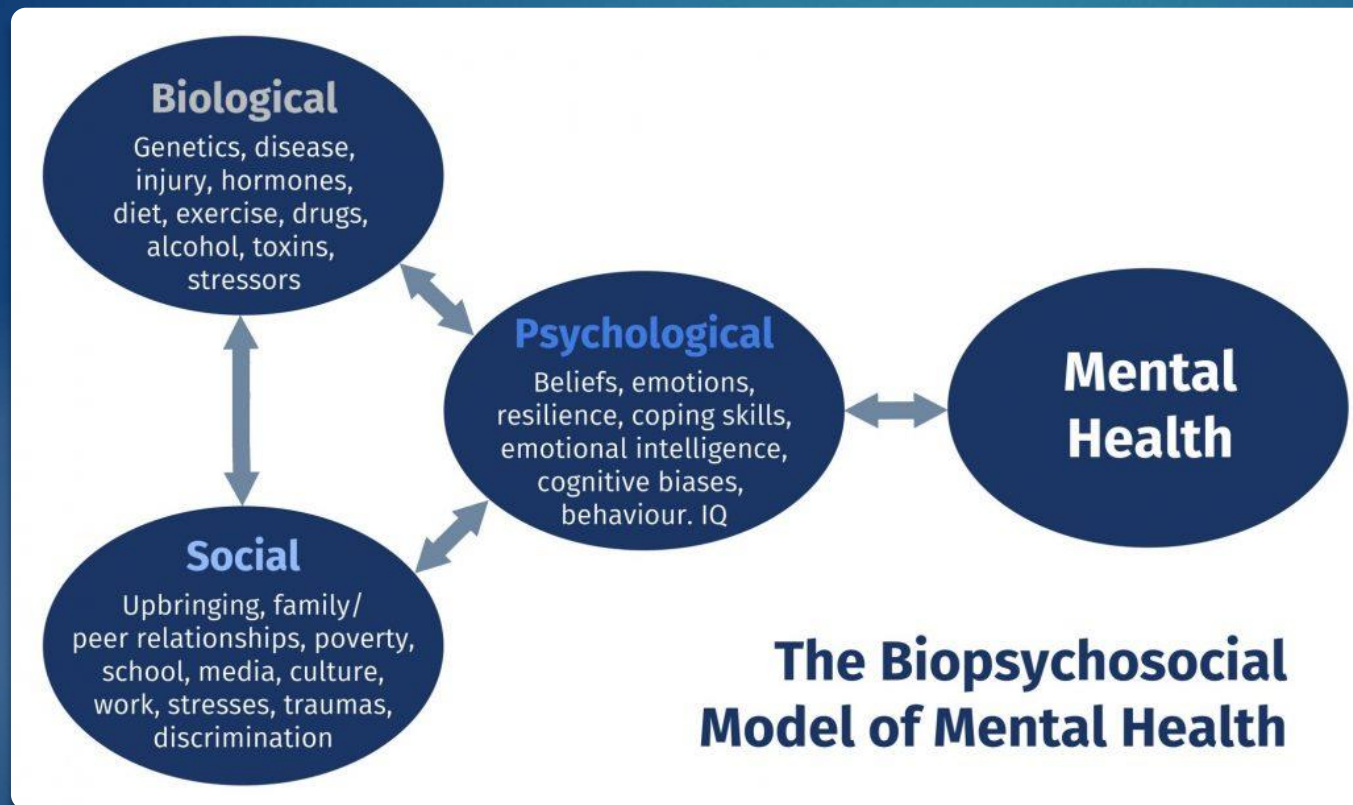
“a future-oriented mood state that consists of a complex cognitive, affective, physiological, and behavioural response system associated with preparation for the anticipated events or circumstances perceived as threatening.”



Lots of factors which
interplay in the
development of anxiety.

Influencing Factors

- ▶ Genetic factors – hormones, diet, ability to handle stress etc.
- ▶ Medical factors – Medications, underlying health issues etc.
- ▶ Life Stressors – Student's case: starting university or college for the first time, leaving home, different country/culture, money worries, pressures & expectations on self and from family.
- ▶ Recreational drug/alcohol use
- ▶ The biggest influencing factor has been found to be environmental factors (Felman, 2021). e.g early life trauma events.



The Biopsychosocial Model of Mental Health

- Delphis (2019).

Pandemic Influence

- ▶ An experiment conducted by Bridgland et al. (2021) utilised several screening scales in order to understand the impact of the pandemic. Emerging research now shows traumatic stress symptoms as a result of this ongoing global stressor.
- ▶ Findings support emerging research that the pandemic can be understood as a traumatic stressor event capable of eliciting PTSD-like responses and exacerbating other related mental health problems (e.g., anxiety, depression, psychosocial functioning, etc.)

Symptoms

- ▶ Feelings of stress and apprehension
- ▶ Irritability
- ▶ Struggling getting to sleep or staying asleep
- ▶ Trouble concentrating
- ▶ Feeling Fearful
- ▶ Not wanting to go out
- ▶ Overthinking
- ▶ Alcohol/Drug misuse
- ▶ Headaches
- ▶ Muscle pain/tension
- ▶ Tensing jaw
- ▶ Decreased appetite
- ▶ Not meeting deadlines
- ▶ Work quality slips
- ▶ Upset stomachs
- ▶ Hypervigilant
- ▶ Trying to control everything
- ▶ Feeling sick
- ▶ Shortness of Breath

Reducing Nerves and Anxiety

Preparation/Organisation . You're less likely to feel nervous or start feeling anxious if you're prepared. This also means knowing where you are going, asking for help, leaving on time and taking medications regularly. Nothing calms nerves and gives you as much confidence as being well-prepared.

Breathe. When you're nervous, your muscles tighten and you may even hold your breath. Take deep breaths to get oxygen to your brain and relax your body.

Stay positive. When the nervousness try to remember , that it's normal to feel nervous sometimes

Get Active. Exercise, even just a short walk has shown to alleviate a lot of anxious symptoms.

Eat something. Eating some things more often tells the body to calm down, reducing cortisol.

Distraction – Listening to music, tele, Visualisation techniques, chewing gum.

Reducing Nerves and Anxiety

Talking to someone

Getting out into nature,
particularly green or beach
space.

Ditch the tech (especially at
night)

Really work upon a good
sleep routine

Set a good Routine and
Structure

Be proactive asking yourself
'what do I need'


Good Diet

Peer to Peer Support. The
mental health
foundation(2021) states that
peer support can enhance
people's wellbeing. Groups,
one-to-one, online

Peer Groups – MH condition specific

- **Bipolar:** Bipolar UK has support groups hosted by staff or volunteers who are affected by the condition.
- **Carers:** Carers UK has directory of local support groups. You can talk honestly to other carers and get tips on how to support someone and look after yourself.
- **Depression:** Peer Talk has a network of peer support groups for people who experience depression. If you prefer writing letters to joining a group or going online, Depression UK has a pen friends scheme.
- **Hearing voices:** the Hearing Voices Network has groups for people who hear voices, see visions or have other unusual sensory experiences.
- **LGBTIQ+:** Stonewall has a list of local peer support groups, including those specifically about mental health.

- The Mental Health Foundation (2021).



**THINK
OUTSIDE
THE BOX**

The Pomodoro Technique

1

Decide on the task to be done.

2

Set the timer to **25 minutes**.

3

Work on the task until the timer rings.

4

Take a short 5 minute **break**.

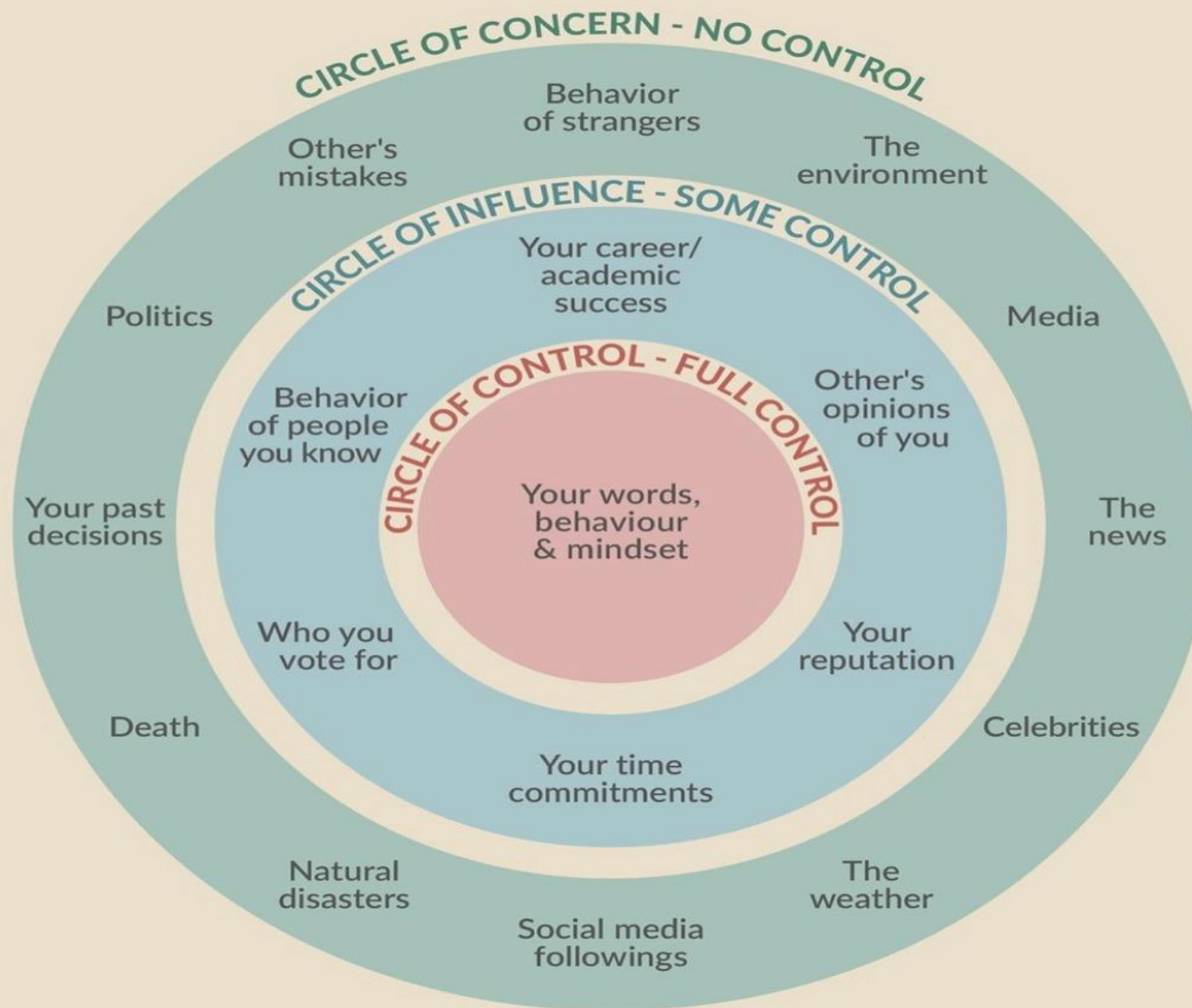
5

Take a 15-30 minute **break**.

repeat 4 times

Rethink Study Methods

THE CIRCLES OF CONTROL



Peer Groups/Counselling

- An interesting article ([Haseltine, 2021](#)) written in August 2021 discusses recent research regarding the effectiveness of peer counselling and student mental health.
- Based on the [Healthy Minds Network](#) research it has been suggested that;

“Mental health was the biggest barrier to students thriving in college, both academically and socially.”
- Dr. Sarah Lipson
- The research pinpointed one solution which has shown some positive results, that of **Peer counselling**. This takes the form of non-professionals (other students) who are trained in active listening and in guiding their peers through emotions without offering specific advice (Haseltine, 2021).
- This system has been shown to help assist students who require community support relatively quickly and shown a lessening in mental health symptomology whilst waiting for counselling support which can take sometimes weeks to be seen by a trained specialist.
- In some cases, some students who have had this peer support felt that they no longer needed the intervention of a trained professional as just having a space to talk safely and freely was enough.

Summary

- ▶ Anxiety is not easily compartmentalised
- ▶ Anxiety is a unique mix of factors both internally and externally
- ▶ Educating Students on the differences between nerves and anxiety (normalising it).
- ▶ Offering lots of options to students to try and reduce or at times prevent anxiety – Reminding them of their responsibility and ability to control what they can do to help themselves.
- ▶ Make them aware of all of the services available to them.
- ▶ Recognising maybe when a student really may need extra support in the form of counselling or GP referral.
- ▶ Encouraging students to invest in their chosen course, what do they love about the subject? – Reinvestment is Key!
- ▶ Thinking outside the box, one size doesn't fit all and encouraging students to get creative on helping themselves is vital.
- ▶ Being aware of the circles of control – This helps perspective
- ▶ Peer Counselling as a possible short-term solution

Questions?



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