

My Signs of Anxiety

Please take a few minutes to think about some of the signals that you've had when feeling anxious. Then, circle and write down examples for each area.

I notice **Physical changes** like:

(muscle tension, rapid heartbeat, rapid breathing, shakiness, dizziness, lightheadedness, stomach ache, chest pressure, feeling on edge, fatigue, difficulty focusing, blushing, sweating, restlessness, headaches...)

My actions and **Behaviors change** like:

(avoiding friends/school/work, withdrawing from others, partner relationship changes, fidgeting, picking at nails/skin/hair, compulsive behaviors, alcohol/substances, turning down invitations, hobbies, eating, computer/t.v./gaming habits, body posture...)

I feel affected by **Thoughts** like:

("I'm going to fail," "I'm losing it," "they probably all think I'm ____," "I feel like I can't breathe,")

Emotionally, I **start feeling**:

(overwhelmed, frustrated, sad, annoyed, frantic, panicked, worried, afraid, uneasy, numb, scattered, doomed, restless...)

Any additional signs:

(friends and family tend to notice _____)

What are Cognitive Distortions?

Cognitive distortions alter our perception, much like wearing glasses with misshaped lenses. These are *automatic thinking patterns that distort reality* and contribute to increased anxiety, hopelessness, and suffering. They're also called *Thinking Errors* or *Thought Distortions*.

Please check the distortions that affect your anxiety the most

- Catastrophizing** (“The snowball effect”): Imagining what has happened, or will happen, will be so awful you’ll be completely unable to handle it. Expecting worst-case scenarios.
Example: *“I bet I’ll mess up this job interview just like the last one. I’ll never get a good job, and I’ll end up all alone and living on the street!”*
- Fortune Telling**: A pattern of consistently making negative predictions.
Example: *Even though I studied hard, I know I’ll fail.*
- Mind reading**: A pattern of assuming you know exactly what other people are thinking. It involves consistently predicting the worst, without strong evidence it’s true.
Example: *“Everyone probably thinks I’m a loser after that presentation.”*
- Emotional Reasoning**: Allowing your mood to bias your interpretation.
Example: *“I feel nervous, so it must be unsafe in this elevator.”*
- Negative Filtering** (discounting the positives): Focusing almost entirely on the negatives and dismissing the positives.
Example: *Doing really well on an exam but only focusing on a question you missed.*
- Overgeneralizing**: Overestimating a pattern based on insufficient evidence.
Example: *“Everyone in California drives recklessly.”*
- Perfectionism**: Unfair and very rigid demands and expectations for yourself.
Examples: *“I can’t make any mistakes”* or *“This presentation must go perfectly.”*
- All-or-Nothing Thinking**: Seeing situations and people in all-or-nothing extremes.
Examples: *“I am a total failure,”* *“I always have bad luck!”* or *“No one cares about me.”*

Discussion: Which distortions are impacting your anxiety the most?

Cycle of Anxiety

Risk Factors

Genetics Health Concerns
Trauma Substance Misuse
Learning: family, culture, society

Triggers

Stress & Change, such as:
School, Relationships
Injustices, Finances

Thoughts

Negative & Unfair
Cognitive Distortions
Worry Habits

Behavior

Avoidance Over-preparedness
Reassurance-seeking
Substance use Procrastination

Feelings

Guilt Anxiety
Frustration Sadness
Embarrassment Fear

Physical Changes

Muscle Tension Reduced Focus
Rapid Heart rate Stomach Issues
Sleep Issues Restlessness Fatigue

My Cycle of Anxiety

Risk Factors

Triggers

Thoughts

Behavior

Feelings

Physical Changes

Mindfulness of Emotions: Primary & Secondary Emotions

It's important to be able to separate primary and secondary emotions. This can be tricky since primary emotions trigger other emotions so quickly we usually aren't aware it's happening.

Primary versus Secondary Emotions:

Primary Emotions are our immediate emotional response to what just happened. These emotions typically make sense and are straightforward. When a good friend moves away, you feel sadness. If someone tells you how much you've helped them, you feel happy.

Secondary Emotions are emotional reactions to primary emotions. They are emotions about our emotions, and are often more intense. Imagine you're feeling anxious about having to do a class presentation this semester in an English class. The nervousness is primary, but suddenly this shifts. Then, you start to feel frustrated, disappointed, and embarrassed for feeling anxious about public speaking.

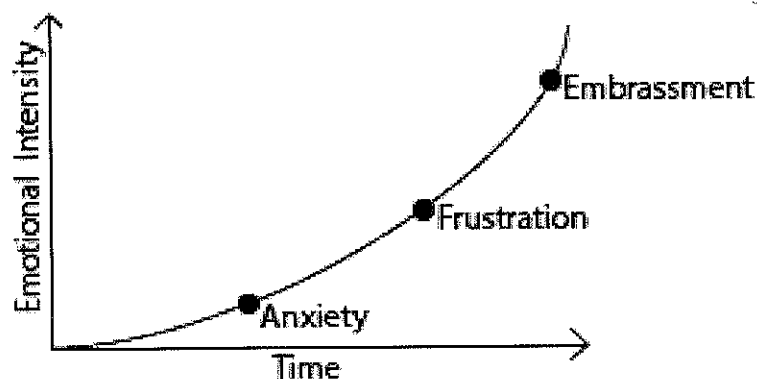
By expanding emotional awareness through mindfulness, we can separate these apart. This also allows us to recognize how judging our emotional reactions, rather than accepting them, often leads to greater distress. For example, anger is often a secondary emotion to anxiety (and sadness) that we fuel by not accepting primary emotions.

Secondary emotions tend to increase the intensity and duration of emotional experiences.

Try to notice your emotional reactions (secondary emotions) to your first emotional response (primary emotion), and judgmental thoughts that play a role.

It can also be very helpful to expand your emotional vocabulary to pinpoint precisely what you're feeling. Feeling annoyed is very different than feeling enraged, and feeling a little nervous is very different than being petrified.

Source: Marra, 2004



It also helps to be more precise, using words beyond upset or uncomfortable, to better understand and support your emotions. Please look over a few examples of this below:

Anxiety & Fear Words:

Afraid, Apprehensive, Cautious, Distrustful, Dread, Endangered, Excited, Fearful, Hesitant, Hypervigilant, Impatient, Nervous, Panicked, Petrified, Overwhelmed, On-edge, Scared, Self-conscious, Shaky, Shy, Suspicious, Suspenseful, Tense, Threatened, Restless, Uneasy, Unsafe...

Sadness Words:

Alone, Burdened, Burdensome, Devastated, Disappointed, Dejected, Demoralized, Discouraged, Disheartened, Distraught, Down, Excluded, Grief-stricken, Gloomy, Heartbroken, Hopeless, Ignored, Invalidated, Lost, Miserable, Tearful, Sorrow, Unhappy, Unsupported...

Anger Words:

Annoyed, Agitated, Aggressive, Aggravated, Belligerent, Cranky, Crushed, Depressed, Displeased, Distraught, Enraged, Furious, Frustrated, Grumpy, Irritated, Mad, Mistreated, Provoked, Rageful, Resentful, Snappy, Touchy, Unappreciated, Violated, Wronged...

Happiness & Joy Words:

Acknowledged, Appreciated, Beautiful, Carefree, Cheerful, Connected, Content, Encouraged, Excited, Hopeful, Humorous, Included, Jovial, Joyful, Loved, Lighthearted, Optimistic, Pleased, Protected, Overjoyed, Safe, Satisfied, Secure, Supported, Relieved, Thrilled, Welcomed...