

Managing Anxiety By Changing Your Thinking

Anxiety

Anxiety is a strong feeling of fear in response to danger (whether the danger is real or not). Intense anxiety, also known as “panic,” is a temporary reaction to the buildup of stress over time.

Some amount of anxiety is normal and necessary. It prepares your body for the fight-or-flight response, which is the natural way of coping when you are frightened or challenged. During these times, your instincts take over and tell you to defend yourself (fight) or get away (flight).

Danger That is Real Versus Danger That is Not Real (Perceived)

Anxiety is your body’s natural response to danger. Sometimes the danger you face is real but other times, you only **think** it is.

- **If the danger is real**, your body’s fear response is helpful! A little bit of stress causes your body to react in a way designed to protect you. For example, when a lion roars, it’s best to run.
- **If the danger is only thought to be real (perceived)**, your body responds in the same way as if the danger were real but the anxiety response is unnecessary. For example, running from a rope lying on the ground, thinking it’s a snake.

The way in which you think about something determines your response. In other words, **your thoughts have power!**

The Connection Between Your Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviors

Your thoughts, feelings and behaviors interact with each other. What you think will effect what you feel and what you do in response.

Because you have the power to change your thoughts, you can change your anxiety response. An anxiety response is helpful and necessary only when the danger is real.

What You Can Do to Prevent Unnecessary Anxiety

You can learn to change your thoughts and feelings through the following techniques:

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** CBT teaches you how to manage the connection between thinking, feeling and behavior. If you change how you think about a situation, it will help change what you feel and what you do in response.
- **Mindfulness:** This technique can help to manage your anxiety by calming your mind. You can learn to recognize thoughts just as thoughts, not as facts, and learn to let them go.

Your mental health care provider can teach you these techniques and answer any questions you may have.