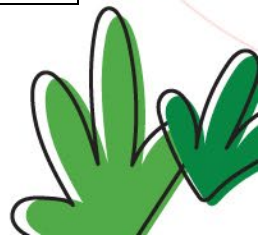




## ANXIETY

Introduction	<p>Everyone experiences anxiety at some time. While it can feel unpleasant, it isn't harmful, and may be helpful in motivating the person experiencing it to solve everyday problems. For example, feeling anxious before an exam can help a student to prioritise studying over spending time with their friends.</p> <p>Anxiety disorders are different from normal (helpful) anxiety because they are more severe, they last longer, and they interfere with things like work, school and relationships.</p> <p>To feel more confident when teaching this lesson, we recommend you access the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the factsheet 'Anxiety</li><li>• the article 'Anxiety 2'.</li></ul>
Objective / teachers' goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describing the signs and symptoms of anxiety;</li><li>• Explaining some of the risk factors of anxiety;</li><li>• Discussing the different anxiety disorders and treatment options;</li><li>• Identifying practical strategies for managing anxiety.</li></ul>
Relation to competence framework <a href="#">INTRODUCTION TO THE VITALITY COMPETENCE FRAMEWORK copy (vitalityforthefuture.eu)</a>	<p>Willingness and empathy to work with different clients/patients</p> <p>Competence in analysing health needs</p> <p>Understanding mental health</p> <p>Communication</p>
Dimensions (check the dimensions and related aspects below) <input type="checkbox"/> Bodily functions <input type="checkbox"/> Mental wellbeing <input type="checkbox"/> Meaningfulness <input type="checkbox"/> Quality of life <input type="checkbox"/> Participation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Daily functioning	
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Butcher's paper</li><li>• Paper and pens</li></ul>
Approach	<p><u>ACTIVITY 01</u> (20 min)</p> <p>Investigation: What is anxiety?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. As a class group, watch the video clip <a href="#">About feeling stressed, anxious, worried or down - YouTube</a></li><li>2. Ask students to draw an outline of the human body.</li></ol>





3. Ask students to write down, in appropriate places on their drawing, the signs and symptoms of anxiety – e.g. racing heart, sweaty hands.
4. Ask students to circle the signs and symptoms that signify ‘normal’ anxiety, and to underline the signs and symptoms that characterise an anxiety disorder – e.g. can’t leave the house = disorder, raised heart rate = normal.

Ask students to write down, outside the figure, the risk factors of anxiety – e.g. family history, personality, stressful events.

1. As a class, discuss the following questions:
2. Can anxiety be beneficial?
3. What is the difference between ‘normal’ anxiety and an anxiety disorder?
4. When is it appropriate to seek professional help for anxiety?
- 5.

#### ACTIVITY 02 (30 min)

Group presentation: Anxiety disorders

1. Divide the class into groups of 3–4 students.
2. Allocate each group an anxiety disorder to investigate:
  - Generalised anxiety disorder
  - Social anxiety disorder
  - Panic attacks
  - Agoraphobia
  - Specific phobias
1. Each group will spend three minutes explaining to the class their allocated anxiety disorder. Encourage students to think of interesting ways to present this information – e.g. on butcher’s paper, through pictures, stories, etc. Questions they can consider when researching their explanation include:
  - What is the definition of the disorder?
  - What are the common signs and symptoms?
  - What are the common treatment options?

#### ACTIVITY 03 (10 min)

Individual reflection: Coping with anxiety:





	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Students access the article '7 tips to help with stress and anxiety'.</li><li>2. Students think about a recent event that caused them anxiety.</li><li>3. Students choose three strategies they would have found helpful in managing this anxiety. The strategies could be taken from the article, or the students may have ones they already use.</li><li>4. If comfortable doing so, students share their strategies with a partner and explain why they chose each one.</li></ol>
Type of activity (workshop, assignment, quiz, debate, presentation, etc.)	Workshop + Research + Self-reflection/assessment
Duration	1 hour
Final goal (learning outcome)	Students develop an understanding of the difference between 'normal' anxiety and an anxiety disorder, and learn ways to manage and cope with associated behaviours and feelings.





## Spiderweb Positive health

Dimension/Aspects							
<b>Bodily functions</b>	Feeling healthy	Fitness	Complaints and pain	Sleep	Food	Condition	Exercise
<b>Mental well-being</b>	Remember	Concentrate	Communicating	Being cheerful	Accepting yourself	Dealing with change	Sense of control
<b>Quality of life</b>	Enjoy	Being happy	Balance	Feeling safe	How you live	Get by with your money	Feeling comfortable with yourself
<b>Social participation</b>	Social contact	Be taken seriously	Doing fun things together	Belonging	Doing meaningful things together	Support from others	Interest in society
<b>Daily functioning</b>	Taking care of yourself	Knowing your limits	Knowledge of health	Dealing with time	Dealing with money	Being able to work	Being able to ask for help
<b>Meaningfulness</b>	Meaningful life	Zest of life	Wanting to achieve deals	Have confidence	Accept	Gratitude	Keep learning





## 7 tips to help with stress and anxiety

It's totally normal to feel anxious from time to time, but there are lots of things you can do to feel a bit better. Remember: there's a difference between feeling stressed every now and then, and experiencing ongoing anxiety. If the anxiety is starting to take a toll and you're looking for ways to deal with it, consider talking to a mental health professional. Get started and learn how to deal with stress and anxiety.

### Quick tips to help with stress and anxiety

These techniques can be really helpful if you experience anxiety every now and then or feel unexpectedly anxious.

#### **Practice breathing techniques**

The physical symptoms of anxiety can be triggered by hyperventilation. This is when your breathing quickens and your body takes in *too much* oxygen, reducing the carbon dioxide in your blood. You need a certain amount of carbon dioxide in your body to regulate your reaction to anxiety and panic.

Try doing one of these breathing exercises to help calm you down and slow your breathing whenever you feel anxious:

- The 4–7–8 technique: Breathe in for four seconds. Hold your breath for seven seconds, and exhale for eight seconds.
- Long exhale: Spend a bit longer exhaling than you do inhaling. Exhale fully, and then take a big, deep breath for four seconds. Then exhale for six seconds.

#### **Practice muscle relaxation techniques**

Also called a 'body scan', this technique helps you to focus on yourself and release tension you're holding in your body.

Breathe in and tense the muscles in your face, squeezing your eyes shut. Clench your jaw and keep your face tensed for five seconds. Gradually relax your muscles over the time it takes to count to ten, then take a deep breath. You can say 'relax' as you relax. Next, move on to your neck and shoulders, and gradually move down your body. Be careful with any injuries or pain that you have.

#### **Focus on the present**

Have you ever noticed that feeling stressed or anxious often coincides with dwelling on the past or worrying about the future? Focusing your mind on the present moment can help you feel a little more relaxed.

#### **Take a break**

Schedule regular breaks into your day. Excuse yourself for five to ten minutes, go to a different room, or put aside what you're doing to take a walk around, try some breathing exercises, get some fresh air or do some light stretches to help you relax.

#### **Talk to someone you trust about how you're feeling**

Just talking to someone about how you're feeling can take a weight off your shoulders. Make sure you trust the person, work out what you want to say to them, and then just go for it.

### Long-term strategies for dealing with stress and anxiety





If you experience anxiety more frequently, or have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, quick coping methods can still help when you're in a bind but they shouldn't be the only thing you use. It's important to find treatment that works for you to manage your day-to-day life. It can be helpful to have a chat to your doctor or mental health professional to figure out a plan.

### **Keep a 'thought diary' and challenge any negative thinking**

Writing down what you're worrying about can help you to clear your head and reduce stress and anxiety. You could keep a journal or have a notes file in your phone, and write down your thoughts whenever you're feeling anxious. It's almost like you're transferring them out of your head and into your journal. Doing this can also help you to see what you're thinking about more clearly and to [challenge negative thinking](#). If you're having trouble challenging your thinking, you could try asking someone you trust (such as a friend, family member or mentor) or a therapist to help you out.

### **Identify your triggers**

You can identify your triggers with a psychologist or on your own. Recognising what causes your anxiety can help you to better understand and face what's going on. Some common triggers are:

- alcohol, caffeine or drugs
- a stressful work, home or school environment
- driving or travelling
- withdrawal or side-effects from certain medications
- phobias
- health issues or concerns
- erratic eating patterns – if you skip a meal, your blood sugar may drop, which can lead to feeling jittery and anxious.

Knowing your triggers doesn't mean you should avoid them. Some ongoing stressors, such as your job, need more time to break down – is there a work deadline, or a specific person or project, that's triggering your anxiety? Some potential triggers, such as a stressful home environment, are difficult to manage. In these situations, using other strategies can help you to become more resilient and better able to cope with your anxiety.

### **Avoid drugs, alcohol and stimulants**

Stimulants are chemicals that 'excite' your nervous system, making it work faster and harder. Using stimulants can worsen your anxiety symptoms, so cutting these out can help you to manage your anxiety. Some of the most common stimulants are:

- caffeine, which is found in coffee and tea
- nicotine, which is found in tobacco products such as cigarettes, chews and vape pens
- drugs such as cocaine.

It's ideal to avoid alcohol and drugs in general when you're experiencing anxiety. If you're using substances to feel better or to relax, you might become dependent on them and they could make you feel worse in the long run.

### **Put relaxation and self-care into your routine**





**VITALity**  
for the future

A fully packed schedule would make a lot of people feel stressed. Make sure you take time out each day for at least one thing you enjoy doing – whether it's spending time on a hobby, watching a Netflix episode, or chatting with a friend. It can also help if you schedule the activity into your day, so that you don't feel guilty about not doing something else.

If you're feeling overwhelmed, don't be afraid to say 'no' to things when you need to.

### **Move more, eat well, sleeeeeeep**

It's pretty well-known that exercise lowers stress, reduces anxiety and improves mood. And the good news is: you don't need to run a marathon to get the benefits. It takes just 30 minutes of exercise a day to make a difference. Diet and sleep are also really important for your wellbeing. A healthy diet will make you feel healthier and stronger and better able to handle stress, while enough sleep positively affects your mood and stress levels.

### **Face your fears**

If you always avoid situations that make you anxious, this might be stopping you from doing things you want or need to do. It sounds weird, but facing the things that make you anxious can reduce your anxiety. Begin with small steps – think of them as 'acts of bravery' – to test whether the situation is as bad as you expected and to learn to manage your fears. It's best to do this with the help of a professional (such as a counsellor or psychologist), though, so that it doesn't get too full-on for you



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

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## What is anxiety

Feeling anxious is a survival response to situations where there are dangers or threats, however some people react more intensely to such situations.



### **Anxiety is more than feeling stressed or worried**

Whether a diagnosis is made (by a health professional) will depend on how often, how easily and how intensely a child or young person experiences the symptoms of anxiety and how much it interferes with everyday living.

Common signs and symptoms of anxiety include:

- feeling more anxious than others their age and level
- having anxious feelings are consistently very intense
- feelings that persist well after the stressful event has passed
- feeling so distressed that it interferes with their capacity to learn, socialize and do everyday things.

It's estimated that one in 14 children and young people experience anxiety.

There are a range of effective treatments and supports available, focusing on how to enable them to manage their condition

### **How do anxiety conditions develop?**

An anxiety condition isn't caused by a single factor but a combination of things.

Various factors play a role, including:

- family history of mental health conditions
- personality factors
- a learnt response
- physical health problems
- other mental health conditions
- substance use
- ongoing stressful events.

Possible triggers for ongoing stressful events include transitions (such as starting at a school), change in living arrangements, family relationship problems, major emotional shock following a stressful or traumatic event, being the recipient of bullying, verbal, sexual, physical or emotional abuse or trauma, and death or loss of a loved one.

### **What signs should I look out for?**

Feeling anxious is a survival response to situations where there are dangers or threats – it helps us to respond efficiently.







However, some people react more quickly or more intensely to such situations.

### Age is important

There are similarities but also key differences in the way anxiety manifests in people of different ages and developmental stages. For example, if a baby cries when an unfamiliar person wants to hold them, their fear seems perfectly normal for this age. But if a 12-year-old withdraws or refuses to talk to new people and avoids situations where it may be expected, this may be a sign of a more serious anxiety issue. No matter their age, both children and young people can have difficulty finding the words to express what they're feeling – their behaviour may be the best clue.

### Early childhood

Young children are in the early stages of learning how to recognise, understand and respond appropriately to their emotions. Anxiety disorders are less likely to be formally identified in children under five, partly because certain fears are considered normal – for instance, fear of the dark, visiting unfamiliar places or separating from a family member.

Behaviours that might indicate they're experiencing higher levels of anxiety than average could include:

- taking a long time to calm or settle following separation from a family member on a regular basis
- frequent tantrums that are more regular or severe than others of the same age
- low interest or significant reluctance to interact in social situations
- unwillingness to get involved in unfamiliar activities
- significant difficulty or distress during change or transitions
- clingy behaviour or inability to separate from a favourite educator.

Many children in early childhood will display one or more of the above behaviours; however, if it happens on a regular basis and interferes with the child's ability to learn and engage in social relationships, then it's a sign they need additional support.

### Primary school years

As children's thinking skills expand and become more abstract, they can develop fears of imaginary creatures and monsters. They may also worry about schoolwork, tests and their social relationships. As they grow older, they may have anxiety about family relationships or global issues such as war or famine.

The following behaviours might indicate a primary school age child is experiencing higher levels of anxiety than average:

- Wanting things to be perfect
- Reluctance to ask for help
- Asking for reassurance excessively
- Difficulty joining in
- Requests to go to sick bay
- Challenging behaviour.

### Adolescence





During adolescence, common sources of anxiety include starting secondary school, fitting in with peers, exam stress, body image and family relationships. Worrying about these things isn't necessarily a sign of a mental health condition. Individuals may need additional support if they experience the following:

- Appearing withdrawn and reluctant to participate in classroom activities or social situations
- Oversensitivity to criticism or feedback
- Perfectionism and fear of failure
- Missing classes or excusing themselves to go to the toilet on a regular basis
- Negative thinking and always expecting the worst
- Challenging behavior.

Looking beyond behavior to try to identify what might be underneath can help you respond with understanding. Anxiety can be difficult to spot because it presents in many ways. The important point is to notice that there's a concern and seek further advice and assistance.

## Signs

ANXIETY, the experience of worry or fear, is a natural biological response that arises in response to uncertain and potentially threatening situations. For some, however, anxiety can occur in many situations not just threatening ones and may lead to avoidance behaviors, social withdrawal and possibly panic attacks. Anxiety in school students is fairly common and if left unmanaged, mild anxiety can become stronger over time and seriously impact a person's quality of life and wellbeing.

### Signs this might be a problem:

- constantly feeling worried
- unable to concentrate
- often feeling nervous or on edge
- difficulty concentrating
- feeling as though your heart is racing or pounding or excessive blushing
- dry mouth
- feeling as though you are having difficulty breathing (often during a panic attack).

### What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a natural biological response to fear or uncertain situations. It involves feeling worried or fearful and often triggers the avoidance of a particular situation. Sometimes anxiety can become generalised, with people experiencing anxiety in many situations, not just uncertain or dangerous ones. In such circumstances, anxiety can become detrimental to wellbeing as it may lead to people avoiding all kinds of situations or social engagements perceived to be too stressful. If anxiety begins to interfere with daily functioning it may be classified as an anxiety disorder. Often anxiety disorders will develop during adolescence and can co- occur with depression, with students presenting signs of anxiety and depression at school.





**Emotional signs of anxiety include:**

- persistent and unfounded fear or worry (either about past or future events)
- difficulty concentrating, having mind blanks or impaired memory
- feeling indecisive, confused, irritable or impatient
- feeling constantly on edge or nervous
- interrupted sleeping patterns, possibly with vivid dreams.

**Physical symptoms include:**

- rapid heart-beat, feeling as though your heart is pounding or chest pain
- excessive or uncomfortable blushing
- uneven breathing or shortness of breath
- dizziness, headache, nausea
- sweating, tingling and numbness
- dry mouth, sweaty palms
- muscle aches and possible tremors/shaking.

**Common anxiety disorders**

There are many different kinds of anxiety disorders depending on the focus and nature of the anxiety. Some of the most common anxiety disorders experienced by young people are:

**Generalised Anxiety Disorder**

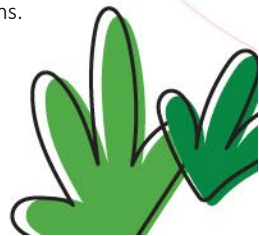
Generalised anxiety disorder, or GAD, refers to when individuals experience anxiety across a range of situations and the worry is excessive and hard for the person to control. Those experiencing GAD will usually also have physical symptoms of anxiety and these symptoms need to be present for the majority of the time over a six month period for GAD to be diagnosed.

**Social Anxiety or Phobia**

Social anxiety or phobia occurs when a person becomes fearful of social situations, worrying excessively about the prospect of being embarrassed or humiliated in front of others. People with social phobia experience intense anxiety over the prospect of being judged negatively by others. This may present as a fear of speaking and eating in front of others, or of engaging in any social events. People with social anxiety often avoid social situations.

**Panic Disorders**

Panic attacks are sudden and often unpredictable episodes of intense anxiety, with acute physiological responses (often being mistaken for or likened to the sensation of having a heart attack). Panic attacks are only classified as such when it is considered to be a disproportionate response to a situation. A panic disorder may be present when an individual has a panic attack and then persistently worries about experiencing more panic attacks for at least one month, and this has a significant impact on their wellbeing. Some people with panic disorders may begin to withdraw and avoid situations they fear a panic attack may occur, however, given panic attacks are often unpredictable, and occur sporadically this can lead to a general avoidance of many situations.





### **Agoraphobia**

Some people with Panic Disorder also experience Agoraphobia. Agoraphobia occurs when a person withdraws from situations where they fear a panic attack may occur. People with agoraphobia may feel extreme anxiety about not being able to leave a place where they anticipate a panic attack may occur (for example, public transport). This can become so extreme that a person may withdraw entirely (not leaving their homes). People who experience panic attacks at a young age are more at risk of developing agoraphobia.

### **Specific phobias**

Specific phobias arise when a person experiences intense fear and worry about a specific object or situation. To be considered a phobia the anxiety experienced must be considered to be an unreasonable response (e.g. no actual threat or very little likelihood of threat actually occurring presently in the object or situation).

### **Common disorders associated with anxiety**

#### **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)**

Obsessive-compulsive disorder or OCD is an anxiety disorder that, although relatively uncommon in the general population, tends to develop during childhood or adolescence when it occurs. OCD is characterised by obsessive thoughts, behaviours and/or impulses. These frequently occurring, intrusive and unwanted thoughts trigger anxiety, and often a person will respond with compulsive and repetitive behaviours that temporarily reduce anxiety.

OCD can often stem from fears about health, contamination and safety, a need for order (symmetry and exactness), sexual impulses or religious obsession. Repetitive behaviours may include things like compulsive hand-washing, repetition of ordering/counting or touch. If left untreated OCD may become a lifelong illness.

#### **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

Post-traumatic stress disorder is a disorder that occurs after a person experiences a traumatic incident, such as witnessing or experiencing violence, sexual assault or being involved in an accident. After experiencing such an event it is natural for a person to experience anxiety and distress. For most people, these symptoms will reduce naturally over time. If this does not resolve or begin to diminish after several weeks and is causing significant distress to the person, they may be suffering PTSD.

Symptoms of PTSD are quite distinct, involving some form of re-experiencing the initial trauma. This may occur through upsetting and intrusive memories, vivid flashbacks or recurrent dreams of the event. In response to PTSD and to reduce anxiety people may avoid situations or people that remind them of the event (e.g. if attacked at night, a person may not leave their house after dark alone or if involved in a car accident, a person may avoid being in a car). Other symptoms may include a general sense of unease or constantly feeling on edge and insomnia.

### **How can you help students with anxiety at school?**

There are many simple and effective relaxation techniques such as breathing exercises that can help students manage or reduce mild anxiety in school. Encouraging students to identify some simple relaxing exercises and activities (such as walking, reading and taking time out from stressful situations) can also be helpful in the early stages of anxiety. If you notice that students are struggling with anxiety, it's important that you contact their parents or parents, and discuss it with the wellbeing staff at your school as they may need to seek medical advice, from their local GP, or other psychological services

