

*Complementary health approaches, including stress and relaxation techniques.

How Congregations Can Help

Anxiety can make people feel as if no one cares and they don't see a way forward. This may cause people to pull back from social situations...and from their faith.

- One of the greatest problems for those with anxiety is the lack of seeing the future as positive. A faith community can offer a vision of hope and assurance that the individual is not alone.
- Congregations can offer a safe, welcoming and accepting community with people who care and will listen without judgment.
- Educate the congregation about anxiety and other mental health issues.
- Be aware of signs and symptoms of persons who need support. Offer support groups or find someone in the congregation to offer individual support.
- Practices of prayer, meditation and mindfulness can help persons calm their breathing and center their bodies in the present.

- Persons of faith are more likely to take care of themselves and model healthier lifestyles that reduce stress and anxiety.
- Faith communities can offer healthy distractions for overcoming anxiety by helping persons get involved in the congregation's activities and volunteer opportunities in the community.
- Faith leaders need to be aware of referral resources in their community.

*Be still,
and know that I am God...*
Psalm 46:10

The Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA)
www.adaa.org

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
www.nami.org

Mental Health Ministries
www.MentalHealthMinistries.net

Obsessive-Compulsive Foundation
www.iocdf.org

Worrywisekids
www.worrywisekids.org

Anxiety Disorders



Overcoming the Fear

Mental Health Ministries
www/MentalHealthMinistries.net

Background on Anxiety Disorders

Everyone experiences anxiety. However, when feelings of intense fear and distress are overwhelming and prevent us from doing everyday things, an anxiety disorder may be the cause. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health concern in the United States. An estimated 40 million adults in the U.S., or 18%, have an anxiety disorder. Approximately 8% of children and teenagers experience the negative impact of an anxiety disorder at school and at home.

These disorders are much more than the stress that results from the fast pace of life today. Often the feeling of panic, fear or physical discomfort arises without warning. People with an anxiety disorder may understand that their reactions aren't logical, but they cannot control them. There is a high success rate by treating the symptoms of anxiety with medication and therapy.

Types of Anxiety Disorders

A **Panic Disorder** is primarily defined as a panic attack when the body sends out various warning signals such as pounding heart, chest pains, sweating, shortness of breath, sensations of choking, fear of losing control and even a fear of dying. Because these attacks occur suddenly

with no logical cause, people think they are having a heart attack or other medical emergency.

A **Phobia** is a deep-seated fear that is irrational, distressing and disruptive to a person's life. The person may have a specific phobia such as a fear of confined spaces or a fear of heights. A social phobia is the fear of being watched, embarrassed or humiliated while doing something in public. A common form of social phobia is the fear of public speaking. Agoraphobia is the fear of places or situations from which escape might be difficult, such as being in a crowd or standing in line. In severe cases, untreated agoraphobia can keep a person from leaving his or her home.

A person with **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder** (OCD) finds that his or her life is consumed by obsessions that cannot be controlled. To combat these obsessions, the person with OCD engages in repetitive rituals such as constant hand washing, checking and rechecking or following rigid procedural rules that have no realistic connection to whether the unwanted event happens.

Some people, who survive a disaster such as a fire, earthquake or war or a very traumatic experience such as a rape, death of a loved one or sexual abuse, will experience the same physical symptoms that they felt at the time of the incident. Often there is a triggering event for **Post-Traumatic**

Stress Disorder (PTSD) that causes the event to replay over and over in their minds. Nightmares, flashbacks and physical discomfort are common.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) occurs when individuals experience persistent feelings of exaggerated worry and tension that are unfounded or unrelenting. They may worry constantly about their health, loved ones, finances or jobs, even when there appears to be no reason to do so. Often people with GAD have additional mental health problems such as depression, another anxiety disorder, or a substance abuse disorder.

Treatment

Fear is rooted in the body, which has a natural way of dealing with it, as it does with every feeling. First there is a trigger that causes the body to react with fear. Once the cause is gone, the body clears away the fear response. Finally, it calms down, returning to its normal state of balance.

As each anxiety disorder has a different set of symptoms, the types of treatment that a mental health professional may suggest also can vary. But there are common types of treatment that are used:

- *Psychotherapy, including cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)
- *Medications, including anti-anxiety medications and antidepressants