

Anxiety and stress

Anxiety and the feelings of stress that result from it bother us when we run into trouble holding together our conflicted lives. We may find ourselves in situations that feel uncomfortable and end up justifying what's happening in ways that seem thoroughly rational, but somehow we have a sense that something isn't right. When that happens we might start to lose sleep, to feel breathless, and to worry without having a concrete sense of what we are worrying about. Sometimes those feelings lead to panic attacks and sleeplessness.

Anxiety occurs when we try to avoid conflict. In a sense it puts off the moment of getting angry, or feeling deep shame, or hurt, or sadness by encouraging us to adapt and behave in ways that usually don't even suggest those feelings might be present. An anxious person might smile and laugh when he or she is in trouble, or look gentle and helpless when angry.

So saying 'I feel anxious' is really only getting half way towards how I might really feel. Some of us find anger, shame, hurt or sadness unbearable and will do anything to avoid falling into those feelings. What we might feel instead is anxious ... and we put on a brave face. We look to cope somehow so difficult emotions, thoughts and memories don't come to light.

For example a man who, as a child, felt unloved and uncared for might grow up looking on the outside to be firm, decisive and independent. But when he gets into a relationship he might choose somebody who is heavily dependent on him – because what he can't face up to is his inner neediness and fear of being left to fend on his

own again. If his partner decides to get a job he might become anxious and irritable without really knowing why. He has created a life for himself where he can control his experience of intimacy but now it is being threatened and the feelings of abandonment, of not being loved, which he once felt are threatening to re-surface. His solution to the stress he feels entering his life? Perhaps not to allow those feelings space but to become angry and to behave badly: to be more the kind of man he has turned himself into to get away from what he believes to be his unbearable childhood.

There's no short route to dealing with anxiety. Mindfulness, a popular form of meditation, is an excellent way of getting to know the things which hover at the edge of our awareness and perhaps make us anxious. Jon Kabat-Zinn, one of the best known and most trusted Mindfulness practitioners, founder of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Programme, has published widely on the subject, produced many CDs with guided meditations and has numerous clips available on **Youtube**.

Sleeplessness – one of the most common symptoms of stress – can be overwhelming. It can feel as if it's eating up your life. In addition to embracing mindfulness avoid using computers, phones or other screen-based activities for at least an hour before bedtime. Do all you can to eliminate discomfort (cold draughts, noises from the street, creased sheets, worn out mattresses) because you are likely to be far more sensitive to them. Don't eat in the hours immediately leading up to bedtime, and ensure your room is well-ventilated.

If you think you suffering from anxiety and stress then give us a call, we can help

Call 020 7323 4970

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