

How to Support Someone With Anxiety

This page may be helpful for you if:

- a loved one has anxiety
- you are a carer for someone with anxiety
- you have anxiety and want to help others learn how best to support you



TBP

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Self-Care

When someone we love is anxious and going through a difficult time, it can be really hard for us to watch. We might feel a whole range of difficult emotions because we can't make it better, or control what is happening to them. It's crucial to notice your own emotions and how the situation is affecting you. Remember, it's okay to feel this way. Make sure you are also looking after yourself and showing yourself compassion.

Don't blame yourself or them

Lots of people can feel to blame when experiencing anxiety, or when watching someone else suffer. It's important to remember that anxiety is a really real and valid experience and is a totally normal cycle of fear and avoidance that many of us can get stuck in. Anxiety can be incredibly debilitating, but it is not your fault or theirs.

Listen first

Our urge might be to try to fix things for the other person. This can be well intentioned, but it's much better if we can stay quiet and listen first. Try to only offer advice when they have given you permission to, or when they ask for it. First try to be curious to really understand how their anxiety is affecting them (anxiety can look different for each of us). This approach shows respect and consideration for their feelings.

Working out where and how to talk

People can find it hard to open up and feel comfortable talking about their anxiety. Think about where/how the person might find it easiest to talk to you and open up about how they feel. Gauge where the person feels most relaxed – this may be in the car or on a walk, for example, where there is less pressure to have a face-to-face chat. Avoid pressure and give space and time.

'I am not my anxiety'

It can be useful to refer to the anxiety as distinct from your loved one when you speak about it – so it is clear that it is the anxiety that is causing the problems, and not the person. A way to restructure the way you talk about anxiety can be like this:

Don't say: You can't do 'xxx'

Try: The anxiety makes it hard for you to do 'xxx'

Ask how to help

Sometimes, we can feel like we know the answers and know what we would do in their position so that we will provide advice or comments based on our experiences. It's important to remember that people with anxiety have very different experiences from us and that before we offer advice, we should ask questions like:

- What can I do to help?
- How does this situation make you feel?

If they do ask for help or advice

If the person has decided to ask you for support or advice, there are plenty of ways you can offer this that may help their anxiety.

- Practical support: This can be planning to go to the GP together or making sure you can offer lifts or walk with them
- Joining in on activities: Supporting your loved one by participating in the exercises that might help them feel less isolated and encourage them to join in. For example, going on walks together, deep breathing, journalling or meditating
- Listening: Regularly checking in and being emotionally in touch with how they are feeling can help them feel seen and maybe help them ask for support if they're feeling anxious