

Panic Attack Resources

This resource is a tie-in with the first session of our *Wellbeing Wednesdays* [series](#) (Winter 2020). These are group mental health sessions based around symptoms brought on or exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. Our first session was on [panic attacks](#), and was led by Bethany Garner (BSc, MPsycholsci, MBPsS).

So what's on this page?

Presentation slides	2
Breathing exercise	8
Thought diary	8
Bethany's A-Z of important external resources	10



Took part and wanted to learn more, or catching up and you want to get in touch with the creator of the session? Contact Bethany Garner (the Be Extra Wellbeing Officer) via [email](#).

We have also made the slides from the presentation available to everyone so you can recap or look over for the first time.

Presentation slides

PANIC ATTACKS

What are they? How do we deal with them?

Bethany Garner, BSc, MPsycholSci, MBPsS



INTRODUCTIONS

- What will this session be about?
- I am going to discuss some possible causes and management strategies of panic attacks.
- If anyone feels uncomfortable, you can leave at any time and if you want to rejoin, the team will let you back in.
- My contact details will be available at the end and some links for mental health support will also be provided.



INTRODUCTIONS

- Who am I?
- Aspiring assistant psychologist with a postgraduate degree in clinical and health psychology and an undergraduate in psychology.
- I have over two years experience working one to one with clients that have a diverse range of mental health issues.
- Recent membership with the British Psychological Society
- Undertaking a CBT course and looking to improve my skills.



INTRODUCTIONS

- There is evidence that levels of depression and anxiety have risen in the general population, especially with the current circumstances.
- Ages 16-24 reported as highly affected by anxiety during COVID.
- High levels of anxiety can sometimes lead to a reaction in the body, this may lead to someone experiencing a 'panic attack'.
- This is a difficult and distressing response and usually is very exhausting.



WHO HAS EXPERIENCED ONE BEFORE, OR KNOW SOMEONE WHO HAS?

- If anyone here is comfortable, could we have a show of hands who has experienced a panic attack, or an anxiety attack before?
- The answer is usually more than we think!



STATISTICS:

- 13.2% of the population has experienced a panic attack at some point in their life (however this number is usually higher with unreported cases).
- This makes it extremely common and it is not an unusual response to high levels of stress and anxiety.
- There are ways we can manage panic attacks, with our own tools and resources.



WHAT ARE THEY?

- To manage a panic attack, we need to first of all understand what is happening to the body during one.
- A panic attack is a response to high levels of stress/anxiety, it involves a lot of physical symptoms and can leave someone feeling extremely distressed.
- Some of the symptoms: Rapid breathing, sweating, fast heartbeat, feeling faint, feeling sick or dizzy, sweating.
- Although someone may feel like they are unsafe or in danger during this high adrenaline response, panic attacks are not physically dangerous and symptoms (typically) stop after 20 minutes.
- The body experiences high rates of adrenaline during this time, hence the physical symptoms above. The body is going through a fight/flight response and is releasing adrenaline and cortisol through the sympathetic nervous system.



HOW DO THEY HAPPEN?

- The Stress Bucket Theory: When stress accumulates, sometimes, it can eventually "overflow".
- Imagine stress as water filling up in a bucket, the more water that goes in, the more likely it can overflow.
- This may even be a small event or small stressor which can then cause the bucket to overflow.
- This accumulation and overload of stress can then lead to a panic attack.
- Past Trauma: A trigger can also cause a panic attack.



HOW TO MANAGE PANIC ATTACKS

- Panic attacks are unpleasant, scary and distressing. Someone may also experience more panic attacks after they have experienced one, or they may only have one and not have another again.
- There are ways of managing panic attacks and dealing with the anxiety one may experience beforehand, so that someone can recognise the signs of high anxiety before the onset of a panic attack.
- We will discuss three important methods: Breathing techniques, Coping mechanisms and some methods for CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy).



BREATHING

- When someone slows down their breathing during a panic attack, this can initiate the parasympathetic response (or the breaks!) from the flight or flight response.
- Slowing your breathing is key during a panic attack to slow down the body and recover.
- It helps to imagine a balloon in your diaphragm inflating and deflating (to encourage deep breathing!)
- Breathe deeply, in for 4 seconds and out for 4 seconds, and then increase to 8 seconds each way, and then 10.



BREATHING

- Once we have slowed down our breathing, we need to keep breathing slowly to encourage the body to remain in the parasympathetic state (our normal state).
- Practicing deep, diaphragm breathing is key, even after the panic attack has subsided, for future incidents where someone may become distressed. This can help prevent panic attacks in the future.
- It may help to practice with someone else, or having a timer to make sure you are doing long, deep breaths.
- A helpful video to watch during a panic attack:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXItOY0sLRY>



SOME COPING MECHANISMS:

- During a panic attack, while doing some deep breathing, here are some more ways to cool down the body and return to a calm state.
- Make yourself cold!
- Cold water on the wrists (run wrists under cold/freezing water for a few minutes, this will help encourage the parasympathetic response and cool down the body)
- An ice pack on the back of the neck, or feet (these are key areas for heat, when something cold is placed on these areas the body will automatically cool down)
- A cold shower or cold water, anything to try and cool yourself down. Once your body is cooler, it will naturally slow down the panic attack and symptoms will subside.



SOME COPING MECHANISMS

- Grounding techniques:
- Acknowledge 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, two things you can smell, one thing you can taste.



Breathing exercise

Following on from the session, one great video for relaxation and breathing control is ['RELAX AND BREATHE: Do Nothing for 10 Minutes'](#) by The School of Self.

Thought diary

Use the template below for keeping a thought diary/record to help analyse and challenge unhelpful thoughts as they come up.

Thought Record Sheet – 7 column

Situation / Trigger	Feelings Emotions = (Rate 0 – 100%) Body sensations	Unhelpful Thoughts / Images	Facts that <u>support</u> the unhelpful thought	Facts that provide evidence <u>against</u> the unhelpful thought	Alternative, more realistic and balanced perspective	Outcome Re-write emotion
<p>What happened? Where? When? Who with? How?</p>	<p>What emotion did I feel at that time? What else? How intense was it? What did I notice in my body? Where did I feel it?</p>	<p>What went through my mind? What disturbed me? What did those thoughts/images/memories mean to me, or say about me or the situation? What am I responding to? What 'button' is this pressing for me? What would be the worst thing about that, or that could happen?</p>	<p>What are the facts? What facts do I have that the unhelpful thoughts are totally true?</p>	<p>What facts do I have that the unhelpful thoughts are NOT totally true? Is it possible that this is opinion, rather than fact? What have others said about this?</p>	<p>STOP! Take a breath... What would someone else say about this situation? What's the bigger picture? Is there another way of seeing it? What advice would I give someone else? Is my reaction in proportion to the actual event? Is this really as important as it seems?</p>	<p>What am I feeling now? (0-100%) What could I do differently? What would be more effective? Do what works! Act wisely. What will be most helpful for me or the situation? What will the consequences be?</p>

Bethany's A-Z of important external resources

- [Anxiety UK](#) - Charity providing support if you have been diagnosed with an anxiety condition. Phone 03444 775 774 (Mon-Fri, 9.30am - 5.30pm)
- [Bipolar UK](#) - Charity helping people living with manic depression or bipolar disorder
- [CALM](#) - Campaign Against Living Miserably, for men aged 15-35. Phone 0800 58 58 58 (daily, 5pm - 12am)
- [Men's Health Forum](#) - 24/7 stress support for men by text, chat, or email
- [Mental Health Foundation](#) - Provides information and support for anyone with mental health problems and learning disabilities
- [Mind](#) - Promotes the views and needs of people with mental health problems. Phone 0300 123 3393 (Mon-Fri, 9am - 6pm)
- [No Panic](#) - Charity offering support for sufferers of panic attacks and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). Offers a course to help overcome your phobia or OCD. Phone 0844 967 4848 (daily, 10am - 10pm)
- [OCD Action](#) - Support for people with OCD. Includes information on treatment and online resources. Phone 0845 390 6232 (Mon-Fri, 9.30am - 5pm)
- [OCD UK](#) - Charity run by people with OCD, for people with OCD. Includes facts, news, and treatments. Phone 0333 212 7890 (Mon-Fri, 9am - 5pm)
- [Papyrus](#) - Young suicide prevention society. Phone HOPElineUK 0800 068 4141 (Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm, 7pm - 10pm, Sat-Sun, 2pm - 5pm)
- [Samaritans](#) - Confidential support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair. Phone 116 123 (free 24/7 helpline)
- [SANE](#) - Emotional support, information and guidance for people affected by mental illness and their families and carers.