



Covid Anxiety

Anxiety is a warning for you to start getting creative.

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*“Every time you are tempted to react in the same old way,
ask if you want to be a prisoner of the past or a pioneer of the future.”*

— **Deepak Chopra**

Threats

Covid-19 has caused both socially recognized and personally specific threats. This generates a social dialog different from what’s spoken about within the family, and different again from the dialog that we speak to ourselves.

While this is typical of natural disasters, it’s unusual to have multiple anxious dialogs going on simultaneously, continuously, and inescapably. This issue alone, a variety of multiple anxieties assailing us at once, is causing a strain on our egos and the rupture of some. People are freaking out.

The kinds of thoughts and behaviors caused in people by a general, pervasive, poorly defined threat is different from the results of personal anxiety. The general social anxiety tends to be pushed aside, rationalized away, or projected onto a more tractable enemy. You can feel yourself doing this to varying degrees, and you can see other people occasionally doing it to more extreme degrees. The important insight to remember is that people are doing this as a means of reducing their anxiety and not as a well-reasoned, future-oriented plan of action.

Personal anxieties have a limited scope. If you're worried about your relationship, your children, or your finances, then there are things you can do or plan to do that offer an alternative. There are situations you can change and other environments you can enter in order to relieve or distract yourself. The pandemic does not allow such respite.

Everywhere you go people are worried, pressured, frightened, angry, and sometimes ill. It is natural that we have emotional "leakage" from one issue to the next and the emotions that are leaking from all these sources are negative. This builds into a pervasive negative tone that can take us out of our normal emotional operating range.

We will not be the first to notice this. From our own points of view, we're just responding to events around us. We don't see the negative filters that we're using that bias what we perceive. Other people will see our filters as they compare our response to their own and to the emotional tone in other corners of their environment. Our egos act as an accumulator that inflates or deflates in response to pressure.

Some people are quick to respond. Others respond in an exaggerated manner. Most people are carried away without much sense of holding to their baseline. This can happen for small matters but becomes more likely with growing stress. By the time your anxiety reaches crisis proportions you are only weakly in control. When you burst outside the limit of self-control you are lost by definition.

We try to keep our personalities in a kind of regular shape. We try to retain the skill to respond to various assaults without losing our normal presentation. In spite of this, each person's personality has its strong and weak points, places where their normal presentation is more vulnerable and more resilient.

I have one friend with a short fuse. When any stress gets excessive, this person gets angry regardless of whether anger is rational or appropriate. They're not even aware that they've become snappish and resentful, they think they're just responding to outside issues.

Another friend is fearful. As they are exposed to more uncertainty—and the rest of us don't know what they're hearing—they become more fearful. While they are embedded in the same social matrix that I am, and I think I'm holding outside threats at bay, they are starting to succumb. They start to behave in an obsessive and compulsive manner.

The result is not a tone of general concern such as you might expect in a boardroom, consulting session, or similar environment of critical appraisal. Instead, the result is a lot of unstable, dysregulated people who are seeing, thinking, and responding according to out-of-character emotions. They are not

responding in the proscribed or expected manner and you cannot rely on them to support the familiar social container.



Emotions

People are emotionally driven social animals to a greater degree than we admit. Our emotions and intellect attempt to work in synchrony. Our emotions provide the context for which our intellect improvises notions of cause and effect. We think our actions follow the sense we've made of things, but the sense we make is more like a veneer we lay over the landscape of our emotions.

Our emotions reflect our bigger picture. They can be equivocal and flow in many directions at once. They rarely make things clear, often feeling fluid and yielding. They carry us like a river and, like a river, they wear canyons into our personalities. Emotions govern our dreams and forge our memories.

“Anxiety is a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained.”

— **Arthur Somers Roche**, writer

Meditation, reflection, and creativity enable us to build personally meaningful conclusions. Creating something for oneself changes the emotional landscape reflecting what is new and meaningful. People who don't create, engage in less committed meaningful activities. We describe being committed to what is meaningful as being grounded.

Proper stress serves as a warning without being toxic. It draws our attention without causing panic. Too much stress overwhelms our better judgment. It can lead us to act before judgment. Much of what we see people doing pertaining to the threat of the pandemic borders on panic.

To recover our ground we separate from stress and protect ourselves from the things that trigger us. We find paths to relief, reducing stress to a level we can process without our personality folding and our reactive instincts taking over.

In our culture, we start trading autonomy for stability as soon as we begin being socialized. We trade thinking for ourselves for future safety offered by parents, teachers, institutions, regulations, laws, debt, jobs, media, and government. A somewhat haphazard hierarchy of authority provides a rock pile of security.

Covid is causing this rock pile to collapse. It is undermining many people's sense of foundation but, as this instability is foundational, its failure may not be obvious in the structures we've built on it. Like the cracks in a building's foundation, you have to know what to look for.



Creativity

If you haven't practiced recovering your emotional stability, then your skills are undeveloped. Thinking for oneself is a creative and practiced art. At the start one is drawing stick figures. One needs to learn volume, shadow, and perspective. We are not taught how to think for ourselves.

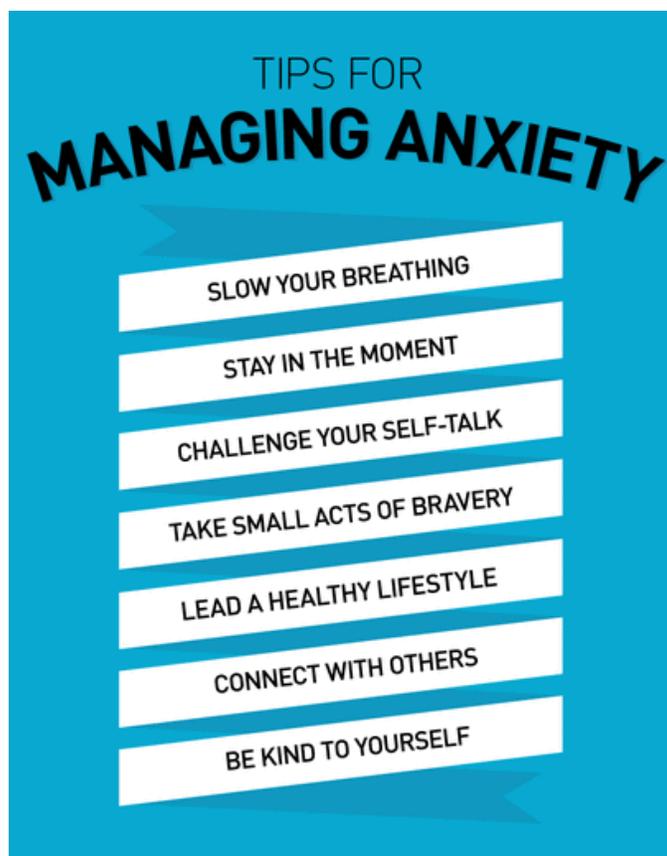
Recognize growing anxiety and recognize its source. Like a leaking roof you need to contain it, apply a temporary fix and have something more permanent in mind. Change your position to remove your vulnerability. Recognize small irritations and be proactive. Be flexible, attentive, and creative. Don't ignore the warning lights.

Anxiety grows from feeling stuck in a threatened position. It is reduced by having new options in what to think and do. Avoid thinking or acting precipitously. To do so is to accept the reality of the threat and follow the herd instinct. Fear is a good motivator but a poor guide. Find other options, safer actions, and better results. You can only take control before you're overwhelmed.

"Nothing diminishes anxiety faster than action."

— **Walter Inglis Anderson**, painter

People respond differently to fear and operate with different levels of anxiety. People tolerate rising levels of anxiety to differing degrees. Always look ahead and not just in front of you, but beyond the immediate. Think like you drive a car; develop situational awareness.



Protection

I've had Covid at least twice. I've been in intensive care for the partially collapsed lung it caused. I've studied Covid, written a book about it, and realized that while the infection poses little threat to young people, my children are indirectly at risk by the threat it poses to me.

Over the longer term, the virus is threatening society by creating chaos and opportunism. My future and my children's futures depend on public attitudes, government agencies, and the social order. The virus is not just a question of personal, family, and public health, it is all of these distorting each other. We need see how these issues relate to each other and to respond intelligently to all of them.

Your challenge is to think widely, embrace the situation fully, and act appropriately in all regards. You don't need to be right to find solutions and allay anxiety but you do need to think and act carefully. Form opinions, explore them, and correct them when you can.

The three typical responses to crises are freezing, fainting, or fighting. None of these are a good use of your resources in this case. Keep ahead of these instinctive defensive reactions. Remain thoughtful, open minded, and creative. Create safety for yourself.



What you'll first see will be attached to your anxiety. Don't feel driven to listen to what's being told to you. Don't feel driven to buy what's being sold to you.

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