

Information for students with:

ANXIETY

Student Counselling Service

We all feel anxious from time to time. Anxiety is a primitive psychological response triggered when we feel under threat e.g. feeling nervous before an exam, a presentation or a first date. Anxiety can also be triggered by more subtle threats - worrying about what to say, what to wear, about what people think of you.

Anxiety can take many forms causing sleepless nights, loss of confidence and irritability. The more we worry, the worse we feel and the worse we feel the more likely we are to think in an anxious and worried way. It creates a vicious circle affecting our mood, our motivation, sleep and confidence. Not everyone is affected in the same way but common experiences can include:

Thinking:

- Fearful thoughts about the worst happening – negative and catastrophic predictions about our decisions, the future and our ability to cope.
- Thoughts being problem focused – the mind leaping from one worry to the next.
- Becoming vigilant to problems and things going wrong whilst dismissing things that go well.

Behaviour:

- Avoiding and putting things off.
- Relying on other people to make decisions, give re-assurance or provide company to accomplish tasks.
- Not taking risks. Living within your comfort zone to increase the sense of safeness.

Mood:

- Apprehensive, nervous, fearful.
- Loss of confidence in one's ability to cope.
- Feeling overwhelmed.

Body:

- Tense, hard to relax.
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Headaches, aches and pains, skin & bowel irritability etc

Anxiety in its various guises:

Worry The tendency to worry about everything, wanting to get things right, to have certainty. Often people who are worriers have a tendency to perfectionism, wanting things to be and to feel 'right'. Worriers often describe a 'racing mind', the mind jumping from one concern to the next and nothing feeling resolvable.

Health Anxiety where worry is focused upon health concerns, either for yourself or others that you care about. Generally it involves concern about your future health and a fear that medics may have missed something. The need for reassurance from friends, and medics can be strong.

Panic Attacks occur when there is a strong and imminent sense of threat or danger. They can involve a range of alarming symptoms including breathlessness, dizziness, pins & needles, feeling faint, visual disturbances, feeling hot or cold, sweating and chest pains. It is not unusual for people to believe they are about to collapse, faint or die, Symptoms of a racing mind and unreality can lead people to fear they are losing their minds and going mad. The experience can vary from individual to individual but generally the symptoms are alarming and add to the sense of threat and imminent danger which further compounds the anxiety. It is important to note that nothing

dangerous can happen as a result of a panic attack. The symptoms always pass, nothing terrible can happen.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder is a specific form of anxiety related to an over inflated concern that you could cause harm to others or that something bad could happen unless you perform tasks in a certain way. It can involve needing to prepare endless lists or perform rituals in a certain way. Sometimes people have a specific concern about germs and cleanliness.

Social Phobia where people have a concern about being judged negatively by other people. They might worry that they would blush, stammer or come across as stupid and that they would be ridiculed for this. It can lead to severe difficulties in mixing with others, in socialising, making friends and performing publically. Often the image they have of themselves is far more extreme than the way that they actually come across which further fuels the anxiety.

Phobias about specific fears like spiders, flying, being enclosed in spaces, of open spaces, vomit etc. Again there is a sense that something terrible could happen if you become exposed to the threat and a corresponding belief that you would not cope if this were to happen.

Details of self help literature, relevant websites along with helpful podcasts are provided on the Student Counselling webpage.

If you feel you would like to discuss your particular concerns with a counsellor please contact the Student Counselling Service: counselling@bangor.ac.uk / 01248 388520.