Clark County TeenTalk

Nonjudgmental support for teens, by teens

Monday to Thursday: 4-9 pm Friday: 4-7 pm

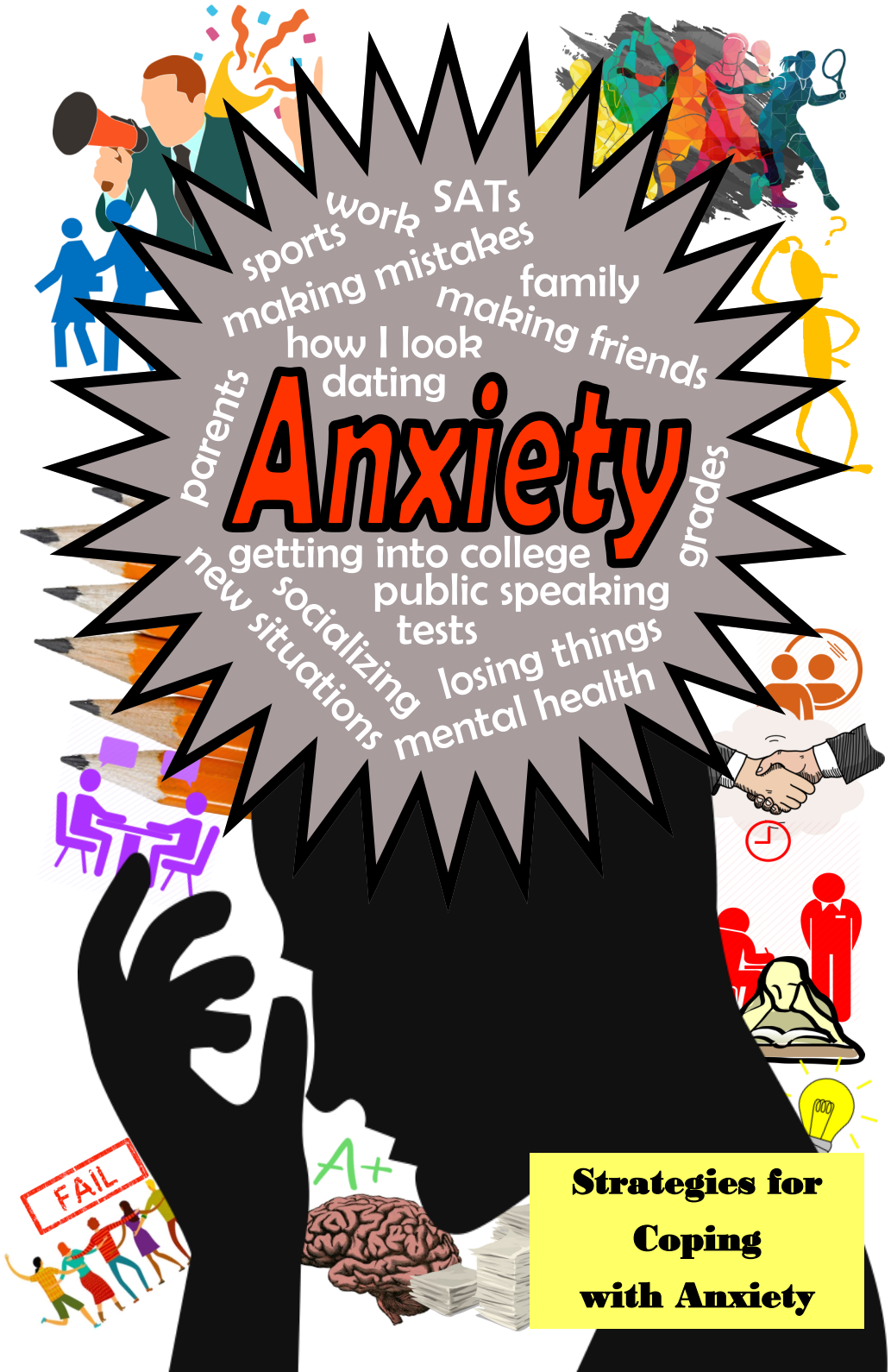
Call 360.397.CHAT [2428] or text 360.984.0936

ccteentalk1@hotmail.com

www.ccteentalk.clark.wa.gov

@PeppyPenerson

CLARK COUNTY, WASHINGTON



Strategies for Coping with Anxiety

What is this booklet about?

TeenTalk volunteers have created a few strategies you might find helpful during the hard times. Each volunteer at TeenTalk has their own unique story and their own personal experiences and struggles, which is what makes TeenTalk such a great resource. We are teens between the ages of 15 and 19, and we know what it's like to face some of the same struggles. Some may have struggled with something similar to you. You are not alone and we at TeenTalk are here for you. What you will find in this booklet are coping strategies our TeenTalk volunteers found or have used to work through tough moments. Please note that we are teens/peers and not professionals. We have gathered ideas we think are helpful and not every suggestion will fit you and that is OK. Use and do what is right for you!

Content warning: This booklet is intended for support and to provide suggestions around coping with difficult situations. It includes references to anxiety. If this puts you at risk of experiencing trauma, flashbacks, or any other reaction you may have to emotionally stressful subjects, consider a safety plan. Do not read this booklet if the subject matter puts you at risk of being triggered, or make sure to read it when you feel you are in a good place mentally and emotionally. If you do read it and find yourself having a difficult time with emotions, memories, etc. or are feeling triggered by the booklet, look toward a good friend, family member, counselor, or the Crisis Line (1.800.626.8137) to discuss it with or try finding a good outlet like a sport, book, art, or other favorite pastime. Remember to take care of yourself as well as others!

What should friends and family do during a panic attack

When a someone is having a panic attack, the environment they're in can make all the difference. Here are some helpful things one could say or do to help the person through the attack:

- **Stay with that person. Going through an attack with someone you trust can be easier**
- **Tell them "It's going to be ok"**
- **Start a conversation/ distract them**
- **Say "you'll get through this"**
- **Do what they ask/comfort them**
- **Tell them that you're there for them**
- **Give them a hug (if they consent to it)**
- **Make some comfort food them**
- **Be patient with them.**

What Is The Difference Between A Panic Attack And An Anxiety Attack?

There are a couple differences between anxiety and panic attacks

An anxiety attack often happens in response to something stressful

An anxiety attack can be very short lived, and it's possible that when the stressor goes away, so does the anxiety attack.

Panic attacks are different because they dont always need a stressful event. It can be unprovoked and unpredictable.

What is in this booklet?

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A MESSAGE FROM A TEENTALKER WITH ANXIETY

"I've felt a lot of anxiety in my life and if you don't take time for self-care it can make everything harder. The times I do the best in school is when I am taking care of myself because anxiety can be crippling and make it difficult to get work done when you think of all the things you have to do. It can also be hard if you have social anxiety because the longer you are away from people the more your brain can create stories and run with it. I try to volunteer several times a week so that I make sure to hang out with people even if I feel really uncomfortable talking to people. I try to do self-care, such as running and cooking healthy foods, because TV can really be a crutch and make things worse. It usually numbs rather than solves problems, at least for me. But when I take care of myself and push myself out of my comfort zone on a regular basis, I don't feel like I am out of control and can't handle my anxiety. It is a lot of work keeping good mental health."

DO **NOT**:

- Ignore it
- Yell
- Get mad
- Insult them
- Laugh
- Be overbearing if they need space
- Call attention to them
- Ridicule/make fun of them
- Undervalue what they're saying
- Push them into uncomfortable places or situations
- Encourage them to use stimulants

DO **NOT** SAY:

- "You'll get over it."
- "Just calm down."
- "You're being a baby."
- "What's wrong with you?"
- "Stop using that as an excuse."
- "I have anxiety too and that doesn't happen to me."
- "Stop being clingy."
- "Be more positive."
- "You're not special."
- "You're not disabled."
- "I have it worse."
- "Others have it worse."
- "Take a chill pill."
- "Don't be weird."
- "Can you not right now?"

WHAT TO DO & SAY

IF SOMEONE IS HAVING AN

anxiety or panic attack

DO

- ◊ Stay near them
- ◊ Start a conversation
- ◊ Do what they say
- ◊ Offer some comfort tools
- ◊ Provide distractions
- ◊ Be there for them
- ◊ Give a hug (with consent)
- ◊ Take them to a calmer area (with consent)
- ◊ Talk about the situation, act engaged, and offer advice
- ◊ Provide resources
- ◊ Speak calmly
- ◊ Be patient
- ◊ Avoid bringing up triggers
- ◊ Remind them of self-care things
- ◊ Help them come up with a safety plan
- ◊ Create a quiet environment

DO SAY:

- ◊ "It's going to be OK."
- ◊ "Stay strong."
- ◊ "You got this."
- ◊ "You'll get through this."
- ◊ "I got you."
- ◊ "What can I do for you?"
- ◊ "What did you have for lunch?" (encourage them to focus on something else)
- ◊ "I'm here for you."
- ◊ "What are you feeling worried about?"
- ◊ "What are you feeling?"
- ◊ "I'm sorry you're going through that, it must really suck."
- ◊ Remind them they're not alone

What is it like to have anxiety?

- Feeling like everything and everyone is against you.
- Feeling terrified about something small.
- Feeling alone in your feelings, like no one else knows the feeling.
- It's like that moment when you're watching a horror move where you know something bad is about to happen but you're not sure what ... it's the build, but the suspense never comes.
- Constantly thinking about the future and what is next rather than living in the moment.
- It's like a piranha gnawing at your foot, but when you try to shake it off, it grows more.

How to get a referral to a mental health professional

To get a referral, talk to your doctor. If you don't have insurance, you might qualify for free/reduced healthcare. To see if you are eligible, you can check out Washington Health Plan Finder. However, many websites now let you do a self referral. Find a counselor and ask them what you need to do to get an appointment.

If you have Medicaid, you can go online and look for a psychologist and find one that you like that is close by. Call them to see if they have space and either do a drop-in intake or set one up with the receptionist. An intake is a first appointment so they can see who you'd possibly match well with as far as psychologist/psychiatrist and whether you are interested in group therapy, medications, etc.

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO HAVE anxiety?

IMAGINE being invited to a party that you've always wanted to go to but an hour before going you think about all the things that could go wrong and you never actually end up getting to go because you couldn't put on your shoes and walk out the door.

IMAGINE wanting to go on a spring break trip to visit family but thinking about all of the details and things that need to be done to be able to go and not being able to think about it because every time you do you feel overwhelmed, and a deep sense of dread.

If they do not understand ...

- **Ask your counselor or some other person you trust to be a mediator**/to be there when you try again.
- **Show them YouTube videos about anxiety.**
- **Give examples of what causes it.**
- If you didn't do this the first time, **explain how it affects you personally** so they can better understand.
- **Educate yourself about anxiety and then share what you learned with them.**
- **Tell them again in a different way.** You can use metaphors or an example from a time in their life when they experienced anxiety.
- **Seek professional help.** Sometimes friends and family just don't understand. However, it's important to talk to someone about it.
- **Always find someone to talk to.** We are here if you would like to **talk to us.** Some of us experience anxiety and can help you brainstorm other ideas.
- If they still don't understand, **be honest about your boundaries and what you need** to be your best self.

How to tell your friends or family about your anxiety

Depending on who you want to share this with, here are some different things you can consider when sharing with your family or friends:

Before talking to them

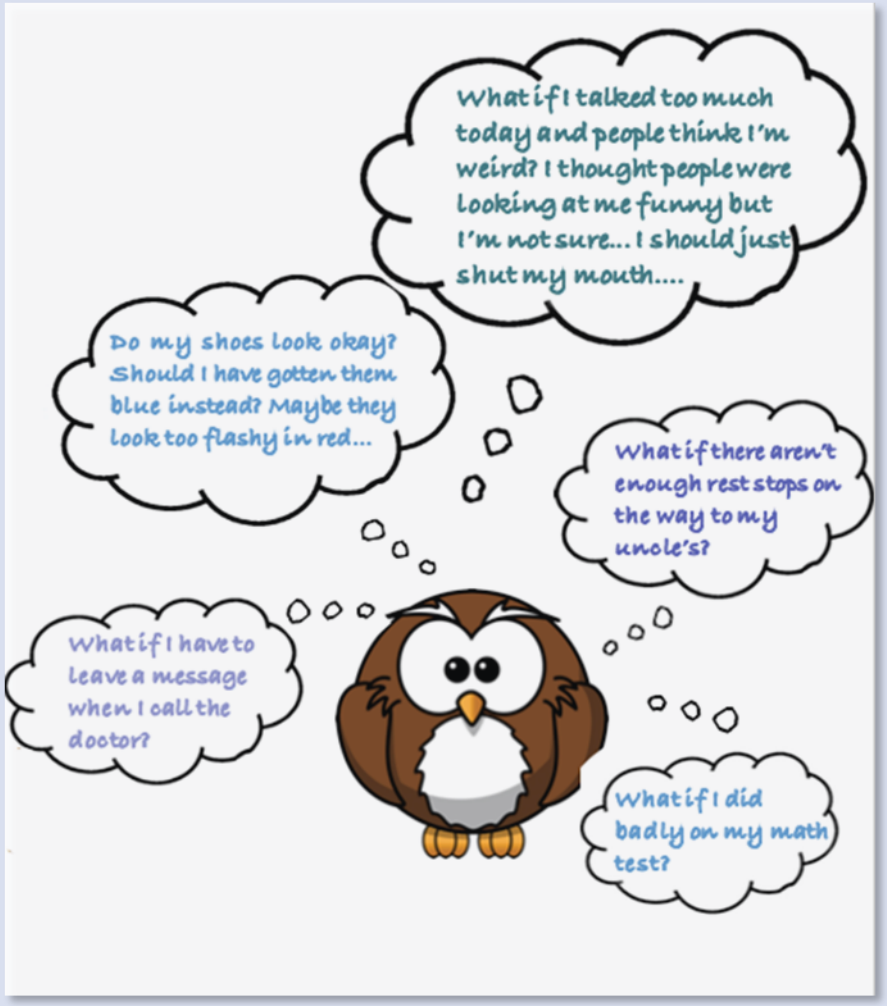
- **Assess the risk of telling them.** Some people are not always the safest people to confide in.
- If you are not comfortable talking about it on your own and you think you might need support, **bring a friend or someone you trust**.

Let them know ...

- **How you express your symptoms** so they know when you are experiencing anxiety and can support you.
- **How you were diagnosed**. While your anxiety is valid regardless of whether or not you have been formally diagnosed, if you do have a formal diagnosis, it may help others better understand.

- **What specifically gives you anxiety and how it affects you personally** so they can either help prevent you from experiencing anxiety or figure out how to make you feel safe and welcome if you do.
- **If they can or can't ask questions.** It's natural for people to ask questions. If this overwhelms you, let them know if they can or can't ask questions or that you will only answer a few questions for now and that you will get back to them when you had a chance to breathe.
- **How they can help support you.** As someone who loves and cares about you, your friends and family might want to know how they can support you. Come prepared with things they can say or do to support you when you are experiencing anxiety and some things they should avoid saying or doing so they won't make it worse.

IMAGINE you are talking to your friends and their biggest worry is their test score and reflecting on yours and having your biggest stressors be whether or not your shoes are in style or whether you should have gotten the other color, if you talked too much today or too little, if people will ask you questions that you don't know the answer to, if you will have to call and make an appointment by phone, as well as your test grade.



Identify your triggers

Some discussions, topics, life events, and things in our environment can trigger anxiety. When you're triggered, you might notice that you are overly observant and aware of your surroundings, are feeling a sense of panic in a moderately calm environment, or are feeling like you get overwhelmed and stressed easily. Sometimes it's really obvious what triggers us and sometimes it's not. If you don't know what's triggering your anxiety, keep a journal and write down:

How to recognize when someone you know is using unhealthy coping skills

- When they seem to try and back up the way they are treating an issue
- If the person seems overly passionate about something that is most likely not the best for them
- They don't have a long-term resolution
- They can't address the original issue or do not have the effort to address it
- They are harming themselves physically, mentally, or emotionally
- They are using something as a distraction instead of a healthy solution
- What they are doing gets in the way of their normal life
- They seem agitated/irritable
- They seem distracted

Use this space to keep track of your triggers!

Review your journal often and see if you notice any patterns. That way you can make a game plan on how to either avoid those triggers or how to reduce your anxiety symptoms if you can't avoid them.

-HEALTHY COPING SKILLS -

- TRY A GROUNDING EXERCISE: NAME 5 THINGS YOU SEE, 4 THINGS YOU FEEL, 3 THINGS YOU HEAR, 2 THINGS YOU SMELL, AND 1 THING YOU TASTE

- PRACTICE SOME BREATHING EXERCISES

- WRITE A STORY

- WATCH SOMETHING FUNNY

- HANG OUT WITH YOUR PET

- LISTEN TO MUSIC

- TALK TO FRIENDS/USE YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEMS; TALK TO US IF YOU NEED SOMEONE TO TALK TO

- ORGANIZE YOUR SPACE

-HEALTHY COPING SKILLS PT. 2 -

-RUB LOTION ON YOUR HANDS-

-GET SOME SLEEP -

-STEP AWAY FROM WHATEVER IS MAKING YOU FEEL THIS WAY-

-LISTEN TO MUSIC-

-CRY-

-REPEAT A PHRASE, SUCH AS "I AM BRAVE. I AM STRONG. I AM ENOUGH. "-

-EXERCISE: EVEN GOING FOR A WALK OR DOING YOGA CAN HELP YOU FOCUS ON YOUR BODY AND TAKE YOUR MIND OFF OF WHATEVER MIGHT BE GIVING YOU ANXIETY-

-MAKE SOME ART (PAINT, SKETCH, DRAW, SEW, KNIT, TAKE PICTURES-

-WRAP YOURSELF IN A BLANKET-

-DO SOMETHING MENTALLY STIMULATING-