

PLAN OF ACTION FOR DEALING WITH ANXIETY

1. Recognize and identify anxiety symptoms, and situations related to it.
2. Develop relaxation skills. Most people will be able to feel relaxed by using progressive muscle relaxation. If you have made a good effort to use it and do not find that it is relaxing for you then it is your responsibility to try other techniques until you find one that is effective for you. Other techniques include deep breathing, visualization, meditation, body scanning, and brief forms of progressive muscle relaxation. This is a very important part of managing anxiety. Because of the way the nervous system works it is physically impossible to be stressed and relaxed at the same time. Learn a relaxation technique.
3. Confront anxiety. Make a commitment to understand and deal with the issues underlying your experience of anxiety.
4. Problem solve. Once you have identified the underlying issues contributing to the anxiety you experience deal with the issues that you can do something about and let go of the issues that you cannot do anything about.
5. Develop positive self-esteem. If you do not accept and like who you are, how can you effectively manage the things that are causing your anxiety. The managing of anxiety is about lifestyle changes. This requires a commitment to yourself. To make this commitment and follow through will depend on how important your well-being is to you.
6. Exercise. Aerobic exercise, especially walking is a good stress reliever. It decreases muscle tension, increases energy, and can improve sleep. You will experience the benefits of walking after several weeks of commitment to this anxiety relieving strategy. It feels good to take care of yourself.
7. Using positive self-talk. How you talk to yourself will make a big difference in how you interpret things around you, how you choose to feel, and how you choose to respond. In other words, how you talk to yourself affects your entire life experience. Practice positive, rational self-talk and incorporate daily use of positive affirmations.
8. Keeping a journal. A journal is a great tool for venting your feelings and thoughts. It takes emotional energy to keep all of this “stuff” inside. Get it out. Writing your thoughts and feelings can also clarify issues. Problem solve these issues to alleviate distress and to unclutter your mind. A journal is also a great way to monitor your consistency and actual commitment to the changes necessary for managing your anxiety.
9. Confront and change self-defeating behavioral patterns and personality traits. This means changing perfectionistic, controlling, codependent behaviors. These behaviors do not help you get your needs met and they do not make you feel better. Contrary, they generally leave you feeling stressed, frustrated, anxious, angry and over time resentful.
10. Desensitize phobias. If there are specific situations that elicit extreme anxiety for you then work with your therapist using a technique called systematic desensitization.
11. Utilize your support system. If you do not have a support system then develop

one. Start by putting in place the supports that you need for confronting and dealing with your anxiety. A support system can include your therapist (individual or group), your physician, family members, friends, people at your church, etc. Generally the reason why a person lacks a support system is because they have made the choice to not allow others to help them. Instead, they have this distorted belief that it is only themselves that can be there to support other people.

12. Energize yourself with pleasure and humor. This means spending time with people you enjoy and doing activities that you like. Laughter is a great stress reliever. Have laughter in your life everyday.
13. Practice good nutrition and get adequate sleep. You must take care of yourself to live life fully which includes work, relaxation, and pleasure.
14. Develop assertive communication. Being able to say “no” and to otherwise effectively express yourself is a skill. If you do not have it learn it. To get your needs appropriately met requires that you speak honestly and appropriately about what you want and need.
15. Develop self-nurturing behaviors. You are so good at taking care of the needs of others. Practice doing things that feel good to you.

If you have developed a program for managing anxiety and are consistently practicing it you are probably feeling much better. Because change is difficult, people need to feel motivated to do things differently. Originally, it was the extreme distress and physical symptoms that facilitated your change. Sometimes when people start feeling better they quit following through on the changes in their thinking and their behaviors. This can lead to a relapse of symptoms. If a relapse happens to you view it as an opportunity to understand the importance of the components of your management program and the validation that if you do not make a commitment to take care of yourself your body will keep sending you the message that it needs to be taken better care of.

Some people experience relapse as a normal part of their recovery from extreme stress and anxiety. It could be that they are consistently practicing all of the parts of their program but reexperience some symptoms. This has likely happened because there was so much body tension that you may go through one or more stages of a readjustment. So if you are consistently doing what is prescribed in the way of changes continue even if some symptoms reoccur. They will subside. Remember, it took a long time to get to this state, and it may take a while to alleviate all of the emotional and physical distress. Therefore, think of relapse as a normal, predictable part of recovery.

Be prepared to deal with the possibility of a relapse. If it does occur, it is likely that the symptoms will not be as intense or last as long as they did before. This is because you have developed skills to manage your anxiety.