

Protect Yourself from "Anxiety Contagion"

What to Know

Anxiety, like a cold, can spread from person to person, affecting how you feel, think, and act. This is known as "anxiety contagion," and it's not about catching anxiety through the air but rather about how the people around you can influence your emotions and behaviors. Whether it's a family member's stress about work or a friend's worries about an upcoming test, you may sometimes find yourself feeling anxious, too - even if the original worry isn't yours. Understanding anxiety contagion is the first step toward managing its impact on your life.

If you find your anxiety levels are getting out of hand and you have a difficult time dealing with anything else, you can learn to regain some control over your anxiety by limiting "fear contagion." Studies suggest that negative emotional states are contagious, like a virus. The more you are exposed to panicky, negative, or anxious people, the more anxiety you are likely to experience. Fortunately, studies also find that positive emotional states are also contagious. Being in the presence of calm, confident, and positive people can reduce your fear and anxiety. This is especially true when you are around positive people, authority figures, or people you depend on and respect.

This worksheet is designed to help you recognize when anxiety might be spreading in your relationships and provide strategies to safeguard your emotional well-being. Through activities, reflections, and strategies, you'll learn how to build resilience against anxiety contagion, maintain calm in the face of others' stress, and foster an environment supporting emotional health for everyone involved.

What to Do

You can fight the effects of "anxiety contagion" by spending more time with people in your life who make you feel comforted, safe, and calm—or make you laugh. Write in the names of people like this below and note how you will communicate with them (e.g., face-to-face, by phone, or by video chat).

My supports	How I will communicate with them

If you can't name any supportive people, consider watching webinars and videos that offer encouragement, calmness, and reassurance. Personal development websites and apps like Sounds True, Shambhala Publications, Head Space, and Simple Habit provide free courses and meditations to help people manage fear and anxiety.

Write down some resources you plan to explore.

If media coverage of world events makes you anxious, limit your time watching the news, reading headlines online, and visiting social media sites. Constantly watching videos or hearing about tragic events will serve to increase your anxiety, fear, and feelings of helplessness. Here are some suggestions for reducing your screen time:

- Limit the time you spend viewing the news. For instance, if you usually watch the news or read headlines several hours a day, try reducing that to one or two scheduled times a day - and ideally, not at bedtime.
- Unsubscribe from media alerts and "breaking news" on your phone and email.
- Pick a single trustworthy media source.
- Turn your phone off while sleeping.
- Look for "feel good" stories that highlight the kindness, creativity, and problem-solving abilities of people worldwide.

- Other ideas:

For one week, use the following chart to record the date and place an "X" under each column when you limit negative social media coverage, expose yourself to positive people or online resources, or connect with a supportive person. Make a note in the box if there is a resource or person you would like to revisit or talk to in the future!

Date	Limit negative social media coverage?	Expose yourself to positive people or online resources?	Connect with a supportive person?

After one week, answer the following questions.

Which activities are most effective in dealing with "anxiety contagion?"

After one week of limiting social media exposure and exposing yourself to positive people or online resources, what improvements have you noticed in your own anxiety level and mood?

What else can you do to reduce your anxiety?

Reflections on This Exercise

What will help you avoid anxiety contagion in the future?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?