



August 2022

Mindfulness for Anxiety

Mindfulness is the psychological process of bringing one's attention to experiences occurring in the present moment, which one can develop through the practice of meditation and through other training. (Wikipedia)

Anxiety is an emotion characterized by an unpleasant state of inner turmoil, often accompanied by nervous behavior such as pacing back and forth, somatic complaints and rumination. (Wikipedia)

How does Mindfulness help us with anxiety?

When we experience anxiety, we are experiencing a form of the “fight or flight” response. This response is governed by the more primitive part of our brain and it is a very helpful response for physical threats; things with “teeth and fangs”. This response initiates physiological changes such as shallow breathing to increase the oxygen in our blood stream, stronger heart beats to circulate the oxygen rich blood to the large muscles in our arms and legs so we can use it to fight or run. Our pupils dilate in order to see the threat better and adrenaline gets released.

While the fight or flight response is useful if you encounter a cougar or a bear in your backyard, it can also get triggered into action when we believe there is threat or danger even if there is not. For example, you may yell at your partner for pushing you into agreeing to go to a party you don't want to go to (fight). Or you avoid going to a party or leave early because you don't feel comfortable around unfamiliar people (flight).

In cases where the threat is not a physical one, it is our thoughts about the situation that keep the uncomfortable anxiety symptoms going. When we are mindful, we can begin to notice these thoughts, and evaluate whether they are:

- ★ Helpful thoughts or something we have control over. “I am worried about the test tomorrow – I can do something about that, I will go study.”
- ★ Unhelpful or something over which we have no control. “I am worried that I failed the test I wrote yesterday” Unhelpful thoughts cause us unnecessary suffering.

Through the practice of mindfulness we get better at releasing the thoughts that bring us unnecessary suffering.

How to practice mindfulness

One of the best ways to practice is using the **Insight Timer App**, available for Android and IOS. This app provides many guided meditations, includes a playlist for Anxiety and Stress, and has mindfulness teachings. A good one to start with is the “Gateway to Presence” meditation, or any other meditation by Tara Brach, who is a psychologist and meditation teacher.

Other Meditations to try include:

- Anxiety Relief by Oliver Jenkin
- Soothe an Anxious Mind by Meg James
- Learning to Surrender by Sarah Blondin

For more information about anxiety for adults and youth see <https://www.anxietycanada.com/>

If you would like to speak to a counsellor about your life challenges, please call one of the numbers listed below.



305 - 394 Duncan St
Duncan, BC V9L 3W4

Vancouver Island Counselling

Duncan: 250 746 6900
Nanaimo: 250 754 8222
Port Alberni: 250 723 7001
Victoria / Gulf Islands / Lower Mainland
1 877 746 6911