



Me & Anxiety

How to put it into words

A Guide for Young Parents

*"A thought is just a thought,
not a FACT"*



What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is an everyday feeling, but it can become an anxiety disorder if it interferes with your day-to-day life, and if it lasts longer than two weeks.

Anxiety disorders can make you feel nervous a lot of the time and uncomfortable in different situations.

Anxiety is that little, horrible negative voice in your head that ruins your confidence and creates worry, (see exercise to name your anxiety).

Anxiety affects how you think, feel and behave.

What are the symptoms of anxiety?

- You feel irritable, argumentative, or are always in a bad mood.
- You are always worried or believe something terrible will happen.
- You ask unnecessary questions or need a lot of reassurance.
- You will get upset with mistakes or with a change of routine.
- You try to do everything perfectly.
- You have a dry mouth and have difficulty swallowing.
- You find it hard to get to sleep and to stay asleep.
- You may have heart palpitations, feel dizzy, or have a headache.
- You can feel sick or have diarrhoea.

If you experience any of these symptoms over a couple of weeks, you may need some extra support.

You have enough • You do enough
You are enough

What causes Anxiety?

Anxiety can affect your physical and mental health. It might be short-lived, or it can stay for a long time.

Other young parents have named some of their triggers for anxiety. They include:

- Being both a young person and a parent.
- Trying to deal with the extra responsibility.
- The relationship between you and your child's father's / mother's family.
- Feeling judged.
- Trying to be the "perfect" mum/dad. (By the way, there is no such thing as the perfect mum/dad.)
- Feeling lonely and isolated.
- Not being able to do all the things that you were able to do before becoming a parent.
- Thinking that your friends will treat you differently after you have your baby and that you might lose some friends.
- Juggling school/college, money, friends, family, looking after your baby, and not getting enough sleep.

Exercise 1: Quiet time – Mindfulness

- Get a notebook - write down your thoughts, this will help you to think more clearly.



Exercise 2:

Think back to a recent event or time that you felt anxious.

Who was I with? How was I feeling? What did I see/hear/read?

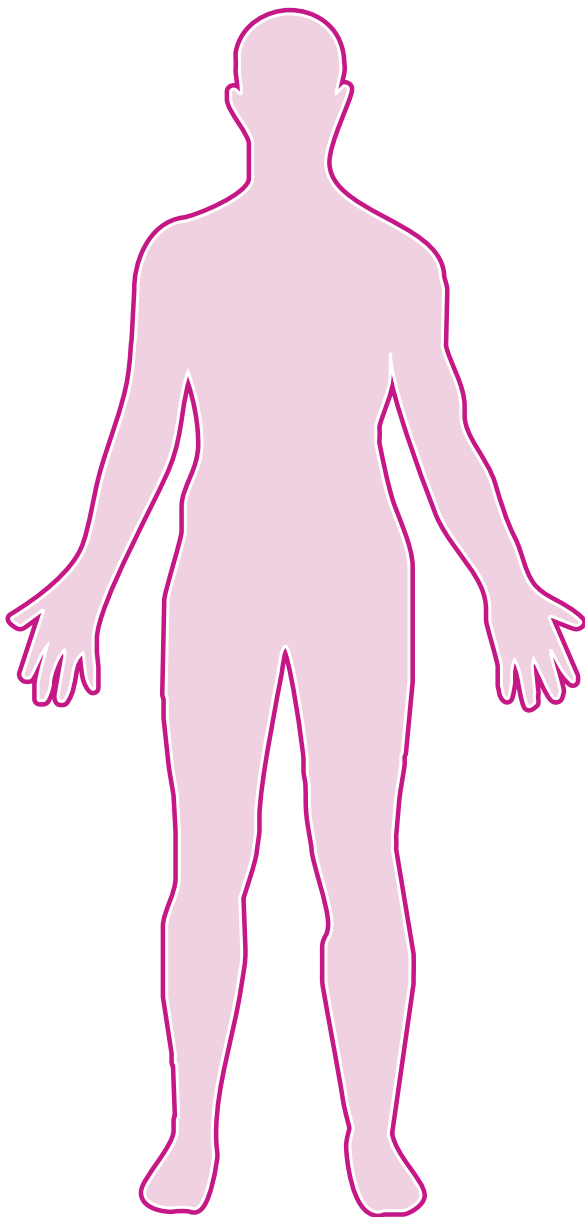
When did my mood change? What thoughts was I thinking? What would be a better way to deal with the event/situation/person in the future?

*We try to read their minds and guess what others are thinking.
It is impossible to know what other people are thinking.*

Let's give your anxiety a name (example Mary/John - pick any name you want). People often feel it helps when trying to cope with their anxiety.

So the next time that horrible voice in your head tells you what to do or how to feel you call it by its name and tell it to go away, you are not interested in listening to his/her negativity.

Now mark with an X where you feel the physical effects of anxiety on the picture to the right. You can also draw clothes/face/hair if you wish.



Did you know...?

The impact of sleep loss can make emotional distress more difficult and can be mistaken for postnatal depression.

Advice: seek advice and support if sleep is an issue for you as a parent.

There are 'baby sleep clinics' running throughout Co. Donegal. These clinics offer practical support for parents having difficulties with their baby's sleep routines/patterns. If you would like more information on this service, please contact your Public Health Nurse (PHN) at your local health centre.

Public Health Nurses offer a great range of supports to parents so never be afraid to contact them, they are there to help.

Some things that parents are sometimes afraid to say out loud...

- The hardest thing I ever did was have my first baby.
- I don't remember being more tired, lonely or overwhelmed in my life.
- There is nothing like the wave of shock (good and bad) that hits you when you bring home your baby.
- We are all struggling. Don't ever feel like you have let yourself down.

There is nothing more important than your mental health. You are succeeding every day, you get through it. Don't ever forget that.

Anxiety

Anxiety or panic attacks can come out of the blue or be set off by specific triggers.

- Living with anxiety every day can be exhausting.
- It is always right there no matter what you are doing.
- It can ruin relationships, friendships and confidence.

This can make you feel even more overwhelmed.

Having anxiety can happen to anyone, at any time.

How our body reacts to anxiety:

- Panic attacks.
- Unhelpful thinking patterns (e.g. thinking the worst will happen).
- Constantly feeling down (e.g. sadness and tearfulness).
- Heart palpitations.
- A tightness in your chest.
- Difficulty in catching a breath.
- Feeling sick.
- Dizziness.

What are your thinking patterns?

- Thinking patterns are the types of thoughts that you have.
- How you think affects how you feel and behave every day.
- It is believed that we have over 60,000 thoughts a day!

"A thought is just a thought, it is not a FACT".

When we have negative thoughts and believe bad things will happen it can destroy our confidence, make us feel lonely and anxious.

Anxiety

Listed below are 10 negative thinking patterns; are there any you can identify with personally?

1. All-or-nothing thinking

- You see things in black or white.
- You say words like "always", "never", or "every".
- If you think you have not done your best, you will see yourself as a complete failure.

2. Overgeneralisation

- You see a single negative event such as not passing a test as a never-ending pattern of defeat.
- Thinking "nothing good ever happens to me".

3. Mental filter

- You pick out a single negative defeat and focus all your energy on it. This negative mental filter stops you seeing the whole picture.

4. Ignoring the positive

- You disregard any positive experiences by insisting they "don't count", reinforcing your negative beliefs about yourself.

5. Jumping to conclusions

- You believe the worst is going to happen.

a) Mind reading

- You believe that you can read a person's mind and therefore know if that person likes you or does not like you.

b) The fortune-teller

- You expect and believe that things will turn out bad.

6. Catastrophising or minimisation

- You either exaggerate the importance of things, such as believing small mistakes are life-changing events, OR you downplay your positive qualities and achievements.

7. Emotional reasoning

- You believe that your negative emotions reflect the way things are: "I feel it; therefore, it must be true". For example, "as I feel like a bad friend, therefore I must be a bad friend".

8. Should Statements

- The words "should" or "must" can make you feel guilty. So try to avoid using them. For example, "I should have gone for a walk with the baby today". This negative self-talk is going to make you feel worse and more anxious.

Anxiety

9. Labeling

- Instead of describing your mistake, you attach a negative label to yourself. Such as “I’m a loser”, “lazy” or “stupid”, saying them like they are facts.
- By doing this you are lowering your self-esteem and self-worth.

10. Personalisation

- You take things personally, believing that other people are blaming you or that you are the reason for a negative situation.
- This can be done without having any evidence to back this up.

Simple steps to help you cope with your anxiety

There are different techniques you can use to manage anxiety.

Catch, challenge, and change how you think!

- **Catch** your thoughts - become aware of that untrue negative thought and catch it when it enters your head.
- **Challenge** your thoughts - ask yourself, is this thought real? Do I have any PROOF to say that it will happen?
- **Change** your thoughts - change your negative thought to one that is real and has proof to show it is real!

Note down how you feel

(Recap of previous exercise as it is very important for you to be able to recognise what triggers your anxiety)

- Take ten minutes and sit somewhere quietly.
- Get a notebook and pen.
- Write down your thoughts; this will help you to think more clearly.
- Think back to a recent event or person that made you feel anxious.
- Ask yourself:
 - Who was I with?
 - How was I feeling?
 - What did I see/hear/read? When did my mood change?
 - What thoughts was I thinking?
 - What would be a better way to deal with this event/situation/person in the future?

A MAIN SOURCE OF ANXIETY: Who am I? ~ Identity Loss & Social Media

"Can you remember who you were, before the world told you who should be?"
Danielle Laporte.

We believe that pregnancy and post-pregnancy are supposed to be one of the happiest times of our lives.

So what happens when it isn't?

Do we feel that there is something wrong with us?

Do we compare?

What happens if you lose your sense of self?

- Loss of identity can lead to anxiety, depression, loss of self-confidence and loneliness.
- When this happens, we may seek approval from others.
- Our self-worth may become dependent on external factors such as our appearance, our status, and how much money we have.
- We may believe this will give others a better idea of who we are.
- Yet we worry about being judged, how others view us and may ask ourselves "am I good enough?"

What can you do if you feel lost?

Reach out to a friend

Sometimes we may not realise that others are feeling the same way. Opening up and telling someone you trust how you feel can help clarify your thoughts, make you feel better, and may lead to a conversation of shared experiences.

Do what you love

Take ten minutes, sit down with a pen and paper and write down any interests you have, or if this is difficult, write down any past interests or, if this is difficult, write down hobbies you had. Ask yourself, would you like to do something that involves this interest? Or would you like to learn a new skill? If you answered yes, allocate time and allow yourself to do something that you love.

Anxiety

Surround yourself with positive people

The people we surround ourselves with have a massive impact on how we see ourselves, our views on who we are, and on our confidence. Joining a group or starting an activity in your local community can allow you to find like-minded people.

Sign off from social media

If you find social media is hurting how you feel about yourself, you can sign off. We can become consumed by how many 'likes' we get, comparing ourselves to others and hiding behind a profile showing everyone how happy we are. This can lead to negative thoughts and self-talk.

What can stop you from being you?

1. Fear of what others think of you

- Worrying what other people think of you, mind-reading, and making assumptions (without any real evidence) can get in the way of you being authentic, i.e. your real self.

2. Trying to fit and be accepted

- The fear of rejection can drive you to do what you can to fit in and be accepted. You may people please, say 'yes' to everyone. Boundaries become blurred. It may lead to feeling anxious as you're not looking after yourself.

3. Trapped by other people's expectations

- In your personal life you may find that people have had unfair expectations of you or label you. People try to label or put people into certain boxes.
- When we become aware of this, we can do something about it by stopping others from defining your reality.

4. Forgive yourself

- Start by forgiving yourself for past mistakes.
- Show kindness to yourself by accepting the past and realising you no longer need to punish yourself.

Make a list of things that might help you cope when you suffer from anxiety and use this list as your go-to guide to help on the bad days (please remember that everyone deals with anxiety in different ways so make sure you list what works for you).

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This booklet was designed and compiled by Foróige's Teen Parents Support Programme Donegal with the help of Sarah Barr from New Beginnings