



# Guiseley School

## How are You?

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Hello to you all. hope you're keeping well despite the loss of sunshine recently. Looking back to last week, I really do hope that it helped some of you out there who needed a push to talk to the people around you and get some support. I hope you feel less lonely and I hope you now have faith that better times are coming. This week I'm looking at anxiety, I think perhaps most of us have been visited by the anxiety bug at some stage in our lives and I think we can all agree it's a very unwelcome guest in our minds so I hope this week helps enable those of you out there that need it to serve an eviction notice on it promptly.



## Self-Care: when to reach out.

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Believe it or not anxiety is actually there to help us. Think about how and why you learnt to look both ways before crossing a road, or learning not to talk to strangers etc These acts all come from a place of mild anxiety to learn to protect ourselves for the "What ifs" in the world. Without a little anxiety we would be careless and prone to risky behaviours. The problem with anxiety occurs when it grows to such a place where it no longer is serving as something to protect us from harm, it actually causes problems rather than help you solve them.

Anxiety has taken over when:

- It interferes with your life
- You struggle to feel calm day to day

- Your brain can no longer tell the difference between fearful situations in real life or the situations you create in your mind alone.

A recent study showed that **32 %** of teenagers have suffered from anxiety at some stage. Add lockdown into this and I imagine it is much higher currently. If anxiety is starting to become a problem in your life, please be assured, you are not alone and nor should you continue to suffer alone.

The list of symptoms of general anxiety is huge but some of the main contenders are:

- Feeling on edge, tired and irritable
- Feel a sense of dread for no reason
- Having trouble sleeping



- Experiencing a strong , fast irregular heartbeat
- Feel like you have a dry mouth
- Sweat excessively
- Repeatedly check things and seek assurance from others
- Feeling sick, dizzy or short of breath
- Avoid situations or put things off you are worried about
- Get headaches and /or stomach aches

There are many others but these are from the NHS website and appear to be the ones that most people struggle with when they're anxious. As stated above these are the main symptoms for **general** anxiety but there are other more specific types such as **social** anxiety, specific fears and **phobias** and **panic** disorders. These all come with their own symptoms that you can find on any of the resources I will be highlighting later.

For some people anxiety pops up and takes over their lives without so much as a hello, for others it feels like its constantly been there humming away in the background. It can be absolutely mentally exhausting as well as physically painful at times and when you don't know how to ease it you can fall into ways of coping that may make you feel like they're helping but are actually making it worse. These include:

**Avoiding-** sometimes avoiding the situation/issue may seem like the best solution but it just makes the problem bigger. It feeds the anxiety no end and keeps you trapped in the anxiety cycle.

**Being perfect-** You may feel you are more in control of your anxiety if you achieve everything perfectly...all of the time. Just writing that sentence makes me feel exhausted. This is not helpful thinking, by setting these impossible high standards on yourself you are setting yourself up for more anxiety if you make mistakes...like everyone does. Don't do this to yourself, no one is perfect ...at all ...whatsoever.

**Overthinking-** this is something where you think about something over and over again. You might find your mind drifting to think of worse possible scenarios as a way to figure out solutions for them . Focusing on your fears only sends signals to your brain that there is something to be afraid about.

**Compulsions-** Now these are often a hard thing to discuss. I suffered these in my adolescence. It can be anything from checking your door is locked 20 times to make sure your house is safe but can become bigger quickly, it can take over many aspects of your life and needs stopping . These rituals do not make your anxiety go away,its feeding it.



## Light in The Lockdown!

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Similar to last week, I'm using this week's light in the lockdown to give you some hope that you can tackle this...and win. I'll look at things that you can try to help take control of your anxiety. I am however strongly recommending that if you feel completely overwhelmed then seek professional help. For the time being let's look at simple little things you can do day to day to start chipping away at this big mass of anxiety.

**Face your anxiety!** -Yes, I know, no one wants to do this but it's crucial. Facing your fears, challenging your thoughts all add up to you feeling stronger, the stronger you feel the more likely you are to break this vicious cycle. I'm not expecting you to go to have an instant battle and try and take everything on at once. That would be cruel and also set you up for failure. Let's break it down into small steps to get you started.

**Start documenting your thoughts** - Get them all down in a journal, it can help with the process of getting them out of your head and onto paper. It can also assist in identifying your triggers and patterns.

**Set a worry time** - This may sound bizarre but it actually works for some people. If you feel like your days are being consumed by your thoughts of worst-case scenarios, self-doubt and fears set yourself a time each day to go through all your concerns and then stop, you've

had your time allocation, leave it until tomorrow.

**Inbox or spam?** – I've used this technique with lots of students and it really helps. Take a moment to write down your worries into these two categories. What actually warrants your energy and what quite frankly is junk mail that simply needs putting in the bin. We've all received an email and thought "Why on earth am I being sent that" Treat your own negative thoughts in the exact same way.

**Shift your focus** - You cannot go through the entire day being taken over by anxiety, it zaps your energy and quite frankly is an absolute time thief. Find an outlet that gives you a break from this. I recently read an amazing book called 'Jog on-how running saved my life' by Bella Mackie about a woman who was desperate to break free from severe anxiety and started jogging. At first just a few minutes at a time, then gradually built it up. It broke all of her avoidance habits and when she jogged, she didn't worry, she concentrated on her breathing and putting one foot in front of another and not falling over. I'm not saying jogging has to be your escape but think of something that could do the same for you.



## Spotlight on: additional support

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There is so much information out there on anxiety and I'm hoping that the more information you gain, the less alone you'll feel and the stronger you'll feel to start tackling it.

**Which type of anxiety do you have?** - There are many websites out there that can help give you a better idea of exactly what you're struggling with. A great first introduction to summaries of the different types can be found on the anxiety UK website. They also suggest which support is best for each:

<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/get-help/anxiety-information/young-people-and-anxiety/>

**Talk to your parents or carers** - These are the best people to talk to in the beginning! You will feel so much better knowing that you have opened up and the people around you on a daily basis. They are also a great help in you seeking support from outside services if you feel you need it.

**Gusieley school** - As mentioned last week, if you are struggling with anxiety and would like school to help, please speak to someone in your pastoral team who can put you in touch with the wellbeing team and we can go from there.

**GP** - The process for going to your GP is the same as last week when I discussed low mood. Your GP will be able to signpost you to the services who can assess your needs. Spend

some time beforehand accessing as much information as you can so you have a full picture of what you feel you are struggling with and make sure you get across your feelings about what you feel would be the best support for you.

**Youngminds** - This website is great for looking at the different treatment options as well as well as lots more information on anxiety itself. It also has great videos including one on fantastic self-care tips in particular creating a self-soothing box which is a lovely idea:

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/anxiety/>

**Remember Lockdown is a magnifying glass!** - One last point I want you to remember is that lockdown and anxiety is the worst partnership ever! If you already suffered from bouts of anxiety and it has risen, this is completely understandable. If you never suffered from anxiety before and found yourself suddenly struggling with it, also completely understandable under the circumstances. This will get better, but access support if you need it to get you through this stressful time.

Next week I am looking at mindfulness which works hand in hand with other treatments for anxiety. I look forward to sharing this with you next week.

