



## A Guide to Coping with Panic Attacks

### Panic Attacks

Anxiety is a response to a sense of danger such as ‘something bad about to happen’ or ‘I don’t know what to expect and am sure I won’t be able to cope’. The reason why we are anxious can therefore be hard to find sometimes. Everybody feels anxious from time to time. A little bit of anxiety is normal. It can help us to stay safe and to focus and get things done. But feeling anxious a lot means we can also get used to feeling anxious and it can become a way of being. **Panic attacks can happen if we feel really anxious and haven’t yet been helped to learn ways to calm ourselves.** Panic attacks can be frightening but we can learn to control them. They can last from a few seconds to 10 minutes. A panic attack cannot harm you. Stay calm and breathe and it **WILL** pass.

### How will I know if I am having a Panic Attack?

We all have our own way of responding when anxious. However, when having a panic attack our thoughts, feelings and actions become more intense.

**THOUGHTS.** You may think:

“I don’t want to go anywhere”

“I don’t want to see those people”

“Am I doing this right?”

“I think I’m dying”,

“Everyone will think I’m stupid”





### **BODY FEELINGS.** You may:

- Find it hard to breathe
- Have chest or stomach pains
- Have tingling in your hands or feet
- Feel like you are choking
- Have a skin rash
- Have a headache
- Find your heart beating very quickly
- Have really tense muscles
- Start to sweat or tremble
- Feel dizzy
- Feel sick
- Have diarrhoea



### **ACTIONS.** You may:

- Want to hide
- Not know what to do
- Not be able to speak
- Stay rigid
- Not know what to say
- Want to run away
- Want to push people away

### **How to Manage a Panic Attack.**

#### Things you can do

- Practice things to help you relax. Find what works well for you.
- Practice taking deep breaths.
- Try to figure out what causes you to feel anxious. Pay attention to what you are thinking when you begin to feel anxious.
- Talk to someone about your feelings.
- Let others know what helps you during a panic attack e.g. “a hand on my shoulder lets me know that there are people with me” or “I do not like if someone touches me”.

#### During a Panic Attack

- Don't run away.
- Ask or signal for help.
- Try using a paper bag to breathe into - this will help you to breathe.
- Tell yourself what is happening. You can say “I am having a panic attack, it will pass”.



- Say things that will help you to be calm – “This will pass”; “I will be ok”.
- Take deep breaths. Do this until you calm down.
- Try to count backwards or sing a song in your head.
- Try to move around. Walking or stretching may help.
- Think of a place or a thing that makes you feel happy or safe.

Remember this takes practice. Stick with it. Take the time to practice when you are not feeling anxious.

**You are not alone. Talking with someone you trust will help. If you have panic attacks, talk to an adult you trust and/or visit your doctor.**

**For more information on how to seek help see [here](#)**