



Anxiety

What is Anxiety?¹

Roughly 12% of Canadians will struggle with anxiety in any given year (Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada). Anxiety is defined as nervousness or fear about what might happen. Most people experience anxiety from time to time, and this is not typically problematic. However, for some people, it can be. These characteristics help us understand when anxiety becomes problematic:

- **Excessive fear:** an emotional response to a real or perceived threat, often triggering the fight, flight, freeze response
- **Excessive anxiety:** anticipation of a future threat, related to vigilance and muscle tension
- **Source of threat:** except in the case of generalized anxiety, there is typically an identifiable source of the anxiety. These can differ in the feared object (e.g. spiders or public speaking) and the associated thought processes and beliefs
- Fears and anxiety that **persist** for a period of six or more months
- Fears and anxiety that are **not typically experienced** by same-age peers
- **Disproportionate** fear or anxiety to a situation or object

Risk Factors

- **Environment:** negative life experiences or stressful situations, parenting styles (e.g. overprotective), traumatic experiences
- **Genes:** inherited through genetic material and gene-influenced traits
- **Personality:** personality traits that predispose a person towards anxiety (e.g. negative affectivity, experience negative emotions and self-concept)

Consequence of Anxiety

Consequences of anxiety may vary depending on the person and the type of anxiety they have. Anxiety can ebb and flow in terms of its intensity and impact on a person's life. Here are some possible symptoms:

Social	Personal	Situational
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulty communicating• Withdrawal from others• Substance abuse• Compulsive, repetitive behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physical: increased heart rate, excessive sweating, difficulty breathing, etc.• Difficulty sleeping• Impaired ability to accomplish tasks efficiently• Emotional: irritability, restlessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid school, work, or other social situations• Difficulty coping with changing life circumstances (e.g. child moving away, relocation, etc.)

How to help friends and family struggling with anxiety²

- **Listen** to your friend or family member and do not downplay their feelings
- Be **supportive** to your friend or family member
- Be **available** to talk with him or her about the anxiety, but allow them to start the conversation
- Maintain **healthy boundaries** - don't allow their anxiety to become your anxiety
- Understand that there is a **physical link** with anxiety
- Be **patient** with your friend or family member, change takes time
- **Invite** your friend to engage in activities
- Remain **authentic** as a friend or family member
- **Encourage** them to seek help

What does the Bible say about anxiety?

Anxiety is a normal part of life. Many heroes of the Bible experienced anxiety, including Jesus. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ asked the Father to take away the suffering that was coming if it were His will (Matthew 26:39). Jesus turned his concern over to God, and ultimately accepted the Father's will. In times of turmoil, David cried out in anguish to God and even questioned where God was. In the end, he placed his trust in God's unwavering love. Peter's life was rife with worry as he and those around him were jailed and killed for speaking of Jesus. Peter instructed persecuted Christ followers to "cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). We can stand on firm ground knowing that anxiety

is part of the human condition. It is what we do in response to anxiety that makes a difference. Yet, sometimes anxiety gets the best of us and we need extra support and new skills to stand firm.

Treatment

There are many different treatment options. Some of these include:

- **Medication:** can help with decreasing the physical symptoms of anxiety (talk with a doctor or psychiatrist)
- **Cognitive-behavioural therapy:** recognizing and changing underlying thought patterns that contribute to feelings of anxiety
- **Dietary and lifestyle changes**
- **Relaxation therapy**

A crucial part of counselling is the relationship between clients and counsellors. The Bible talks about loving people with an unconditional love, and that is what Christians who are counsellors are called to do.³ From a foundation of non-judgment, people can begin to explore distorted thoughts that may be causing anxiety. Understanding the connection between thought, feeling and action, people can be better equipped to face a life that is full of worries. They can learn new patterns of thinking and learn to weigh the evidence for their thoughts. People can also be equipped with coping skills to combat anxiety in the moment and evaluate stressful situations as they arise.

More Information

Anxiety BC <http://www.anxietybc.com>

Anxiety Disorder Association of Canada <http://www.anxietycanada.ca>

For more information or counselling support, please contact:

Christian Counselling Services

<http://www.saskatoonccs.com/>

(306) 244-9890

chcounselling@sasktel.net

¹ American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Washington, DC.

² No Author (no date). 12 tips for friends and family of those with anxiety. <http://www.calmclinic.com/anxiety/tipsforfriendsfamily>

³ Tan, S. Y. (2011). *Counselling and Psychotherapy A Christian Perspective*. Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, Michigan.