



## ANXIETY

### Opening Exercise: *What Weighs Your Mind?*

#### Worry v.

- ★ to allow one's mind to dwell on difficulty or troubles
- ★ to think about problems or fears : to feel or show fear and concern because you think that something bad has happened or could happen

**Directions:** On the next page is a list of 15 common things that people might worry about.

**First**, there is a box on the bottom marked **\*YOUR IDEA**: Try to write something not already listed that you may worry about in that box or come up with something from another area that is specific to your personal situation

**Next**, everyone should stand up and walk around the room with your list and a pen. Go up to other people in the room and ask them to place their initials within the same box as some of the things that they worry about on your paper. Try to see if you can get at least one set of initials in each box if possible.

#### When Complete: Questions for Discussion:

- Which areas were the most popular and easiest to get people to initial?
- What areas in this group were difficult to get people to say they worried about?
- Did anyone else have the same worry as the one you added for yourself personally?
- How do you think that people's background affects what they worry about? Consider the following:
  - Does age play a role in what people may worry about?
  - Do men and women tend to worry about different things?
  - What other personal factors can influence what people may tend to worry about?
- **Critical Question: How do your personal worries affect your daily life? – Share and Discuss**



**Money:** Worrying about bills, rent/mortgage, expenses, debts, loans, investments, savings

**Appearance:** Worrying about aging, fashion, clothes, hair, weight, attractiveness

**Health:** Worrying about being sick or getting sick, having or getting a disease or injury

**Romantic Relationships:** Worrying about finding the right person or if the person you are with now is right

**The World Around You:** Worrying where the world is headed; disasters, crime, politics, pollution, war, etc.

**Employment:** Worrying about finding the right job or worrying about the job situation you currently have

**Interpersonal:** Worrying about arguments or disputes you may be having with friends or family

**Time/Goal Attainment:** Worrying about “How am I possibly going to get everything done that I need to?”

**Immediate Family:** Examples: “Am being a good parent?” or “Am I letting my family down?”

**Anxiety about Anxiety:** Ex: “What if I go out and have a panic attack? Or “Will I ever stop feeling anxious?”

**Safety/ Security – Self:** Worrying about: “What if I get: killed, hurt, robbed, etc.”

**Safety/Security – Others:** “What if my loved ones get hurt, killed, robbed, abducted, in an accident, etc.?”

**The Future:** Worrying about “Where is my life headed?” or “Are my kids going to be able to succeed?”

**Social:** Worrying about dealing with social situations, making friends, being self-conscious in public, etc.

**The Past:** Worrying about past bad experiences: “I feel like I am never going to get over...”

**Orderliness:** “I need things to be just the right way or I feel like something bad is going to happen”

**Mistakes/Embarrassment:** “What if I mess everything up” or “What if I fail or make a fool of myself?”

**\*YOUR IDEA:**



## **ANXIETY: Background Information**

There are a lot of definitions of anxiety and none of them seem perfect, probably because people experience anxiety in different ways on a personal level. Here is one simple definition:

**Anxiety** – n, - *a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome.*

**Defining your anxiety** - Some words often associated with feeling anxiety include:

- Overwhelmed
- Apprehension
- Uneasiness
- Concern
- Worry
- Uncertainty
- Fear
- Discomfort
- Restlessness
- Dread
- “Nerves”
- Stress
- Angst
- “On Edge”
- Overthinking
- Obsession
- Expecting the Worst
- Self-doubt
- Distraction
- Mistrust
- Distress
- Insecurity
- Self-Consciousness
- Hesitation
- Confusion
- Paranoia
- Terror
- Alarm
- Panic

★ **DISCUSSON**: Go through the list above for a minute or two and check which words describe how you experience anxiety personally. When done, discuss which stood out to you and why.



**Causes of Anxiety** - It can be difficult to determine the exact cause of anxiety from person to person, but there are a number of factors that can contribute to anxiety: (Keep in mind, these factors can increase the chances of anxiety but they do not **always** lead to anxiety. For example, not everyone who grows up in a chaotic or problematic family environment ends up being anxious and people who do grow up in a stable environment can also still end up with issues with anxiety. There are many people who survive some of these issues without serious issues with anxiety. Nothing is 100%, these are simply risk factors commonly associated with anxiety)

- **Genetic Factors:** Anxiety can run in families. Some people may be born with a better ability to tolerate stress and uncertainty more than others. Sometimes you can even see this in very young children
- **Past Life Experiences:** The stability and security of the environment which you grow up in can factor in your future anxiety level. Within your life experiences there are a number of things that can affect future anxiety issues:
  - **Parenting Style** – Growing up in an environment where you are put down or insulted can be a risk factor for anxiety later in life. Inconsistency or lack of support also can be issues
  - **Trauma** – Things such as abuse or neglect, significant losses, serious accidents, illness, injuries, or disabilities, victimization (such as being the victim of crime or assault) near death experiences (or perceived near death experiences) can all contribute to an increased likelihood of anxiety
  - **Social Factors** – Being bullied or teased or feeling like an outcast can contribute to anxiety later in life
- **Substance Abuse:** When someone uses substances to deal with stress and other problems, particularly early in life, they may not develop the natural ability to cope with anxiety without the substance.
- **Medical Conditions:** There are medical conditions that can be associated with increased anxiety levels including substance withdrawal, hormonal imbalance, diabetes and heart disease
- **Current life situation:** As one would expect, your current life situation can be a huge factor when it comes to anxiety. There are many examples:
  - **Unemployment**
  - **Working a high-stress or demanding job**
  - **Relationship problems** (Divorce, fighting, cheating, etc.)
  - **Financial problems**
  - **Danger** – (Such as living in a high crime area, for example)
  - **Poor health**
  - **Lack of resources** – In other words, you don't have what you need to get by
  - **Problems with loved ones** (Sick child, parent or spouse, for example)
  - **Oppression** – Being in a situation where others are exploiting, mistreating, persecuting or otherwise treating you unfairly

★ **DISCUSSON:** Did any of the above risk factors stand out for you?



**Types of Anxiety** – Nowadays, most people are very familiar with anxiety and anxiety disorders. So without getting into too much of the specifics about anxiety, here is a brief list of factors that can determine which type of anxiety a person may have:

- **Generalized Anxiety** – A regular pattern of worry and uneasiness that does not necessarily need a specific cause or trigger. Someone with generalized anxiety just tends to worry more than others in a general day to day sense.
- **Trauma** – As stated earlier, there are anxiety disorders (like Posttraumatic Stress Disorder) that are specifically related to having experienced a traumatic event (or multiple events) in one's past
- **Obsessive-Compulsive** – Anxiety that involves intrusive thoughts (obsessions) followed by unwanted often uncontrollable behaviors (compulsions – such as having to flick the lights on and off a certain amount of times)
- **Phobia** – An exaggerated fear that affects your functioning
- **Social** – Anxiety specifically triggered by social situations such as being afraid to talk in public or dreading meeting new people or extreme discomfort being in crowds, for example
- **Panic** – Severe and intense “attacks” of anxiety that affect functioning

**Coping with Anxiety** – As we said earlier, most people are pretty familiar these days with regard to what works for them and what does not work when it comes to effectively coping with anxiety. Rather than go through a list of coping skills for anxiety, have the following discussion:

- ★ **DISCUSS - What works for you when it comes to effectively coping with anxiety?**

**Anxiety: A Basic Skills List:**  
Relaxation  
Self-Care  
Communication  
Practice Positive Thinking  
Humor  
Accept What You Cannot Change  
Support  
Stay Busy  
Learn Positive Self-Talk  
Exercise  
Know Your Triggers  
Deep Breathing  
Five Minute Vacations  
Prioritize  
Learn to Trust and Delegate  
Counseling  
Learn to Let Go  
Spirituality

**Finally - Considering suggestions from other group members – What anxiety coping skills can you increase your focus on?**