

The Center A Place of Hope Reviews: 10 ways to help someone with anxiety

EDMONDS, WASHINGTON, UNITED STATES, March 17, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Supporting a loved one through anxiety can be painful and make you feel helpless. You try your best to be there for them, but you may not always know what to say or how to show them how much you care. If you're like most people in this situation, you probably wonder how to calm someone with anxiety.

It's important to know that your support, alone, isn't likely to lead to full recovery for your loved one. Anxiety is a serious condition that often requires treatment. However, there are things you can do (and things you shouldn't) to support your loved one through this difficult time.

Here is a guide that will help you better understand how to support people with anxiety, including things not to say.

How do you help someone with anxiety? Here are 10 tips to help you effectively support a loved one going through this scary and painful time.

Understand what anxiety really is.

Despite mental health awareness campaigns, anxiety continues to be a very misunderstood condition. After all, we all feel "anxious" from time to time -- and that feeling of everyday nervousness is often confused with what it feels like to live with an anxiety disorder every single day

Understand that anxiety disorders are much more serious than normal nervousness or stress. Anxiety is a mental illness that requires treatment. It's linked to biological changes in the part of the brain that's responsible for fear.[1]

Anxiety is debilitating to people's lives. Even if a situation might not feel like "a big deal", anxiety makes people's brains interpret certain events as threatening. Until they receive treatment, they may not have much control over this.

It's also important to understand that anxiety manifests in different ways for different people. Not everyone with anxiety starts visibly trembling at the first sign of a trigger. Just because someone can't observe someone else's anxiety symptoms on the outside doesn't mean they aren't there.

Help them get connected to mental health treatment.

Part of understanding that anxiety is a serious mental health disorder is understanding that support alone likely won't be enough to cure a loved one of anxiety. No matter how much family and friends are there for them -- and no matter how helpful this support is -- it's likely a loved one will need treatment, delivered by a licensed mental health practitioner.

A combination of therapy and medication is usually what's recommended for treating anxiety disorders. Anxiety may make the task of finding a treatment provider feel overwhelming to your loved one, and this is an excellent time for you to be helpful.

Help your loved one look through their insurance provider's directory; this is often the best place to find a provider their insurance covers. You can also help them look into telehealth providers (if anxiety makes it difficult for them to attend in-person appointments) or a therapist who shares their cultural identity.

Breathe together.

It sounds cliché, but by doing deep breathing, you attack anxiety symptoms on a biological level.

When someone is having an anxiety attack, their body activates the stress response.[2] Stress hormones are released, and their body goes through many changes, like taking shorter and more shallow breaths. By inviting them to practice a deep breathing exercise with you, you can help them to physically counteract this response and regulate their nervous system.

With that said, telling someone to "just breathe!" when they're facing anxiety symptoms usually isn't helpful, and can come off as dismissive.

Instead, try phrasing it as an invitation rather than a command. Say something like, "I see that you're really suffering right now. There is this breathing exercise that a lot of people say is helpful. It's really simple. Would you like to try it with me?"

Don't enable avoidance behaviors.

It's common for people with anxiety to want to avoid whatever triggers their symptoms.

What they avoid depends on what type of anxiety they have. For example, people with specific phobias may avoid the thing, person, or situation that they're afraid of. For example, someone with agoraphobia may avoid going outside at all.

This is understandable, and it's okay to have empathy for your loved one.

At the same time, try not to enable these avoidance behaviors, especially if your loved one hasn't discussed these behaviors with a mental health professional. Avoidance is only a temporary

bandaid for the problem of anxiety, and it doesn't do anything to help your loved one learn how to manage their anxiety.

If you keep accommodating your loved one's anxiety, it'll only get stronger. Maybe your friend has agoraphobia, so you always do her shopping for her. Or perhaps your husband has a specific phobia of flying, so you agree to take cross-country bus trips.

This is helpful temporarily, but not in the long-term. Instead of doing this, encourage your loved one to get real treatment so they can learn how to confront the things that trigger their anxiety rather than run away from them.

Provide the support that your loved one actually needs.

We all have different "love languages." What feels supportive to one person may feel overbearing to another. Make sure the type of support you're offering to your loved one is the type of support that they actually need and find helpful.

For example, some people may prefer more practical offerings of support -- things like bringing meals over or offering to babysit. Others might crave more emotional forms of support -- like getting a daily call just to check in on them. If you're not sure what would make your loved one feel the most supported, just ask!

It's always better to know exactly what your loved one needs so that you can make sure the support you're offering actually feels helpful to them. When the way you support your loved one matches up with how your loved one wants to be supported, you can avoid frustration for both of you.

Validate their experience.

Nobody wants to feel dismissed or foolish for feeling the way they do; this is especially true for people who already struggle with anxiety. It's important to validate your loved one's experience with anxiety, and to not insinuate that anxiety is trivial or an overreaction in any way.

Avoid saying anything like, "Everyone feels like that sometimes," or "Don't worry, things really aren't that bad." You may have good intentions, but these types of statements may make your loved one feel brushed off and misunderstood.

Instead, validate your loved one's feelings. Validation is the act of letting someone know that what they are feeling or experiencing is valid, or normal -- that they aren't crazy or weak for feeling this way. Sometimes, even saying something as simple as "That sounds really hard," can make all the difference.

Don't be forceful.

If you try to force anything onto your loved one that they aren't ready for, you might inadvertently push them away. This includes things like confronting their anxiety triggers and

seeking treatment. Although it'll likely be necessary for your loved one to take these steps at some point, they may not be ready yet -- and that's okay.

Avoid being forceful, even when you're trying to help. Forcing someone to confront their fears before they're ready is likely to damage the relationship you have with them. On top of that, the experience may be traumatic for them, especially if they already suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This can make their anxiety worse.

Confronting your fears and anxiety triggers is scary, and is best done under the supervision of a mental health practitioner.

Help them challenge their thoughts.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is one of the most helpful types of therapy for anxiety disorders.[3] CBT is based on the idea that our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are all connected. Often, it's how we're interpreting or thinking about a situation that makes us feel anxious (rather than the situation itself).

You may notice your loved one with anxiety often has irrational thoughts. For example, they may think everyone hates them (when that's obviously not true), or constantly worry about getting fired even though they're excelling at their job. When you notice this, gently bring their awareness to it and try to help them challenge these types of thoughts.

This shouldn't be done as if you're reprimanding your loved one or giving them a lecture. Simply let them know that you've noticed their thoughts seem to affect them, and invite them to challenge their own thoughts.

To do this in a structured way, you might consider asking your loved one what evidence they have that the thought is true -- and what evidence they have that it isn't.

Bring them back down to Earth.

Often, when people are in the middle of an anxiety or panic attack, they feel completely disconnected from their bodies. It may feel to them as if they're floating around untethered, with nothing to keep them connected to the real world.

We often talk about people having "their head in the clouds"; having an anxiety attack can feel this way, but instead of daydreams, the "clouds" are their worst nightmares.

If you notice that your loved one is disconnecting from themselves, it may be helpful to do a grounding exercise with them. Grounding is a way to use your five senses to reconnect to the world around you in the present moment. It's a good way to break the horrifying loop of anxious thoughts and remember that, at this moment, you're safe.

One easy grounding exercise that anybody can do is the 5-4-3-2-1 exercise. It's a structured

exercise that guides people through using their five senses to ground themselves. Ask your loved one to find:

5 things they can see
4 things they can hear
3 things they can touch
2 things they can smell
And 1 thing they can taste

Another grounding idea is to take your loved one into nature and help them connect to the world around them.

Take care of yourself.

Lastly, it's important to make sure that you, yourself, are taken care of, too. It can be emotionally draining to support someone going through anxiety, no matter how much you love them. It doesn't make you a bad or selfish person to feel exhausted and need your own support.

Sometimes, the simplest types of self-care are the most effective. Make sure you're taking care of yourself in basic ways, like getting enough sleep, eating three nourishing meals a day, and finding rejuvenating ways to move your body. Don't be afraid to schedule time away from your loved one with anxiety so you can focus on you. It's okay, and healthy, to have boundaries.

Some people who are in close relationships with people with anxiety (or other mental illness) choose to seek out their own mental health therapy.

To begin having a conversation with someone about their anxiety, follow these tips:

Don't be afraid to bring it up.

You won't make someone's anxiety worse by talking about it. Don't feel like you need to beat around the bush. Ask them, directly, how high their anxiety has been in recent days.

Talk about other interests.

At the same time, don't feel like anxiety is the only topic you can talk about. Anxiety doesn't define your loved one. Ask them about other things going on in their life, too, including hobbies and interests.

Avoid unsolicited advice.

Most of the time, when people talk about their struggles with anxiety, they aren't asking for advice. Avoid launching into giving advice about how to beat anxiety unless your loved one specifically asks for it. Instead, simply listen and validate.

Ask them what they need.

It's okay not to know what exactly to say to someone who's going through anxiety -- and it's also okay to just ask them what they need. Some people with anxiety may find it helpful to talk about

something else as a distraction, and others may need to vent more about what they're feeling. You might say something like, "Would you like to keep talking about this, or do you want to go do something to get your mind off of it? I'm here for anything you need."

Verbally express your care and solidarity.

Anxiety can be a lonely experience. Verbally expressing to your loved one that you care about them and are there for them can go a long way in making them feel supported. You can say something as simple as, "I'll always be here for you, no matter what."

What Not to Say to Someone With Anxiety

It's just as important to know what not to say to someone who's going through anxiety.

I know exactly how you feel; I hate flying, too.

Hating or being afraid of something isn't the same thing as living with an anxiety disorder.

Everyone gets nervous or scared from time to time, but anxiety severely disrupts every area of people's lives.

If you do happen to also live with an anxiety disorder, it could be appropriate to share your diagnosis with your loved one to help them feel less alone; however, avoid doing it in a way that centers you in the conversation.

At least...

Any sentence that starts with "at least" is bound to be invalidating. "At least you have your health," or "At least you're not so anxious that you have to be hospitalized" are words that no one wants to hear when they're going through one of the worst times of their life.

Essentially, sentences that start with "at least" are saying, "You don't have the right to feel the way you do, because other people have it worse." That isn't helpful, or validating, for anyone.

Chin up!

Avoid generic, "cheerleading" statements. These statements are invalidating, they also feel inauthentic. These are phrases that anyone could say to someone they see suffering; they have nothing to do with a loved one's unique struggle.

Anxiety Treatment at The Center • A Place of HOPE

When your loved one is struggling with anxiety, it can start to feel like you'll never get them back. But there is hope: anxiety is a [highly treatable](#) condition. The compassionate and experienced clinical team at The Center • A Place of Hope can help your loved one start making progress toward recovery.

Our unique [Whole Person Care approach](#) ensures that a loved one's anxiety treatment will address the physical, emotional, intellectual, relational, and spiritual elements of their life. In this way, they can start healing from all of the different ways that anxiety has affected them.

Things don't have to be this way forever. [Contact us today](#) to learn more about how we can help.

[1] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/labs/pmc/articles/PMC3684250/>

[2] <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/understanding-the-stress-response>

[3] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4610618/>

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