

How do I deal with anxiety at work?

Do you find yourself feeling anxious in meetings? You wait for your turn to speak but it never seems to come. Or you drum up the courage to say something but nobody seems to be listening. Or perhaps you notice that other colleague say the same things as you but get a better response?

Or maybe you get an email from your boss and your brain starts to cycle through all the things that might be wrong. Did you make a mistake? Say something wrong? Are you going to be fired?

You start to feel panicky and your day is ruined. You don't know how to feel better or what to do differently.

It's very common to feel like you're on your own in feeling like this. Clients ask me why 'everyone else manages ok' or 'why is it only me that is struggling?'. Of course, it isn't just you, with Anxietyuk confirming that 'More than one in 10 people are likely to have a 'disabling anxiety disorder' at some stage in their life'. It's normal that anxiety spills over into the workplace. Sometimes the workplace is also the cause of stress or anxiety.

When it's difficult to tell others how you feel, you can end up feeling alone. You might fear being dismissed, or other people thinking that you're overreacting or you're not up to doing your job. Perhaps someone well-meaning but unhelpful told you 'you'll be fine' when you tried to bring it up, and now you don't want to mention it again incase you get the same response.

So what can you do to help yourself feel better at work when you're anxious?

1. Do something calming

When you notice your anxiety rising, this is your cue to do something to help yourself feel better. That might be going for a quick walk, taking a break to make a cup of tea, or texting a friend or partner who you know will be supportive. If you can't take a break, focus on slowing down your breathing to tell your body to relax. Learning to calm down is a skill, and it takes practice. Don't panic if it doesn't work the first few times you try it. The more you practice, the easier it will be to learn to calm yourself.

2. Try and identify the triggers

Is your anxiety about a personal problem? Are you worried you're not good enough at your job? Is it speaking to others that causes anxiety? Anxiety can be confusing and it can spread, so it's not always easy to work out what causes it. You could try writing down what you're doing and how you're feeling a couple of times a day

(just make a quick note on your phone) to see if you can make some links about what's going on.

3. Ask for help at work if you need it

The tricky thing about mental health issues is that they lie to us, telling us that we need to manage everything on our own. It's not true, and asking for help is a brave and sensible thing to do. Could you speak to a colleague who you have a good relationship with so they can check in on you and see how you're doing? Have you got a sympathetic boss who can give you more positive input when you're overwhelmed? Could you ask for some training in an area that you're struggling with to give you some more support? Workplaces are increasingly involving themselves in their employees' well-being and mental health, and many would be happy to help if given the chance.

4. Seek professional help if you can't manage by yourself

By the time they've arrived at a counsellor's office, clients have often struggled for years with anxiety. You don't need to be having an emergency before you look for more support. If you've tried self-help measures and don't get anywhere, it doesn't mean that you've failed or that you will never stop being anxious. You may just need some extra help. It can be tricky to know where to start or what to look for. Having someone on your side who knows which bits are relevant can make a big difference in encouraging you to keep going.

Anxiety can be overwhelming and debilitating, but it's not set in stone. It's possible to recognise the triggers and interrupt them before they get out of control. It's possible to learn ways of managing anxiety and panic attacks before they take hold. As your knowledge increases, you notice the positive steps you have taken to change your experience and learn to break free from its grip.