Coping Cards and Other Management Options for Anxiety

by NATASHA DEVINE

Coping Cards for Anxiety

Anxiety is so much more than just being worried. It can be triggered by the smallest of things and send you spiraling before you know what hit you, or it can creep up slowly and steal your logical thoughts, causing a detrimental distraction. This is why coping with anxiety can be difficult.

The exact cause of anxiety disorders are unknown and triggers are often unique to each sufferer. They're either inspired by a belief, past event, hormone changes or even genetics and brain chemistry.

My depression and anxiety seem to go hand-in-hand; one will affect the chemicals in my brain or bring on a wave of negative thoughts, which then often triggers the other.

In the midst of an anxiety attack or anxious feelings, logical thinking is often affected and it can be hard to focus on one thing because your body has entered fight-or-flight mode. It’s helpful in these moments to have coping techniques to turn to as distraction and force your mind and body back into a sense of calm.

Coping Techniques

Because each individual has a different experience with anxiety and triggers that are unique to them, not all techniques will work as effectively for everyone. But these are some things that have worked for me:

Deep Breathing and Meditation

I find that slow, intentional breaths and trying to keep my thoughts honed in on the inhale and exhale of each breath can help to lower my heart rate and slow my breathing to help bring back some clarity. The longer I meditate and focus on my breathing, the calmer I feel, which allows rational thought to return.

Grounding

This is a great way to distract myself from the panicky feelings. Grounding helps me to center myself in the current moment and not on the catastrophic thoughts and feelings that are currently trying to rule my body. I count down starting at five:

- Five things I see.
- Four things I feel.
- Three things I hear.
- Two things that are red (or any color you wish).
- One thing I can smell.

Doing this brings my thoughts and focal point to a specific activity and helps me become aware of my

surroundings in the here and now. This is also a great trick for kids because you can turn it into a game of I Spy and have the child find the things mentioned above.

Lists

Similar to grounding, this acts as a distraction. I typically resort to this when I can feel myself getting anxious to avoid an attack.

I pick a category and just start listing off as many things as I can, breathing deeply with each item. For example, you can choose fruit as your category and list as many fruits as you can think of until you are feeling calm.

Other methods you can try are:

- **Draw, doodle, or color.** Adult coloring books are becoming more popular for a reason: they offer a wonderful distraction and have a beautiful, colorful result.
- **Exercise or yoga.** Productive movement can be a great way of expelling anxious energy, and if you do yoga, child's pose is helpful for feeling safe and secure as well as bringing your thoughts inward.
- **Water.** Drink a glass of cold water, have a cup of soothing tea, put an ice cube on your arm, or have a shower.
- **Write it down.** This is a great way to identify what triggered the anxious feelings and helps to release them.
- **Talk to a friend.** Similar to writing it down, talking to a friend can bring an alternate perspective to the situation and an understanding friend can offer comfort and support.

Coping Cards

While these tips work for me, sometimes in the intensity of the moment it is hard to align your focus on what you are doing or which methods work for you. That's why coping cards are so beneficial: they are a visual reminder (or several) of the steps to take to help bring you back down.

What is a Coping Card?

A coping card is a physical reminder of your management techniques that help you in the event of an anxiety attack or an oncoming attack. You can write it out on a business card and keep it with your or design it online and print it.

It doesn't have to be a single card either. You may find it helpful to have a few cards on a ring, each with a coping tip, an image, affirmation or a combination of things.

If you don't have something that you carry with you all the time — your phone may be the better option. In today's age of technology, we have access to helpful apps, photo albums and people who can help.

Create an album of photos on your phone that improve your mood or help to calm you. Start a board on Pinterest of coping techniques that can keep you on track and can act like a digital coping card.

You can even pin images to the board that help to enhance that sense of well-being. There are also mood apps available to help you track your feelings, thoughts and triggers that can help you identify patterns and triggers so you can avoid them or work towards long-term management.

Make your coping card (either physical or digital) unique to you and it can become a reliable and beneficial aid to guide you through.