8 Strategies for Dealing With Anxiety at Work

by LANA BARHUM

Is Anxiety Interfering With Work? How to Calm Anxiety at Work

Living with an anxiety disorder affects every aspect of your life, including at work. When your anxiety is severe, it can keep you from performing at your best, and even deter employers from advancing you or recognizing your talents and accomplishments.

You Are Not Alone

Even people who don't live with anxiety can find their jobs to be stressful. However, for people with anxiety disorders, deadlines and being at the center of attention are even more challenging.

Research from the Anxiety Disorders Association of America (ADAA) finds up to 28 percent of working people have had an anxiety or panic attack. Sadly, only nine percent have been formally diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.

Anxiety has professional consequences, and the ADAA report finds 56 percent of workers with anxiety say it affects work performance and relationships with professional peers. Fifty percent of workers say anxiety affects work quality and 43 percent say it affects relationships with superiors.

Only 1 in 4 employees report anxiety disorders to their employers. They don't report these because they fear employers will think they're making excuses, or their mental health will keep them job advancement.

8 Tips for Dealing With Anxiety at Work

Dealing with an anxiety disorder doesn't mean you should forgo opportunities to excel at or advance in your profession.

Here are some ways to calm your thoughts and manage anxiety symptoms while on the job.

Don't Suppress Anxiety

Trying to hold it in will only make you feel more overwhelmed and less in control. If you allow yourself the space to feel anxious, symptoms will be less bothersome in the future.

Be Mindful

It is okay to take a break once in a while and examine what triggers your anxious feelings.

Take a moment to think about what you are doing when anxiety rears its ugly head and what are you're thinking and feeling. Hopefully, understanding these triggers can help you to minimize them in the future.

Confront Anxious Feelings

Challenging your anxiety is okay.

For example, if you are nervous about speaking in front of a group, get involved in a presentation, or you are anxious about talking to coworkers, try striking up a conversation.

When you push yourself to take the lead, you can persevere despite the anxiety and improve your confidence.

Take Care of Yourself

Attend to your feelings and practice an anxiety-friendly lifestyle that includes a healthy diet, good sleep habits, and stress management techniques.

Focus on the Future

Try to focus on the positive and set goals for the future rather than worrying about past failures where your anxiety got in the way.

Avoid Caffeine

Caffeine is an anxiety trigger for many people. Try to avoid it before and during work hours. Drinking water instead can help you to feel more focused, centered and healthy.

Just Breathe

If you are starting to feel anxious, check your breathing. Try breathing through your nose and out of your mouth while imagining your mind is free and clear of worry and will continue to be.

You may also consider going outside for a few minutes, like going for a walk or just stepping out to get some fresh air.

Meditate

You don’t have to be an expert at meditation to take about five minutes in your day to send a message to your brain that it is time to relax and refocus.

Seek Treatment

Many people who suffer from anxiety do not seek out diagnosis and treatment because they don’t realize anxiety is a real disorder, or that it can be treated. But research from the Center for Workplace Mental Health reports 80 percent of people who get treatment for mental health issues report improved job satisfaction and increased productivity.

Several treatments have proved useful for treating anxiety. Examples include:

- Talk therapy involves talking with a therapist about issues contributing to anxiety, including triggers, and findings ways to cope.
- Cognitive behavior theory (CBT) helps you to examine thoughts and feelings contributing to anxious feelings. It also teaches you to control behaviors and reactions in situations that trigger anxiety.
- Medication is helpful for lessening anxiety symptoms and is often prescribed in addition to other therapies. Anxiety medications are usually prescribed on a short-term or as needed basis because they can be habit-forming.

Mental Health Accommodations at Work: Know Your Rights

Anxiety disorders are covered disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. The ADA protects employees from being discriminated at work because of their disability.

Under the ADA, people with disabilities are entitled to “reasonable accommodations.” Reasonable accommodations must not cause undue hardship to the employer.

If you need accommodations for your anxiety disorder, your employer can provide:

- Plenty of time and opportunity for you to learn new responsibilities.
- A reasonable amount of privacy or partitions to minimize sound in your workspace.
- Taping and recording of meetings if group situations trigger anxiety
- Flexible scheduling and the option to change schedules to attend therapy and medical appointments.
- Other reasonable accommodations to help you do your job despite anxiety.

You are, of course, not required to disclose your anxiety disorder to your employer. You may want to if you need accommodations, want to educate others about anxiety, or because you worry about an anxiety attack at work.

It Gets Better

While I am dealing with anxiety – whether at work or home – it feels like it may never end. I just keep reminding myself it will, that I won’t always feel like I can’t breathe or as if I am dying because it does get better.

You won’t always feel like you are dying inside, and anxiety isn’t who you are, and it doesn’t determine your level of professional success. You will be okay, especially if you take the time to manage anxiety symptoms on the job before and as they occur, and to ask for accommodations, if necessary.

Remember, you are entitled to succeed just like everyone else. You just need to keep fighting and treating yourself with the respect you deserve.