

# UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY AT WORK

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**WORK BOOK**

**WITH EXERCISES &  
HELP SHEETS**

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# Table Of Contents Covering These Topics And More.

01 The Causes Of Anxiety Disorders

02 The Legal Issue - Health & Safety At Work

03 Disability Discrimination

04 The Stigma

05 Help Sheets 1 - 3

06 Exercises 1 -5

# Anxiety – Definition

Let's begin our course by explaining what anxiety is and how it is defined.

Firstly, anxiety is a symptom. This means it occurs when someone has a medical condition. According to the NHS\*:

“Anxiety is an unpleasant feeling when you feel worried, uneasy or distressed about something that may or may not be about to happen.

There are several conditions for which anxiety is the main symptom. Panic disorder, phobias, and post-traumatic syndrome can all cause severe anxiety.”



\* [www.nhs.uk.com](http://www.nhs.uk.com)

In this definition, we see the term “disorder”.

A person with an anxiety disorder experiences uncomfortably high levels of arousal in situations where you wouldn't normally expect to feel this level of fear.

Anxiety is classed as a “mental illness” and a “neurotic disorder”.

Types of Anxiety Disorder:

Panic disorders / attacks- Sufferers often feel fine one minute, yet the next may feel totally out of control and in the grips of a panic attack. Panic attacks produce very real physical symptoms from a rapid increase in heartbeat to a churning stomach sensation.

Post traumatic stress disorder - an anxiety disorder which may develop following exposure to any one of a variety of traumatic events that involve actual or threatened death, or serious injury.

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) - obsessions are repetitive, obtrusive, unwanted thoughts that are experienced and result in unreasonable fears, and compulsions are acts or rituals carried out in response to fears generated by obsessions.

And here are some more that you may or may not have heard of:

Anticipatory anxiety - where a person experiences increased levels of anxiety by thinking about an event or situation in the future.

Separation anxiety – this is a feeling of anxiety or stress when away from family or home. The sufferer may only feel comfortable and stop worrying when at home or with family and may also feel afraid of going to sleep alone and when not able to get to sleep.



Social anxiety disorder - Social or public situations of any kind may induce this disorder which is often expressed as a fear of being the centre of attention, or of others noticing the sufferer's anxious behaviour.

Also, there is a condition known as general anxiety disorder (GAD).

Anxiety Care defines GAD as "possibly the most common anxiety disorder".

It is characterised by chronic worry about all sorts of life problems and circumstances. It differs from normal worrying through the intensity, frequency and perceived uncontrollability of the worry thoughts.

## Some Statistics

There are lots of statistics on anxiety. According to Anxiety UK more than 1 in 10 people are likely to have a 'disabling anxiety disorder' at some stage in their life.

Anxiety Care tells us that currently, GAD affects 5-6% of the population in the UK – that's more than 3.5 million people.

In 2000 the Office for National Statistics reported that 1 in 6 adults in Great Britain had a neurotic disorder (such as anxiety and depression).

Weekly prevalence of neurotic disorders: by sex, 2000, GB

And according to the Mental Health Foundation (2009), there are over 7 million people living with anxiety problems in the UK.

As an interesting contrast, in 2007, HealthyPlace.com reported that in the USA, anxiety disorders were the most common mental illness with 19.1 million (13.3%) of the adult population (ages 18-54) affected.

Let's put this into some context, taking a relatively common and familiar medical condition – diabetes.

In 2008, Diabetes UK reported that 2.5 million people have been diagnosed with diabetes.

The American Diabetes Association reported that in 2009 7.8% of the US population suffered with diabetes.

### Concluding on the Statistics:

\* Anxiety is incredibly common. \*Significantly more people suffer with anxiety than suffer with diabetes. \*Possibly, more people than we thought are anxious. \*The use of terms like mental illness and neurotic disorder gives anxiety a particular image. \*The terminology may, arguably, create a label or a stigma. \*Perhaps we feel a person with anxiety should pull themselves together and get a grip?