

INCANDESCENT

MCI (P) 090/07/2019 | **December 2019**

Advent of Peace

Some years back, my family had an unusual experience that bordered the realm of anxiety. While staying in the USA, we wanted to drive out to experience autumn and its colours. So off we went, on an unplanned journey into Michigan. We saw the beautiful fall leaves but had to stay the night before driving back home to Kentucky. As we drove into the first three motels along the way, none of the motels had rooms available. *Hmm...that's not good*, we thought. At every new motel we went to, and with every "no more room" response, our anxiety began to increase. We stopped at a gas station to ask for more information. And then we realised, there were two or three other families in cars ahead and behind us, each racing to get a room! I tried to cover my escalating fear with humour and told my husband, "Wait, this is beginning to sound like Christmas! Jesus had no room!" It sure sounds more humorous now than it was then. The thought of sleeping in an unheated car on a cold autumn night in a foreign place with a five-year-old heightened our anxiety. Relief only came about when we finally found a room.

We go through life with many anxieties. Daily anxieties and unusually difficult anxieties. Is there a difference? How can I cope with my anxieties? How can I be of help to someone

I love who suffers from anxiety? **These are questions that we hope to answer in this issue of INCANDESCENT. We want to highlight the prevalence of anxiety in our society especially amongst our youths as they feel the pressure to succeed. We also want to be sensitive and more aware of our own anxieties or among those we love.**

At Advent, we remember that Christians all over the world celebrate Christmas as an advent of Peace into this world. The Christ Child enters a pain-filled and anxiety-driven world. His parents went through anxiety from conception into childbirth. However, as the Bible testifies, there was God breaking into their lives, and breaking into ours. At EMCC, we carry this same message as we seek to help those with personal and relational problems and conflict. We embrace and carry the message we truly believe in, a message we hope to share with anyone who comes to us for help. The message is: There Is Hope.

Dr Jeannie Chiu
General Manager, EMCC

Calming An Anxious Heart

“The moment I wake up, a thousand scenarios will begin to run through my mind. I start worrying about things that have not happened or may not even happen.

This relentless worry is exhausting. It turns the simplest task into an arduous one. Things that should not take long to do like calling someone or ordering food at a hawker centre stall all become battles I have to take at least 10 minutes to hype myself up for before I actually do them.

I know I should not worry about these things. I try to rationalise my thoughts and tell myself that things are not as bad as it seems but worrying has become a constant state for me. When I stop worrying, I start to feel uneasy and agitated. Worrying gives me a false sense of control but it is also a burden – a burden that tires me out, overwhelms me and prevents me from completing things quickly. It makes me agitated and cranky with people. It makes life a little harder to enjoy.”

Jamie (pseudonym), 25 years old

WHEN IS ANXIETY NORMAL OR ABNORMAL?

Anxiety is a normal stress response and has its benefits. It helps us avoid dangerous situations by keeping us alert and functions as a form of motivation, pushing us to complete our daily tasks on time.

“Everyday Anxiety” refers to common worries which range from feeling concerned about a test result to feeling apprehensive about whether one is living life to the fullest. Anxiety becomes abnormal when such feelings become intense and distressing, is sustained over a period of time, and interferes with normal day-to-day functioning. This type of anxiety may be classified as a disorder.

TYPES OF ANXIETY DISORDERS

GENERALISED ANXIETY DISORDER

People diagnosed with Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) tend to experience uncontrollable excessive and persistent worry. It can be common worries about work, school or relationships. Even when they know there is nothing to worry about, they cannot help but worry. There is a constant dread that something will go wrong and they will ruminate on the worst-case scenarios. This negative thinking is commonly known as catastrophising.

GAD is accompanied with at least three of the following physical or cognitive (mental) symptoms.

- Edginess or restlessness
- Easily tired, more fatigued than usual
- Impaired concentration or feeling as though the mind goes blank
- Irritability (which may or may not be observable to others)
- Increased muscle aches or soreness
- Difficulty sleeping (due to trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, restlessness at night, or unsatisfying sleep)

SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER

A person with social anxiety disorder feels anxiety on an intense level when required to engage with others in a social context. This includes starting and holding conversations, meeting new people or performing in front of others.

This intense, uncontrollable and persistent fear of being humiliated, judged, or embarrassed in social situations makes an individual avoid social engagements. This significantly interferes with their quality of life and relationship with others.

PANIC ATTACK

A panic attack is characterised by an unexpected surge of intense fear or discomfort that reaches a peak in a short period of time and leads to physical symptoms like heart palpitations, sweats, shakes, trouble breathing, chest pain, nausea, chills or feeling hot, feeling numb or detached, and/or dizziness. These physical symptoms are often accompanied by thoughts about fear of losing control, ‘going crazy’, having a heart attack, dying or worrying about having another panic attack.

Sometimes, these panic attacks occur on a recurrent basis, making it scary for individuals to predict when or how it would present itself. The fear of losing control is at the heart of panic attacks, causing individuals to avoid certain situations and places for fear of a panic attack that strikes without warning.

There are other types of anxiety disorders which are not listed and described above. They include obsessive compulsive disorder, specific phobias, selective mutism, agoraphobia and others.

PRACTICAL STEPS TO MANAGE EVERYDAY ANXIETY

While everyday anxiety is considered a normal part of life, it is still important to manage it so it does not affect our quality of life in the long run. Try these practical tips:

Practise deep breathing

When anxious, our breathing becomes quick and shallow which may lead to hyperventilation. To combat this, we can practise deep breathing which helps slow down our breathing and heart rate and introduces more oxygen into our brains. This brings about clarity to our thoughts which directly affects our feelings and moods. Try to focus the mind on the breathing instead of ruminating or worrying.

Choose realistic instead of negative thoughts

As our thoughts impact our emotions, we can feel a lot better if we are able to identify and replace negative thought patterns with realistic and balanced thinking. Realistic thinking involves seeing yourself, others and the world in a balanced and fair way, without being overly negative or positive.

For example, a negative thought could be, 'I am always making mistakes. What is wrong with me?'. A balanced thought that is kinder and more realistic could be, 'Making mistakes is normal for everyone, including me, because we are human. All I can really do now is to learn from my experience to avoid making similar mistakes in the future.'

Pay attention to sleep, diet, exercise

Create a self-care routine which allows you to get quality sleep, a healthy diet and sufficient exercise. This ensures that you are healthy and strong enough to manage stress more effectively, compared to being in a state of fatigue and poor health.

Tell someone about it

Telling someone about the stressors in your life that are causing anxiety helps to remove the secrecy of your suffering. We are made to be relational and no one is an island. By talking to others, we often realise that we are not alone in our pain and others do feel similarly at times too.

Remember that what may work well for one, may not always work as well for another. It is necessary to be patient and try a strategy for at least 2 weeks to measure its effectiveness in helping you to manage anxiety.

HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT SOMEONE WITH ANXIETY

When someone is experiencing anxiety, they often feel like they are losing control. They tend to focus on the negative and feel helpless towards managing the situation that they are in. If you notice someone feeling this way, here are some ways to show them that you care.

Send them a supportive message

Pen an encouraging note or send a friendly text to let them know that you are available for them. Be specific by telling them what mode you are available – in person, phone call, text or email. Knowing that someone cares and has an empathetic listening ear goes a long way in reassuring them that someone is aware of their emotions and that they are not alone.

People who are anxious experience impending gloom and doom that feels very real to them. Reminding them of their resources and strengths allows them to feel confident and capable of handling challenges ahead one step at a time. It will help to assuage their fears of a situation that is completely out of their control.

Point them to helpful resources

An anxious person can feel alone in their problems. Reminding them that there are resources to tap on for help is a practical way of showing them that they are supported and cared for. For instance, if someone is anxious about meeting their deadlines at work, have a conversation with them about who they can speak with if they need more time, who can lend a helping hand and what other barriers are slowing them down. Only offer any form of help if you have time and capacity to do so.

Ask them how they are doing, then listen without judgement

By taking the initiative to ask how they are, you are showing that you notice their distress and would like to support them. Once they share their worries with you, be patient and listen attentively. While it may be tempting, withhold personal judgement and advice. Your goal is not to correct their thinking. Instead, it is to create a safe and supportive environment for them to express their feelings. However, if you think that they may want advice, ask gently, "Would you like my advice on this issue?" Only proceed if they say yes.

References

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.)*. Washington, DC: Author.
The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health. (2017). *Anxiety and Young People*. Retrieved from <https://www.orygen.org.au/Training/Training-areas/Anxiety/Fact-Sheets/Anxiety-and-young-people/anxiety-yp?ext=>



SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

If you think you or someone you know is experiencing anxiety disorders, do seek professional help from a psychiatrist. He or she will be able to help you gain clarity with regards to the symptoms you are experiencing and prescribe medication if necessary. You can seek help from your doctor or the polyclinic to refer you to a suitable specialist for further help.

You may also seek counselling so that you can be equipped with coping strategies to help you accept and manage the challenges that may come with having an anxiety disorder.

WORKSHOPS

Visit www.emcc.org.sg for more information.

MARRIAGE

Marriage Preparation Programme (MPP)

Our MPP is designed to help couples lay a strong foundation for their marriage. It creates a space for them to discuss important topics like child rearing, finances and life goals. Using the PREPARE/ENRICH Couple Relationship Diagnostic Inventory, couples are given a snapshot of their relationship dynamic and shown areas of strength and growth in their relationship. MPP also equips couples with the necessary skills in managing differences, making room for open communication and facilitating support for each other. We offer individual and group MPP.

Seven Principles Program (7PP)

This workshop is based on the scientifically researched New York Times bestseller “The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work” by Dr John Gottman. It helps couples better understand their relationship and teach them ways to foster friendship, trust and intimacy with their spouse. It will also teach them ways to navigate or prevent relational conflicts.

Bringing Baby Home (BBH)

A Gottman workshop that teaches couples how to strengthen their relationship, create a healthy social, emotional and intellectual environment for their baby, and be the best parenting team possible.

PARENTING

You and Your Teen

For parents seeking to strengthen their relationship with their teenaged children. Learn how to better understand your children and how to manage conflict in a healthy manner.

SUPPORT US

With Christmas soon approaching, we enter this season of hope and joy remembering those around us who need just that. EMCC provides mediation and counselling at a subsidised rate to ensure these services remain assessable to all in need regardless of their financial status.

Through your donations, you too can be agents of hope and help others get the help they need. You are eligible for 250% tax deduction when you

1. donate \$10 or above and
2. provide your NRIC.

Donation Methods

1. Cheque

Please make your crossed cheque payable to “EMCC”, indicating your full name, NRIC and contact details at the back of the cheque (for tax-deductible receipt), and mail it to our address.

EMCC

177 River Valley Road
#05-19 (Level M5) Liang Court
Singapore 179030

2. Online

Visit Giving.SG (<https://www.giving.sg/emcc>) or Give. Asia (https://give.asia/campaign/donate_to_emcc#/) to make your donation.

3. PayNow

Using your bank app, scan the QR code or key in the UEN number: **S97SS0164E**. Please email us upon donating, at donate@emcc.org.sg, with the transaction details, your full name, NRIC and contact details if you need a tax deductible receipt.

