

UNDERSTANDING PANIC ATTACKS

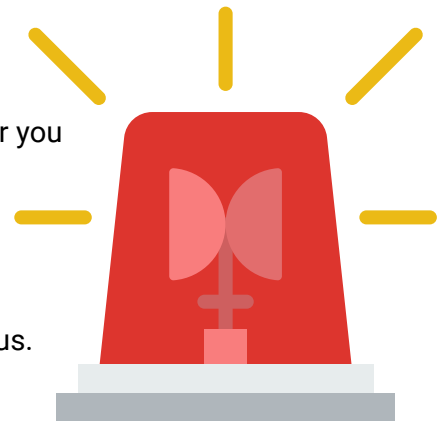
WHAT IS A PANIC ATTACK?



Panic is a type of fear response and an exaggeration of your body's normal response to danger, stress or excitement. Panic can be described as a sudden and overwhelming feeling of fear or anxiety, that is accompanied by physical symptoms and negative thoughts. Panic feels different to everyone, but the most common physical symptoms include: an increase in heart rate, feeling breathless, sweating, trembling, shaking, chest pain, nausea, feeling dizzy and feeling like you're choking. When these physical symptoms happen, we tend to have thoughts that help us to try and make sense of what is happening, but they are often unhelpful. Some examples of thoughts that people typically experience include: "I'm going to die"; "I can't breathe", "I'm going to lose control"; "I'm having a heart attack".

WHAT CAUSES A PANIC ATTACK?

Panic attacks can occur without any warning, and sometimes with no trigger – they can even occur when you are relaxed. You may just have one panic attack, or you may experience several panic attacks across a period of time. Recurrent panic attacks are often triggered by a specific situation, such as crossing a bridge or performing in class – especially if that situation has caused a panic attack before. Sometimes we can misinterpret physical feelings for something dangerous. For example, if you are late for school and you walk a bit faster than normal, your heart may beat faster, and you start to feel out of breath. This feeling might trigger a panic attack because you misinterpret feeling out of breath as something more dangerous. Usually, these situations cause you to feel fear or anxiety, which triggers the fight or flight response.



WHEN DO PANIC ATTACKS BECOME A PROBLEM?

It is common to feel panic and anxiety at various life stages. Panic can become a problem however when it is interrupting your daily life, such as stopping you from doing the things that you want to or need to do each day, causing strong emotions, and occurring more often and for longer periods of time.

TOP TIPS TO MANAGE PANIC ATTACKS

- 1 Learn about panic attacks and anxiety.** Simply knowing more about panic attacks and the fight-or-flight response experienced during a panic attack will help you to understand what is happening for you. You'll learn that the sensations and feelings you have when you panic are normal, they will pass, and nothing physically dangerous will happen to you.
- 2 Work on reducing your overall levels of stress and anxiety.** Get good quality sleep, eat a balanced diet, exercise, do things that you enjoy, have a rest from time to time, socialise, practice mindfulness.
- 3 Trying new things** helps you to learn about different things, and improves your brain function, which helps you to become more confident and resilient to anxiety. It also helps to improve your coping skills, and you never know, you might find a new hobby or interest!
- 4 Grounding exercises** help you to feel more in control by helping you to focus on the present moment and things that are going on around you. Try looking for 1 thing that you can hear, see, smell, touch, and taste, or try thinking of 1 thing for each letter of the alphabet.
- 5 Talking to someone** can help you to process and understand your feelings, and it also informs someone close to you about what you are experiencing which can create a sense of safety for you. Normalise coming and going of physical sensations.



WHERE CAN I FIND MORE SUPPORT?

USEFUL WEBSITES:

www.YoungMinds.co.uk
www.TheMix.org.uk
www.Kooth.com

USEFUL APPS:



Mindshift
CBT (12+)



Smiling Mind
(3+)



Clear Fear
(11+)



Chill Panda
(4+)



IF YOU FEEL UNABLE TO MANAGE SYMPTOMS OF PANIC ON YOUR OWN, SPEAK TO A TRUSTED ADULT AT SCHOOL ABOUT FURTHER SUPPORT.