

Anxiety - the theme of mental health week 2023

ANXIETY is the theme of this Mental Health Awareness Week (15-21 May 2023). As we try to navigate our lives in an increasingly changing world, our mental wellbeing is constantly being tested which has led to a huge increase in anxiety: the UK's most common mental health disorder.

Mentalhealth-uk.org have been driving an innovative campaign leading up to Mental Health Awareness Week called **Not Just Anxiety**, highlighting just how multi-faceted anxiety is. It's vital that more awareness of anxiety and anxiety disorders like OCD, phobias and separation anxiety that show up in our lives, our workplace and our relationships are better understood and validated.

All of us can feel anxious at various times in our lives and, as a couple therapist, anxiety shows up in my counselling room in many different guises.

So many things cause anxiety in relationships. It means different things to different people. It's not uncommon for anxiety to have a profound impact on the quality of your life and the life of your relationship.

HOW DOES ANXIETY IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP SHOW UP?

- Recognising if you have your own anxieties how you may be more prone to anxiety in a relationship.
- Past experiences of hurt and betrayal with a previous partner or early childhood experiences can bring up triggers even though you think you have recovered from them.
- Understanding how insecure attachments can contribute to relationship anxiety. Anxious attachment can show up at the start of a relationship when we are uncertain if a partner has the same feelings as we have. You might feel you are going to be abandoned or rejected and the relationship won't last. Avoidant attachment can lead to anxiety about the level of commitment you are making and the need for deepening intimacy.
- Feeling you are walking on eggshells and can't talk about what you are thinking or feeling because you fear a negative reaction from a partner. It's very important that you are in a relationship where it feels safe and secure to talk and share with a partner without being shut down.
- Ongoing cycles of fighting and arguments that never seem to change or get resolved can bring a lot of anxiety to a relationship. It's probably the most common reason why couples seek out therapy. They present all the arguments they have but often find it difficult to identify the

emotions that trigger the anxiety. A recent couple recognised that their feelings of being unloved and not thought about by their partner triggered them into feeling so anxious that they were going to be abandoned, that they began a whole cycle of shouting and blame which escalated them to a point where they were indeed ready to split up. Recognising what would have happened if they had just shared how anxious they were about being left would have been a better option.

- Finding yourself constantly thinking about your partner and what they are doing, where they are going and who they may be spending time with. Feeling stressed out and not trusting your partner causes anxiety. It's not unusual to find it difficult to trust a partner when you have been hurt or cheated on in the past.
- Being in a relationship where thoughts and feelings are frequently dismissed, and your opinion is not valid.
- Feeling your partner doesn't talk to you with respect and care, perhaps even feeling you are in an abusive or co-dependent relationship. No longer feeling you are friendly and supportive of each other as you used to be.
- Uncertainty around the future of your relationship where it's going, are we on the same page. Do I matter to you? Are you there for me? These feelings reflect the strong need for connection and to feel safe and secure in a partnership.
- Uncertainty around our physical and sexual relationship. Why aren't we having sex anymore, are you no longer attracted to me? Are you attracted to someone else?
- My partner has anxiety, and I don't know what to do.
- Ongoing medical conditions in yourself, your partner or family members can bring anxiety to the relationship
- Sabotaging behaviours show up in relationship anxiety such as picking unnecessary arguments, pushing a partner away, continually finding faults with your partner are all examples of how anxiety questions whether your partner really loves and cares for you.

HOW TO MANAGE ANXIETY IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP

- Identify what's underlying your anxiety to understand how it shows up for you and in the relationship.
- Question how you feel about yourself? Are you confident and self-assured or lacking in confidence with low self-esteem?
- Write down your anxious thoughts in a clear way.
- Believe you are worthy of love and affection.

- Be aware of how anxiety shows up in your body perhaps heart racing, palpitations and feeling sweaty. Find tools to manage your breathing to bring a sense of calm.
- Being able to communicate with your partner is key: how you are feeling and your worries and challenges.
- Spend more time enjoying being in the relationship than worrying about it.
- Focus more with your partner on what works for you both in the relationship rather than focusing on what doesn't work. Look for the joy and happiness that you are both creating.
- Find a therapist to help you work through your anxieties and get them under control so you can minimise damage to the relationship and enjoy being in it.

Anxiety can show up in happy relationships as well as unhappy ones. What's important is how we take ownership of our anxiety and take steps to manage it more effectively. That takes true strength.

Dawn Kaffel

If you would like to discuss things further or to make an appointment, you can call me on either:

07976 403741 or (020) 8959 9528.

Alternatively you can contact me by email by clicking [here](#).