

PANIC ATTACKS

WHAT ARE PANIC ATTACKS AND HOW CAN YOU HELP MANAGE THEM?

Panic attacks are an acute fear response – going back to our fight/flight/freeze mechanism, a panic attack occurs when the body behaves as if there is significant danger or threat when there isn't.

Panic attacks can occur in response to high anxiety or particular stressors (for example if you are scared of spiders and you see a spider) but can also occur spontaneously with no obvious triggers.

Panic attacks have a number of physical symptoms and accompanying thoughts and feelings which are frightening, and seeing someone having a panic attack can be upsetting and worrying too. The first step is to have an awareness of what a panic attack is and what it looks like.

SYMPTOMS OF A PANIC ATTACK



Heart racing, heart palpitations or pounding heart



Shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, a choking sensation, hyperventilation (fast, shallow, breathing)



Trembling or shaking



Sweating or clamminess



Feeling sick, nauseous, or stomach pains



Hot flashes or sudden chills



Fear of dying, fear you might lose control in some way or be 'going crazy'



Feeling of 'impending doom', dread or fear



Feelings of numbness or tingling



Feeling dizzy, faint or lightheaded

If possible, it's best to get into a quiet, calm space. Focus on your breathing; people having a panic attack often hyperventilate (when your breathing is deeper and more rapid than normal), and this makes the panic worse. Focus on slow, deep breathing – breathe in for a count of 5 and out for a count of 5.

Stomp on the spot.

Focus on your senses and grounding techniques to help you feel more in control. Find five things you can see, hear, taste, touch, or smell. This is called a grounding exercise.

Think of a happy time, a place where you have been that you have felt happy, people or pets who make you happy

Panic attacks can last for 5-20 minutes; they will resolve themselves, but you can help make them less intense and scary and reduce the duration by following these tips.