

## How to Use Mental Health First Aid to Treat Anxiety Disorders

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### Introduction

If you or someone you know is suffering from anxiety, you can help them by using the ALGEE approach, which consists of five steps:

- Assess for risk of suicide or injury
- Listen without passing judgment
- Give reassurance and information
- Encourage appropriate professional treatment
- Encourage self-help and other forms of support

### Check for the Risk of Suicide or Harm

You can provide first-aid for panic attacks, suicide thoughts and behaviours, traumatic events and non-suicidal self-injury if the person you're assisting is suffering a panic attack, thinking about suicide, or purposely injuring oneself.

In any of these scenarios, however, if the person has a weapon and threatens to harm him/her or others, notify the police or seek professional mental health help online. If they are not in an imminent crisis and no one's safety is in jeopardy, you can start a dialogue with them and proceed through the rest of the steps of the ALGEE plan.

### Listen without Passing Judgment

One of the most important parts of mental health first aid is empathic listening. This reassures the person that speaking up about their situation is acceptable and encouraged, and that others are concerned about their concerns.

To initiate mental health first aid, approach the person in a private area and respectfully convey your worries about their worry. "How have you been feeling lately?" as well as other open-ended inquiries. "How long have you been like this?" can assist to start a constructive conversation? If they agree to speak with you, be ready to listen to what they have to say calmly and politely.

At this moment, it's vital that you actively listen and show compassion and understanding. Here are some ideas for becoming a better attentive listener:

- Restating what the other person has said
- Using minimal verbal prompts, such as "I see," and "Ah"
- Asking clarifying questions, which suggests that you want to understand
- Allowing silence and pauses in the dialogue
- Practicing patience

Throughout this conversation, be aware of how you think and act.

- Don't pass judgment on the person or their feelings
- Don't try to correct or persuade them that their viewpoints are incorrect
- Don't give them meaningless advice like "You'll get over it"
- Don't fidget with and/or glance at your smartphone while speaking with them.

### Give Confidence and Information

An anxiety condition can cause a person to experience fear in unexpected ways. They may lose touch with reality and become enraged, fearful that their loved ones detest them, fearful of being unlovable, or fearful of being a failure. Despite the fact that these fears are typically unfounded, they are still intrusive and harmful. Don't try to reason with the person or persuade them that their sentiments are baseless as a mental health first responder. Dismissing their concerns as unreasonable or inconsequential is detrimental, as it may make them feel guilty and deter them from discussing their fear with others. Instead, express sympathy for the person's concerns. Assure them of the following:

They do not have to blame themselves for their mental illness; Their anxiety does not make them less lovable; Anxiety is a disease that requires treatment; Anxiety can be overcome; You are available to listen if they need to talk again [1,2].

### Encourage Appropriate Professional Treatment

Many people are unaware of the severity of anxiety disorders and believe that it will go away with time. Patients with anxiety disorders, on the other hand, do not have to suffer in silence or wait for their symptoms to go away. Anxiety sufferers should seek professional assistance. Knowing when to urge someone to seek professional treatment is crucial. Professional help is essential when anxiety lasts for weeks and interferes with a person's ability to function in daily life. Don't expect the person's anxiety to vanish on its own. Keep in mind that treating anxiety as soon as possible will yield the best outcomes.

Discuss how obtaining professional help can be beneficial with the nervous individual and their careers, and ask the individual and his family members if they believe it would be beneficial to them. Discuss seeking professional help in a way that makes it seem natural, for as by characterizing it as a natural activity and explaining that mental health concerns are common and treatable.

If they believe they require assistance, inform them about the professional services available in their region and encourage them to seek it. Volunteer to assist the person if they require assistance.

Encourage the person to make a list of questions to bring to their first appointment with a health expert if they decide to seek professional help. If the person desires for you to accompany them to a doctor's appointment, you should not entirely take control because a person suffering from depression needs to make as many decisions as possible. As a first responder, you can refer these people to mental health professionals like psychiatrists (medical doctors who prescribe

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medicines for various mental disorders) and clinical psychologists (mental health professionals who treat various mental health issues using various non-pharmacological modes of treatment like CBT, family therapy, couple therapy, and so on). Counseling, when provided by a clinical psychologist, has been demonstrated to be a highly effective therapy option for a variety of anxiety disorders. When seeking counseling, check to determine if the person claiming to be a professional clinical psychologist has an RCI license to practice clinical psychology [3,4].

### **What if the Individual Refuses to Seek Expert Assistance?**

If the person refuses to seek professional assistance, inquire as to if they have any specific reservations about seeking aid. They may misinterpret how treatment works or be scared to share their feelings with others. Assure them that they have the right to recover from their anxiety disorder, and that if they don't seek professional help, it will only get worse.

At the same time, remember that it isn't your obligation to help them overcome their anxiety, and you can't force them to get help. If they're still unsure after this conversation, tell them you'll be happy to help them if they change their minds. You may only provide words of encouragement and therapy recommendations. It is up to the person

suffering anxiety to decide how to proceed after receiving your counsel and first aid.

### **Self-Help and Other Support Measures Should be Encouraged**

Anxiety disorder sufferers, fortunately, have a variety of self-help methods at their disposal. One of the most beneficial strategies is to seek out the assistance of others. Although your assistance as a first responder is critical, encourage the person to talk to friends, family members, or other people they trust about their anxiety problem.

You could also suggest that they practice self-care and self-help activities to help them establish excellent coping mechanisms, such as: Daily physical activity; A varied diet of fruits and vegetables; Practicing mindfulness meditation; Practicing an attitude of gratitude on a daily basis; Reading self-help books on how to manage stress in life

### **References**

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