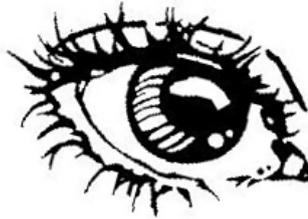


The AWARE framework for Managing Anxiety

A accept your feelings
W atch your thoughts
A ct calmly
R e-direct your focus
E xpect it will improve



Accept- and welcome the feeling / thought. Remind yourself that anticipating threatening situations is a normal function of the brain to anticipate and plan for potentially dangerous situations. Allow yourself to feel anxious without becoming annoyed or frustrated with yourself or using negative self-talk. Say “hello” to the thoughts and feelings; acknowledge the fact that they exist, and adopt a patient attitude towards them.

Watch - your thoughts and feelings without judgement as transitory (not permanent). Observe your thoughts from a distance as if they are passing objects - like clouds moving across the sky, instead of becoming absorbed in them. Do not use negative labels to describe your feelings or yourself. Say to yourself: I am not my thoughts or feelings; I am merely observing them – I am not anxious, but I am having an anxious thought at this moment.

Act – as if you’ve overcome your fears and are already feeling calm and in control. For example, relax your facial muscles or smile; make direct eye contact with someone instead of glancing around nervously; relax your hands; breathe calmly and deeply in and out from your belly.

Re-direct – your thoughts gently by means of questions to help the brain re-focus - for example, where in my body am I experiencing the feelings; when in the past did I feel this way; how anxious am I on a scale of 1 – 10; what will I feel like if my anxiety goes down two levels. You might also distract your mind by giving it a task that it has to concentrate on, for example, closing your eyes and counting down from 100 in multiples of 7.

Expect – that your current state of anxiety will end. Remind yourself that nothing lasts forever – for example by repeating the phrase – “this too shall pass”. Expect to feel better, but don’t be impatient with yourself. Be realistic about setbacks and view them as temporary, surmountable, and opportunities to improve your coping skills. Expect that anxiety may return, because it’s human nature, but also expect that you can learn to cope and progress steadily if you persevere.

If you still don’t feel calm, start with A again and repeat the AWARE steps. Keep accepting your anxiety, watching it from a detached perspective, and acting as if you’re better until it becomes second nature and you feel calmer.