

## Workplace Anxiety and What You Need to Know

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### Introduction

Workplace anxiety is something that is on the rise, especially with the increasingly competitive job market and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is now more than ever, where everyone must be educated on this topic. Many suffer from this without realising while some know but do not know who to turn to for help. Workplace anxiety is a real thing and should not be treated lightly or responded to with threats of any sort.

According to the World Health Organisation (2020), around 250 million people have reported suffering from workplace anxiety. Workplace anxiety is a learnt response to stress and can be triggered by a range of factors, with some cases being more severe and debilitating to the individual than others (Hansen, 2006).

It is important to note that workplace anxiety differs slightly from a general anxiety disorder as the symptoms are specifically related to the work environment. However, workplace anxiety may develop as generalised fears, workplace bullying, phobias, or hypochondria anxieties regarding working conditions, interacting with colleagues and superiors, and fears of inadequacy or judgement (Hansen, 2016).

### Signs and symptoms of workplace anxiety

- Increased irritability or aggressiveness
- Avoiding social situations, or becoming withdrawn
- Decreased ability to focus and lack of concentration
- Decreased tolerance to stress or handling challenging situations
- Feeling overwhelmed by the pressures in everyday life
- Fear of interacting with authority figures
- Fear of speaking out
- Fear of public humiliation
- Fear of noticeable embarrassment or nervousness
- Avoidance of committing to new and challenging tasks
- Fear of not performing to the highest standards
- Fear of negative evaluation of performance or professional standards (World Health Organisation, 2020)

### The causes of workplace anxiety

Having read about workplace anxiety, the next question is to ask what causes this? There are many

causes of workplace anxiety and it is different in everyone based on personality, personal life among other things. Below are some common causes of workplace anxiety according to Better Health (2012):

Long hours	Tight deadlines	Changes to duties
Heavy workload	Job insecurity	Lack of autonomy
Over supervision	Inadequate working environment	Lack of proper resources
Harassment	Discrimination	Poor relationships with colleagues or bosses

## How to manage workplace anxiety

If you suffer from anxiety, like other things, there are ways you can help yourself in dealing with this. Here are five ways to deal with workplace anxiety:

1. **Ask for help** - When work is hectic, it becomes all too easy to say “yes” even when you don’t understand how to do something. While it is good to put yourself to the challenge, there are times where you can do without it. The discomfort of asking for help or clarification is worth it in the long run, and it can decrease overall anxiety about responsibilities. Asking for help also communicates to your superiors that you genuinely care about doing a good job (Smith, 2020).
2. **Setting honest deadlines** - Smith (2020) highlights the importance of setting realistic deadlines that do not result in you being burnt out. Anxious people sometimes will agree to deadlines and timelines that they know they cannot meet. It is often much better, to be honest upfront when you know you cannot meet a certain target rather than to apologise later. Not every deadline is negotiable, but it will save you hours of anxiety if you can be honest upfront and work at a manageable pace. If you happen to finish the job ahead of time, that will make you look even better.
3. **Access benefits** - When you build more solid relationships, improve communication, and ask for help, the entire office will benefit. Anxiety is always present to some degree in your daily life but this does not have to interfere with doing good work and enjoying your profession. Although anxiety is an unpleasant emotion, it’s also an opportunity for you to grow in your career. The more you face anxiety in the workplace rather than run away from it or complain about it, the more significant a stressor will have to be to make you feel off your game.
4. **Practise self-compassion** - Be kind to yourself! Only let yourself criticise your behaviours to the extent you would to someone you cared about. When you are experiencing negative mind chatter and unhelpful self-criticisms, try to imagine if you would think or say the same things about your friends or family to their face. Chances are you wouldn’t, so why treat yourself with any less respect?
5. **Think optimistically** – The Anxiety House Brisbane (2017) says “the more you let a negative thought unravel, the more havoc it can wreck.” Make a conscious effort to recognise when a

negative thought springs into your mind. Instead of dwelling on the undesirable implications of that thought, try to flip it around and find at least one positive that can come from it. Try to practise positive affirmations and being grateful for being alive. Remember, there will always be positive and negative outcomes in every situation. You can either chose to dwell on your misfortunes or make the most out of what you have. Instead of looking at your glass being half empty, see it as half full.

## Helping people with workplace anxiety

As we are focusing on anxiety in the workplace, help will mostly come from work. Better Health (2017) has noted that “Work-related stress is a management issue”. Employers must recognise work-related stress as a significant health and safety issue. A company can and should take steps to ensure that employees are not subjected to unnecessary stress. This can be through any of the following steps:

- Ensure a safe working environment.
- Make sure that everyone is properly trained for their job.
- De-stigmatise work-related stress by openly recognising it as a genuine problem. implementation and enforcement of health and safety policies and practices, including identification of distress, harmful use of psychoactive substances and illness and providing resources to manage them (World Health Organisation, 2020).
- Discuss issues and grievances with employees, and take appropriate action when possible.
- Devise a stress management policy in consultation with the employees.
- Encourage an environment where employees have more say over their duties, promotional prospects and safety.
- Organise to have a human resources manager.
- Cut down on the need for overtime by reorganising duties or employing extra staff.
- Take into account the personal lives of employees and recognise that the demands of the home will sometimes clash with the demands of work.
- Seek advice from health professionals, if necessary.

## Conclusion

Workplace anxiety is a serious issue that needs more effort in dealing with and preventing as a whole. If you suffer from this, it is important to take some time to realise the importance of giving yourself time to deal with it. If you are on the other side and you know someone who is dealing with is and you are in a position to potentially help, lend a hand. Refer them to someone. Anxiety is a real thing and should be treated as such.

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