What is anxiety? What is an anxiety disorder?

- "Anxiety" refers to feelings of worry or unease, often related to uncertain situations. It is a normal reaction to stress and can alert us to danger and help us prepare and pay attention. However, anxiety can also cause muscle tension and other physical symptoms and can cause us to avoid situations that worsen feelings of unease.
- "Fear" is an emotion that occurs in response to an immediate threat. Fear activates the body's "fight or flight," response.
- The following may also be present in the context of feeling anxious or fearful:
  - Muscle tension
  - Increased heart rate
  - Sweating
  - Worry and being unable to relax
  - Fearing that the worst will happen, fear of dying, or fear of losing control
  - Dizziness
  - Shaking or trembling
  - Indigestion
  - Difficulty breathing
- "Anxiety disorders" occur when feelings of fear or anxiety are excessive and keep a person from functioning normally.
- Anxiety disorders are the most commonly diagnosed category of mental health disorder. Types of anxiety disorders include:
  - Generalized anxiety disorder
  - Social anxiety disorder
  - Panic disorder
  - Agoraphobia
  - Specific phobias
  - Separation anxiety disorder

What might treatment for anxiety include at Shepherd Center?

- Normalizing of feelings of worry or unease in the face of stressful situations and education about anxiety
- Counseling, or individual or group therapy
- Learning cognitive behavioral skills for managing anxiety (e.g., tools for monitoring anxiety, challenging negative self-talk, and practicing relaxation exercises)
- Referral to a doctor for medication to treat anxiety
- Community re-integration/ support for "avoiding avoidance"

What are some suggestions for people experiencing a lot of anxiety?

- Talk to a health professional about your symptoms
- Learn about anxiety and effective coping strategies
- Spend time with friends, family, and supportive people
- Try to be kind to yourself and avoid judging your feelings or experiences

- Practice good self-care (eat well, exercise, sleep, and engage in activities that make you feel good or that matter to you)
- Try to maintain a daily routine
- Learn and practice strategies that support relaxation and focus on the present moment
- Take your medications as prescribed and talk to a doctor about medication for anxiety if you feel it might be helpful for you

How might a person's anxiety affect people around them?

- Family members and other people in a person's support system may experience a range of negative emotions themselves, as anxiety can affect communication, interest in family activities, sexual activity, and energy level
- Family members and other people in a person's support system may feel worried, frustrated, or discouraged when trying to help

How can I support someone who is experiencing anxiety?

- Try to be patient, encouraging, and nurturing
- Remind the person of skills that are helpful for him or her when they feel anxious (e.g., taking a time out, deep breathing, focusing on the present moment)
- Encourage them to talk to a health professional about his/her symptoms

How can I take care of myself while supporting someone with anxiety?

- Learn about anxiety and treatment, but acknowledge that it is not your job to control or treat someone else's anxiety
- Join a support group. You can learn more about support groups at https://www.nami.org/Support-Education/Support-Groups
- Spend time with friends, family, and supportive people
- Try to be kind to yourself and avoid judging your feelings or experiences
- Practice good self-care (eat well, exercise, sleep, and engage in activities that make you feel good or that matter to you)
- Try to maintain a routine for yourself and other household members
- Meet with a counselor or therapist if you feel like you need more support

Additional Comments:

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