

NAMELESS FEARS

Coping With Anxiety

Anxiety is a vague sense of fear or tension about something that may or may not happen. Often, we are unable to name what it is that's causing our tension. Fortunately, by understanding what anxiety is, how to identify your real concerns, and where to get help, you can learn to "let go" of anxiety.

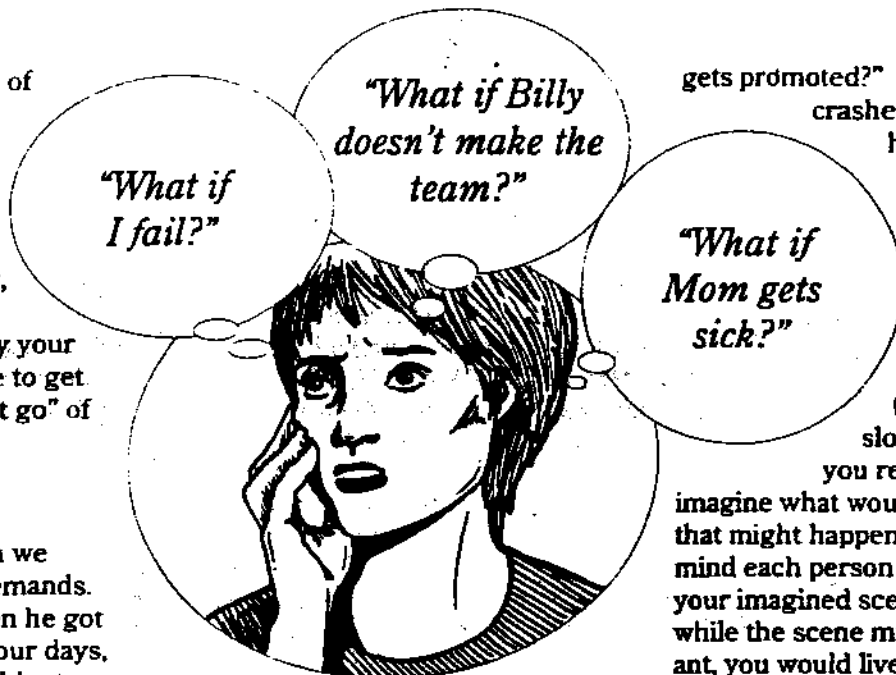
Recognize Anxiety

Anxiety is common when we experience conflicting demands. (Bob was exhausted when he got home after working 10-hour days, but his wife Jane wanted him to spend more time with the children. He began to feel anxious.) Some people only feel anxious around certain situations. Others have "performance anxiety" when they think they need to live up to others' expectations, as in a job or relationship. Unresolved stress can also lead to feelings of generalized anxiety.

Stomach ache, headache, irritability, and muscle twitches can all be signs of anxiety. Usually, you'll feel tense without knowing why. If you close your eyes and try to calm your mind, you will probably notice a stream of worried thoughts.

Confront Anxiety

There are many ways to confront anxiety. You can begin by trying to identify what is causing it. For example, your present anxiety might be caused by expectations



Anxious people often have a stream of worries going through their minds.

family members had of you in the past. Writing down your fears or talking to a trusted friend can also help you identify why you're anxious. Then, try "listening" to the thoughts in your mind. They may be extreme "what if?" questions, such as "What if he never



Anxiety is common when we experience conflicting demands

gets promoted?" "What if the plane crashes?" Learning to hear these statements can help you gain a more realistic perspective.

"What if Mom gets sick?"

When you feel yourself becoming anxious, take several deep, slow breaths to help you relax. Then, imagine what would be the worst that might happen. See in your mind each person and emotion in your imagined scene. In most cases, while the scene might be unpleasant, you would live through it. This can help you become more realistic about your fear. You can also try imagining that the thing you fear is happening to someone else. What could you tell them that would put them more at ease? Write it down and read it to yourself.

Counseling by a trained professional can also help you identify and alleviate your anxiety.

Identify And Let Go

Once you identify your anxieties, you may realize that there are steps you can take to relieve your fears. You might also recognize that the situations you're worried about are beyond your control. If so, stepping back and learning to accept what you can't change can greatly relieve anxious feelings. Letting go of anxiety can take time, but the freedom and relief you'll feel are well worth the effort.