

JOHN PENDAL: Coaching For People Who Feel Like Outsiders

Reducing Anxiety

Here are some suggestions that have helped other people, sharing in case any of them help you too.

BREATHING

Breathing can be really useful to help us regulate, reduce anxiety, manage transitions, and give our brains a chance to reset. I've found that deep breathing, (*with my toes connected to the ground and my palms open and face up*), helps me.

A phone app like <https://isjustawesome.com/awesome-breathing/> can help - or the website <https://xhalr.com/> works on any browser.

One client does a breathing exercise for 8 breaths or 30 seconds, and then says *"I'm going to give myself permission to..."* and finishes the sentence before they stand up.

ACKNOWLEDGING FEELINGS

There is a saying that *"if you resist an emotion, it persists"*. Several people I know have said that acknowledging feelings out loud has helped them. One person does a *"full body scan"* when they sit somewhere and think about each body part from their head to their toes, acknowledging how they are feeling.

You can also do this by keeping a diary, mood journal or writing down something that you are grateful for each day.

A MANTRA

I know a few people who have found that repeating a mantra has helped them.

One person says *"This too shall pass"*; another says *"This is not an emergency"* when they are feeling anxious. In our house we often use the John Lennon quote: *"It will all be okay in the end, and if it's not okay, it's not the end."*

Is there a sentence that helps to reassure you?

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SOOTHING YOUR SENSES

For example:

- Lying under a weighted blanket
- Being held in a tight embrace
- Having a pet or volunteering to work with animals
- Holding an object in your pocket (*a fidget toy or smooth pebble have been suggested*)
- Being in a sensory swing
- Engaging in a hobby or other routine that you find calming.

TAKING UP A HOBBY

If you type "*Therapeutic hobbies*" into a search engine there are lots of suggestions.

I've heard from several people that it helps if they keep their fingers busy and mind occupied, for example painting, crafting, or building with Lego.

EXERCISE

Taking some exercise (*even a short walk*) can help. Yoga and pilates have also been recommended.

Some people say they find being in nature very healing, whether that's looking at clouds, tending a garden or looking for bees.

Someone else likes to lie down and tense groups of muscles from your toes up to your head, one at a time, and then you feel the release of tension after you "let go".

A HEALTHIER DIET

When we are stressed our bodies can crave high sugar comfort foods or caffeinated drinks. Try eating/ drinking healthier options to see if that helps.

Is there a meal that makes you feel better? (*My comfort food is tomato soup with marmite on toast, but many clients have mentioned "mac and cheese" as their favourite.*)

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REDUCING SCREEN TIME

Some people have found that reducing the time they spend on their phone, coming off social media, or turning off notifications - has helped them feel less anxious and more in control.

MENTAL HEALTH APPS

Several clients have recommended 'Finch' - This is a mental health app where you take care of a virtual pet by taking care of yourself. There is a free version with adverts or premium version with subscription. One of my clients recommended it saying that it had really helped them set goals, fill in a journal, complete breathing exercises and stretches. *"There's a baby finch you hatch and each day you energize it by doing tasks and then it sets out on its daily adventure, and when it comes back it has a story for you. You can get it to come back sooner by completing more tasks."*

PHYSICAL THERAPIES

Some people find physical therapies, such as massage and aromatherapy, helps to reduce their stress and anxiety.

Meditation can also relieve stress and anxiety, but I've heard from many neurodivergent folk that meditation wasn't for them.

MENTAL HEALTH PLAN

Another suggestion I found useful was to come up with a mental health plan, so that friends or work colleagues know what to look out for if you are anxious, and what they could do to help. It was recommended I do this in advance, as on a bad day you might not have the words/ executive function to tackle it. This is something you may want to discuss with a therapist or coach to help work out what's best for you.

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TALKING TO OTHER PEOPLE

One strategy for dealing with anxiety is to talk about your worries with others. I've found that other people can give me perspective on whether my worries are real and I need to take action, or if they are unhelpful thoughts that can be put into context.

Saying worries out loud, or writing them down, can help you feel more in control.

There are some neurodivergent-affirming counsellors and therapists on the Neurodivergent Practitioners Directory: <https://neurodivergentpractitioners.org/>

As well as counsellors and therapists there are also organisations who offer support, such as:

Anxiety UK is a charity that has a helpline, textline, "*calm club*" and lots of information about anxiety on their website: <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/>

Anxiety Care has some information on their website: <https://anxietycare.org.uk/>

Rethink is a mental health service that includes information and support on anxiety disorders: <https://www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/about-mental-illness/learn-more-about-conditions/anxiety-disorders/>

There are other support organisations listed on my website at <https://www.johnpendal.com/resources.html>

If you would like to chat further about this please email me – or check out my blog for other suggestions: <https://www.johnpendal.com/blog.html>

Best wishes, John Pendal

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