



Anxiety – An Uncomfortable Truth

Most of us have struggled with worry. Tax time, report cards or a trip to the dentist can bring about considerable worry, leaving us pre-occupied with unpleasant thoughts of negative outcomes. On such days, advice to “Pray about it” or “Trust in God” can be very helpful.

If worry is manageable, that advice is relatively easy to use. Our mind is able to address the concern, put it into perspective and move on. But what about when worry becomes downright unmanageable – even out of control? Is a lack of prayer or self-control responsible?

Anxiety disorders involve a persistent and unrealistic worry which becomes a habitual way of approaching situations. They are more than butterflies in your stomach. They are real disorders that can disrupt your life. They can leave you feeling paralyzed, powerless and overwhelmed—but there is hope.

Statistics

If this describes you, you are not alone. Research shows that 1 person in 10 has or has had an anxiety disorder this year (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, or CAMH). Anxiety Disorders, as a group, are the most common mental illnesses and yet are the

least understood (Canadian Mental Health Association, or CMHA).

In their “Report on Mental Illnesses in Canada”, Public Health Canada estimates that 12% of the population is affected by anxiety disorders. They afflict twice as many women as men, and the rate of hospitalization is the highest for those 65 years and over. Most anxiety, however, can be treated effectively in community settings. Children also can be affected (see back page)—and the indications are that the number of children impacted is rising.

There are several types of anxiety disorders, each of which affects behaviour, thoughts, emotions and physical health. Anxiety disorders include generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, agoraphobia, social phobia, obsessive-compulsive disorder and post traumatic stress disorder,

each with unique impacts on thinking and functioning. It is common for people to suffer from more than one anxiety disorder and for anxiety to be experienced along with depression, eating disorders or substance abuse.

The cause of anxiety disorders is complex. Often it stems from a combination of biological, genetic, developmental and circumstantial

factors such as stress. Our fast-paced society and daily stress contributes to the increase of anxiety disorders. Normally our bodies react to danger with a “fight or flight” response. Adrenaline is released from a region in the brain called the amygdala, which then gives a spurt of energy to help us to attack or flee the danger. This physical response is activated whether the danger is real, imagined or simply anticipated. Exposed to more and more triggers, the body begins to adapt by releasing adrenaline and hormones several times a day, which is hard on the body (CAMH).

Feeling, Thinking, Acting

This then also leads to changes in the way your body feels and works (physical), the way you think (cognitive) and the way you act (behavioural).

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Director's Corner

Mark Vander Vennen, MA, M.Ed,
R.S.W.

Dear friends,



Shalem is about creating a new relationship between communities and professional mental health services. Historically, the relationship between them has been uneasy. But when they work together in a partnership directed by the people we serve, remarkable and exciting things can happen.

Our WrapAround program seeks to build that new relationship one situation at a time. WrapAround is meant for people who have overwhelming, complex needs. Mental illness, for example, can bring with it significant poverty. Sometimes other difficulties pile on and reinforce each other: there may be a special needs child in the family, health issues, family breakdown, a death, unemployment, homelessness, etc. With WrapAround, in a process led by the family, community members and mental health professionals come together to provide support. In the old days, when a barn burned down, the community gathered around to do a "barn-raising". WrapAround is the practice of "people-raising".

Over the past four years Shalem has been doing WrapAround in downtown Hamilton, supporting WrapAround programs in the Northumberland and Durham regions, and equipping interested churches around Ontario to provide WrapAround help for people in their congregations. Shalem has been supported in this work in part by a beautiful partnership with World Vision

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Physical changes you may experience might include increased heart rate or palpitations, shallow breathing, sweating, shaking, lightheadedness or dizziness, muscle tension and nausea. More extreme physical changes (as in the case of a panic attack) may feel similar to a heart attack.

The cognitive reaction can range from mild worry to extreme terror as your attention shifts automatically to the potential danger. The changes may occur in your thoughts ("I'm losing it") or beliefs ("only weak people react this way") or in your predictions ("I'm going to humiliate myself" or "I'm going to die"). Another common thought people experience is "what if"—"what if this happens... what will I do?" Sometimes the thoughts get stuck or keep recycling through and take over the thought process.

Your behaviour may change to protect yourself from anxiety by engaging in certain actions and refraining from others, even to the extreme of avoiding feared situations or ac-

tivities. You may isolate yourself or participate in ritual or strange "safety" behaviours designed to help you feel safer and that you just cannot stop.

What about our faith?

How does anxiety affect Christians? Shouldn't we be immune to anxiety disorders? The uncomfortable truth is that we now know that many anxiety disorders are biologically based. Because the brain is an organ of our body just like the lungs or heart or liver, it can break down, malfunction or become diseased. Are we immune to heart disease or liver malfunction? Do we treat heart or lung disease only with prayer or by reading Scripture or by an act of our own will?

Treatment for anxiety disorders is directed at moving the brain to a more normal state by boosting some areas of functioning and toning down others. The first step is to get a thorough medical check up. Medical illnesses such as diabetes, thyroid conditions, heart disease and others can be accompanied by anxiety. Certain medications, caffeine, nicotine, energy drinks, allergies and mineral or vitamin deficiencies have been shown to be associated with and might increase anxiety.

When does worrying move into an anxiety disorder?

When should we start to worry about our worrying?

Here are some questions that may help:

Does your worry/anxiety interfere with your daily life and functioning?

Are you troubled by:

- excessive worry that has occurred more days than not, for at least six months?
- unreasonable worry about a number of events or activities, such as work, school or health?
- the inability to control worry?

Are you bothered by at least three (or more) of the following six symptoms (with at least some symptoms present for more days than not for the past six months):

- restlessness, feeling keyed up or on edge?
- being easily tired?
- problems concentrating?
- irritability?
- muscle tension?
- trouble falling asleep or staying asleep or restless and unsatisfying sleep?

Research demonstrates that a combination of drug therapy and talk therapy is most effective in the treatment of anxiety (CMHA, CAMH and National Institute of Mental Health). Medication may be required depending on the severity of the anxiety disorder. Often it is needed before the person can take advantage of talk therapy or make helpful life-style changes. Talk therapy or counselling helps the individual to understand and change their thinking patterns to enable different reactions/responses to the situations that cause the anxiety. Therapy also works on specific actions and techniques to help stop the unwanted behaviours. This is called Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy or CBT.

Support groups and educational resources are also valuable. Sharing your needs and ideas with others who understand are beneficial in many

ways. Learning from each other can help you develop tools/techniques that may work for you or your family member who is experiencing anxiety. You also will benefit from realizing you are not alone and from helping others.

Finally, as a Christian community we are called by God to help one another, regardless of our ability to cope with our mind's challenges. Let us not judge each other's effort at coping. Instead, through our prayers and relationships with one another, as God uses us as His instruments of grace, let us support God's remarkable process of healing.

June Zwier, M.Div., is a Marriage and Family Therapist in our Durham office and the Director of Mental Health Resources for Shalem.



Shalem is committed to best practices in mental health and is a member of Family Service Ontario. All services are offered in strictest confidence.

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Canada, consisting of a three-year grant which is just now coming to an end.

Our WrapAround work has caught the attention of the highly regarded Provincial Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health, operating out of the children's hospital in Ottawa, CHEO (www.onthepoint.ca/index_e.htm). The Centre is funded by Ontario's Ministry of Children and Youth Services and provides grants to mental health organizations to help build their capacity to do research and evaluation on innovative, promising practices. We have just received word that the Centre is providing us with a \$20,000 grant over 12 months to expand our WrapAround research and evaluation capacity—work which will then be of benefit to children's

mental health programs across Ontario.

Meanwhile, we are in conversation with World Vision Canada about a possible new four-year grant to help support our WrapAround work specifically with churches. The research and evaluation work funded by the Centre of Excellence would then also be applied to the WrapAround work in churches done under our World Vision partnership.

I love this rare coming together of two worlds, each bringing its own gifts for the benefit of all! Please join me in giving thanks to God for these remarkable openings. And please also accept my deepest thanks for your support—both your prayers and donations—for Shalem's work. In truth, this is a partnership of three essential partners—the funded mental health sector, the communities and people we serve, and you, the supporters of Shalem.

World Vision
Canadian Programs

This is also your accomplishment—we could not do this without you!

May God bless you in all your efforts to support our neighbours in need.

Yours in Christ,

P.S. check out www.shalemnetwork.org for more on Shalem's WrapAround program. Soon we will post a short video documenting the compelling story of a single, once-homeless young mom whose life was transformed with the support of our WrapAround program.

A Mom's Thoughts on Anxiety*

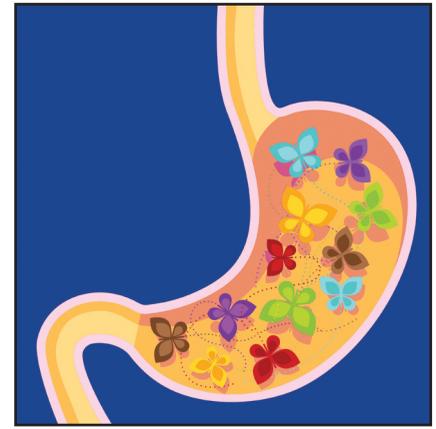
When I was asked to share what it is like to be a mom of anxious child, I thought what a blessing our story could be to others. Our struggle with anxiety began when our daughter was a baby, although we didn't know it. As a baby she would often have an hour a day where she would become overwhelmed and would need time away from the other stimuli in her life. When she was three she would ask every day if we would stay on the main floor. She wanted to know where we were constantly. Going into Grade One she would cry every day in class which interfered with her ability to learn and the other children's ability to learn. Our daughter lost 10 pounds in 3 months due to the stress of school. It was so frightening to see as a mom. In Grades Two, Three, and Four our daughter was able to manage her anxiety. But in Grade Five the anxiety returned and was much stronger. But something new accompanied the anxiety—panic. I had never seen panic in a child and especially about school (which seemed like a natural place for kids to go to). Our daughter would spend days crying at school and home because she didn't want to go to school. This was extremely difficult on our family. Our sons were upset. They often said to our daughter, "Stop crying, you're wrecking our family." There was much guilt and anger that needed to be dealt with during this time for our entire family.

Support is essential. Sharing experiences and everyday struggles with loved ones can help. We realize we are not alone.

During this past year our daughter has been diagnosed with anxiety disorder. Some of the techniques we learned during therapy (individual and group) are: belly breathing, helping our daughter visualize a calming place, and helping her to change her negative thoughts into coping thoughts. We also learned that we needed to push her to face her fears. Most importantly, we learned it's okay to make mistakes helping her through her anxiety and panic.

When our daughter was first diagnosed with anxiety I prayed that God would take the anxiety away completely, but during the darkness of this past year I began to pray differently. I began to pray that God would give us the strength and knowledge to help our daughter. And He provided it in abundance! It is important to understand that for caregivers and siblings of anxious children the road to health can be a bumpy one. Support is essential. Sharing experiences and everyday struggles with loved ones can help us realize we are not alone.

I would like to leave you with this quote which now expresses up how we feel, as a family, dealing with anxiety: "Times and Seasons - Learn to get in touch with the silence within yourself, and know that everything in this life has purpose. There are no mistakes, no coincidences, all events are blessings given to us to learn from." ~Elizabeth Kubler-Ross~



A Child's Thoughts on Anxiety*

I am an eleven year old girl who has been living with anxiety since I was little. What I find hard about living with anxiety is living with the symptoms of anxiety. The symptoms I experience are a sore tummy, dizziness, and headaches. And this makes it hard for me to enjoy parties, because if I become anxious I can't eat. When I focus on the anxiety I can no longer focus on the fun and the people who are there. I also find it very hard to go to school. This summer, I went to a special group and learned that I am in charge of my anxiety. (I call them butterflies because the anxiety affects my tummy so much.) I also went to Shalem Mental Health Network to see Betty Brouwer. She really helped me. One of the most important things she taught me is to love myself the way I am and its OK to make mistakes. Living with anxiety can be very hard but I have learned that God is with me always and that He has given me people in my life who can help me.

**Names and other identifying information have been changed to protect the identity of the family.*

Is your church interested in CAP ?

Join with 14 other churches around Ontario who are finding innovative ways to meet the counseling needs of their congregation—including treating anxiety.

CAP (Congregational Assistance Plan) enables a church to make professional, Master's degree-level Christian counselling available to all its members. Each member can receive up to six sessions per year, services are anonymous and confidential and there is no cost to the church member using the service.

For more information call our office at 866 347-0041, visit our website www.shalemnetwork.org or email margsv@shalemnetwork.org