



Supporting staff with Anxiety

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is broadly described as regular uncontrollable feelings of worry, fear or dread.

Most of us experience anxiety from time-to-time but if difficulties persist, and have a detrimental effect on our daily lives, we may be suffering from an anxiety disorder. There are a number of specific anxiety disorders with Generalised Anxiety Disorder being the most common. Anxiety is also a recognised component of some physical health conditions, can be a side-effect of many medications, and is a common experience during menopause.

It is important to consider adjustments for anyone who is experiencing persistent anxiety, whatever the diagnosis or cause.

Common symptoms of Anxiety

No two people with anxiety have the same experience, and symptoms can vary over time.

The most common core symptoms of anxiety at work include:

- Strong feelings of worry and stress, which can result in panic attacks
- Difficulty concentrating, and retaining information
- Excessive tiredness
- Difficulty in making decisions and prioritising work
- Irritability, easily startled and/or being easily moved to tears
- Experiencing physical symptoms such as heart palpitations, sweating, shakiness and digestive problems

How can staff get assessed?

Formal diagnosis is usually made by a GP.

Reasonable adjustments at work

Effective adjustments will be specific to individuals. Ask the person what they find harder to do or to manage, and what has helped previously if appropriate. Adjustments to be considered include:

- Scheduling regular check-in meetings to support the individual to prioritise work, and to identify any further support needs;
- Agreeing on signs that an individual may need to take a break, or to leave work for the day;
- Identifying and reducing any workplace triggers that increase stress and anxiety, such as changes to the work environment or location, and/or reallocation of duties for an appropriate time period;
- Enabling flexible working to accommodate treatment, the effects of any medications, and allow for short breaks during the working day;
- Using dividers between desks or providing noise-cancelling headphones to aid concentration for office-based individuals;
- Understanding that an individual may have to leave a situation suddenly;
- Providing a safe space to talk if the individual wishes to, helping them to identify coping strategies and sources of support, and providing reassurance that the individual is valued.

Sources of support:

Occupational Health - <https://www.ed.ac.uk/health-safety/occupational-health>

Staff Counselling - <https://www.ed.ac.uk/counselling-services/staff>

Anxiety UK - <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/>

Mind - <https://www.mind.org.uk/>