

Crisis Management

Patient in an anxiety crisis

Why do patients experience anxiety crises/ anxiety attacks?

- Feelings of depression, anxiety or fear are very common and, to a certain extent, are normal responses to a life altering experience such as cancer
- Anxiety crises or panic attacks constitute a very worrying symptom of anxiety.



What kind of symptoms exist anxiety crisis or a panic attack?

Physically, the individual can experience:

- Dyspnoea or a crushing feeling to the chest
- Tachycardia
- Dizziness, unsteadiness, fainting
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Feeling of choking
- Trembling
- Sweating
- Numbness or tingling sensations
- Shivers or Flushes

What kind of symptoms exist anxiety crisis or a panic attack?

Physically, the individual can experience:

- Fear of loss of control
- Impulse to flee
- Feeling disconnected / irreality

What can you do?

After excluding all pathological reasons which can cause similar symptomatology

Stay with the patient. Anxiety / panic attack can get worse if the person is left to his/her own thoughts.

Assure the patient that he/she is absolutely safe and that you are there to help them overcome it.

What can you do?

- 3. Encourage the patient to breathe properly. Ask the patient to take a deep breath for 4 seconds, exhale for 4 seconds and then repeat.

Or

- 4. Ask the patient to count slowly up to 10 with you.



What can you do?

- 5. Tell the patient that what he/she is experiencing is temporary. It is usually a relief to know that the crisis will not last long.
- 6. Try to start a conversation with the patient. Start with short, simple sentences and slowly try to gain his/her interest or curiosity and take it away from feelings of fear / panic.

What to avoid

- Do not tell the patient to calm down or relax – This is not simple at all and can aggravate the anxiety already experienced.
- Do not ask the patient why he/she feels panic or anxiety – in that moment he/she cannot even determine the cause of the crisis.
- Do not try to ‘persuade’ the patient to not feel fear using logical arguments – it is not going to help relieve the patient from the feelings of this experience.

What to avoid

- Do not underestimate the severity of the situation – even if the patient has a history of anxiety/panic attacks, it does not mean that he/she is accustomed to them or they are less frightening to him/her.
- Do not show irritability, impatience or criticism - even if you do not understand the cause of the crisis or think the reaction is excessive, keep your temper and do not judge the patient because he/she feels afraid or behaves in a strange way.

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Remember

- The patient in an anxiety/panic crisis may feel terrified and not think clearly.
- If the symptoms of an anxiety/panic attack are obvious, try to manage it accordingly and do not be reassured just by the patient's words.



What phrases can you use?

- 'You can and will get through this'
- 'Try and focus on your breathing'
- 'What you are experiencing may be very scary but is not dangerous'

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