



# Missionaries to Ministers and Ministering to Missionaries

## **Panic Attack: How Can I Help?**

**Anxiety is the #1 Diagnosis in the United States.**

The symptoms of Generalized Anxiety Disorder are:

- Excessive worry more days than not for 6+ months about several events,
- It is difficult to control the worry
- Several of the following symptoms are also present
  - Restless
  - Irritable
  - Fatigued
  - Muscle Tension
  - Difficulty Concentrating
  - Sleep Disturbance

**Panic Specifier or Panic Disorder.** Individuals who have an anxiety disorder may or may not have an additional struggle with panic, which may be infrequent as part of the anxiety disorder or may be a separate Panic Disorder itself.

Symptoms can include:

- Pounding Heart
- Nausea
- Sweating
- Light Headed
- Shaking
- Chills/Heat
- Shortness of Breath
- Numbness/Tingling
- Feelings of Choking
- Feelings of Unreality
- Chest pain
- Fear of losing control
- Fear of dying.

### **How to help if you see someone who may be having a Panic Attack**

Remain calm, or find someone who can. If you have a relationship with them, offer safe touch. If not, do not assume they want to be touched. Notice who is around who knows them and can help provide information and support. Their brain is in fight/flight (amygdala) and their heart is the checking station that is responding with a rapid rate and blood pressure. Distracting from the racing thoughts, cooling the body down, calming the breath are all ways to help the body out of crisis.

1. Offer an ice pack for the nape of their neck (no breathing into paper bags).
2. Encourage them to stand against a wall or sit up on a chair to allow air flow into lungs.
3. Prompt them to breathe in through their nose, feeling the cool air in their nose to the count of 5; hold the breath to the count of 5 if possible; then breathe out through their mouth, feeling the warm air in their mouth to the count of 5. **Breathe with them as you tell them they are going to be ok. Remind them this will be over soon. It won't last.** (Panic Attacks last between 10-30 minutes)
4. Grounding Tool: Ask them to notice external sensations **as they breathe**  
Name 5 things they see around them
  - a. Name 5 things they hear around them
  - b. Name 5 things they smell around them
  - c. Name 5 things they taste
  - d. Name 5 things they physically feel (the shirt on their body, the icepack, etc..)  
*Repeat with 4 things, going through the list again, as long as they will do it. This grounds them.*
5. They may be dehydrated - offer water
6. If they are calming down, take them for a walk. Focus on how much better they feel now, not on the overwhelm.
7. If the symptoms get worse, call 911 or take them to the ER. It may provide the consolation they need **and rule out any medical issues. Remember you are not diagnosing here as that is out of your scope of competence. They need to be seen by a medical professional to rule out anything else that may be going on.**
8. If the individual does not have a therapist who they see for this, encourage them to do so and follow up. Once they have one Panic Attack, there can become a significant fear of having another. They will need help around this. Research shows that therapy and medical intervention has the best results. I would add, having a supporting church community that is educated on all of the above, provides a wonderful path for ongoing growth.
9. Follow up with them to see how they are doing:
  - Rest: "I'll bet you were exhausted after all you went through. I'm so sorry for what you endured. How are you doing now?"
  - Community: "Were you able to tell your family and friends?"
  - Prayer, Meals (meals for those who are struggling with mental health issues are often overlooked), Rides, Discipleship
  - Coping Skills: What do they normally do for fun? When they are stressed?
  - Support: Remind them their body is alerting them to pay attention to what it needs. What do they think it has been telling them? How can I help?

*For those with ongoing symptoms, you will learn that the symptoms are just that, symptoms. You will learn to catch them quicker and they will have less and less power over you. It is in our weakness that we find His strength to be made perfect (2Cor. 12:9). You are not alone.*