

Thrive 365

Dragonfly: Impact Education



Did you know?

Panic attacks are relatively common, although often not talked about. Some people might only have one, whereas others might have lots over the course of many years.

They are different from general 'panic' because they can come out of the blue, are not in response to a scary situation, the feeling is intense, and it lasts for longer than a few minutes. The symptoms are very physical, and some people even mistake them for a heart attack. Despite this, panic attacks are not physically harmful.

1

Breathe out

When we're scared, we start to breathe more quickly and shallowly. This can cause light-headedness or dizziness which then leads to more panic and creates a vicious cycle. Practise calm, regular breathing (not too deeply). Breathe into your belly, so it rises and take the focus off your chest. Breathe in for a count of 4 and out for a count of 4. By making the out breathe longer, you are engaging the parasympathetic nervous system to signal to the body that you're safe. It's best to practise lots when you're calm so that it's easier to use this technique when you need to.

2 Rehearse thoughts

Notice the thoughts you have which add to your panic. When calm, come up with some more realistic thoughts you can bring to mind to challenge the unhelpful ones. For example, instead of thinking 'I'm going to faint', replace it with 'People having panic attacks rarely faint. I've never fainted before. This will pass'. It can also be helpful to have a pre-rehearsed mantra as logical thought can be inaccessible when we panic. Something as simple as "this will pass" can be reassuring and self-soothing.

3

Don't shrink

Fear can make us change our behaviour as we try and avoid or escape things to stay safe. It's important to slowly and gradually face the situations that might cause feelings of panic. If you find you've been avoiding supermarkets, for example, start by going to a shop, then a short trip to the supermarket, and then gradually build up the time you spend there. Remember that panic attacks cannot physically harm you and whatever you do/don't do the panic will always stop eventually.

