

1. Ever feel you're not good enough?

Have you ever felt that no matter how hard you try, you never get the same successful results as your peer? Either you don't get enough marks or the faculty doesn't like you. Or, it's simply your peers don't appreciate you as a person. We all feel unappreciated at some time in life. What should you do?

Perfectionism is ideal. But, not all of us are perfect. Some of us have good analytical abilities and some of us don't. Some of us write well and some of us don't. It's important you recognize the skills you already possess. You need to identify what you are good at before anyone else notices.

Once you have done that, understand the skills you need to develop in order to do well in your academics or in improving your social life. Remember, we are all different individuals. Your parents are very different from each other. You and your brother or sister are not the same as you even though you grew up in the same family.

When you first come to campus it's not unusual to feel out of place. Just remember that when you are trying to fit in you portray the real person you are already. If you are not very talkative and try to be what you are not, you will find it hard to sustain for long.

Be realistic in your goals. Try to improve and upgrade your skills regularly. No one likes a braggart. Let other people discover your qualities and praise you themselves. It will feel good and acceptance will come easier.

Try to limit negative thoughts in your life. If you always feel that you can't do something, chances are you will prove the statement to be true. None of us likes to fail. All of us want to succeed.

Remember the following thinking comes to play when you fear failure.

- All-or-none – Many of us feel like failures and worthless when we don't achieve our goals. "I expected an A in the last test and got a B. I am a complete failure." Keep away from such statements. Instead try to work harder and make sure what you expect and what you get are closer.
- Fear of mistakes – Mistakes are often equated as being failures. They are not. In your attempt to avoid mistakes, you miss many opportunities to learn and grow. Don't be afraid to try something new. Remember you will achieve being a winner because you will gain a new experience.
- Fear of failure – If you fail at a task do not equate that to mean that your personal worth or value has become less. It hasn't! Take it as a learning experience and try to identify how you could do the task better in the future.
- Fear of disapproval – None of us like others to point out our flaws. We fear that we are being rejected. Perfection is a way to protect ourselves from criticism and disapproval. No one is perfect. We all have strengths and weaknesses and there is nothing wrong in that.
- Emphasizing "Shoulds" and "Should nots" – We all develop our personal lists of "Shoulds" that are overemphasized and the "Should nots" that should always be avoided. Most of the times these set categories do not allow us the freedom to focus on our personal wants and desires.

- “I never get what I want” – Many times we ourselves believe that others achieve success more easily. They don’t have to put in too much effort, make better money and live stress-free lives. I, on the other hand, no matter how many efforts I put in, never get adequate results.

Thinking like this will not help you in the long run. Try to improve your personal circumstances without comparing yourself to others. Stop being so hard on yourself and start believing in yourself, it helps! The more positive your thinking, the more positive results you can expect in return. Try it and don’t be surprised at the changes in your life.

2. The Reality of Addictions

Ever wondered why a perfectly mature individual loses being sensible when they are drinking? Parent/adult that misuse or abuse alcohol or another substance have a lifelong impact on the entire family which includes the children, even grown up children. Many times we deny that a problem exists in our family. Sure my mother drinks but she takes care of the entire household too. Yes, my father drinks but only at night to relax. He works very hard from morning to night. These are justifications that we try to bring into our present.

Substance abuse impacts family

Each family and their personal dynamics are different. However, it has been found that some common factors emerge in families where an adult abuses alcohol or another substance. Life feels chaotic. You never know what the situation will be at home each day. Violence is a part of life. Usually it is verbal but sometimes can become physical and sexual too.

The family of an addicted adult also behaves like a co-dependent and denial of substance abuse runs in the family. It is the family secret that is kept hidden from the world. Claudia Black, a leading author and theorist has written that there are several rules followed in alcoholic homes including these:

1. *Don't trust.* Promises are often forgotten, celebrations cancelled and adults' moods are unpredictable. Children learn not to count on others. They often have a hard time believing that others care enough to follow through on commitments.
2. *Don't feel.* It is painful living with an adult substance user. Children must stop feeling to survive. In these families, expression of emotions is largely abusive prompted by drunkenness. The happenings of the previous night are denied the following day. Children in such families rarely experience expression of appropriate emotions.
3. *Don't talk.* Children in these families do not talk about a huge part of their reality – the drinking or substance use. The family needs to deny that a problem exists and drinking is tied to that problem. There is a hope that if no one mentions the drinking, it won't happen again. There is no good time to talk. You can't talk to a parent when they are drunk. When the parent is sober, you just want to forget. Children are trained to not talk about unpleasant things.

Substance abuse disrupts the family. You know even if no medical diagnosis has been made. Don't deny yourself a future free from addiction. You have been affected but you can take charge once you stop denying the reality of addiction in your life.

3. Everyone else seems okay

Everyone in the family finds their own personal rules to live by. Some are similar and some are different. Claudia Black talks about different “roles” that are adopted. Each has its own drawbacks and implications.

- **Hero:** These children try to ensure the family looks “normal” to the outside world. They project a personal image of achievement, competence, and responsibility. They are academically or professionally very successful. The cost of such success is denial of own feelings and a belief that they are “imposters.”
- **Adjuster:** These children never expect or plan anything. They follow without questioning. They strive to be invisible and to avoid taking a stand. This results in their experience of life as drifting through or being out of control.
- **Placater:** These “people pleaser” children learn from early on to smooth over potentially upsetting situations in the family. They have an uncanny ability to sense what others are feeling at the expense of their own feelings. They have a high tolerance for inappropriate behavior. They often choose careers as helping professionals.
- **Mascot:** These children are “entertainers.” They rely on their sense of humor to distract from or take away the family’s being upset. They have difficulty in focusing and making decisions. They have a low tolerance for distress.
- **Scapegoat:** These people are identified as the “family problems.” They are likely to get into various kinds of trouble, including drug and alcohol abuse. This is their way of expressing anger at the family. They function as a pressure valve. When tension builds in the family, the scapegoat will misbehave. This allows the family to avoid dealing with the drinking problem. Scapegoats are unaware of feelings other than anger.

4. Abuse: World of Dependence versus Co-Dependence

“Co-dependence” refers to ways in which family members change in relation to the substance user in order to cope with the disruption caused by the substance use. Frequently they try to focus on controlling the abuse, or to “clean up” or minimize its harmful consequences. Everyone in the family would have adopted co-dependent focus to survive. It results in being good at taking care of others and anticipating others’ needs. You justify your behavior by telling yourself that you are trying to help the person become sober. You are trying to minimize the harm to your family.

The focus on your loved one can become self-destructive. It causes you to lose your sense of self as you take responsibility for another person’s thoughts, feelings, and actions. This “enabling” also prevents the person from getting better. They are being helped by you to avoid the consequences of their behavior.

Forget the past

Just trying to forget the past without understanding its affects doesn’t work. You learned as a child to follow the family rules. You carry these behaviours as baggage into all subsequent adult relationships even if you deny it. Even if you decide to avoid alcohol for life, you may begin abusing alcohol or other substances. You repeat patterns of relating from your family of origin. You may get involved with someone who is like the substance user in your life or with someone like your parent who was the co-dependent.

How to move on?

The only way to recover is to face your past, its importance and meaning in your life. You need to understand your parents and yourself so that you can begin healing. You can work hard to replace self-destructive behaviours with healthy ones. Melody Beattie, shares recovery from codependency involves accepting your reality, becoming in tune with your thoughts and feelings, setting boundaries in your relationships, expressing your wants and needs, and establishing a sense of self-worth, self-love, and self-appreciation.

How to get peace of mind?

- Read books written about adult children of alcoholics or about co-dependence.
- Twelve-step programs that help substance abusers to recover are useful for family members also. Join a support group like Al-Anon for families with alcohol abuse, or Co-Dependents Anonymous/CoDA to help recover personally. You deserve to do so.
- You can choose individual or group therapy.

5. Unveiling the reality of Anxiety

We have all felt anxious at some point in our lives, maybe even multiple times. Anxiety is a part of life and can be good for you. Remember ever running a race? Anxiety heightens alertness and readies the body for action. Many students practice speeches and study for tests because they are feeling anxious.

Anxiety or fear is normal. It is not normal when it becomes overwhelming or interferes with functioning in life. Anxiety is one of the most common problems that people face. It can be treated successfully depending on the severity of the problem.

Symptoms can become extremely severe and leave you feeling disabled. You are scared of leaving your home. You cannot enter the elevator to go upstairs. You cannot attend a party. Anxiety is a word used very commonly in the English language and often inter-changed with fear in usage.

The use of Anxiety in the world of mental health refers to an unpleasant and overriding mental tension that has no apparent identifiable cause. Fear usually causes mental tension for a specific, external reason such as the fear of crawling animals such as lizards.

The Realm of Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders cover a group of illnesses that includes generalized anxiety disorder, phobias, panic disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorders.

Some of the ways in which people describe the suffering from this problem are:

- unrealistic or excessive worry
- exaggerated startle reactions
- "flashbacks" of past trauma
- sleep disturbances
- shakiness, trembling, muscle aches, sweating, cold/clammy hands or dizziness
- dry mouth
- numbness/tingling of hands, feet or other body part
- high pulse and/or breathing rate

People suffering from these disorders feel apprehensive and worry something bad may happen to themselves or their loved ones. They feel impatient, irritable and are easily distracted.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

People suffering from generalized anxiety disorder feel unrealistic or excessive anxiety and worry about life situations. They may feel panicky about financial matters even though they have a good bank balance. They feel preoccupied about the safety of a loved one even when they know the person is safely at home.

People in this category feel anxious most of the time. They are often on edge and experience feeling blank because of the tension felt. Often they suffer from depression as well.

Phobias

People suffering from this illness feel terror, dread or panic when they have to face their feared object, situation or activity. Some can't eat in a mess because of fear of eating in front of others. Some do not choose to work in a highrise building because they fear elevators.

Some common phobias:

- Social phobia: Fear of situations in which a person can be watched by others, such as public speaking.
- Simple phobia: Fear of specific objects or situations that cause terror such as fear of snakes or fear of closed spaces.
- Agoraphobia: Fear of being alone or in a public place that has no escape route.

Panic Disorder

Fear is accompanied by at least four of the following symptoms:

- sweating
- heart palpitations
- hot or cold flashes
- trembling
- feelings of unreality
- choking or smothering sensations
- shortness of breath
- chest discomfort
- faintness
- unsteadiness
- tingling
- fear of losing control, dying or going crazy

People who suffer from a panic attack for the first time usually rush to the hospital because they are sure they are having a heart attack. There is no prediction of when the attacks will take place. However, certain situations such as where the first attack occurred can become associated with future attacks. If left untreated, people suffering from panic can experience extreme despair and also become suicidal.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders

People with OCD can usually be divided into two categories though most experience a combination of the two. They suffer from obsessions which are repeated, intrusive, unwanted thoughts that cause distress and extreme anxiety. They may also suffer from compulsions or rituals such as hand washing to reduce his or her anxiety.

Common obsessions focus on a fear of hurting others or violating socially acceptable behavior standards such as swearing or making sexual advances. They can also be focused on religious or philosophical issues.

People with compulsions go through senseless, repeated and involuntary ritualistic behaviors which they believe will prevent or create a future event. Often people with this disorder also suffer from a complementary obsession such as worrying about infection.

Examples of compulsive rituals:

- Cleaning: They may spend hours washing and cleaning till their hands bleed.
- Repeating a behavior: Saying a loved one's name several times.
- Checking: Victims check and recheck that doors are locked or electric switches are turned off.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Post-traumatic stress disorder can occur to anyone who has experienced a severe and unusual physical or mental trauma. Severity of the disorder tends to increase if the trauma was unanticipated such as in the case of Rape victims.

People who suffer from PTSD re-experience the event that traumatized them through the following:

- Nightmares, night terrors or flashbacks of the event.
- Psychic numbing or emotional anesthesia.
- Excessive alertness and highly sharpened startle reaction.
- General anxiety, depression, inability to sleep, poor memory, difficulty concentrating or completing tasks, and survivor's guilt.

6. Understanding anxiety: Helping yourself and others

Theories explaining Anxiety

No single situation or condition causes anxiety disorders.

Psychoanalytic theory suggests anxiety stems from unconscious conflicts that arose from discomfort during infancy or childhood. Anxiety is resolved by identifying and resolving the unconscious conflict.

Learning theory states anxiety is a learned behavior that can be unlearned. A parent who fears dogs usually passes their fear on to their children. People who feel uncomfortable in a given situation will begin to avoid it.

Research indicates that biochemical imbalances can cause this disorder. According to this theory treatment of anxiety requires correcting these biochemical imbalances.

All these theories have an element of truth in explaining anxiety disorders. Events in childhood may lead to certain fears that can develop into full-blown anxiety disorder with time.

Anxiety is a basic human emotion like sadness. How do you know if anxiety is a problem in your life? The following can help you in answering the question:

- Do I feel anxious more often than not through the day?
- Have I restricted my activities to cope with anxiety?
- Do I experience panic or panic-like symptoms in certain situations?
- Am I intensely fearful of specific situations or things?
- Do I experience anxiety in social situations?
- Have I developed rituals or thought-processes to manage anxiety?
- Is my anxiety related to a specific, traumatic event?

Based on your specific answers, you can zero in to understand your anxiety symptoms better.

What you can do?

Identify the events that surround your experience of anxiety:

- What provokes the anxiety?
- What thoughts or physical sensations do you experience?
- How distressing is the anxiety?
- How do you cope with the anxiety?

Some simple ways you can help yourself are:

- Exercise or engage in daily physical activity
- Eat a nutritious, well-balanced diet
- Obtain adequate amount of sleep
- Seek emotional support from friends and family

- Focus on positive aspects in your life
- Create realistic and attainable goals
- Monitor how you think about stress
- Change negative thoughts

In case someone close to you is suffering from anxiety, you can help by:

- Being empathic and understanding
- Do not try to minimize the severity of anxiety symptoms
- Avoid making critical or negative statements
- Encourage coping strategies to deal with the issue

7. Do you feel sad?

It is not uncommon to hear people say I'm feeling depressed or I'm really sad. However most of us do not realize that we are using a mental health term very loosely. If we continue to suffer from these feelings for over two weeks we may be suffering from the illness of depression. We all experience this problem at some point in our life. Treatment can help many cope with the problem. Not many realize the option is available to them.

Signs to watch out for

Professional help including medication is required if the following symptoms are present most of the time for more than two weeks:

- Noticeable change in appetite
- Change in sleeping patterns such as inability to sleep or sleeping too much
- Loss of interest and pleasure in former activities
- Loss of energy, fatigue
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Persistent feelings of hopelessness
- Feelings of inappropriate guilt
- Inability to concentrate or think
- Recurring thoughts of death or suicide
- Melancholia (defined as overwhelming feelings of sadness and grief)
- Disturbed thinking
- Frequent crying for no apparent reason/cause
- Physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomachaches

Many victims of depression do not feel better when told about happy or good events/news. Depression can appear at any age. Sadness at the loss of a loved one or at the end of a love relationship is normal. Major environmental changes can trigger depression too such as Job promotions or changes in living spaces.

Types of depression

Most common type of depression is what is referred to as "feeling blue" or "being in a bad mood." Feelings of this kind are brief in duration and do not alter one's functionality in normal everyday activities.

The next level of depression has more intense symptoms that last for a longer period of time. Ability to perform daily activities becomes more difficult but people are still able to cope. At this level there can be strong feelings of hopelessness resulting in suicidal ideations.

Severe depression finds a person experiencing extreme fluctuations in moods or even desire to completely withdraw from daily routines and/or the outside world.

It's important to remember, no matter what the issue is, no matter what the cause, you have the ability to change the direction of your life. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign of strength. And, things can get better no matter what you are facing. Talk to someone and get the

help you require. You might not find the right person right away, but you will find the right person for you!