



“EN-TÊTE” campaign on mental health

FEARS AND ANXIETY

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Anxiety disorders can come in many forms, the most common being generalized anxiety, phobias, and obsessive and compulsive behaviour.

What is generalized anxiety?

Generalized anxiety is characterized by an almost permanent state of dread, when someone is always expecting the worst, is afraid of not measuring up to expectations, or of being hurt, pushed around or criticized by others. In other words, you set the bar high. You have the impression that things just never let up. It is not a matter of “I’m afraid of something, but when it doesn’t happen, I feel all right.” Instead, it’s “I always feel like I’m in danger.”

For instance, a lawyer enters a meeting, saying to himself that one of the people there is definitely out to humiliate him, or goes to court expecting a judge who is hard on lawyers, or starts his day saying that he just can’t do it, and it will impact the course of his career.

Generalized anxiety is overwhelming. Fortunately, there are ways to reduce it. First, you must be aware of it, what is so important and what you want to protect. You have to challenge the idea that you are in danger and that only the worst-case scenario is going to happen. After all, you know that, from time to time, it’s the best-case scenario that actually happens.

Let us consider phobias. If you have a fear of dogs, this is unlikely to hinder you in your career as a lawyer. Common phobias in the legal community run more to social phobias: fear of trembling, blushing or perspiring. A social phobia is the fear that our vulnerability will show and that others will see it. This is something that can adversely affect the career of someone who otherwise would be an excellent litigator or negotiator, or it can even affect recognition of his or her competencies in in-house discussions.

When we are afraid that our vulnerabilities will show, most of the time it is because we think that other people do not have any. But, believe me, in my experience as a clinical psychologist, WE ALL HAVE VULNERABILITIES. When your vulnerability shows, it isn’t such a terrible thing. In some cases, if it is too overwhelming, it’s important to seek help, but anyone can learn how to relax and to accept that nobody’s perfect, and it’s possible that someone may criticize us.

Now let’s take a look at obsessive and compulsive behaviour, which can range from being a perfectionist to complete paralysis. If you go over and over a text to make sure there are no typos,

that may be a good thing and lead you to excellence, but it can also be a bad thing and affect your productivity. Not meeting deadlines can lead to conflict with your colleagues.

Whatever the type, anxiety has several components:

- Physical (muscle tension). You feel tense when you're anxious. Get into the habit of paying attention to what is happening in your muscles. In general, our shoulders go up: the more anxious we are, the higher they go. Get into the habit of relaxing your muscles from time to time. No need to go to a spa or to someplace private to do this. You can do it in the middle of a meeting, in court or when you are with another person.
- Cognitive (unpleasant thoughts). Pay attention to dramatic thoughts. Ask yourself, "Am I imagining the worst?" Could things actually play out in a different way?
- Emotional (fear). Let yourself fully experience your fear, to the point where even to yourself it may seem exaggerated. There's nothing dramatic about being afraid. The fear will eventually diminish.

Try not to avoid what worries you, or approach it gradually.

Just take a deep breath, assess what is going on and then enjoy it.

That's the best antidote to anxiety!