

Shalom Updates:

Shalom's Continuing Services

In the time of COVID-19 Shalom has transitioned to providing services through telephone and online video counselling. We appreciate your continued support as we respond to requests for counselling and support our community during this unprecedented time.

10,000 Steps for Mental Health

We look forward to the possibility of gathering in person for *10,000 Steps for Mental Health* on

Saturday morning, September 19, 2020

If we are unable to gather in person, stay tuned for a creative new way to take *10,000 Steps for Mental Health*.

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Understanding Anxiety in a Time of Change



By Dan Good, MSW, RSW

We are living in a very strange time. Schools have shut down, many workplaces have been forced to adapt or close, and we are facing the uncertainty of what the next weeks, months, or even years may hold. Our social contact is mostly limited to the virtual world. In person funerals are limited. Weddings are being postponed. All the changes we have made, and continue to implement, are helping to prevent the spread of this novel virus. Not only has this pandemic forced many, if not all of us, to significantly adapt our daily routine, it has also robbed many of us of our tried and true self-care measures, leaving us scrambling to find new ways to cope. For many individuals, these changes, losses and uncertainties, have led to an increase in anxiety. So how do I know if I'm experiencing anxiety? Is this normal to feel? And what might I do about it if I am experiencing this?

Anxiety and its origins

Anxiety, just like all emotions, can serve a useful function. If we are joyful, we may be motivated to connect with others, and if we feel guilty, we may be led to seek reparations with the people we have wronged. If we feel afraid (an emotion closely tied with anxiety), this fear may signal there is imminent danger and we may feel the need to prepare to fight, or flee. This "fight or flight" response has had a significant evolutionary advantage for us, mobilizing our resources so we can quickly defend ourselves, or leave a threatening situation to protect our safety. Without this basic instinct, we would be at risk.

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Understanding Anxiety in a Time of Change

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Anxiety is an extension of this basic instinct. It is like a smoke detector that has increased its sensitivity to the possibility of threat, which can lead to false alarms. When this smoke detector senses a threat, it sends the message to our body that we need to be physically ready for whatever is in store for us. We experience an increased heart rate, rapid breathing, and tension in the muscles, all things which can be helpful if there is danger to our survival. With anxiety however, the “smoke detector” overestimates this danger, creating this increased physiological response even though there may be no immediate threat to our current situation.

This “smoke detector” may be activated by a variety of things: social situations, uncertainty, work performance, planning for the day, etc. For reasons which we won't have time to explore here, individuals will have different smoke detectors that will be sensitive to different things. Although these things are often not directly related to our survival, anxiety can lead to a snowball-effect of worries, which makes us believe it could pose a real threat (What if I don't pass this test? What if I fail this course? What if I don't get into the program I want? What if I don't get the job I want? What if I can't support myself financially?). One thought can lead to another, linking the seemingly unthreatening situation, to a possibly dangerous outcome. These thoughts can then contribute to what we call the “cycle of anxiety”.

Cycle of anxiety

The “cycle of anxiety” occurs in this way. We perceive a threat, for this example, let's say that threat is social judgement, the root fear of social anxiety. The thought “I will make a fool of myself” may accompany this. This fear mobilizes the body's “fight or flight” response which then motivates us to avoid going to a social gathering/interacting with other people. We feel a reduction in anxiety when we don't engage with that fear (the social event). Because we like the feeling of relief we experience when we don't enter that situation, we want to feel that again and again, thus leading to more avoidance. This cycle then prevents us from learning that the thing they were afraid of, might not actually be as dangerous as they once thought. Because of this cycle, anxiety can keep individuals stuck, making them believe they aren't able to cope with the situation that triggered the anxiety.

Working through anxiety

In our current state of change, things are not what they once were. Things are not normal, and novelty means

uncertainty. We are hard-wired to prepare for threat in the midst of uncertainty. Many of our “smoke detectors” will be on slightly higher alert. Uncertainties include our financial situation, our ability to connect socially with others, and even our own survival and that of our loved ones. So if you are anxious right now, it makes absolute sense.

Working through anxiety involves finding ways to bring our smoke detector back to helpful, adaptive levels. This is achieved through:

Relaxation strategies - which serve to calm the body's fight or flight response

Cognitive strategies - which reduce our worries about the possible danger, helping us develop more adaptive perceptions of real threat

Behavioural strategies - which seek to help us gradually approach situations we once feared, so that our smoke detector can start to see that we are in fact able to confront certain scenarios, without any significant threat occurring.

These are not simple things, but knowing how anxiety works, and how this can be shifted, is a huge step towards gaining some control over anxiety. There are things we can do to cope with anxiety. Consider the following:

1. Make a list of what you can and can't control in your life. Focus on the list of things you can control, and work at doing some of those things every day.
2. Consider the benefits of mindfulness and meditation. You can learn about meditation through books, apps (Headspace, Breathe, Waking Up), YouTube videos and counselling.
3. Deep breathing and other relaxation exercises. Anxiety tends to increase heart rate, make breathing more rapid, and increase tension in the body. Deep breathing and other relaxation strategies can physically reduce these effects on the body.
4. Set yourself a worry period, and stick to it. Half an hour a day, I am allowed to worry. Any other time a worry comes up, keep a journal, write it down, and come back to it during your worry period.
5. Make a list of the times in your life you worried about something, and it ended up turning out OK.

If you feel you need additional support, to move beyond anxiety, reach out for help. Your family doctor or a counsellor can help you consider what would be most helpful.

Self-care and Coping During the Pandemic

Each of us is aware of those things that we do to care for ourselves. These are the things we claim time for when we are operating from our best selves. Think about those things that have historically made you feel well, grounded and full of energy. While it may not be possible to engage each of these in the way you used to, think creatively about how you might adapt them to this time. What follows are a few thoughts from Shalom counsellors.

- **Maintain a schedule - make time for mealtimes, sleep, accomplishing tasks, and relaxation.**
- **Play - Allow yourself to step outside of the usual day-to-day and find pleasure through play.**
- **Consider one thing each day you'd like to accomplish. At the end of the day, "I will feel good if I have completed _____."**
- **Make the effort to connect at a distance with one person outside of your home, face-to-face, each day.**
- **Listen to music, sing, play an instrument.**
- **If you are working from home, establish a routine that marks the beginning and end of your work day - walk around the block, change your outfit, put away your work-related items.**
- **Do one thing just because you want to.**
- **Connect with loved ones by phone, video chat, through online games or by mailing a card or letter.**
- **Claim time for meaningful reading, writing, reflecting and silence.**
- **Remind yourself to move your body and exercise daily - stand, walk, stretch, bike, run or dance.**
- **Tend something growing/living.**
- **Eat healthfully, limiting your intake of caffeine, alcohol or other substances.**
- **Get out in nature, when you can. Even a brief time outdoors can restore and replenish us.**
- **Monitor your need for news updates and consider what limits you want to put on watching or reading the news.**
- **Reach out and provide support to others. Look for opportunities to "pay it forward" and to offer "random acts of kindness."**

Seedlings

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*Helping People Grow Toward
Peace and Wholeness*

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United Way
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Get to Know Shalom: Staff and Board



**Katie Cowie-Redekopp,
Administrative Secretary**

Katie began in her role as Administrative Secretary at Shalom in June 2019. Katie brings many gifts from her background in community support to her role in overseeing reception and office functioning at Shalom.



Allan Sauder, Board Member

Allan joined the Shalom board in April 2020. Allan is retired from a 40-year career in international economic development, serving most recently as President/CEO of MEDA (Mennonite Economic Development Associates). Allan and his wife, Donna, reside in Waterloo.

Thank You!

Thank you to all of Shalom's supporters, and to the COVID-19 Community Response Fund for providing support as we seek to provide need counselling services.

You Can Help

Shalom clients come from all walks of life, and many require a fee subsidy to be able to afford counselling. Every donation supports Shalom in providing services now and into the future. This mutual aid, supporting others in a time of need, is central to Shalom's mission, "Helping People Grow Toward Peace and Wholeness."

Shalom is grateful for every gift that is received, and this reminds us of the community of care that surrounds our work. Thank you!

If you are interested in donating to the ongoing work of Shalom Counselling, you can donate in the following ways:

Cheque

Cheques can be made payable to:
Shalom Counselling Services Inc.

Credit Card

Credit card donations can be made online or by phone:
shalomcounselling.org/donate
(519) 886-9690

Legacy Gifts

Legacy gifts (estates and wills) can be made through Abundance Canada