

Unicorn Shadows

Coping Guide for Panic Attacks and Anxiety

The following suggestions* are to be used in ANY order. Use one. Use them all. Try each one. See what works. If something does not work, that's fine. Scratch it off your list. These are merely ideas I've tried and practiced. This list is a reference to be printed off and kept with you. We all know how our minds freeze when that sheer panic hits. It's okay. It's your brain reacting to habitual patterns established over time, your limbic system screaming at you to fight, flee or freeze! It's all good.

You've got this!

- ☺ Smile . . . BIG. Force a smile onto your face. Look like you're losing your mind. It's okay. Allow yourself joy. By forcing a smile, you begin the shift from anxious state to one of calm serenity.

- ☺ Breathe. That sounds simple enough, doesn't it? But, it can be oh-so-difficult! What I do is this: I breathe in as slowly as possible through my nose and count to 5. I blow the air back out through my mouth, once again, as slowly as possible, counting to five. I've heard this called a rolling breath. As I do this, I allow my mind to focus on my belly moving out and in, out and in. I try to maintain focus on the counting and the sensation of my stomach rising and falling.

- 😊 Follow the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 mindfulness rule.
- **I find five visual stimuli, something to study with my eyes. Take in every detail of your chosen focus: the colors, shapes, size, beauty, intricacies, etc. Describe them in as much detail to yourself as possible.**
 - Then listen for four sounds. Stretch your hearing to as far a distance as you can. Listen for that far away dog barking or just the bass notes in a song on the radio, something that requires focused listening. Allow yourself to become mindful of the sound's impact on you. Is it a happy sound, such as laughter, or calming, such as a water trickling along rocks in a stream?
 - **Next, touch three things. But, don't just touch them, feel them. What do they feel like? Describe every detail to yourself (temperature, texture, feelings evoked such as "this soft jacket is soothing"). Use every part of yourself to practice touch, not just your fingertips or hands. What does your foot feel like in its shoe right now? Are your glasses touching your face? How does your back feel touching the chair? Notice everything you are touching.**

- Find two scents to smell. It can be something you pick up and savor by slowly breathing in its scent or a smell you catch in the air. Sometimes when I focus, I find I'm surrounded by smells I was unaware of until I purposefully paid attention!
- **Finally, focus on one taste. Eat something and examine every flavor, texture and sensation in that bite. Or just notice the taste of saltiness in the sweat on your lip or the freshness of having just brushed your teeth. Let your taste buds bring you into this moment. Right here. Right now.**

😊 Stop. Just stop where you are. Be still. Allow yourself to tremble and shake and experience the horrifically scary feelings. Again, it's okay. We live in a society where showing our emotions is frowned upon (even happy emotions such as someone singing a song out loud or dancing along the sidewalk is taboo). It's time we take back our power and allow ourselves the freedom to merely BE. Be sad and cry. Be scared and shake. Be happy and laugh out loud. Stop and just be. Be gentle with yourself and allow the feelings to flow. And if someone stops and asks, "Are you okay?" be honest and tell them what's happening, "I'm having a panic attack. I'm scared. I just need a minute to breathe." You will be blown away by how many people "get it" and will support you in that moment. Welcome it.

😊 Pray. Or talk to the universe. Or have a conversation with a tree. Whatever works for you in your practice of faith. Simply put, faith is having trust in something or someone. Trust is a huge factor in panic and anxiety most of the time. Learn to trust again. Trust in yourself that you are strong. You are brave. You are more powerful than your fears and worries. You are a warrior. A survivor. Reestablish your connection with God/universe/angels/self.

😊 Utilize positive affirmations. Tell yourself, as you look in a mirror, "I love you", "You are strong", "I believe in you" and so on. Tell yourself what YOU need to hear. Talk to yourself the way you want to be treated, how you deserve to be treated. Be your own best friend. Take care of that little kid who still lives in your soul and might be scared. Take that child by the hand and help guide that little person to a place of security and comfort.

😊 Let go of expectations. This was HUGE for me. Do not expect anything from anyone. Accept what they have to offer. That's it. Do not put expectations on yourself, either. That does not mean we shouldn't have goals or strive to better ourselves. What it means is that you are allowing yourself to be patient with you when you struggle or flail or backslide. By stating, "here is where

I want to be" you've set a goal. But, do not demand of yourself or others how it will transpire. Allow for change and flow and human nature.

- 😊 **Connect.** Connect to people, pets, angels, music, and all things joyous. Find one thing to be joyous about in this very moment. Mine right now in this second is that I adore these new pants I found while shopping online as they are cozy warm and silky soft. Fabulous! Ground yourself in this second.
- 😊 **Journal.** Write down your thoughts or voice record it all or video tape yourself. Whatever works for you to document a free flow thought process about your experience, feelings, progress, setbacks, joys, fears, what is working, what does not, pep talks to yourself, etc. Do not edit your flow. Allow it to be. Doodle if you feel the urge. Let it spill out. Set it free.
- 😊 **Remind yourself of the reality that is happening.** Talk out loud. I panic when I drive. I remind myself verbally, "You are sitting in your car. Look to your right, T. Now look to your left. You are safe. No one is going to hurt you. You are safe." Bring yourself into the now by acknowledging what is happening in the reality of the moment.

- ☺ Focus on the scary body sensations. That's right. You read that right! Focus on them. Demand more. The panic comes in fighting the racing heart, sweaty palms, tunnel vision, tingling head, weak limbs, flipping stomach, racing thoughts, feeling as if you are going to snap and jump into the abyss of insanity. Try to make your heart beat faster. I have found getting mad about it helps sometimes, "Come on!! Beat faster!"
- ☺ Find something to collect. This has been my number one, absolute saving grace! I'm not sure how it started, but I began finding hearts. Everywhere! I now collect them. Friends send me pics of hearts they've found in a fallen leaf or a potato chip crumb or random light reflecting on a wall. I find hearts every single day without fail. And I smile. I'm reminded that we are surrounded by love. Always. It's in that knowledge that I find comfort in my moments of terror.
- ☺ Put a support system in place. I now have people I can call or text when I'm in the midst of panic. I have support in place to help remind me, "You are safe. Breathe. Find something beautiful in this moment." The last time I had a panic attack was over 6 months ago and as I walked it off in our backyard, I looked up to find one lone, brilliantly white Magnolia bloom glowing in

the moonlight. It caught my breath. On this tall green tree stood one beautiful flower, reaching out to me in my moment of terror. I was immediately brought back to the safety of the moment. It was magnificent.

- 😊 Put your story out there. You will be amazed at how many people can connect to your soul as a result. For some people, that's a scary proposition. But, if you put it out there with the intention of helping light the way for others who may be struggling with similar feelings, you will find support in your efforts. Talk about what has occurred in your life and what is currently happening to you as a result. Talk about your fears.
- 😊 **Meditate and/or practice yoga. I do both. I found a super cool app for my phone which has simplistic 5-8 minute daily meditations on it. I will eventually build up to longer meditations, but I'm patiently learning how to be comfortable in the now, in my grounding efforts, in my own body. I've learned to love me and who I am.**
- 😊 Write letters of forgiveness to those who have hurt you. Then burn them. Set them free. Not for their sake, but for your own. Write a letter to God. To the universe. To fate. Whatever you feel has burdened you with something unbearable. Be honest in your letter. Release the emotions

and, just like with the journaling, do not edit yourself. Let it flow. Free it! Free yourself!

- ☺ **Create a safe space for yourself.** A safe space in your mind where you can go when feeling anxious. Mine is a cozy little nook, surrounded by books and filled with a snugly bed with lots of pillows and blankets, looking out a ceiling to floor window over a brilliant blue ocean, with a calming breeze flowing through the room, and sunlight streaming from behind a lone white cloud. Use as much detail as you can muster. What does the space smell like, what's the temperature, what's there in the space? Are you outside or inside? Remember, this is **YOUR** space. Fill it with you and everything that makes your heart happy.
- ☺ **Exercise.** Find what works for you. Walk, run, do yoga, ZUMBA, bike, lift, hit the gym circuit, join a class. Just move.
- ☺ **Connect with nature.** This has been another life saver for me. I hike at a local nature preserve, (finding hearts all over nature, by the way) and it has helped me heal my trauma.

- 😊 Join a club. Or volunteer. You will meet new people. You will feel empowered in making a difference in either your own life or the lives of others. Connect with others.

- 😊 Find an artistic/creative outlet. I can't draw a straight line with a ruler. But, I can write! Allow yourself the gift of expression. And it IS a gift you deserve.

- 😊 LOVE! Love your life. Love others. Love yourself. Love nature. Love simple beauty such as a sunset. Welcome love. Welcome an abundance of love. You deserve it. You are worthy of infinite love. You are loved. Infinitely.

Peace, happiness & love,

T

Unicorn Shadows

Quick Guide for Panic Attacks and Anxiety

Smile

Breathe

5,4,3,2,1 Mindfulness

Stop and Be

Pray

Positive Affirmations

Release Expectations

Grounding

Journal

Reality Reminder

Body Sensations Focus Collect

Utilize Support System

Share story

Meditate

Forgive

Create Safe Space

Exercise

Nature

Connect

Be Creative

Love

Unicorn Shadows

My Story

I am in the process of writing a book which I have currently titled *Unicorn Shadows*. As you can see from the photo above, my vision for the title was one of a little girl, her head bowed in prayer, her eyes lowered out of fear. However, God's light shines on her and casts a unicorn shadow. The unicorn is a mythical creature which is often symbolic of miracles or innocence. For far too many years I believed "hope after trauma" was a mythical concept. However, my story has become not just a tale of a little girl cowering in fear and praying for rescue, but of the shadow beyond, as well. I am a trauma warrior, with a unicorn shadow!

So many people have said to me over the past few years, "How can you have experienced so much trauma and yet always be smiling?" or "You are the happiest person I know and you always have a smile on your face!" Knowing the "me" that lives in the NOW, one would find my story incongruent with who I am today. But, I'm here to tell you, I lived it. Every terrifying moment of it. I utilized EMDR therapy with Dr. Barb Hensley from 2013 until 2017 (98 sessions!). I hit a metaphorical wall in the summer of 2013, after battling severe panic attacks for 26 years, and decided I could no longer live a life dictated by my fears and panic. So, I started the journey to take my power back.

I still struggle in a few areas when it comes to anxiety and panic, particularly when it comes to driving on highways and bridges. But, I'm feeling about 90% improved. I no longer take Xanax on long road trips or succumb to the panic when it rears its ugly head. I quickly take action to ground myself and bring myself back to a calm and tranquil state. And it's working! Even if I never completely eliminate my panic, I now feel empowered. And that is where the hope lies!

I always believed I'd have to be 100% "cured" to justify writing my book. But, I've come to the beautiful realization that the hope exists within the struggle itself. I empower myself with each ATTEMPT at overcoming, not

necessarily in the victory itself. Because, honestly, sometimes I fail. And that's okay. I'm still learning. And I am learning to embrace the process instead of wishing for the final destination.

I am a trauma survivor. I am a trauma warrior.

I have conquered:

Attempted drowning by alcoholic adult - age 4

Molested by a 16 year old neighbor - age 5

Molested by a 19 year old neighbor - age 9

Molested repeatedly by a choir director - age 10

Molested by a religious education director in a priests' rectory - age 14

Lost virginity to date rape - age 16

Sexual assault by gang in downtown Cincinnati on skywalk - age 16

Attempted rape by police officer investigating gang attack - age 17

Physical abuse by adult until age 10

Bank robbery with gun held to my head and coworker stabbed - age 21

Bank robbery with same gun/assailant murdering coworker - age 22

And those are just the highlights! There's so much more. I'm excited to share my story and offer hope to others. Please keep in mind that no one person's trauma is easier or more difficult than another's. Trauma is trauma. We are not here to judge another's pain. We are here to support and encourage and offer loving acceptance. We are a warrior team, we humans. Share the love!

Peace, happiness & love,

T

* **DISCLAIMER:** The guide, website, book, speeches, blog, courses, and any other written or spoken communications contain the opinions and ideas of Teri Wellbrock. It is intended to provide helpful and informative material on the subjects addressed. It is shared with the understanding that I am not engaged in rendering medical, health, or any other kind of professional services. Please consult your medical, health or other competent professional before adopting any of the suggestions or drawing inferences from it. The author specifically disclaims all responsibility for any liability, loss, or risk, personal or otherwise, which is incurred as a consequence, directly or indirectly, of the use and application of any of the contents of my shared communications.

Printable reference card!

Print, cut out, laminate, and keep with you for easy reference!

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