



Philadelphia Coordinated Health Care  
a core program of PMHCC, Inc.

Empowerment through  
education, **support** and advocacy

### Tips for Supporting Individuals Experiencing an **Anxiety Disorder**

- It is important to identify and reduce the anxiety in the person's environment by reducing situations or things that you know make the person anxious.
- If the environment itself is the trigger- their anxiety will not be stabilized as long as that person is in that environment. It is important for supporters to discuss possible ways, if any, that can help reduce anxiety related symptoms in the environment.
- Encourage the person to use relaxation techniques: Deep breathing exercises, aromatherapy, sensory stimulation/distraction
- Ask the person if they want/need to find a place where they feel safe.
- Also observe the person's behavior, keeping particular attention on what activities, habits or items the person utilizes to reduce anxiety. You can then create a "worry box" or "anxiety box" with items or activities that may help reduce anxiety.
- Know how the person reacts to their anxiety and do not punish people for their reactions, as this only increases anxiety. If a person is experiencing clinical anxiety and is attempting to utilize their coping strategy they developed to reduce the anxiety, redirection may only increase and intensify anxiety symptoms. The person may also begin to act out. Allow the person time to cope with their anxiety as long as their way of coping does not have the potential to physically endanger themselves or others.

For a person that experiences **Panic Attacks** it is important that you:

- Suggest that the person stay in a "safe place" until the panic passes. This could take up to 2 hours.
- Try and focus their attention on something visible like a picture, a show, a desired item etc.
- Encourage slow breathing and attempt to use relaxation techniques
- Remind the person that you are there with them
- **Being a fun and relaxing person to be around can make you an invaluable support. Sometimes being distracting and humorous is much better than simple redirection. Since anxiety involves persistent and intrusive thoughts and irrational fears, sometimes simply distracting the person in a fun way can be the best intervention as it can halt the irrational thoughts and break the negative thought cycle.**

***\*This information does not take the place of medical advice. Please seek a psychiatrist or medical professional if you support a person experiencing a mental health challenge.\****