



Welcome to the first of the monthly 'Wellbeing Matters' articles, which greets you on World Mental Health Day, 2017!

The aim of these monthly articles is to educate and support anyone who accesses the Pastoral Care and Counselling pages, but also to continue the journey of raising the profile of Wellbeing and Self Care within our Diocese. Each month will hold a different focus, and within the first year, I hope that we will be able to join in embracing our differences, and within this our needs.

Anxiety

For October, the focus is upon Anxiety – an unpleasant feeling that each of us will have experienced at some point given how our lives are frequently filled with first experiences, targets, life events and the subsequent pressures that come with both.

Whilst we all experience short bursts of anxiety in our day to day lives, the level of challenge increases when anxiety becomes a regular feature in our lives.

Anxiety is often a word which is used to describe when we are feeling uptight or irritable, nervous or tense, and can be associated with a wide variety of physical symptoms including:

- Increased heart rate
- Muscular tension
- Sweating
- Trembling
- Feelings of breathlessness



Of course, anxiety also affects us mentally and where this has become a regular feature in life the result can mean that we worry for extended periods of time, which in turn can cause us to feel that the worry is out of control. Anxiety can influence how we behave, and lead to behaviours such as avoiding doing certain things that we might want to because we are worried what the outcome might be.

It is often the case that a range of different factors and events will contribute to a person's anxiety levels rather than one specific thing, and whilst it can be very helpful to explore the causes (including patterns of unhelpful thinking) within a safe, therapeutic space, often what can also be helpful is to appreciate what stops us from overcoming it.

For some, this is due to a style of thinking which lends itself to experiencing anxiety, such as a negative thought pattern that results in unclear thinking and a vicious cycle of, often elevating, anxiety.

For others, there is a belief that anxiety has a protective function, for example that by being 'on the look-out' this can help them to recognise and avoid danger. However, the problem here is that, quite soon, potential dangers can be envisaged within relatively



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safe situations and anxiety is therefore increasingly present. Often avoidant behaviours (mentioned above) will be experienced here, which leads to different outcomes never being experienced (such as a gathering being better than expected, or a sermon being praised!).

For some of us, a thinking style of 'worried about worrying' can serve to maintain anxiety within a vicious cycle. For example, somebody who thinks in this way might worry that they are doing harm to themselves by worrying so often, with a common worry being that this means they are 'going mad', or that normal physical symptoms such as a rapid pulse are indicative of serious illness. This is not the case as these are normal bodily reactions, however worrying at this level can intensify these experiences, perhaps with panic attacks, which make people feel worse and lead to a further vicious cycle of anxiety.

Often not having time to relax and benefit from doing things that we enjoy can also contribute to higher anxiety levels, however there is a warning attached as this must be balanced with having too much time - which can allow an unmanaged mind to allow extended periods of worry!

Fortunately there are several strategies that can be used to reduce anxiety, including:

- Understanding our own anxiety
- Learning how to challenge unhelpful thoughts
- Improving problem solving skills
- Reducing the amount of time spent worrying
- Learning to relax (emotionally and physically)
- Learning to stop avoiding things that may make us anxious

These strategies often form part of CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) based support, which can be accessed via a GP or, for Clergy and Families, via the Diocesan Officer for Pastoral Care and Counselling.

The challenge via GP led services can often sadly be long waiting lists, so other avenues of support can be found from:

- <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/>
- <http://supportline.org.uk/problems/anxiety.php>
- <http://anxietynetwork.com/anxiety-help-and-support>
- <https://www.nopanic.org.uk/>
- https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks/#.WdTVb_6QyUk



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