

5 Tips for Dealing with Panic Attacks – The BRAVE Way

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Panic attacks can feel terrifying in the moment. Managing your thoughts and behaviours can go a long way toward reducing the frequency and intensity of panic symptoms as well as how much they interfere with your life.

When you are having a panic attack, use the acronym “BRAVE” to remember five great strategies for dealing with panic attacks.

1. Body knowledge. Learn the facts about panic. A panic attack is your body preparing you to deal with danger (F3-fight-flight-freeze response gets activated). If there is no danger – your body is giving you a false alarm.

2. Realistic thinking. Try not to panic about panic. Remind yourself that the panic is not harmful. Your body is having a false alarm – your F3 system has kicked into gear at the wrong time – the alarm will stop ringing in time. Panic is hard but harmless. Think of it like a migraine headache – real and uncomfortable but not life-threatening. You can cope and function during a panic attack.

3. Acceptance. Accept that once your body’s alarm system has been triggered, it will take a while before it settles down. Your body can’t un-release adrenaline once you realize it’s a false alarm. It will take a while for your body to return to normal. Once your sympathetic nervous system gets revved up, it will take a while for your parasympathetic nervous system to settle things down, like slowing down a fast-moving train.

4. Validation. Validate your experience. Panic attacks are real and very uncomfortable. But they are not deadly and you do not have to let them stop you. You may be suffering but you are also strong.

5. End. Remind yourself that panic attacks end. They do not last forever. It is not your job to stop or end a panic attack. It is your job to ride the wave of panic. Surf it or dive into it. Trying to fight or end panic tends to make it worse. You can handle the panic attack.

If you try the BRAVE techniques and you don't see a change in a healthy direction, don't quit. These are just five tips, and there are many more things people can do to manage panic attacks. Panic is treatable.

Learning more can help you manage and BRAVE your anxiety when panic attacks. Anxiety Canada has lots of free resources to help you learn about panic, panic disorder, and the evidence-based strategies for dealing with them.

Disclaimer: Tips provided in this blog post are not meant to replace evidence-based psychotherapy or pharmacotherapy for anxiety disorders. If panic attacks are causing you a lot of distress or interfering with your life, consult with a trained health care provider.

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