



## Coping with anxiety & panic

It is not uncommon for survivors of sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse to feel anxious or panicky. When people become anxious they can feel upset, uncomfortable and tense and can get anxious about feeling anxious! Panic attacks can be described as a brief periods of intense fear or discomfort that occur in situations where most people would normally not feel afraid. The symptoms of a panic attack may include:

- Racing or pounding heart
- Sweating
- Trembling or shaking
- Fear of dying
- Shortness of breathe
- Feeling of choking
- Dizziness or faint
- Hot flushes/chills
- Fear of going crazy or losing control

**NB: if you have any concerns about your health ensure that you contact your doctor for advice and assistance**

### What to do to help yourself?

- Remind yourself that your feelings are not dangerous or harmful and are an exaggeration of your body's normal response to stress.
- Try not to fight your feelings - the more you are willing to face the feelings, the less intense the panic will become.
- Remember to breathe slowly, as not doing so will lead to dizziness and breathlessness.
- Replace negative thoughts with more realistic ones. For example say to yourself, This will pass and I will be OK

Try holding your breath for 6 seconds, then breathing in slowly for 6 seconds, then slowly out for 6 seconds. Continue breathing in and out in this 6 second cycle. After a minute, hold you breath again for 6 seconds.

**Continue in this manner until the anxiety has passed.**



- Replace negative thoughts with more realistic ones. For example say to yourself, This will pass and I will be OK
- When you find yourself thinking about the fear or panic, try using the breathing technique described above or a distraction technique such as counting backwards from 100.
- Stay in the present. Be aware of your surroundings. Notice your feet on the floor, place them firmly on the ground, and wriggle them about.

### **Seek assistance**

- Through counseling
- Talking to your doctor
- At your local community health centre or community mental health centre