

WOUND UP TOO TIGHT

By Maura Calvert, Cognitive Behavioural Therapist

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety in a mild form is regarded as normal and it is not usually a cause for concern. A degree of anxiety can help you perform well in situations that require concentration, efficiency and skill. However, anxiety symptoms can become so severe and persistent that they can become disabling. In some cases people develop episodes of sudden and intense anxiety, known as panic attacks. These can be very frightening, and because anxiety is a very physical body response, you may feel like you are having a heart attack, and though it lasts between 2 and 30 minutes, it can feel like it is going on forever. You can think that you are losing control, going insane, and have other distressing thoughts. If you have experienced a panic attack, it is likely that you will have developed a strong fear of having another episode. You may find that

you are worrying a lot more about things, especially when it comes to any uncertainty.

Avoidance: 'Sure if it makes me feel anxious I won't want to go there'

This may lead to a pattern of behaviour known as avoidance. You may begin to avoid people and places associated with the panic attack / intense anxiety. You 'anticipate' that the worst thing is going to happen, so you either avoid it completely or may go there with plans of what to do if the worst thing does happen.

What we know about avoiding people and places in the longer term is that it can lead to an increase in anxiety, and a decrease in the belief that you can manage. The increase in anxiety, alongside the avoidance can result in depression, which can further

increase feelings of isolation and loss of motivation.

In the police, the safety of you and your family is paramount. This is why it can be difficult to strike a balance between safety in relation to an actual or real threat, and to know when that threat is more distant.

WHEN DOES 'VIGILANCE' BECOME 'HYPERVIGILANCE'?

Vigilance is the act of keeping careful watch for possible danger. This can develop into hypervigilance. Hypervigilance is when you have an exaggerated sense of fear, where you may notice you constantly scan the environment and you can be on continuous high alert, which can lead to an increase in anxiety and a sense of exhaustion. This can relate to a past trauma event or years of vigilant behaviour.



WHAT OR WHO CAN HELP?

It is important to take steps towards recovery and management of anxiety. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) can help to work through the avoidance in a gradual manner, in order to reduce the symptoms of anxiety. This is a tried and tested therapy and can be used with all types of anxiety such as social and other phobias, obsessive compulsive disorder (obsessive checking), general anxiety and health anxiety. Professional help can assist you in working towards a more helpful way to deal with anxiety. In addition to community mental health services accessible via GP, PRRT has a psychological therapies department which specialises in providing CBT to Police Officers and their Families. PRRT can be accessed by ringing 02890 427788 and ask for an initial assessment. Your experiences as a Police Officer and associated risks may require you to maintain a level of vigilance to stay safe. Our team of specialist Clinicians work alongside Officers to ensure they are not carrying any more anxiety than is absolutely necessary. Do not suffer in silence.

PRRT is based at Maryfield, Holywood and provides psychology, physiotherapy, personal development and training to the retired police population. PSNI employees can access our healthcare services via referrals from PSNI occupational health. Serving officers can access personal development and training directly. For further information or to make an appointment please call 028 9042 7788.



For further information on all PRRT services please visit www.prirt.org.