

## Understanding Anxiety

**What is anxiety?** Anxiety disorders can be challenging to diagnosis. Worry is a normal emotion that we all feel on some basis. Anxiety is when worry becomes disruptive to functioning. Anxiety Disorders can be experienced differently. Some of the primary anxiety disorders include: Panic Disorders, Agoraphobia, Social Anxiety Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and Separation Anxiety Disorder.

**What does anxiety look like?** The experience of anxiety varies. For example, the experience of generalized anxiety is very different than the experience of a panic attack. We must remember that a certain amount of anxiety is normal and adaptive to our behavior. For example, it is normal and helpful for us to be nervous before a big job interview or life event. It is when this worry takes away from quality of life that it becomes problematic. Often anxiety is present with other psychological disorders and is frequently a symptom of something else that may be going on. Keeping all of this in mind, anxiety symptoms may include hard to control excessive worrying, muscle tension, becoming easily tired and irritable, poor concentration, and sleep disruption.

**What does this mean for me as a support person?** It is important to remember that one of the major symptoms of anxiety is “hard to control excessive worrying.” The person you are working with does not want to feel this way and likely feels they have no control over their worry. So, we want to provide support and not dismiss their worries or “shut it down.” We never want to belittle their concerns even if they seem trivial. As support staff we must work together to find the best solution to dealing with anxiety. No one technique will work on everyone. So if you have concerns about someone you are working with, reach out, there is help available to you!

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Arlington, VA: Author.