



Tolerating Uncertainty

Counseling & Student Development Center
Bucknell University

Human brains hate the unknown!

Uncertainty = Danger

Planning → Safety

But what if we don't know what to plan for?

- ◎ Our brain will do its best to fill in the blanks, even if it means guessing or assuming the worst
- ◎ We're hardwired to overestimate threats and underestimate our abilities

Feeling anxious is NORMAL. It's how you respond to the anxiety from uncertainty that determines how things will go.

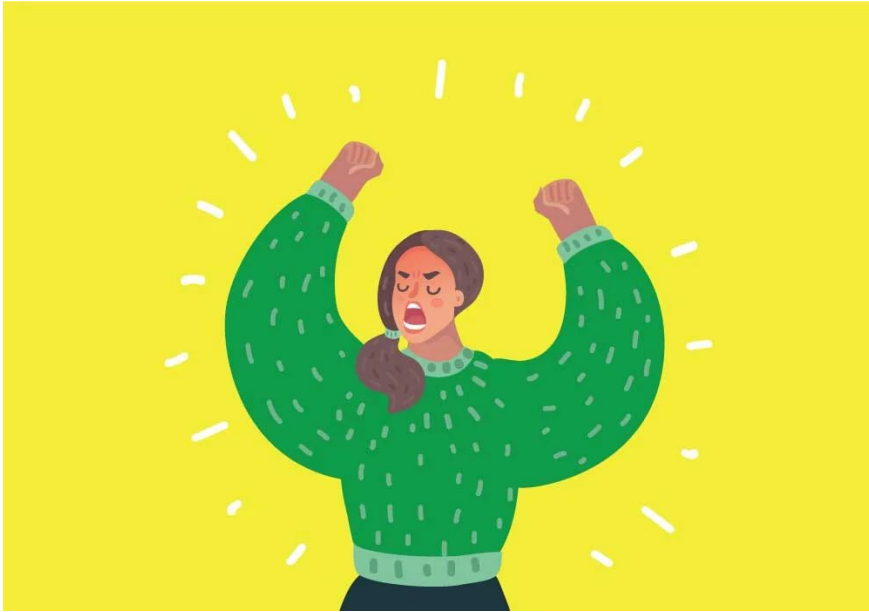
Anxiety about uncertainty shows itself as...

- ⊙ Getting stuck in cycles of, “What if...?”
- ⊙ Seeking reassurance through obsessively thinking or asking others for advice
- ⊙ Struggling with plans that aren’t fully formed or changes to routine
- ⊙ Fear of new experiences because you don’t know what to expect
- ⊙ Struggling with transitions between routine changes
- ⊙ Dichotomous thinking & having very firm opinions about how things *should* be
- ⊙ Over-preparing and not allowing others to help or support you
- ⊙ Deferring to others to make decisions for you
- ⊙ Impulsively making a decision to get it over with



PLOT TWIST

Recognize signs of frustration



- ◎ Know your physical and cognitive cues that signal when you are starting to get frustrated
- ◎ Remember: Frustration stops you from thinking clearly and creatively.
- ◎ Take 5-10 deep breaths to stop the downward spiral and allow your wiser mind to prevail

Challenge your thinking

- ◎ Notice when a fear about your abilities occurs
 - “There’s nothing I can do about this. I’m helpless.”
- ◎ Push back on it by focusing on what is within your control
 - “I may not know how to do XXX but, for now at least, I can do YYY.”
- ◎ Seek out a friend, family member or mentor for support to help you maintain perspective and ground yourself in what is within your control and what to try and let go



Celebrate past success

- ◎ The current situation may indeed be challenging.
 - Fortunately, for you, you have faced challenges before!
- ◎ Think back on a time when things were uncertain and you weren't sure it would work out.
- ◎ What strategies and skills did you use to overcome a past challenge?



Practice Acceptance




- ◎ Acknowledge that we may not have the control to fulfill our desired outcomes.
- ◎ We can allow reality to be true without fighting against it, which leads to exhaustion and frustration in addition to the pain of the problem itself.
- ◎ Use mindfulness to help you ground yourself each time the struggle to accept arises.
- ◎ Drop the rope

Drop the Rope - Guided Imagery



Discussion Questions



- ① How does anxiety manifest itself for you - physically, emotionally & mentally?
 - ② What situations (people, environments, etc.) tend to provoke the most anxiety about uncertainty for you?
 - ③ What is a mantra or phrase that you could say to yourself for comfort in the midst of uncertainty?
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Resources

- ◎ The CSDC remains available for Telehealth sessions or even a one on one consultation
 - Schedule an appointment by calling our office at 570-577-1604
 - Review our [website](#) for more info on our services and staff
- ◎ If you are in distress, a counselor is available after hours 24/7/365 by calling our office at 570-577-1604 and pressing “2” when prompted
- ◎ If you’re looking for a provider to connect with closer to home consider visiting [PsychologyToday](#) and use their “Find a Therapist” feature to locate a provider in your area

Hotlines

- ⦿ National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – Call 800-273-TALK (8255)
- ⦿ Crisis Text Line – Text HOME to 741-741
- ⦿ National Domestic Violence Hotline – Call 800-799-SAFE (7233)
- ⦿ National Sexual Assault Hotline – Call 800-656-HOPE (4673)

Identity-specific

- ⦿ Students of Color: The Steve Fund - Text STEVE to 741-741
- ⦿ LGBTQ+ Support: Trevor Project - (866)-488-7386
- ⦿ Trans Support: Trans Lifeline - (877)-565-8860

Please share your thoughts!

A decorative network diagram in the top right corner, consisting of various sized grey circles connected by thin grey lines, forming a complex web-like structure.

Please take a 2-3 minutes to give us your feedback on this program. It is greatly appreciated and used to improve future resources.

<https://baseline.campuslabs.com/bucknell/2021oe>

A decorative network diagram in the bottom left corner, consisting of various sized grey circles connected by thin grey lines, forming a complex web-like structure.