

Montclair State University
Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

Living with Terror Alerts and the Related Anxiety

The World We Live in Today

Since September 11, 2001, the nation has remained on various states of alert, as we are considered at risk for possible future terrorist attacks. For quite some time, our Department of Homeland Security (DHS) (<http://www.dhs.gov>) has placed the nation on a high condition of alert (orange), which is the second highest level of alert, indicating that there is a high risk of terrorist attacks. Furthermore, diplomatic endeavors have ended and we have entered a war.

Stress, Fear and Anxiety

Given that we have been living in a sustained heightened state of alert it is both understandable and normal to feel nervous and anxious these days. In addition to the significant aforementioned stressor, we all have regular life stresses such as school, work, relationships, etc. to manage. Fear and anxiety are natural human reactions that help the mind and body deal with extreme stress. We can all use our increased awareness to live consciously and to direct us in making safer choices in our daily lives (see <http://www.ready.gov> for preparedness information). However, prolonged anxiety can have negative effects on a person, especially when anxiety becomes overwhelming.

When Anxiety Becomes Overwhelming

Occasionally, people find that their anxiety overwhelms them. When this happens, it sometimes leads to negative and self-destructive behaviors. Some signs that you are being overwhelmed include (but are not limited to):

- A change in sleeping patterns. You may either be unable to sleep or, finding yourself always sleeping.
- Using substances to manage emotions. This includes alcohol, illegal drugs, food and even prescription medication. Craving a substance in order to manage your emotions can be a dangerous indicator.
- Dramatic mood swings may also be an indicator of overwhelming anxiety.
- Change in eating behaviors. Like with sleep, your eating might be at one extreme or the other. You may either be eating little to nothing or eating large amounts of food.
- Physical changes. If you find yourself sweating, tremulous, having difficulty breathing, or you feel your heart racing, you may be overwhelmed by anxiety. Sometimes when you feel overly anxious, you may feel ill and like you require medical attention.
- If you are feeling “out of sorts” it’s always a good idea to check in with a health professional. A good rule of thumb is that if you feel you are struggling or notice a significant decline in functioning in any area of your life, it may be a sign that your anxiety is overwhelming you. If you find yourself making choices you might not normally make or doing things you might not normally do, you may need some help managing your anxiety.

Managing Your Anxiety

If you felt that anxiety is getting the best of you and having a negative effect on your well-being, you can do something about it. Standard stress reduction techniques are always a good idea. These include eating well, exercising and getting plenty of good rest. Engaging in any healthy activity you find relaxing on a consistent basis and reducing stress in the areas of your life that you can control is helpful in managing anxiety. In general, paying attention to your body and mind and responding to your needs are important. Keep yourself informed but not obsessively so to the exclusion of other important areas of your life. However, if you're experiencing significant behavioral changes, talking to friends and loved ones is a good idea, but it's also important to talk with a trained professional. Finally, keep in mind that according to statistics, the likelihood that you will be a victim of a terrorist attack is quite low.

Helping Friends

Sometimes when we are experiencing extreme stress and anxiety it is hard to see the negative behaviors we are inflicting upon ourselves. When this happens we rely on friends and family to help us recognize the situation. If you think one of your friends is having trouble managing his or her anxiety, you can take steps to help. You may share this article with your friend. In addition to talking with them, it is also recommended that you consult with a campus professional so that your friend gets the support he or she needs.

Resources for MSU Students

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): (973) 655-5211. Located in Gilbreth House. CAPS is open 9:00am - 5:00pm (Monday – Thursday) and Fridays 8:30am –4:30pm. During non-business hours for emergencies, an on-call psychologist can be reached via campus police (973) 655-5222.

Health and Wellness Services: (973) 655-4361. Located in Blanton Hall. Hours of operation are 9:00am – 8:00pm (Monday – Thursday) and Friday s 9:00am – 5:00pm.

Women's Center: (973) 655-5114. Located in Student Center Room 421. Hours of operation are 8:30am – 4:30pm (Monday – Friday).

University Police Department: (973) 655-5122. Open 24 hours seven days a week. The University Police Department is available to respond to questions regarding the University's efforts to ensure the safety and welfare of the campus community.

Resources for Faculty and Staff

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) provides consultation appointments. Employees currently enrolled in benefits may receive referrals for mental health professionals through their insurance providers.