



# Tips for Anxiety



## RANK

Ranking your worries means putting them on a scale or giving them a grade. The exercise is based on the notion that if we “file” everything in our brain as a worry we won’t be able to tell which ones are actually worthy of our time and attention to be able to focus on solving them. It’s kind of like *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*, but for our brain.

For this exercise, we create a scale (I like a basic scale from 1 to 10). I determine what’s a 10 and what’s a 1. For me, “10” is a very serious all-alarms-going situation. “1” is a nuisance, a pebble in my shoe, a shoulder shrug situation. From here, I can get a sense of where other worries may fall. This exercise helps me have a better grasp on what’s an 8 versus a 3 and determine how I am going to delegate my energy toward the situation. It doesn’t mean I don’t care about a 3 or it suddenly doesn’t worry me at all. Of course, it does—if it registers on my scale, it means I care. Rather, this helps me say, “This is just a 3. I am not giving it more time and energy than it deserves.” Whereas an 8 might demand I stop what I’m doing and address the situation.

This ranking and scale system can also be extremely useful in communicating with our partners. Telling my partner that I’m “worried” or “freaking out” about something might sound all the same. Saying, “this feels like a 9 to me right now” lets them know where I’m really at in my feelings. It helps me remember that I’m in the driver’s seat, not anxiety. “This is only a 4, so I’m not giving it 8-level attention.” Finally, it’s a great way to measure if your coping strategies are working. Something that used to be registering as a 7 is now a 5. Or I was able to assess myself as I came down out of that anxiety tornado—a 9 to a 7 to a 5 and then a 3.

## GROUNDING

Grounding is a lot like what it sounds like. It’s the practice of standing exactly where you are in the present moment. Anxiety is like a swirling tornado tossing us around in the strong winds. Grounding is about coming down out of that spiral and standing in the present moment—not the what ifs that anxiety wants us to focus on. One of the most common ways to ground is by activating each of your five senses. Name five things you can see, four things you can touch (I often suggest actually feeling the ground under your feet), three things you can hear, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste. This exercise can work well even if you don’t apply the counts, but some find the counting helpful.

## SAY IT OUT LOUD

Anxiety does a really good job of turning these thoughts into taboos. Anxiety convinces us that if we mention what we are thinking, it will come true. If it hides in the dark, somehow we’re protected from that scary thing we’re thinking. A prime breeding ground for anxiety is fear and shame (things we keep hidden in the dark). Therefore, the truth is anxiety dies when we bring it to light. We need to cultivate safe spaces to speak about our anxious and scary thoughts, such as with a spouse, a parent, a best friend, or a professional. The more you find or create these spaces for yourself and you refuse to listen to the lies anxiety tells you, the less of a hold they will have on you.



These techniques, or any aimed at treating anxiety, aren’t about “making anxiety stop.” Stress and anxiety are naturally occurring states, and we want these biological response systems working in tip-top shape. What we don’t want is overactivated systems—chronic stress or anxiety disorders. The goal of these techniques (or any treatment) is to help manage anxiety, not eliminate it completely. I like to think of these strategies as taking the edge off. They make that anxiety cliff feel more like a rolling hill. As with anything, practice is the key. With time and practice, it will become more natural, work faster, and, generally, you’ll need it less and less.