



# PANIC ATTACKS

More than 1 in 5 people have a panic attack in their lifetime. A panic attack is a distinct episode of high anxiety with fear or discomfort that develops abruptly and has its peak within 10 minutes. (An attack typically lasts 3 – 20 minutes.) Some people have only one attack in their lifetime, others have repeated occurrences. During an attack, several of the following symptoms are present

Palpitations/ rapid heart rate

Trembling and shaking

Choking or smothering sensations

Abdominal distress or nausea

Feeling faint

Fear of losing control or “going crazy”

Numbness or tingling

Sweating

Shortness of breath

Chest pain or discomfort

Dizziness light-headedness

Feelings of unreality or being detached from oneself

Fear of dying

Chills or hot flashes

If someone is experiencing these symptoms and you suspect a panic attack, ask the person if they know what’s happening or have previously had a panic attack. If they have had a panic attack before and believe that they are having one now, offer to assist them. Rather than make assumptions about what the person needs, ask them directly what they think might help. When you are helping someone you do not know, introduce yourself. ***The symptoms of a panic attack sometimes resemble a heart attack or other medical problem. If a person is unsure what is happening, assist them in getting medical attention.***

## **What to say and do if you know someone is having a panic attack.**

- Remain calm and do not start to panic yourself.
- Speak to the person in a reassuring, but firm manner.
- Speak slowly and clearly, and use short, simple sentences.
- Reassure the person that they are experiencing a panic attack.
- **DO NOT** belittle or dismiss the person’s experience.
- You may encourage the person to take **slow** deep breaths. This is often difficult for the person and it may help to breathe with them. Be patient.

Assure the person that although panic attacks feel very real and scary, they are not life threatening or dangerous. Reassure them that panic attacks are time limited, that the symptoms will pass, and that they will be okay.

## **After the panic attack has ended**

After the attack has subsided, encourage them to get information about panic attacks. Tell the person that if the panic attack recurs and is causing them distress, that there are very effective treatments available for panic attacks. Encourage them to explore treatment from a medical professional.