

Relationship Advice: When The Person You Love Suffers From An Anxiety Disorder



By Amy Osmond Cook for [Divorce Support Center](#)

This time of year is filled with holiday magic and festive gatherings with friends and family. But for many, the holidays ignite staggering levels of anxiety that paralyzes the sufferer with fear. Celebrities such as Emma Stone, Oprah Winfrey, and Jennifer Lawrence have been candid about their struggles with anxiety disorder while balancing public life. The road hasn't been easy. "The first time I had a panic attack, I was sitting at my friend's house, I thought the house was burning down," said Stone. "I called my mom, and she brought me home. For the next year, it just would not stop."

How can you create a feeling of normalcy with your partner when the circumstances are far from typical? “For the majority of our residents, the holiday season brings family together and cheerful memories of Christmases past. But for some, this time of year brings on higher levels of anxiety and depression,” said Mark Hymas, executive director of Copper Ridge Health Care. “We watch for changes in behavior and initiate conversations where we can talk about his or her feelings and find a solution that can best help during this stressful time of year.” If anxiety is a large part of your relationship, here are three pieces of [relationship advice](#) to understand when the person you love suffers from an anxiety disorder.

Relationship Advice For Those Who Know Anxiety Sufferers

1. Their anxiety disorder makes them tired. Some people view their role as they are the one worrying about their loved one’s anxiety and trying to find solutions while their partner sleeps and doesn’t seem to think about it. In reality, nothing could be further from the truth. “I still do get terribly nervous, and that’s partly due to the fact I think too much and over-analyze things,” said Amanda Seyfried. Anxiety sufferers think about their situation – a lot. “Anxiety is naturally tiring,” said Ryan Rivera, relationship expert and founder of CalmClinic.com. “Anxiety can essentially cause both low and high levels of fatigue, and leave you feeling incredibly drained.” Rivera added that tiredness is much easier to prevent than it is to stop. “That’s why you need to take steps to start controlling your anxiety better,” he said. “The less intense your anxiety is, the less tired you should feel.” This year, limit your attendance to gatherings that are meaningful or more intimate with close friends and family.

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2. They don't like being around their anxiety, either. Like most people, anxiety sufferers don't want to be defined by their anxiety disorder. "If you truly want to be supportive of someone with anxiety, remind them that you appreciate the individual behind the anxiety," said contributor Jake Mcspirit. "Recognize that they are more than just their anxiety." Anxiety sufferers understand that their behavior is irrational, and they feel frustrated by seeing their irrational responses. It doesn't help to point them out. "What they need is compassion, understanding, and support," said Mcspirit. "Very rarely do they need advice on how irrational and pointless is their anxiety."

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3. Partners can be part of the solution. Most partners are unsure of the best way they can offer support to their loved one. Although living with anxiety disorder can be overwhelming, The Anxiety and Depression Association of America encourages partners of those suffering from anxiety disorder to play an active role in treatment. "In one approach, a mental health professional enlists the partner as a co-therapist," said the ADAA experts. "With training, the partner can assist the patient with homework assigned by the therapist. This might involve accompanying the patient into anxiety-producing situations and providing encouragement to stay in the situation by using anxiety-reduction techniques." ADAA recommends setting specific goals that challenge the loved one to progress through different levels then be sure to note the progress.

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If someone you love suffers from anxiety disorder, ensure all is truly calm and bright this time of year by recognizing the physical toll these emotions create for your loved one. Take time to understand the frustration behind their responses, and appreciate your role in the solution. With support and encouragement, your partner will share in your joy during what can be considered one of the most cheerful times of year.

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