

How to Help – Panic attacks

These notes are taken from the course notes for ‘Understanding How to Help’. Click for further details of the [Understanding Yourself](#) courses.

What is a panic attack?

A panic attack can be a frightening experience and can come out of the blue. It is a rush of anxiety or apprehension and is often accompanied by physical symptoms. Those symptoms only serve to intensify the fear and can include hyperventilation, nausea, tingling fingers, sweating, palpitations, dizziness or ringing in your ears. It can be a brief passing attack or go on for up to 20 minutes.

What is going on?

Imagine you are in a room, and smoke starts coming through the floorboards. A panic attack is like anxiety coming up through the floorboards. The smoke tells you there is a fire in the basement. If you wait a while, the fire might go out and in fact, panic attacks usually pass within twenty minutes. But if the smoke comes up again and again, then you know the basement needs investigating. Panic attacks are a sign that all is not well in your introvert, whether Melancholic or Phlegmatic.

How to help

Ultimately, you will want to help the person deal with the root cause of panic attacks, but it is important that he knows what is happening and how to cope when they occur. Remind him that the physical symptoms are the result of anxiety. He isn’t having a heart attack; he isn’t going to die, although he might feel like it. His body has gone into ‘fight or flight’ mode, so it is trying to take in more oxygen, hence the shortness of breath. Hormones are released that cause his heart to beat faster and his muscles to tense up. Encourage him to breathe deeply and slowly if he experiences another panic attack and to remember what he has learnt and to slow himself down and be still.

If panic attacks are telling us that all is not well in the engine room, then we need to investigate. Many people are content to repress and ignore the warning signs, but they do so at their peril. Panic attacks are the warning lights telling us there is a malfunction that needs addressing.

If the person you are helping is prepared to look, introduce him to his introvert. It probably has never been properly understood or lived in. Again, bring to bear all that you have learnt about the Melancholic and the Phlegmatic so that you can bring him to a place of peace at the deepest level.