

Special Report



Terror Threats and Anxiety

As the department of Homeland Security has raised the Terror Alert level to level Orange and the nation seems poised on the brink of war, many on campus are feeling anxious. It's natural and normal to be feeling a high-level of anxiety in these uncertain times. Here are some thoughts on terror threats and anxiety.

Level Orange Terror Alert

Many are wondering what this means. After September 11th, the federal government, working through Homeland Security, created a five-level warning system to help Americans understand how likely a terrorist attack might be and to help public safety departments across the country to coordinate efforts. The Orange level is the second-highest level, which means that the federal government is specifically concerned about terror events. To learn more about this warning system you can visit www.DHS.gov.

Am I in Danger?

The increased level in the warning system does mean that the government is specifically concerned about acts of terrorism. The nature of terrorism is that terror groups can strike at any time in any place. The random nature of terrorism means that we can not say who is in specific danger at any time. This randomness is meant as a psychological weapon designed to generate fear among a large group of people. According to statistics, the likelihood that you will be the victim of terrorist act is really quite low.

Is Campus Safe?

Again, terrorism is random and therefore it is hard to say that any specific area is dangerous or safe. However, it is important for you to know that administrators on campus are being proactive and taking logical and sensible steps to ensure campus safety. You can help by being aware and cooperating with campus officials. Make sure you are familiar with any emergency procedures that your campus has in place. You can also help administrators by being aware of your surroundings and reporting anything that seems suspicious or out of the ordinary.

Campus officials are trained to respond to a wide variety of scenarios and situations. Letting a campus official know about something suspicious will ensure that the proper authorities will handle any situation.

Stress, Fear and Anxiety

It is very normal to feel nervous and anxious these days. In addition to your regular stresses (school, work, relationships, etc.) you are hearing about terror alerts and possible war. Anxiety, stress and fear are natural human reactions that help the body and mind prepare for extreme situations. Prolonged anxiety can have negative effects on a person. While today's headlines are frightening and disturbing, it's important that you try to keep things in perspective. Allow your anxiety to direct you into making good and safe choices but it's important to ensure that your anxiety does not overwhelm you.

When Anxiety Overwhelms You

Occasionally, people find that their anxiety overwhelms them. When someone feels overwhelmed by his or her anxiety it can lead to negative and destructive behaviors. Some signs that you are being overwhelmed include (but are not limited to):

- A change in sleeping patterns. Either being 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 is a dangerous behavior.
- Dramatic mood swings may also be an indicator of overwhelming anxiety.
- Change in eating behaviors. Like sleep, you might find yourself at one extreme or the other. Either eating nothing or very little or eating large amounts of food.
- Physical changes. If you find yourself sweating or you feel your heart racing you may be overwhelmed by anxiety. Sometimes when we feel overly anxious we feel ill and feel like we require

medical attention. If you are feeling "out of sorts" it's always a good idea to check with a health professional.

A good rule of thumb is that a significant change in your behavior 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 be reacting to your anxiety. This is a sign that you may need some help managing your anxieties.

Resources for Managing Your Anxiety

If you feel that anxiety is getting the best of you and having a negative effect on your well being, you should do something about it. Standard stress reduction techniques are always a good idea. These include eating well, exercising and getting plenty of good rest. In general, paying attention to your body and mind and responding to your needs. However, if you're experiencing significant behavioral changes it's also a good to talk with someone about how you're feeling. Most anxiety problems can be overcome with good discussions about the anxieties. Of course, talking to friends is a good idea, but it is also important that you talk with a campus professional. Campus professionals can direct you to the best resources on your campus to help you overcome your feelings of anxiety.

Looking out for Your 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 should take steps to help. Of course, talking with them is a good idea; perhaps you can even share this article with them. However, it's also a good idea to let a campus professional know about your friend. Campus professionals can help you decide what's in the best interest of your friend.

The most important thing to remember is that while stress, fear and anxiety are natural human reactions, managing these feelings is an important part of being a mature adult. And, if we find that we are not managing these feelings in positive ways, another important piece of being a mature adult is to seek out the necessary resources to help us manage our stress.