

Pandemic Panic Attacks©

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Pandemic Panic? What to do!

Suddenly you get that sick feeling in the pit of your stomach. Your adrenaline shoots up and you begin to sweat. Your palms get sweaty and your heart pounds like crazy. It's hard to breathe. You feel terribly afraid, anxious. Are you going crazy?

No!!! This is a normal reaction to something abnormal! We just have to figure to what....

My daughter Kath lived under terrorism for 12 years in a very dangerous country. She coped quite well until she came home, then began to have terrifying experiences. She didn't know what to call the sudden rush of adrenaline from fear! She phoned me in tears one day for help.

We started by talking through the process. This panic happened several times, and she said, "Mom, as soon as this starts, I forget what you told me to do last time!" So, I wrote the steps on a 3x5 card for her to keep in her purse. Now, I've made a card for you to download from the website.

Ten steps you can do wherever you are when you feel that ferocious panic attack you.

1. Name it! Say, "Oh, I am having a panic attack. It will last about five minutes."
2. Take a deep breath. Take more deep breaths to calm yourself.
3. Say to yourself, "I can get through this! Something made me afraid, but I am safe now. I was not safe then, but I am safe now! I feel terrible, but I am not in danger."
4. Tell someone who is with you. Ask, "Can you help me? I'm having a panic attack and I just need you for a minute. Would you walk out with me or hold my hand?"
(If you are in a group this is especially important. It is reassuring that someone knows. You need not feel embarrassed as others have such attacks too.)
5. Breathe a prayer. "Thank you, Lord, that I am not alone. You are with me and I am safe in your presence."
6. Identify the trigger, often a LIE about your safety, perhaps triggered by a sight or sound, or a prior experience of danger, or even an imagined one!
7. Take the thought "captive to Jesus." Imagine a cowboy tossing a lariat around a bull to pull it to the ground. Lasso the thought. Take it to the feet of Jesus and leave it with Him (II Cor. 10:5).
8. Keep breathing deeply; breathe in prayer and breathe out thanks that you are safe.
9. Say "thank you" to the person who helped you. Tell them about it if you wish.
10. Do something physical, such as take a vigorous walk, or even rip up newspapers, to use up the adrenaline coursing in your body. It may take 20 to 30 minutes to subside.

Literally, this panic attack will last about five minutes and then a bit longer to burn up the adrenaline. You can manage it! If you panic further, and breathe too fast, with shallow breaths, you make it last longer and you get more scared, because carbon dioxide builds up and you feel dizzy or experience needle-point sensations, such as when you bump your elbow. If that happens, breathe slowing into a paper bag until your breathing gets back to normal. (Many Latinos call this feeling “susto” (fright!). It grows more frightening with shallow breathing, but it can be easily reversed.). Sometimes, when you feel panic you might believe you will do something dangerous, like jump out the window. That is just a passing thought that suggests action pumping from the adrenaline. You can tell yourself that is just a passing thought, not a real action to take.

Sometimes you may fight the feeling of doom. “I feel doomed! I just have this sudden sense that I'm going to die, and I have no power to resist it.” “I feel crazy; I'm out of control; I don't know what's happening to me.” Sometimes our attack is like another voice speaking to us, rather than just our own voice.

As it turned out, Kath had developed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) due to the perpetually dangerous environment and certain experiences, such as being robbed at gunpoint by a man claiming to be a terrorist. Gradually her panic attacks lessened as she worked through all that.

With the pandemic, many people are experiencing panic—the sudden “what if’s??!!” and “Oh! No!” related to the uncertainty of infection, or death, or food, or future jobs and careers. It’s crucial to ground yourself in reality, to CHOOSE to think of what is actual, not to dwell on the fears of what might be. Most things worried over never happen. When you feel the panic, look around you and ground yourself in the present reality. You are here and now, and safe! Use your thought energy for positive “what can be’s” and for working to solve the issues causing you concern.

When you are faced with a very real dilemma, such as no food or rent money, resolve to contact social service agencies or charities, churches, food banks, or a neighbor, for help. Resolve reduces anxiety while you put your energy into productive efforts to solve problems. Get up and make that call! Most people would love to help you!

Spiritual attacks too:

After I gave this protocol to Kath, I realized that many of my counselees, who come from all over the world and live and work in some very dark places, feel panic for a different reason. Spiritual attacks feel the same as panic attacks, but they come from an outside, spiritual force and source.

Moral panic attacks too: Any one of us can face a sudden, fierce temptation that feels like a panic attack, related to a moral choice. The military began recognizing “moral injury” as a major outcome of what was first thought to be simply PTSD. It happens when we either witness or participate in something morally repugnant, such as watching someone be killed. Our spirits and

emotions rebel and our stomachs wrench or churn, yet we can have the sudden terror that we might be capable of such an act ourselves! “Oh, my God!” we say or pray, “Would I do something like that?” So, in extreme temptation or oppression we can use this same process to recover. I faced a horrifying example of this as a very young mother. My physician husband was working about 100 hours a week. I feared he would die. I was exhausted and isolated, and then got sick. On television the news showed a young mother with post-partum depression who out of desperation drowned her children in the bathtub. I was undone. I wept for three days! “Oh, my God,” truly I prayed, “Why am I crying like this?!” He said, “Lois, you are fearing that you could even feel so desperate you could do that too.” It was terrifying and the most dreadful self-talk of my life. The astounding end to that horrifying episode was when it seemed the Lord put His arms around me and said, “Lois, Lois, you are horrified. But I have always known you. I know your thoughts. I am with you. I know you will not do that!”

You can read more about this process on our website, under the radio scripts. Below is one transcription, included here for your convenience. If you wish to have a free paper on how this same process helps you to resist temptation and spiritual attacks, please contact Dr. Dodds through our website.

Panic Attacks - Part 1 (Transcript slightly revised from the radio script.)

I want to share some thoughts today on how you can behave, or what you can do, when you experience a panic attack, or when you have some kind of spiritual attack, or maybe even an attack of conscience, because the process is the same. I talk to a lot of people who work abroad and when you work under high stress environments - especially where there's war or terrorism or frequent crime – it's very easy to get into a state of mind where you don't feel safe and you feel much pressured.

My own daughter, Kathryn, worked in a country where terrorism was very strong during the 12 years that she was there. She did OK when she was there because she could compensate, but when she came back to the States, she started having panic attacks, and of course at first, she didn't know what to call them. But she telephoned one day and said, ‘Mom, I just don't know what's happening. My heart starts racing; my hands get sweaty; I'm shaking all over; I feel nauseated. I just feel terrified, but I don't know why. I don't know what this is about.’

And so, we began to talk about her experiences in Peru. She was actually having a delayed reaction to many of the situations of danger that she had been in when she lived overseas. For instance, she had been robbed at gunpoint by a man who said he was one of the terrorists and that he had people watching her. When she finally walked away from him, he said, ‘Don't look back, because I have 8 people watching you. So, you go straight down the street and don't stop and don't talk to anyone.’ She actually ran past several groups of friends in her neighborhood and she didn't let on that anything was wrong. She just ran, pushing the baby stroller with her little boy in it.

That was one of many experiences. She coped while she had to, while the pressure was still on, but afterwards, it was as if all that delayed reaction began to come out in panic attacks. She said, ‘Mom, what can I do? What am I going to do when these things happen?’ So, one day I wrote down for her the steps to go through that would help her to deal with these panic attacks, because they were so

frightening. If they happened when she was in a social setting, she especially felt very embarrassed because she didn't know how to explain what was happening. Here's what I suggested, and it's turned out to be helpful to other people besides my daughter.

1) The first thing we have to do when we experience an attack, whether it's panic or something else, is to say, 'What am I feeling?'

We might name that feeling and say, 'I feel terrified that I might just jump out the window right now. I feel panic.' I might feel accused. I might feel as if Satan or someone is saying to me, 'You are an awful person. You have sinned and God will never forgive you. You can't help other people.' Or I might have to name the feeling of doom. 'I feel doomed - I just have this sudden sense that I'm going to die, and I have no power to resist it.' Sometimes we need to name what we feel, and sometimes, we'll call it crazy. 'I feel crazy; I'm out of control; I don't know what's happening to me.'

Sometimes our attack is like another voice speaking to us, rather than just our own voice. It may say, 'You know, you're not a child of God. You're just a wicked person and you could never be good enough for God.' We know that such lies come from God's own enemy, who is called the "father of lies."

2) After we name what we feel, we need to recognize the lie that's inherent in what we're thinking, and we have to quickly act to put it in truth.

With Kathryn, I could ask her to say, 'I am not in that country anymore; I'm right here in Albuquerque, and I am safe.' So, she had to identify the lie that was causing her feeling of insecurity, of being in danger. For instance, one day, she just saw the figure of a man on a billboard. The billboard was dark and so she just saw the profile of a man with a gun. She hit the floor in the car - fortunately, she was the passenger and not the driver - but she had to say to herself, 'Wait a minute, that's not a terrorist. I'm in Albuquerque and that's just a billboard.' She had to identify the lie that created that feeling of panic. We have to identify the lie if Satan or our conscience is saying, 'You're a bad person.' And we have to say, 'No. Wait a minute. Whatever I've done, I'm not a bad person. God has forgiven me, and he will forgive me.' The lie and temptation are to think that we're helpless, that we can't do anything about it or take control. We need to speak the truth to ourselves and say, 'I don't have to give in to sin. God has given me his spirit, so I can always resist sin or temptation.' If it's a spiritual attack we can resist the lie by saying, 'I don't have to be afraid. God has given me the spirit of love and power and a sound mind. I'm not going crazy. I'm just having a panic attack or some spiritual attack.'

3) I like to visualize the third step, which is that we take that thought captive to Jesus.

Because I'm a very imaginative person I like to visualize things. When I was a child and I played with my big brothers they would sometimes let me play cops and robbers. If I was really lucky, they would let me be the calf and one time they lassoed me. (My mother was not happy with that, because I got a rope burn around my neck!) But I imagine sending out a lasso and capturing the lying thought and winding it up in the rope like the cowboys did, then bringing it to Jesus and laying it at his feet. I can say to Jesus, 'Please take this thought or feeling. I'm giving it to you; it's not worth me thinking about. I'm rejecting this thought as unfit for your child.' I want to encourage you to memorize the scripture which speaks of God's power, because Jesus gave you and me power to bind up things on earth that he would bind in

heaven. Is it fear? Bind it up, wrap it in the lasso and take it to Jesus. It's not fit for you. Is it panic, the sudden feeling that you're in danger? Remind yourself that you are safe in God's keeping; wind up that rope and take that thought to Jesus and lay it at his feet.

4) The fourth step is that you can calm yourself whenever you're afraid.

Physically, you can take these steps: stop, breathe slowly, take a long deep breath. If you've ever given birth, you know what that's like. You can take a cleansing breath and as you breathe in, imagine that you are breathing in God's spirit and his power. As you breathe out, imagine that you are breathing out his peace. Pray that God will calm you like a baby is stilled and quieted on its mother's breast or its father's chest.

Breathe in God's love; breathe out his peace; feel his presence. Then bring to your memory passages of scripture that reassure you about the situation which you're afraid of. For example, the scripture says, 'When I am afraid, I will trust in you.' It doesn't say we will never be afraid, but it says, 'When I am afraid, I will trust in you'. My favorite one in our Jungle Camp days was, 'I sought the Lord and he heard me and delivered me from all my fears.' This was very real to me because I was afraid of the snakes, I was afraid of drowning, I was afraid of all kinds of things, but I wrote them all down and I put them before the Lord and he delivered me from all my fears. So, I did almost drown, but I didn't die. I did step on a coral snake, but I didn't die, and God delivered me from the fears. Or another passage, 'When you pass through the waters, or the river, or the fire, I will be with you.' Then thank God out loud for his presence, his power, his protection; thank him for his purpose in your life, even though right now you've been feeling afraid, or guilty or tempted.

Now, next time we can talk about another step that you can take in this process to help you overcome the panic attack or the spiritual attack.

Below is the transcript of Part 2 of the radio script.

Panic Attacks - Part 1 (slightly revised from the radio script)

I talked last time about what to do when you feel a panic attack, or perhaps a spiritual attack, or even an attack of guilt. If you live in a dangerous environment, especially a place where there's war or terrorism or a lot of crime, you may experience this kind of thing periodically. It's worse than just regular anxiety because you can really feel panic rise in your body - you can feel the physical symptoms of it. Maybe your hands get sweaty, you feel nauseated, your heart's beating fast, you get hot, you sweat, and you suddenly feel endangered. Here are some additional steps that you can take besides the ones we talked about last time.

If you can be with another person at that time, and trust them, tell the person that you need their attention or help for a few minutes. Or, if you'll do better alone, ask to be excused. Tell the person what you're experiencing and ask for their prayers. It might seem really embarrassing if this happens in a social gathering, or at a time you don't expect it, but if you can take a little break, explain what's happening, and ask for prayer, that can be very helpful. You might want to also step outside or to a safe place and collect yourself. Ask God to show you what's happening, tune in to your body. Practice those

physical ways to calm yourself we talked about last time and then deliberately 'put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand.' Realize that this moment of confusion, or oppression, is not the way you usually live. *It's a momentary thing and it will pass.* Remind yourself that you are safe - especially if it seems like a spiritual attack - say the name of Jesus out loud; claim the victory that he bought for you over our enemy Satan, when Jesus died on the cross for you. The amazing thing to me is that even friends I've had in other countries who were not Christians have known the power and the reality of spiritual attacks. They've described things like, 'Something is crushing the life out of me, squeezing my chest,' and instinctively they've called out to God, even though they didn't really understand what was happening.

God has given you authority to reject and to refuse any lie and any power that is not from Him. Again, remember the scripture that says, 'God has not given me - or you - the spirit of fear', so if I'm experiencing fear, that's not from God. 'He's given me the power of love and a sound mind.' I'm not going crazy; this is how I feel right now, but I'm not going crazy - this is a temporary feeling. Call on the name of Jesus and ask Him to cast off any demonic power. Ask Him to put His hedge of protection around you and to surround you with His peace. In such a situation it's actually helpful to speak out loud, and if someone else is there you can ask that person to join you in prayer as a powerful weapon.

Now let's suppose that this is not a spiritual attack but what we might call a normal human panic attack. The same thing works, because what you need is to calm yourself, reassure yourself that this is only temporary; it's a flash-back to some other previous situation, but now you're safe. Whenever this temptation or fear or guilt or oppression hits you, stop right there and thank God for His presence, because, 'In Him we live and move and breathe and have our being,' so you're in Him right now, even in this moment of panic. His power is protecting you and He gives you power. Ask Him to give you insight about what's triggered this thought or fear or temptation.

When my daughter saw that billboard with a figure of a man with a gun, her reaction was a flashback to the many times in that country where she saw people carrying guns for real, and saw them treat others in horrible ways. Another lady I talked to had worked in a country where people got bombed and she told me of her experience of talking with friends and they were blasted right out from under her. What's going to happen to her when she hears a blast or a bomb or a car backfire? Well, her brain is going to take her right back to that experience and create a panic attack. We could call that a post-traumatic stress response. But there's a way out; she can receive healing for that: she could learn that the trigger for those past experiences is the same sounds or the same smells. Anything that reminds us of something hurtful from the past can trigger us into that panic state.

Another helpful strategy is to keep a journal each time you experience this, to say, 'Oh, I notice I'm having these panic attacks, or this particular attack, whenever I sit down to read scripture, or when I enter a room or when I'm around a tall person.' I keep a record of these, and I begin to get insight into what triggers my attacks. I can talk to someone else, like a counselor or a good friend whom I trust. And if I review this periodically, I'm going to gain insight into what happened in the past that caused me to feel terror or fear now.

Another important step is to practice praising God, that He is able to keep you from falling. Isn't that a wonderful reassurance? We feel like we're going to fall, but when we stumble, He holds us and we don't fall headlong. So, God will continue to sustain you. When you call out to Him, He keeps you from falling, whether it's falling into depression, or terror or the clutches of our enemy.

Here's a sample prayer that you might pray in that instant response when this panic hits you:

'Jesus, save me from this work of the enemy; your Name has power over all evil. I'm not obligated to any evil, not to lies or to live in fear. You are the Victor because you shed your blood on the cross for me. Lord Jesus, take this thought, or feeling or fear - whatever it is - I'm giving it to you. I'm tying it up in rope like a lasso and I'm laying it before you. It's not fit for me as a child of God. I refuse to believe this lie. I reject the works of the devil, fear. I resist the enemy in your name, Lord Jesus. I ask you to bind this evil, since with your death and your blood you put to flight all the powers of evil. You are the Victor over death, sin, deceit, lies, fear. Lord Jesus, through your Word and through your blood, I'm taking victory over this. Lord, you have given us, your children, power over evil. You gave me power to bind up evil – so I bind this up and I give it to you. Please send this lie back to Hell, along with Satan and his demons. When you speak, Lord Jesus, all the powers of Heaven and Earth listen, and all the demons shake and quake. Thank you for your power, Lord Jesus, because it's here for me now.'

As I'm sharing these ideas on what to do when you have a panic attack, perhaps you want to take a pencil and paper and jot these ideas down. Even if you don't need them right now, there may be a time later when you will need them, or perhaps someone that you know could benefit by what you share.

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