



Navigating Uncertainty & Change

As we enter the fall of 2021, the landscape is unsettled. With the rise in variants and swift increase in cases, it makes sense from a mind/body and a nervous system perspective that we might be feeling lots of different things, such as worry, fear, and anxiety as our nervous systems senses threat.

Anxiety is a normal reaction to stressful situations, especially ones that involve safety and health. This emotion is beneficial to us, since it helps us think of all the ways to protect ourselves and those we care about. If we completely block anxiety out, we don't get the message it is trying to send us.

Since the pandemic has started, we've adapted to a life marked by hypervigilance and restriction. Shifting guidelines were and are an information overload: tiring at best, maddeningly confusing at worst. Although it is important to listen to when anxiety arises, we also don't want it to be driving or controlling us.

One way to navigate anxiety is called **Acknowledge-Validate-Permit (AVP)**.

- **Acknowledge** by noticing a feeling
- **Validate** by telling yourself why the feeling makes sense
- Give yourself **Permission** to be having that feeling
- Then think through what you might be needing in that moment.

For example, think to yourself: "I'm noticing I'm feeling pretty tense as I come into work today. That makes sense, after all, I haven't done this in a while and the world has changed a ton since March 2020! I'm allowed to feel nervous as I make this transition. I think it'd help me to connect with a co-worker before we get to the office or to think about what might be calming to have in my office now that I'll be back on campus." AVPs are a critical strategy in coping with anxiety and change.

Consider the following equation:

Anxiety = uncertainty + our underestimation to cope

We manage anxiety—not from the uncertainty side of the equation, but from the coping side. One way to think of coping is as slowing down to listen to what we might be needing: to feel, to comfort, to connect, to act or to distract.



Here's a few tiny tools that may help bring regulation and settle your nervous system:

- Breathing exercise: 4-7-8 breathe. Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold the breath for 7 seconds, and exhale for 8 seconds.
- Comfort: for example an Epsom salt bath or a smell that is calming and grounding
- Self-compassion: permission to move slowly, take breaks, rest. Coming back together is more of a thaw than an on/off switch. It is a recalibration.
- Physical activity like walking or riding a bike to help our nervous system metabolize stress hormones.
- Remembering that we can do hard things: honor what things have helped you thus far in the pandemic.
- Connection: resilience is built in community. Our nervous systems long for a felt sense of safety and connection.

If you find that you would like help in managing your anxiety, you can schedule with one of the counselors at the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). You can make an appointment by emailing eap@austin.utexas.edu or calling 512-471-3366.