

Crowds!

How to Manage Anxiety about Crowds



Image Source: [Download Free Cliparts only - ClipGround](#)

Contents

What is Crowd Anxiety?	3
Understanding My Crowd Anxiety.....	4
How Does My Body Respond to Anxiety?.....	5
Sensory Experiences in a Crowd	8
Social Behaviours and Crowds	9
Are There Times When Crowds Haven't Been So Bad?	10
Let's Take a Look at Some Crowds.....	11
What Strategies Have I Used To Control My Anxiety?.....	12
What New Strategies Can I Use?	13
How Will I Know When Things Are Better?	16

What is Crowd Anxiety?

Crowd anxiety is actually quite common, so don't worry you are not alone!

Crowd anxiety happens when a person feels a high level of perceived danger about large gatherings of people.

Some common worries people have about crowds are:

- **Getting stuck in a crowd.** Sometimes people worry that they won't be able to get out of a crowd to a place of safety. They fear they may be trapped and not be able find a way to exit the crowd.
- **Getting lost in the crowd.** People may worry that they will lose their friends or family, or not be able to find their way to where they would like to go, for example, the toilet.
- **Being harmed in some way.** Concerns about becoming physically hurt in a crowd are also common. Sometimes people fear they may be squashed, stepped or trampled on leading to injury.
- **Becoming ill.** Many people worry about becoming infected with an illness or disease if it spreads through a crowd. Since the pandemic, this has become a much more common worry for very good reason. It is still the case that people with weak immune systems should take care in crowded places.

Many people don't like the sensations associated with crowds. For example, people might worry about:

- People touching or bumping into them
- Noise levels
- Smells

The way we live, however, (unless you live in a rural area and don't travel often) means it is very difficult to avoid crowds. There are crowds virtually everywhere we go – in shops, at cinemas, at school, in workplaces, at organised activities and on public transport.

If we avoided every situation with a crowd we would start to miss out on many positive experiences.

Another issue with crowds is that they can be unpredictable! Train stations might be extra busy on some days, or a crowd may gather to listen to a musician or magician on the street.

Understanding My Crowd Anxiety

Now it's time to find out about your experience of crowds and the anxiety you feel. Take your time to think about the questions below and answer them as honestly as you can!

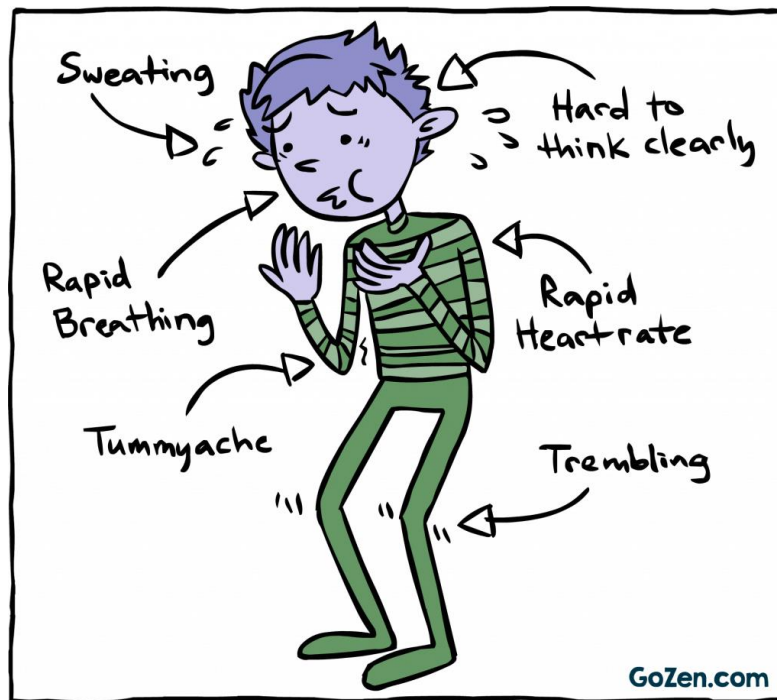
1. **What is it that *you* don't like about crowds? What causes you anxiety about crowds?** Are any of the points on the previous page about crowd anxiety similar to your experience? For example, illness, noise, smells, not being able to get out of the crowd. Are there other reasons for you? Feeling out of control, not understanding the crowd's behaviour?

2. **What types of crowd situations cause you to have these worries?** We might worry about some types of crowds more than others. Which crowds are most worrying for you?

How Does My Body Respond to Anxiety?

Did you know that anxiety is not all in our heads? Anxiety also has a big impact on our bodies.

It is very important to understand how anxiety affects our body. This can help us recognise when we are beginning to feel anxious and learn strategies to help reduce our anxious feelings.



We all feel anxiety in different ways. For example:

- Ellen has wobbly knees and a dizzy head when she is anxious.
- Corrie's heart starts to beat quickly and their mouth becomes very dry.
- Ayan experiences tense muscles, usually his shoulders and legs.

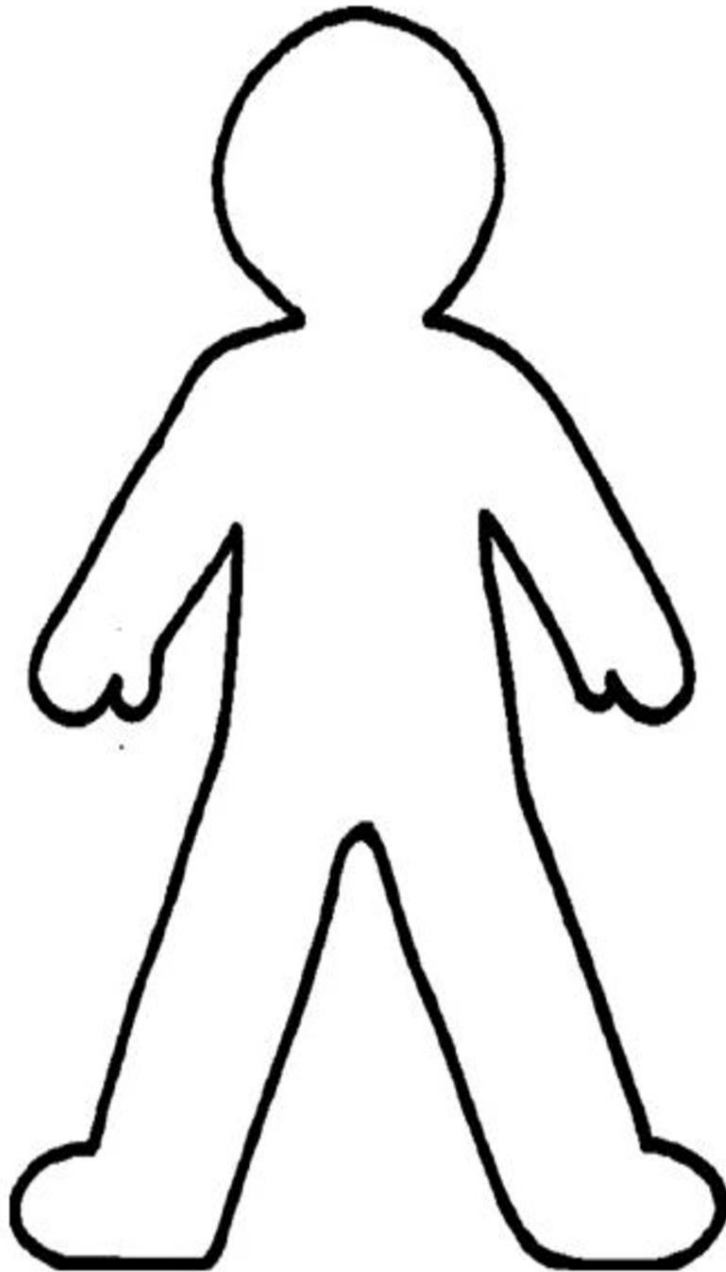
We might even experience anxiety differently in different situations.

Question! When you are in a crowd, how does your body respond to anxiety?

You can use the table below to tick how you feel and add in your own experiences too if you experience something different!

Body Signs of Anxiety			
Breathing is faster		Headache	
Heart is racing		Vision changes (blurs?)	
Shoulders tense		Needing to go to the toilet	
Stomach tenses		Fidgety or restless	
Dizziness / light headed		Frozen to the spot	
Feeling sick / upset stomach		Laughing	
Dry mouth or throat		Crying	
Feeling hot		Tingling parts of the body	
Red face		Sweating	
Tiredness		Sweaty palms	
Difficulty thinking clearly			

If you'd like to, you can mark or write on the body below to show where you feel stress in your body.



Sensory Experiences in a Crowd

Crowds can often be overwhelming for our senses and this can be a huge contributor to our anxiety! Crowds can be busy, noisy and unpredictable environments.

Make some brief notes in the box below about your experience of crowds!

1. How do you experience crowds (from a sensory perspective)?

Noise:

Smell:

Movement:

Sight:

Touch:

Anything else?

Social Behaviours and Crowds

Crowds might also be challenging because they are unpredictable and we might not always know what behaviour to expect from people in a crowd. One minute the crowd might be calm, the next people might be laughing, and a short while later some people may be running around. This can make it difficult for us to make decisions about how to behave when we are in or near a crowd.

1. **What are your thoughts and experiences of people's behaviour in crowds?** How do they make you feel?

2. **Have you had any negative experiences with crowds in the past?**

Are There Times When Crowds Haven't Been So Bad?

Sometimes when we are worried about a situation, such as crowds, we tend to think of the worst case scenario. We need to remind ourselves of times when we have managed to cope and when it hasn't been so bad.

1. **Are there any times you can remember when a crowd hasn't worried you as much as usual, or maybe not at all?** What made it easier?

2. **Are there any crowds that you can tolerate better?** For example, shopping malls, busy restaurants, public transport, parks, swimming pools? Why do you think this is?

Let's Take a Look at Some Crowds

Now we will spend a little bit of time having a look at images and video clips of crowds. This can be helpful to think through what aspects of a crowd we might have most difficulty with.

You can use the table below to take notes about what you notice. For example, which crowds are manageable and why? Which crowds are more problematic and why?

My Notes

What Strategies Have I Used To Control My Anxiety?

Learning how to manage anxiety of crowds or busy areas can help us to access positive experiences and activities, and also to access services such as healthcare.

Avoiding crowds can also be very difficult, therefore, it is helpful to learn how to manage them even if you aim to limit how much time you spend near or in a crowd.

Question! It is very likely that you have been in many situations where there have been crowds. **What did you or others do to try to help you cope with these crowds?** We might have spoken about some of these strategies already.

Let's note these strategies down in the table below and rate how effective you thought they were.



1

Very Unhelpful



2

Unhelpful



3

No effect



4

Helpful



5

Very helpful

Strategy	Rating

What New Strategies Can I Use?

There are many different strategies that you might try using. Some of them will suit you and some of them you might not like the sound of at the moment.

Depending on the type of crowd situation there might be a few things you can do before you find yourself in the crowd.

Before you go into a crowd ...

Can you Visit the Venue Beforehand?

Visiting the venue beforehand can help you understand the layout and may offer some reassurance about exits and entrances, and who can help. If you can't visit beforehand you might be able to phone ahead to ask questions or watch on-line videos.

Plan alternative routes, exits and strategies if a crowd becomes too much

To manage your anxiety, make sure that you know of alternative routes if you do feel that your anxiety is escalating in the presence of a crowd. Could you go into a nearby classroom until the crowd has passed?

Imagine Yourself in the Crowd

Being able to imagine yourself confidently managing a crowded situation can help. When you're imagining yourself, you can try out different behaviours and strategies to see how they will work for you.

It won't go exactly as you imagine in your head but it may help a little.

Talk to a Trusted Friend or Adult

Talk to someone about how you are feeling. They will hopefully listen to you and understand your fears. They may also be able to provide some suggestions about how you might manage.

You can also talk to someone after you have been in a crowd too!

Strategies that can help when you are in the crowd ...

Reducing Sensory Information

Too much noise and visual stimulation can make crowds unmanageable.

Sun glasses can help reduce visual stimulation.

Ear plugs, noise cancelling headphones or listening to music can help to reduce the impact of noise.

Breathing

Breathing is one of the most effective ways to reduce anxiety in the short term. This is because it slows our heart rate down which reduces our anxiety.

The trick to breathing is to breathe out longer than you breathe in. For example, can you breathe in to the count of three, and then breathe out to the count of five. You can build up to breathing in for five counts and out for seven.

There are other types of breathing such as star breathing, square breathing and balloon breathing which you might prefer.

Distraction

Try to place your attention on something other than the crowd. It might be that you focus on a part of your clothing or the ground in front of your feet. You might want to focus your thoughts on something you enjoy, such as, a puzzle you were solving or a book you've been reading.

Five things to see, four things to hear is a good strategy for distraction and calming too. Here is a short video about how to use the technique:

<https://youtu.be/30VMIEmA114>

Remember not to be so focused on these distractions that you don't notice danger.

Challenge Your Own Thoughts

You can change your way of thinking. For example:

Instead of thinking: *I am sure something terrible is going to happen to me in this crowd.*

Try thinking: *I have managed to walk in this area many times before without anything bad happening to me.*

Positive Affirmations

Many people find a combination of deep breathing whilst saying a positive affirmation silently to themselves can be helpful. These are some examples that you might find helpful below. This could also be useful as a method of distraction.

- I am at peace.
- I am calm.
- I believe in myself.
- I am well.

A Healthy Lifestyle

Always remember that a healthy lifestyle is key to reducing anxiety. Getting enough sleep makes sure that we regulate the amount of the stress hormone, cortisol, in our bodies.

Exercising produces positive hormones that help us feel better.

Fruit and vegetables give us the energy and vitamins we need to function well on a day to day basis.

Which Strategies Will I Try?	What will this look like for me?

How Will I Know When Things Are Better?

Now that you have learnt some strategies and will try out different methods to see what strategies work for you, the next step is to think about what you would like to achieve.

What goals should you aim for?

When setting goals for ourselves we must make sure they are realistic and achievable, otherwise we may feel demotivated and not notice any progress that is being made. For example, a goal of 'going to a concert with 50, 000 people in the next four months' is unlikely to be realistic for someone who finds crowds at shopping malls difficult to manage.

Once you have achieved a goal, you can set another, more challenging goal. Also, if you do find that you have set a goal that is too challenging, then change it to something more manageable.

In the table below, the first example goal is about making sure to be confident in using the strategies you have learned so that you feel better equipped to deal with crowd situations. There is space for you to add your own goals

Goal	How will I know I have achieved this?
I will feel more confident talking about and using strategies that make me feel calm.	I will use breathing strategies and feel that my heart rate is slower.

You can discuss your goals and progress with trusted adults. They can help you decide on goals and when you have achieved them.

Remember to be proud of yourself for all the steps you are taking to address your anxieties! Change often occurs slowly with small steps!