

# **Panic Attacks vs. Anxiety**

**Grades 8-12**

**Physical and Health Education, Language Arts,  
Arts Education & Career Education**

## **Purpose of the Lesson**

Students may find it difficult to understand how panic attacks and anxiety differ. Overall, anxiety means to feel worried, nervous or fearful ([Kelty Mental Health](#)).

We all feel anxious from time to time and some anxiety can be helpful. For example, feeling anxious before a quiz helps us to prepare more and study.

Anxiety disorders are one of the most common mental health challenges experienced in children/youth. There are several types of anxiety disorders and panic disorder is one of them (there is also separation anxiety, generalized anxiety, social anxiety, and specific phobias). Panic attacks are relatively short, intense feelings of anxiety or dread that are combined with multiple physical symptoms (dizziness, racing heart, shortness of breath, shaking, and nausea). They often trigger catastrophic thinking such as "I am going crazy" or "I am going to die." A key component of panic disorder is a fear of future unexpected panic attacks. The purpose of this lesson is to explain to youth/teens what anxiety & panic attacks are and how to recognize the differences.

## Curriculum Competencies:

### Physical and Health Education

- ◇ Create strategies for promoting the health and well-being of the school and community (Grade 8)
- ◇ Describe and assess strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use, for others (Grade 8/9)
  - Identify signs and symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression (Grade 8/9/10)
- ◇ Explore and describe the impact of transition and change on identities (Grade 8)
- ◇ Explore and describe factors that shape personal identities, including social and cultural factors (Grade 9/10)

*After Grade 10, Physical and Health Education becomes an elective and is divided into more specific course. However, this lesson plan can still be used in Grades 11/12.*

### Language Arts

- ◇ Use writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create engaging and meaningful literary and informational texts for a variety of purposes and audiences (Grade 8/9)

### Arts Education

- ◇ Take creative risks to express/experience feelings, ideas, and experiences (Grade 8/9)

*After Grade 9, Arts Education is divided into more specific arts course. This lesson plan can still be used for Art Studio 10/11/12.*

### Career Education

- ◇ Recognize the impact of personal public identity in the world of work (Grade 8/9)

## **First Peoples Principles of Learning:**

- ◇ Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors
- ◇ Learning requires the exploration of one's identity

## **Video**

### **5 Differences Between Anxiety and Panic**

#### **Guiding Questions:**

- ◇ What are some examples of situations where anxiety might occur?
- ◇ How common are anxiety disorders?
- ◇ What is generalized anxiety disorder?
- ◇ How common is panic disorder?
- ◇ What is panic disorder?
- ◇ What is the first difference between anxiety and panic?
- ◇ What is the second difference between anxiety and panic?
- ◇ When do panic attacks generally occur? What about anxiety?
- ◇ What is the third difference between anxiety and panic?
- ◇ What are some symptoms of panic disorder?
- ◇ What is the fourth difference between anxiety and panic?
- ◇ What is the fifth difference between anxiety and panic?
- ◇ What is derealization? What is depersonalization?

## Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

1. Begin the lesson by watching the video “5 Differences Between Anxiety and Panic”. This can be found [HERE](#). This awesome animation clearly explains the difference between anxiety and panic in a fun way!
2. **Pause the video and use the teacher guiding questions to spark discussion.**
3. Next, display the comic “Panic Attacks and Anxiety” on the projector. This can be found [HERE](#). **Allow the students to predict what will happen next before flipping the pages.**
3. **Discuss the curricular objectives for this lesson with your class.** Share how recognizing the signs and symptoms of anxiety and panic will be helpful in having empathy for friends, peers, and people in the community experiencing these symptoms.
4. **Follow-up activity: Create your own Comic!**  
Divide students into groups of 2 and use the “Think, Pair, Share” discussion strategy to brainstorm what situations might be appropriate for a comic to show the differences between panic attacks and anxiety. Enlarge the below comic strip template for students to use to create their comics.
5. **Lesson closure:** When the project is finished display or have students share their comics with the class and what they learned about anxiety disorders. Allow students time to explore the mental health education section of the mental health toolkit for more information and resources.

