

LEVELS OF ANXIETY

Mild	Moderate	Severe	Panic
PERCEPTUAL FIELD			
May have heightened perceptual field	Has narrow perceptual field; grasps less of what is occurring	Has greatly reduced perceptual field	Unable to focus on the environment
Is alert and can see, hear and grasp what is happening in the environment	Can attend to more <i>if pointed out by another</i> (selective inattention)	Focuses on details or one specific detail Attention is scattered	Experiences the utmost state of terror and emotional paralysis; feels he or she “ceases to exist”
Can identify issues that are disturbing and are producing anxiety		Completely absorbed with self	In panic, may have hallucinations or delusions that take the place of reality
		May not be able to attend to events in the environment <i>even when pointed out by others</i>	
In severe to panic levels of anxiety, the environment is blocked out. It is as if these events are not occurring			
ABILITY TO LEARN			
Able to work effectively toward a goal and examine alternatives	Able to solve problems but not at optimal ability	Unable to see connections between events or details	May be mute or have extreme psychomotor agitation leading to exhaustion
	Benefits from guidance of others	Has distorted perceptions	Shows disorganized or irrational reasoning
Mild and moderate levels of anxiety can alert the person that something is wrong and can stimulate appropriate action		Severe and panic levels prevent problem solving and discovery of effective solutions. Unproductive relief behaviors are called into play, thus perpetuating a vicious cycle.	
PHYSICAL OR OTHER CHARACTERISTICS			
Slight discomfort	Voice tremors	Feelings of dread	Experience of terror
Attention seeking behaviors	Change in voice pitch	Ineffective functioning	Immobility or severe hyperactivity or flight
Restlessness	Difficulty concentrating	Confusion	Dilated pupils
Irritability or impatience	Shakiness	Purposeless activity	Unintelligible communication or inability to speak
Mild tension-relieving behavior; foot or finger tapping, lip chewing, fidgeting	Repetitive questioning	Sense of impending doom	Severe shakiness
	Somatic complaints, (e.g., urinary frequency and urgency, headache, backache, insomnia)	More intense somatic complaints (e.g., dizziness, nausea, headache, sleeplessness)	Sleeplessness
	Increased pulse and respiratory rate	Hyperventilation	Severe withdrawal
	Increased muscle tension	Tachycardia	Hallucinations or delusions likely out of touch with reality
	More extreme tension-relieving behavior; pacing, banging hands on table	Withdrawal Loud and rapid speech Threats and demands	Likely out of touch with reality
Reference: Varcarolis, E.M. (2017). Essentials of psychiatric mental health nursing: A communication approach to evidence-based care (3 rd ed.). St. Louis, MO: Saunders Elsevier.			