



Three Ps for Coping with Anxiety in the Moment

Intro- Sometimes things come up suddenly or unexpectedly in life that can be very stressful which can produce a lot of anxiety. This exercise is about coping skills for getting through these anxious moments using the Three P's:

1. **Pause**
2. **Positive**
3. **Proceed**

Each is described below:

Pause – When anxious thoughts are going on, they are usually racing. So, pausing even for less than a minute or even a few second can be a game changer. During a brief pause in the middle of an anxious and stressful moment is like hitting the reset button on an overactive mind. There are many things' that can be done during this brief pause so pick something that works for you or use a combination of skills. The most important thing is that you learn to use a pause to get your mind off of things long enough to reflect and refocus.

Some skills people use during pauses from anxiety:

- Deep breathing
- Counting
- Positive imagery
- Repeating a calming word or phrase “Breathe!” or “Slow down” for example
- Praying (if applicable to you)
- Grounding (Use your **senses** to escape by **listening** to the wind blow, or **feeling** the arms of the chair with your hands or **visualize** a positive scene or memory or focus on something in the environment)

Positive - Once you have paused and slowed your mind down, it is so helpful to learn **positive self-talk**. This effective anxiety coping tool involves examining a situation and reframing it by emphasizing something positive over the negative. It can be helpful to focus on what you can control instead of what is beyond your control. Some examples:

- Negative thought “What am I going to do if ____ happens!!!? – Positive self-talk can be something like ***“It may be stressful if ____ happens but I’ll find a way to get through it, I always do!”***
- Negative thought – “This person (or situation) is making me feel really uncomfortable and I am stuck, and I can’t leave! – Positive self-talk may be something like ***“I can get through this if I just keep my cool as best I can and wait it out, then I’ll be out of this situation soon enough***
- Negative thought – “People are going to make me lose it” – Positive self-talk may be ***“I can’t control what others do or say, but I can control what I say and do so I will focus on that”***

Proceed – This final step is so important because learning to cope with anxiety often means pushing through some challenges and proceeding forward in spite of anxious feelings and thoughts. There may be times in life when you might feel that you need to leave. However, in most situations if you can calm yourself effectively you can proceed forward even though you are experiencing anxiety. This can take practice but gradually learning over time to function when you are uncomfortable actually expands your comfort zone and increases your resilience and ability to self-calm. For example, consider how much worse anxiety is the first time you do something compared with the 10th time if you stick with it and don't give up. Proceeding forward when you can even if it's just a little, every effort makes you stronger. Sometimes that first step forward is all you need (*Again this is not meant to shame anyone who has left a situation because of anxiety as that can happen to the best of us on occasion especially when there is a history of anxiety or panic disorder*)



Exercise – Apply the Three Ps in Anxiety Producing Scenarios

Read each scenario below. These scenarios were written based on some common anxiety producing life situations including

- Performances
- Meeting new people (especially in groups)
- Dating
- Distressing public situations and crowds
- Confrontation
- Stating your views (especially when not a popular one in the moment)

Read each scenario and as a group work through how you can use the Three Ps (Pause, Positive, Proceed) to get through the moment,

Nervous Performance – Surprise! - You've just been recognized! – You are in a situation at work where the boss publicly praises you for your hard work and accomplishments and now your room full of coworkers is all cheering you on asking you to tell everyone how you did what you did so well. They won't take no for an answer and want a speech. One person is even holding up a camera. You are on the spot

Urine Trouble – You need to go to the bathroom pretty seriously and it cannot wait much longer. The only bathroom nearby is very dirty and crowded with a lot of commotion and has limited privacy

Distressing Date – You are out in public on a date, and you are in a newer relationship and suddenly you run into your partner's family unexpectedly. You know the family is from a very different background and your partner has told you in the past that they are loud and not shy about asking a lot of personal questions

Taking a Stand – You suddenly find yourself stuck in a social situation with a large group of people whom you know but not super closely. Soon, the group is now doing something that you disagree with, and your view may be unpopular with others. You don't have an out so its either express your viewpoint or stay quiet and just follow the crowd even though you disapprove of what it looks like is about to happen

Stranger Danger – A friend begs you to come out with them to a social gathering and the friend swears to you that there will be people there you know. You get there and you do not know a single person except your friend, who suddenly disappears and leaves you alone to fend for yourself socially

Wacked-Out Waiting Room – You are in a situation where you have to sit in a waiting room that is crowded with a lot of activity. People are loud and it's not uncommon for some random person to try to make small talk with you. You need this appointment, and you can't go outside as you don't want to miss getting called so you cannot escape

Feared Firing – On Monday morning at work you find out from a coworker that there was a big misunderstanding last week at work that involves something you said or did and your coworker warns you that your boss may be really upset with you. You see your boss approaching in the distance with a serious look

Perplexing Promotion – Your boss just gave you a promotion with a significant raise that was way too good to turn down and you need the money and the job (cannot quit). On the first day back at work after you take the promotion your boss tells you that you will be accompanying her to visit several of your coworkers (most of whom you know and used to work with) to help her write them up for disciplinary action

If time or perhaps in a follow up session, discuss some of your own life scenarios, past or present and analyze how to use the Three P's to effectively cope with anxiety in these situations. At the very end review what group members will take home from this exercise