anxietywave

A FREE GUIDE FOR PARTNERS AND LOVED ONES

The Anxiety Support Guide for *Partners*™



How to understand and support your loved one's recovery from anxiety, without accidentally making it worse.

Jort Kamphuis

Founder of Anxiety Wave, and someone who lived with daily panic attacks for over six years

A NOTE FROM JORT

Hi there,



My name is **Jort Kamphuis**. I'm the founder of Anxiety Wave, and someone who lived with daily panic attacks for over six years.

Panic attacks on trains, in stores, in bed, in meetings... you name it, I've probably panicked there.

The only reason I'm on the other side now is that I finally learned to *respond* to anxiety differently, with an approach built on acceptance instead of fighting. It changed everything for me, and since then my team and I have helped over **2,000 people** around the world get their lives back too.

The approach draws on well-researched principles such as acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and exposure. Unfortunately, it's still not nearly as well known as it should be.

But even the best approach works better with support. **That's where you come in.**

This guide explains how anxiety works, what actually helps (and what doesn't, even when it feels loving), and how you can be a steady, supportive presence for the person you love, without accidentally feeding the anxiety.

First of all: thank you

I know how tough it is to see someone you love like this, and to feel so powerless. Maybe you've tried to help in so many ways and nothing worked. Maybe you've changed your whole life around their anxiety. It's not easy. So, thank you.

During my six years of panic attacks, the people closest to me were always there for me, especially my fiancée at the time. And I know it was really hard on her. At times she felt hopeless and stuck, because my panic was shrinking her life too.

You're reading this, so I know you really want to help. Let me show you how.

PART 1

What anxiety really is (and what it's not)

If you've never struggled with anxiety like this, it can be hard to imagine what living with it feels like. And it's hard to explain.

For some people it shows up as panic attacks out of nowhere. For others it's constant worry, a body that never feels calm, fears about their health, intrusive thoughts or a world that keeps getting smaller. It looks different for everyone, but underneath it works the same way.

In essence, it's walking around knowing that at any moment a bomb might drop, and your body goes into full survival mode. You can't trust your own body. You might start to sweat, get heart palpitations, feel dizzy or nauseous, and feel like you have to run, as if you're under attack.

If you're a parent, it's like that split second of terror when you look down in a busy store and your child is gone. Or the phone rings in the middle of the night and you just know it's bad news. Your brain goes into overload, *"What if...", "Oh no, this is bad"*, and your whole body responds.

Which brings me to one of the most common misunderstandings: **anxiety isn't "just in their head".** It shows up in the body too. It feels real, and it feels extremely scary. And once someone is caught in the anxiety cycle, they become more and more afraid of these feelings. Because at any moment:

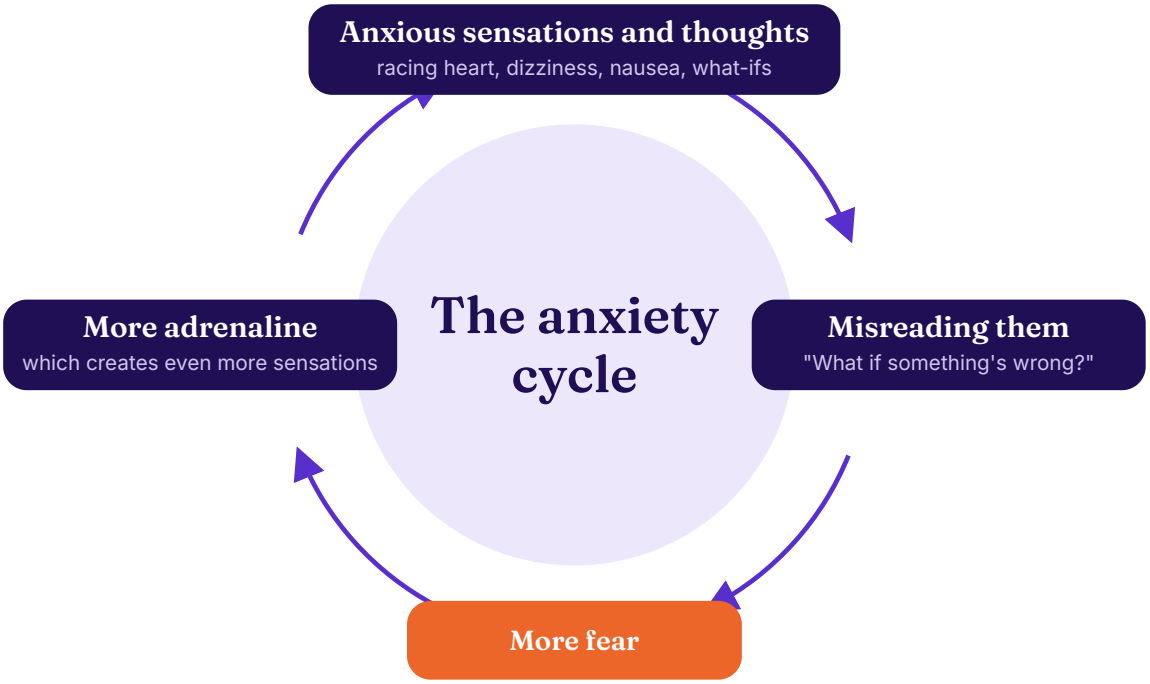
- they can be hit with extreme nausea,
- they can suddenly *need* a toilet,
- right in the middle of a work meeting, they start to sweat and their heart races as if they're on a treadmill,
- or a thought pops up that they just can't shake: *"What if something is really wrong with me?"*

And worst of all: what if it means something is seriously wrong? A heart attack, an illness the doctors missed, losing their mind? Because that's exactly what it can feel like! What if they faint, lose control or embarrass themselves in front of everyone?

Think about it for a second

Picture a moment when you were deeply stressed, shocked or scared. Maybe you lost your wallet, got terrible news or suddenly felt very sick. Now imagine that happening every week, or every day, especially when other people are around or you can't leave.

That's what people call an anxiety "disorder". I don't love that word, because there isn't anything wrong with someone who struggles with anxiety. It's a **pattern of behavior**, and patterns can change.



It usually starts with a **harmless trigger**: a sensation, a thought, a feeling. The brain misreads it as a threat and switches on the survival response. Adrenaline floods the body. The heart races, the chest tightens, the stomach flips, the hands tingle and the thoughts start racing. Nausea, dizziness, feeling unreal and even a fear of fainting or dying are common.

To the person going through it, it feels like something terrible is about to happen.

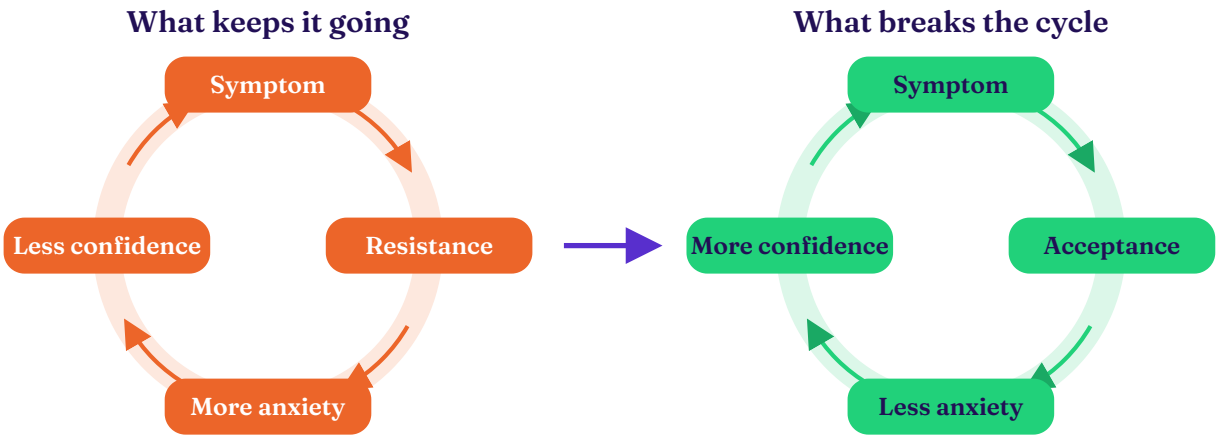
The truth? **Nothing bad is happening.** Their body is doing exactly what it's designed to do in danger. But the danger is a false alarm, a misfire.

The feelings are still real and intense, and it's important to acknowledge that. Your partner isn't exaggerating, they're not weak and they're not doing this for attention. They're caught in a **fear-of-fear loop**: they fear these harmless sensations and thoughts, that fear creates more of them, and the anxiety keeps feeding itself.

PART 2

How the cycle breaks

The way out isn't fighting the anxiety harder. It's learning to respond to it differently.



Every time someone resists anxiety, by fighting it, running from it, avoiding things or trying to make it stop, their brain learns that anxiety is dangerous. That means more anxiety and less confidence, and the cycle keeps going.

When they learn to let the anxiety be there instead, their nervous system gets a very different message: *we're safe*. Less anxiety, more confidence and, over time, fewer symptoms. That's how the nervous system calms down and returns to a regular, relaxed state.

The mindset your partner is working towards

Recovery isn't about never feeling anxious again. It's about no longer being afraid of the feeling. In the end, it comes down to this:

"I don't care if anxiety shows up. I'm going to do what I want anyway, and I know I can handle it."

And ironically, that's exactly when anxiety stops showing up. Everything you'll read in this guide is about helping them get there.

PART 3

The kind of help that hurts (even when it feels supportive)

When someone we love is anxious or scared, our instinct is to protect them. To comfort them. To fix it.

That's natural, and I want to say this upfront: **nothing you've done so far has been wrong.** You've been doing your best, and that counts. But some of the most common ways partners try to help can actually keep the anxiety cycle going:

- **Going everywhere with them.** Driving them to work, standing with them in lines, waiting outside bathrooms, always being the "safe person".
- **Calming tricks in the moment.** Telling them to breathe, to relax, to think positive.
- **Helping them escape.** Offering to leave a restaurant early, cut a trip short or skip an event when anxiety hits.
- **Reassuring them again and again.** Answering *"Am I okay? Is this normal?"* for the tenth time today.
- **Taking over.** Doing the groceries, the phone calls or the driving, so they never have to face it.

All of these come from love. But to your partner's nervous system, they send a very different message:

> **"This is dangerous. I can't handle it on my own. I need to escape."**

And the nervous system responds the way it always does to danger: with more adrenaline. More symptoms, more triggers, less confidence. They get more stuck.

So I'm inviting you to play a different role. Instead of being the rescuer, you get to be **the steady supporter**: the person who stands beside them, calm and confident, while they face the storm and come out stronger for it.

PART 4

Your role in their recovery

Recovery takes practice. Your partner is learning what anxiety really is, why nothing worked so far and how to respond when it shows up. Then they practice that response, again and again.

That can be hard. Sometimes avoiding it all feels easier than facing the very thing they're most afraid of. That's where you come in.

1 Be their accountability partner

Check in regularly, with curiosity instead of pressure. Ask something like:

"How did you respond to the anxiety today?"

"What's something small we can celebrate today?"

"Do you want me to remind you of what you're learning next time the anxiety shows up?"

If they didn't practice that day, that's okay. Gently remind them why they started and encourage one tiny step. They're in charge, but your encouragement can make a huge difference in keeping the momentum going.

2 Be their challenge champion

Facing the situations they avoid is a big part of recovery. Help them plan a small challenge and put it on the calendar. Offer to drive behind them instead of driving for them, or wait nearby instead of right beside them. The key is supporting the stretch, not preventing it.

3 Celebrate effort, not outcomes

They stayed in the store even though they felt anxious? Amazing. They let a wave come and go without running? Huge. Even if they still felt the fear, focus on what they *did* despite it.

4 Let them lead

Recovery is personal. You can walk beside them, but you can't drag them or carry them. Some days they'll take a big step and some days they won't, and both are okay.

PART 5

What to do (and say) when anxiety hits

The goal isn't to make the anxiety go away. It's for your partner to become okay with it.

That doesn't mean they'll feel like this forever. It means that once they learn to let anxiety be there, even at its worst, they stop being afraid of it. And that's when it starts to fade.

So anxiety *will* still show up for your partner. And that's okay, because every time it does, it's an **opportunity to practice their new response**. An opportunity to heal.

Remind them

Remind your partner of the anxiety cycle: the sensations and thoughts are very unpleasant, but not dangerous. Encourage them to let it be there instead of fighting it or running from it. Give it room, literally. Don't do anything, just let it peak and pass. It always does. And let them know you're there.

Speak safety, not urgency

Say things like

"I'm here. Nothing bad is happening. You're safe."

"This is your nervous system doing its job. It just hit a false alarm."

"Let's give it a minute and let the wave pass. You've done this before."

Avoid saying

"Are you okay?"

It signals that maybe they're not.

"Do you want water? Should we go?"

It feeds the urge to escape.

"Just breathe. Calm down."

It turns the anxiety into something they have to fix.

Celebrate when the wave passes

Name the win: *"You stayed through it. That's proof you're stronger than the surge!"*

FINAL WORDS

You didn’t sign up for this. But you’re here anyway.

Reading this. Showing up. Caring. That matters more than you know.

Your partner is learning to build new patterns in their brain, and your presence can either feed the fear or fuel the courage. You don’t need to say the perfect thing or do it all right. Just stay steady. Stay kind. Ask them what they’re practicing, and remind them of their strength when they forget.

And above all: believe in their ability to recover, even when they don’t.

> **They’ll borrow that belief from you until they can own it themselves.**

Full recovery doesn’t happen overnight, but it happens faster when it’s practiced, supported and understood. You being here speeds that up more than you know.

Thank you for being part of this. If you have any questions or concerns, you can reach me directly at **jort@anxietywave.com**, or have a look at the questions partners often ask on the next pages.

Warmly,

Jort
Founder of Anxiety Wave

QUESTIONS PARTNERS ASK

Mini Q&A

What if I say the wrong thing when they're anxious?

You won't. Seriously. If you're reading this, you care, and that already puts you miles ahead. The most important thing is your presence. You don't need magic words. Just stay steady, stay calm and speak safety. A simple *"You're safe. This will pass. It's just adrenaline"* is more powerful than you think.

Should I talk when it hits, or stay quiet?

Both can work. It depends on the moment and on what your partner finds helpful. If you talk, keep it short and grounded: *"This is okay." "Let's let this wave pass." "You've done this before, and you're doing it now."* If they ask for quiet, respect that too. Being a calm, steady presence is already huge.

My partner doesn't have panic attacks, they're just anxious all the time. Does this still apply?

Yes. Whether it's panic attacks, constant worry, health anxiety, intrusive thoughts or avoiding places, it's the same cycle underneath: being afraid of the feeling, and fighting it or running from it. So the same kind of support helps. Stay calm, don't feed the fear, and encourage them to keep living their life while the anxiety is there.

What if they ask me to leave somewhere with them? Should I go?

Anxiety can never actually force someone to do something, but for your partner it can feel like leaving is the only option. And that's normal. Remind them that it's just nervous energy going through their body, and suggest staying a little longer and letting the wave pass together. If they're not up for it and want to leave, that's okay too. Acknowledge how hard it was, and don't make them feel like they failed.

Should I remind them to breathe or try to calm them down?

Tempting, I know. But it's not as helpful as it seems. Most people with anxiety already know how to breathe. What they're learning now is to **allow** the feelings without trying to fix them. Instead of "breathe", try: *"Let it come. Let the wave rise. You're safe."*

They keep asking me if they're okay. Should I keep reassuring them?

Answer once, kindly. After that, you can gently say: *"I think you already know the answer to that one."* Reassurance gives a moment of relief, but it also teaches their brain that they need you to feel safe. Your calm confidence helps more than the words.

They were doing better, and now the anxiety is back. Is that a setback?

Nope. This is part of the process. Recovery isn't a straight line. Some days feel like breakthroughs and others feel like nothing's working. What matters is that they keep practicing. One wave at a time, their nervous system is learning: ***"This is safe. I can handle this."***

What if they feel embarrassed that I saw them like this?

Totally normal. Anxiety can make people feel exposed or ashamed. Let them know you don't see weakness, you see **courage**: ***"I'm proud of you. You stayed in it. That's strength."*** This kind of support helps them rebuild trust in themselves.

Should they see a doctor?

Yes, if they haven't yet. Encourage them to get their symptoms checked once to rule out anything medical, and to go back if their symptoms change. It gives you both a solid baseline of safety. Once it's clear that it's anxiety, it's all about retraining the response.

How long will recovery take?

It's different for everyone. But the more they practice the right response, the faster change happens. Every time they meet anxiety with that response, it's a step forward, even when it doesn't feel like it.

anxietywave

WANT SUPPORT WITH THEIR RECOVERY?

You don't have to figure this out *alone*.

At Anxiety Wave, we guide people through recovery from anxiety, with weekly lessons, live group calls and mentors who recovered from anxiety themselves.

Your partner can book a free discovery call with our team, and you're very welcome to join that call too.

Book a free discovery call

Everything about the call: **call.anxietywave.com/discovery-call**

More free articles: **anxietywave.com/blog**

Questions: **jort@anxietywave.com**

This guide is coaching and education, not medical advice or treatment. Encourage your partner to talk to a doctor about new or changing symptoms.

© Anxiety Wave