

Panic Attack Management

Note: A panic attack is NOT DANGEROUS.

- They can't cause heart failure or cardiac arrest
- They will not cause someone to stop breathing or suffocate
- They will not cause fainting
- They can't cause someone to lose their balance
- They will not cause someone to fall over
- They do not cause people to "go crazy"
- They can't cause people to "lose control of themselves"

(The Anxiety & Phobia Workbook, 2010)

***If a student has symptoms of a panic attack, ring security for assistance, if needed.**

What should I say and do if I know the student is having a panic attack?

- **Reassure the student** that they are experiencing a panic attack.
- It is important that you **remain calm** and that you do not start to panic yourself.
- Speak to the student in a reassuring and calm manner, and **be patient**.
- Speak clearly and slowly and use short, clear sentences.
- Rather than making assumptions about what the student needs, **ask them directly what they think might help**.
- Do not belittle the student's experience.
- Acknowledge that the terror feels very real, but reassure them that a panic attack, while very frightening, is **not life threatening or dangerous**.
- Reassure them that they are safe and that **the symptoms will pass**.

What is a panic attack?

A panic attack is a sudden rush of intense anxiety or fear together with a surge of frightening physical sensations and thoughts.

Physical sensations can include:

- * pounding heart
- * dizziness/faintness
- * breathlessness
- * chest pains
- * numbness/tingling
- * sweating
- * shaking
- * nausea

Thoughts can include feeling like you may be:

- * out of physical and/or emotional control
- * dying
- * having a heart attack/stroke
- * passing out
- * going crazy

Panic attacks are usually brief, but may be very scary while they last. They can often seem to come “out of the blue”, which makes them even scarier.

While panic sensations are a natural response to danger, panic attacks are usually out of proportion to any actual danger the person may be facing at the time. They seem to have a life of their own.