

THE ANXIOUS
MOM
MANIFESTO



18 Lessons to Control Your Anxiety Monster

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The Anxious Mom Manifesto

ANXIETY DOESN'T MAKE YOU A BAD MOM



"A bruise is a lesson... and each lesson makes us better."

-Arya Stark, Game of Thrones



There is a question that people always ask me when I tell them I suffer from severe anxiety and panic attacks. “So, how does it feel?” I tell you one thing; **it is the most challenging thing to explain, and if you have never suffered from anxiety, it’s complicated to understand.** Also, it’s challenging because, for every person, the experience is different.

Let me try to explain for example, how a panic attack feels to me. It can happen at any moment. I could be driving or watching a movie or sleeping. Yes, it has happened when I am sleeping. Then out of the blue, I feel a hot flash, and then I start feeling dizzy. I immediately think that I am going to faint. That dull sensation starts a chain reaction in my brain, releasing a bunch of other stressful random thoughts that create a massive mess in my head. “What if it’s something else, like a heart attack?” “What if I go back to sleep and I never wake up?” “What if I faint and I crash?” Then those thoughts get tangled. In seconds, all of the messages that I have created, all at the same time, all colliding with each other while I desperately try to find a resolution, sink me into a messy hole.

Then comes the guilt after the symptoms subside. I am always thinking, “But why? I have a good life. What is wrong with me?” All of this feels ten times worse when one of those episodes happens in front of my kids.

Once, some time ago, I was a mess. The panic attacks were frequently coming. I had to explain to my kids what was happening to me. Before I was a mother, if I had a panic attack or I was feeling anxious, I would seclude myself for a while. Now things were different. Panic attack or not, I still needed to be a parent, responsible for these two little human beings and their survival and security. I was so scared all the time, not only from the anxiety itself but also, thinking that I was passing the condition

to them. I figured I could make the monster useful, so I used it to tell them about anxiety. I showed them its picture and explained to them that mommy sometimes felt sick. I reassured them that they should not be afraid when these situations happened because mommy could recover; mommy was not in danger. It was funny when Eva, my oldest one, mentioned that it looked cute, "He looks like from *Monsters Inc.*," she said. She made me realize with that comment that monsters not always have to scare us. We can see them and learn not to fear them. (Who knew? There is still wisdom in those animated movies.)

I also told them what to do when mommy was scared by the monster. Eva knows what to say to me and what to do. She starts telling me a story, or holds my hand if she can, and reminds me to breathe and drink water. Erik, my youngest, still has no full comprehension of the whole thing, but he knows that it will pass and he doesn't freak out. Another time, in one of those birthday party goodie bags that are useless most of the time, Erik got a stress ball with a soft pointy surface. I started using it all the time, particularly when I was getting anxious. Many times, when they saw me stressing out or knew I was getting anxious, they looked for it all over the house and gave it to me. I have come to replace that stress ball many times now. I also talked to their teachers about this situation, in case they see any reaction I should be aware of. So far, they are doing fine.

It was not always that easy, though. One of the most significant challenges of coping while being a mom was hiding my emotions from the kids. You never want them to be scared, or that they can misinterpret what it's happening to you. The thing is that anxiety can make you react in unexpected ways. The most usual for me was crying uncontrollably or yelling. It still happens and when it does sometimes is extremely difficult for me. Mainly because of

the guilt that I feel afterward. Yelling at them happened frequently. One day my daughter told me she was scared of me, and it broke my heart to pieces. Controlling those emotions is hard. The good thing is that you can recognize it's your anxiety talking and not you. Don't be ashamed when this happens. There are no more understanding creatures than your kids. They see you with love, no matter what. Talking with them about your anxiety will make your relationship better, plus there is no better response than a hug from one of your kids. If you lose control, don't leave like that. Once you calm down, make sure they understand where your reaction came from so they won't feel guilty.

Slowly I started letting the guilt go away. Sometimes it comes with the monster, but I am not making this sensation to rule my life anymore. The truth is that motherhood and guilt are married. It's a fact. There is so much pressure that we put on ourselves every day — so many expectations. I realized the main problem is that we have trouble handling the ugliness of motherhood. Before you start throwing stones at me, please continue reading. Yes, motherhood has an ugly side; and it has nothing to do with what you feel for your family or you think about motherhood overall.

Moms get tired, burned, bored, sick, worried, depressed, and fed up. Because we are not angels, we are humans. Motherhood is incredibly overwhelming, no matter the kind of mom you are or the amount or lack of help you have. Moms need to wear different hats throughout the day, and sometimes we don't have the energy or patience to do all so lovingly. Some can cope with all of this without the anxiety disorder, and I envy them, and God knows I do. But for others like me, the ones that have to deal with the anxiety monster and panic attacks on top of it, that ugly side and guilt can create a dark repetitive cycle. There is something you need to repeat yourself every day: **It's ok not to be ok. You don't**

have to be the perfect mom, and your kids don't have to be the perfect kids. Perfection doesn't coexist with motherhood. Forget about it! Always look for progress and how can your reactions get better and better.

My fellow anxious mom, I understand you and let me say something: You are NOT crazy. You are NOT weak. Anxiety is exhausting and challenging, but you can overcome this. It's a process. It might take time, and that is fine. Don't be afraid to open up, to ask for help. I know that it is so difficult to explain this to people that have no clue what a panic attack is. Let alone explain this to your kids. But I can assure you, it is more common than you think and you will find those who will listen to you, give you a hand, a piece of advice, or love you and let you know they are there for you. I know you are trying to avoid embarrassment and judgment. But don't let those feelings get in the way of recovering your peace. Anxiety doesn't define you or dictate how good of a mother you are. We are all learning, trying our best. And the simple fact to acknowledge that you want to recover and get better from this makes you a great human, a great mom. I recognize the strength in you because I know it's not easy to overcome those episodes while protecting and raising your kids.

So from an anxious mom to another, I will tell you one more thing: We can do this! We have endured pregnancies, late-night feedings, diaper changing, awful playdates, toddler years to name a few, of course, we can kick the panic attacks and the anxiety monster in the butt too.



LESSON: Anxiety doesn't define you or what kind of mother you are. Don't let guilt consume your thoughts and give credit to yourself just for the fact that you are willing to recover.



TIPS:

- Don't hide your anxiety from your loved ones. Find ways to explain to them in the best way you can about how you feel, and what to do, and most importantly, what do you expect from them. Don't be afraid to talk to your kids about this. They are smarter than you think and they can be incredibly understanding.
- Speak about the ugliness of motherhood. Yes, it is lovely how we post our perfect pictures and to brag about all the milestones online, but we need to tell other mothers about the dark side of the moon too. Let's not perpetuate the perfection standard of motherhood.
- If you need help, ask for help. Don't feel ashamed. All human beings deal with something different. Moms need help sometimes because we are not angels; we are humans.