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What is Mastery of Anxiety and Panic Treatment?

(Client Version)

What is Mastery of Anxiety and Panic Treatment? Mastery of Anxiety and Panic (MAP, also known as Panic Control Treatment) is a manualized, cognitive-behavioral treatment for adults with panic disorder with or without agoraphobia (fear of crowded spaces or being public places where it might be hard to get away). The goal of the treatment is to help clients become panic-free by learning how to anticipate and respond to situations that trigger their panic attacks, use new thinking skills to address worry and fear about panic, and manage the physical symptoms of panic using techniques such as controlled breathing.

Why should I try MAP? MAP is one of the most effective psychological treatments for panic disorder with or without agoraphobia. Many scientific studies demonstrate that most people who go through MAP get significantly better. In fact, **85% of clients are panic free at the end of treatment** and 81% remain free of panic two years after therapy. This reduction in panic dramatically improves people's quality of life, as they are able to engage in their daily lives without the constant worry of their next panic attack and avoidance of meaningful experiences or situations. And best of all, **these improvements are achieved in a very short amount of time - between 8 – 12 weeks.**

What is a panic attack? In our culture, panic often refers to times of distress, worry, and fear. In clinical terms, the term panic attack has a very specific meaning. Not every state of fear and discomfort is a panic attack. Therapists define panic as a specific period of intense fear or discomfort when four (or more) of the following symptoms happen suddenly and reach a peak within ten minutes:

- Increased heart rate
- Sweating
- Shaking
- Shortness of breath or choking
- Chest pain
- Nausea
- Faintness
- Depersonalization (thoughts seem unreal or like they do not belong to oneself)
- Fear of going crazy
- Fear of dying
- Numbness
- Chills or hot flushes

Sometimes, panic attacks may feel like they occur "out of the blue." Other times, panic attacks may be triggered by stressful or anxiety-provoking situations.

What is agoraphobia? Sometimes individuals who suffer from panic attacks become afraid of the locations in which they have experienced panic. For example, someone who had their first panic attack in a mall may then begin to fear that they will have another panic attack when entering the mall again. Others, because of their fear of a panic attack leading to embarrassing social situations, become afraid of environments that are crowded or difficult to escape quickly from. These fears then lead the person to avoid these locations, stay home, or go to only a limited number of locations that they believe are safe. This avoidance can significantly impact their ability to travel, work, or maintain a social life. Not everyone who develops fears of specific situations avoids them.



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Some are still able to enter these situations, but do so under considerable distress. For others, they are willing to go out into these situations, but only with someone they trust and can turn to in the event that they start to feel panic. **Agoraphobia refers to the avoidance of, or significant distress in, situations where escape might be difficult in the event of panic symptoms.**

The nature of anxiety: In MAP, you will learn that anxiety and fear are natural, necessary, and harmless human experiences. Without anxiety about a potential threat or fear that tells us to escape a dangerous situation, we would be much more vulnerable to physical harm. Because anxiety and fear are helpful emotions in the right circumstance, the overall goal of MAP is not to eliminate anxiety and fear from your life, but to help teach you how to cope with these feelings and learn that the things you are afraid of do not often come true. In MAP, you'll learn about the following three parts of anxiety and how to deal with each of them:

- **Physical - *What You Feel*:** This includes all the physical sensations associated with panic. These sensations are what tell your body there might be danger in your environment. Common sensations include increased heart rate, dizziness, shortness of breath, nausea, and sweating.
- **Cognitive - *What You Think*:** This includes all the thoughts that are related to an episode of panic. Often times negative thinking patterns like "jumping to conclusions" or "blowing things out of proportion" trigger panic episodes.
- **Behavioral - *What You Do*:** This includes behaviors you may engage in during, and as a result, of panic. During an episode of panic, most individuals will try to escape the situation and, as a result, will do their best to avoid those situations in the future.

What does MAP involve? MAP is typically conducted in 12 weekly 1-hour individual therapy sessions. Each MAP session builds on skills learned in previous sessions. The main treatment components include:

- **Psychoeducation:** Reviewing information about panic attacks and the cycle of panic.
- **Skills Training:** Teaching controlled breathing skills and thinking skills.
- **Exposure:** Confronting feared but safe situations and physical sensations.
- **Relapse Prevention:** Strategies for maintaining progress after treatment and identifying long term goals.

What will be expected of me during MAP? MAP treatment will require you to be actively involved both during and between therapy sessions. You will be asked to actively participate in planning and implementing every aspect of the treatment. In fact, much of the treatment will occur outside the office and without the supervision and immediate guidance of your therapist. This includes completing homework and gradually conducting exposure exercises to confront fears and engage in activities that you have been avoiding, sometimes for many years.

Additional resources:

National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (NREPP):

<http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=300>

Boston University Center for Anxiety & Related Disorders: <http://www.bu.edu/card/>