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IT'S OK TO FEEL ANXIOUS

Conversation with Richard, Celia and Anna

Anna: We're in a period as a society, as a community, as a world, where all of us are feeling this worry or anxiety at some point. Acknowledging that it's actually okay to feel how we're feeling is really important.

Richard: You're listening to messages of hope with Celia and Richard. Today we're talking about and worry and anxiety with Anna, a counsellor from Journeez. What's the difference and how do we stop being overwhelmed by things we can't control.

Over the past year, we've seen a lot of upheaval and a feeling of uncertainty about what's next. Devastating bushfires, droughts, floods, and the pandemic have been the big picture. But when we focus in, it's about losing homes and jobs, separation from loved ones, tension in relationships and a feeling of loss about the things we've come to rely on. So today we're discussing how to navigate through the feelings of worry and anxiety that rise up when we feel a loss of control over our lives.

Celia: I guess a lot of people are feeling all of those feelings of stress worry, anxiety.

Richard: What's stressing you Celia?

Celia: Where do I start? Probably the new job I've started. I think in any new job you're learning new stuff, you're trying to fit everything in, you're trying to prove yourself. I think I've bitten off more than I can chew a little bit.

Richard: So what do you feel?

Celia: I feel it physically. I feel tension in my stomach and my chest. It's like it's all just balled up in there. Yeah, it's a real physical reaction for me.

Richard: Yeah, feelings of anxiety. I've got a friend who wakes up in the morning and just has no idea what they're going to wear. Even what shoes, socks, all sorts of things. It's actually quite debilitating. They know they've got to do something, but they're not even quite sure what.

Celia: Don't know where to start, do you? And that's, that's the thing. It's making all those decisions, the little decisions, is really, really hard.

Richard: And you've got kids, you've got a daughter in year 12?

Celia: Oh, a daughter in year 12 and I can really see it. Term three is crunch time for them and they've been working so hard, particularly, you know, under trying circumstances and it's that last slog to the end. And you can just see they're wanting to keep the motivation, but they're so tired. You just want to say, just hang in there, you know, keep going.

Anna: Just do something.

Celia: Yeah. And it's almost that paralysis of there's too much. I don't know where to start.

Richard: How do you start dealing with anxiety?

Anna: What a Great question. It's a big question isn't it?

Richard: Beause I know we don't want to live like that.

Anna: Yeah. And I think it's important to note there's a difference between anxiety and worry. So like all of us worry, we might feel anxious, but not all of us maybe have anxiety. Right? I think it's important to differentiate those two things.

Richard: So what's worry?

Anna: Worry seems to be in our head, where we think about something that isn't going to hang around. So it's kind of a shorter term thing and we realise that we can actually find a solution to the problem that we're worrying about.

Whereas anxiety, like you were saying, Celia, you feel it in your body. So all that, like, you know, tension in your stomach. some people like, I get headaches when I'm particularly overwhelmed. That problem solving concept, like if you're feeling anxious, often problem solving is really hard, which comes back to the decision concept of like, "can I even just start, I don't know which socks to put on today?"

Celia: I can't decide what to have for tea. It's all too hard.

Anna: Yeah. So I think that the biggest thing is to acknowledge that it's actually okay to feel anxious. We're in a period as a society, as a community, as a world, where all of us are feeling this worry or anxiety at some point. And acknowledging that it's actually okay to feel how we're feeling is really important.

Richard: Once you realise anxiety is getting in the way of life, what do you do? Just grin and bear it, hoping things will change?

Anna: I think that's a great question, but it's different for everyone and I know no one wants to hear that. But it's true. One really helpful thing is noticing what's changing in your life. So when we're feeling anxious and worried and overwhelmed, we are able to, if we slow down, we're actually able to go, what's different in my life now to what it was last week, last month, last, you know, six months ago? And so when you can notice, like, identify that, then you can move forward.

Celia: And I think that's really the crux of it. But when you're feeling stressed and worried and overwhelmed, you don't take the time to slow down and take stock, do you?

Anna: I think there's some key things that can be really helpful for anxiety. The basis of anxiety is feeling like we're out of control. So we try and focus on the things that we can control. So if it's watching the news and the news makes you spiral into, "Oh my gosh, the world's ending" or whatever the thoughts are, you can go "you know what? I'm going to turn the TV off. I'm going to stop scrolling Facebook or Instagram" or whatever your thing is. I'm actually just going to take back some of that control and go, "what's actually happening for me in the present?" So again, anxiety is very much a worrying about, "Oh, I should have done this in the past," or "what's going to happen in the future?" So if we can stay present in the now. That can be really helpful.

Richard: So what about those things that keep you up at night, like three or four in the morning and you wake up and there's just that really extreme thing that's just gone through your mind. It might be in a vivid dream or you're reminded of something you've forgotten to do at work or something's gone wrong and it was your fault and you just can't slow your mind down.

Celia: And you wake up with that feeling, that physical feeling.

Anna: Absolutely. Yeah. So journaling can be really helpful with that. So you have a notepad and pen next to your bed and somehow try and write in the dark.

Another thing can be breathing exercises. So simply like, especially if it's in the middle of the night, you're in bed, you might not want to get up and wake yourself up but be able to just lie there with your eyes closed again, and actually just take really slow, deep breaths in and out, can be amazing to kind of slow down.

It slows down your brain and actually gives oxygen to your brain, helps you think more clearly, and to be able to put some of that into perspective, I think.

Richard: That's great. Yeah. I've often tried even things like praying and yeah talking and hearing myself think. Might sound a bit crazy at times. But just to say it out loud sometimes and talk. That has helped a little bit. Yeah.

Anna: Yeah, and I think it's important if you're ruminating on things just over and over and over again is, it's okay to ask for help as well. You know, we don't have to do this like alone. There's other people going through it. And as I said before we're in a world crisis. So we're not alone. If we reach out, share with our friends or seek maybe counseling or whatever. We'll actually discover really quickly that we're not alone, that there are other people going through it as well.

Celia: That always makes me feel better if I even just chat with my friends and we, you know, catch up, not that often, but when we do we're all just like, blah, blah, blah, blah. And we all just go, "Oh, thank goodness. We all feel the same." And you just, you don't feel alone. Yeah.

Celia: What I'm finding really hard and what I'm finding people are struggling with is that lack of being able to look forward at the moment, not know what is ahead of us. I think that's a really tricky space to be in.

Richard: That sense of out of control, isn't it? I've got friends who haven't had rain on their property for the last three seasons and they're really struggling and things are just out of their control. So where do they go? They're very anxious and you look on the news and the coronavirus is still going!

Anna: That's right. It's all good to turn the TV off, which is what I was saying, but it doesn't stop it from continuing does it.

Celia: So what do you do, where do you go?

Richard: Well, I think it's trying to get things out of my mind a bit and into the physical realm and trying to deal with that emotion. So I rely on a verse that says "cast your anxiety on me", where Jesus says, "throw it at me." So I literally picture myself throwing whatever's worrying me at him. All right. It's yours. So it's like a ball. I have the ball and this is this worry thing and I'm going to throw it and cast it at him. And now it's his, I don't have the ball.

Celia: So that physical thing is really important for you.

Anna: That action of throwing.

Richard: Yeah, yeah, that casting it. So it's actually not 'thinking' it's not my problem. It's actually kind of 'doing' it's my problem.

Anna: Mm, yeah. Yeah. I think that's really interesting too, because our emotions actually stay in our body if we don't do anything with them. So if we don't cry or talk about it or whatever, and I think that imagery of casting, of throwing a ball of worry, of anxiety and actually doing it with your body, like getting up and throwing with your arm, can actually be something really relieving as well.

Celia: Yeah. And I know particularly if I'm feeling emotional or overwhelmed, just to stop myself bursting in tears, I might go for a walk around the block or something. I have a picture that really,

really helps me when I'm feeling particularly out of control, like you said, throwing your worries at God. I stand at a path and I just put my hand out and I know and I picture, in my mind's eye, that God grabs that hand, that Jesus grabs my hand and I know he's got me and I know I'm not alone.

Richard: And it's a great picture because dealing with anxiety is not a one stop, one fix, and now you're solved for anxiety. It's that relationship then to be able to express that to God and say, God help me through these times and I know even times I've used Psalms. There's some pretty dark Psalms with some real vivid imagery. And you can say those psalms and even just to say,

Celia: Out Loud!

Richard: Say them out loud. Yeah. So he can hear them and so your body's then being washed with this wonderful word that you're not alone, that there is someone there to help guide you through what you're coping with and to remind you again, that there is peace, that God does have us and cares about us.

Celia: Knowing that we're human and that just because I've given it to him once it's not going to happen again. For me, it's a constant thing of, okay, I've woken up, I have this feeling in my stomach again, here I go. Recognizing it, and I think maybe that's a bit also with age comes the recognizing that you do get through it.

Anna: And I think it's, as you were talking about, you know, Jesus holding your hand. I just keep thinking, God, isn't afraid of the anxiety. He's not afraid of the unknown. Like he just jumps, you know, you reach out your hand and he holds it. And then at some point we, as humans, we let go. He doesn't let go. And then when we're ready again, we'll put our hand out and he's there right there. He's like, "yep we're in this mess together, let's go."

So with this whole unknown that we're in and the anxiety that we feel, I find comfort in the fact that my God, my father, isn't afraid to be in the mess.

Celia: That's gold for me. I hadn't actually even thought about him. I'm just busy thinking about me, but just knowing, you're right, knowing that he's okay.

Anna: That's right, we don't have to be okay. That's the whole thing of not being alone in this whole process.

Richard: You've been listening to Messages of Hope. For free pdf's, videos and podcasts about managing anxiety go to messagesofhope.org.au. Or for a free booklet call 1800 353 350, that's 1800 353 350. I'm Richard Fox, I hope you can join me again next week for another message of hope. Real hope to cope with life's challenges.

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