



## Statement on Anxiety and Phobias

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### **Definitions:**

Anxiety is considered an illness when certain anxious situations are regularly and unreasonably avoided and these situations indicate suffering.

Phobias (irrational fear of certain objects, animals or situations, e.g. cancer).

### **Expressions of anxiety:**

Anxiety is expressed in the following forms:

- physically (e.g. palpitation, pallor, rigidity, cold sweat),
- mentally and emotionally (e.g. restlessness, hectic state, panic) and
- behavioural (escaping, avoiding critical situations, crying, screaming, twitching of individual parts of the body).

### **Reasons of anxiety disorders:**

Usually anxiety disorders have more than one cause, e.g. negative experiences, certain behaviour never learned, physical illness, long term or sudden occurrence of stress.

### **Prognosis and therapy:**

Anxiety does not always disappear by itself. If it is not treated with therapy:

- the person concerned tries to avoid the unpleasant situation
- the person feels helpless
- relationships, career and religious life become impaired
- subsequent sadness, resentment and depression can follow
- abuse of alcohol and medication as well as addiction can occur
- the danger of suicide increases

Various methods are available for the treatment of anxiety disorders. It is important that anxiety disorders must not generally be treated with medication. It is often the case that clarification, a little assistance and encouragement to combat the anxiety disorder are the initial and best ways for improvement. The main aim of all therapeutical efforts is that the person concerned learns to overcome his/her anxiety with various methods of assistance.



**Advice for the spiritual caregiver:**

The ministers should not:

- see the reasons for the illness as lack of belief on the part of the person concerned
- give superficial advice or false hope of a speedy recovery, e.g. through believing more intensively or through additional sacrifices.

The ministers should:

- try to take the situation of the person concerned seriously and let him/her feel and know that the ministers want to understand
- make the person aware of available therapies and accompany them in prayer.

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