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# EMPOWER

Empowering Persons with Disabilities  
Through Effective Disaster Management



## VODCAST 1

### How to Stay Calm and Avoid Panic Attacks

#### Summary

In this vodcast we talk to Enrique, a psychologist in Spain. He gives us tips on how to manage stress, anxiety and panic attacks. He also talks about "distress" and "eustress".



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## EMPOWER PROJECT

Empowering people with disabilities through effective disaster management

The project partners are:

The Governorship of Istanbul (from Türkiye)

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Institute for Promotion of Development and Training (from Spain)

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VODCAST: How to Stay Calm and Avoid Panic Attacks?

Victoria: Hello to all of you! This vodcast is part of the EMPOWER project,

"Empowering People with Disabilities through Effective Disaster Management",  
coordinated by the Government

of Istanbul and co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

Enrique is with us, he is a psychologist at the University

of Salamanca and Autonomous University of Madrid; Clinical Psychology at  
European University



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of Madrid. He is working in the last years both as clinical and organisational psychologist in different entities, both in Spain and in Ireland. Also, he has training and he has some experience in emergencies during the last years. Enrique, welcome! One of the objectives of the EMPOWER project is to integrate disability into the disaster management cycle and to raise awareness among people with disabilities and their caregivers about the increasing risks of disasters. Therefore, I would like you to explain a bit about how to stay calm and avoid panic attacks in an emergency or natural disaster.

Enrique: Ok. First of all, thanks, thank you Victoria for having me here. I think it is not an easy question to answer because we could be talking about that for hours or everyday, but I will try to give some general paths or general ideas about that. First of all, I think that is very important for all of us to have clear that anxiety or stress in general is not a bad or negative think. In some point, the stress is very necessary for survival and also I think is very important and positive in some points in our lives. I will put my hand in fire and I think I will help. If I say that all of us in some point of our life, we felt already or we are going to feel anxiety or stress in our life. And it is totally normal. And, in some points, as I say before, it is positive. We don't feel anxiety only on heavy situations or chaos such as natural disasters, or accidents, but also in, in our day today. For example, myself at work every day, or



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with our family, or our partners, or whatever. So it is important to have it, have this clear. I think that is not a negative thing, the anxiety

or stress. And I will say, also that the anxiety or stress

will be the physical signal about the stress. The anxiety, if we talk about the anxiety, we talk about we can see or we can feel like tachycardic or we like feeling that we are

our head is racing or we feel soreness of joints, for example. Or we feel this urge to run away in some

point. This is a kind of signal that our body sent

to us telling us that we feel anxiety or stress. And, at the end, this anxiety, this stress is just an answer to one external or an internal threat. And at the end is the level of anxiety is correct,

that will be allowed, that will allow us to respond in a proper way and with our resources

to this challenge or this threat. That is called in psychology, is called "eustress". It is the positive stress. When your level of resources is the correct

level to answer these stresses, this challenges for this situation. But, on the other hand, we also can find that

if the stress remains too much longer, for example, than the threat is not there anymore,

but we give this high level of stress and anxiety. That will be dangerous for our

health, both mental health, and also physical health. Also, if the threat is not... If the threat of the situations demands more

resources that we have, and we are not prepared about, we feel over-demanding and this negative



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stress will appraise again. And we call this negative stress “distress”. So, we at the end, this is important to differentiate

between these two ways of the response, these two ways of stress the “eustress”, which is a positive one;

and the “distress”, which is the negative one. The one that will be dangerous for our safe

In mental terms and also in physical terms. That is for starting, but also, I think second

thing that I would like to highlight is that when we see people in a stressful situations, such as an accident, for example, or natural disasters, or whatever situation like this, we need to differentiate between those people who are conscious about that and their level

of anxiety is normal, we will see normal or adaptive for the situation; and those who may be in shock, for example, in that moment and they are not conscious about the situation. For the first one, the ones that the people

who are present both physically and mentally, they know the situation. For example, they know what

happen. For example, in Spain, a few months ago we have one volcano in La Palma and the

people... They were really conscious about what happens and, and they were not ready for that, but

they were conscious about the situation in the majority of the times. But they feel any way over

demanding, they



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feel tachycardic, they feel a very high level of psychological anxiety. In that cases, when the people, the

person is conscious, they know about the situation, but they feel over demanding, we can try to do

with them, for example, some “my fullness” exercises, or some breathing exercises also.

For example, the typical exercise could be the people, the persons to close their eyes, his

eyes or her eyes, breathing through your nose, for example... Slowly in a deeply way. Counting to three

in any breathing for example they can feel all the feeling of their body. Feeling the lungs with

fresh air, for example, if possible. All the breathing for some seconds and then let the route again

through the mouth slowly. Counting to three between different breathing and repeat the process to

three or any time that the people need. By that, we try to low the level of anxiety, the physical anxiety

and also low in the responses like tachycardic or different responses, physical responses that may

have. But in other hand, as I said, we can find people... Those people who can be in that moment in

shock, in a mental and an emotional shock. If we see or if we feel that, for example, that a

person is not there or the level of stress is very high but they are not conscious about that,



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about what happened about an accident or similar, we need in some point to let them be there. At

least, for a while, because it is useful. In some point, these shocks, these types of shocks, this

disconnection of the world that I say they allow them to integrate all these heavy pain that they

cannot handle it at that moment. So, we cannot break this moment. This... This shock because in some

point is very necessary and these disconnection is necessary for that. In that case, it is just figured out,

for example, a mother or someone in an accident who has lost their kids or whatever... Is not

positive if you ask them to breathe and everything will be fine. We need to stay there. In that cases,

should be enough in there and validating all they need. If they need to cry, it is okay. They need to

cry. We can live our shoulder to cry If they need scream, it is okay. If they need to sleep, it is okay. They

may go to sleep If they need to push the table or something, at some point, it is okay of course, always

keeping their physical safety and others. Once we see the person is... We will say back to reality, we

can maybe try to do some breath exercises or, if it is necessary, mindfulness. But not before because

not we are going to break this, this... state, and it is very useful for them in the short and long



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terms. And also, and this is the last but not least, I would say that also we can face as we all live from the last 2 years and a half... More continuous natural or sanitary disasters such as the Covid since 2020 and it is normally that we feel this collective anxiety. The anxiety is all around us. For example, I guess that you also felt that at some point. I can also happen that all the mental and emotional things that we have left behind silence through the years came out, comes out in that point. In order to remain calm, we should follow in all times the protocols the authorities and try to filter, for example and control amount of news or information that we are seeking. It is not positive to seek information all the time. It is possible to have enough information, to be informed and not compulsive looking for this information. I will say that it also... It is also positive to look for this information in official press sources or official authorities and try to differentiate that between fake news and official news and not spreading this, this fake news or possible fake news through social media for example, something that networks like Twitter, Instagram or... In this way, we need avoid creating a situation of collective anxiety and collective fearing in some points. And also if possible, try to keep the same habits that we have before, for example, Covid. For





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example, if you just run, just keep running. If I used to watch films, that is keeping the same, watching

films. If you have any other hobbies, just keep or trying these in the... In some point to keep the same

habits that you have before. And to remain in all points, trying to remain calm and understanding that.

It is very difficult because we need to see any specific cases and study all the cases because it is not

the same for me, for you... But in general point, I think that all these points could be useful.

So, thank you very much for your tips, Enrique, it will be very useful to keep calm and avoid panic

attacks in any emergency situation. For more information, you can visit the website

[www.empowerpwd.eu](http://www.empowerpwd.eu)