

To whom this may concern,

You are an important person in this individual's life. That's why you are getting this letter. My name is Robert. I am a therapist and the author of a book about anxiety that this person has recently read. This means that they are trying to find resources to help pull themselves out of the crappy feelings that you have seen them struggling with. It can be immensely hard to explain what anxiety feels like. If you have never had significant issues with anxiety, you are exceptionally lucky because it really sucks. I want you to know that the person who gave you this letter is not trying to be difficult. If they had a magic wand that could help them suddenly stop struggling with these issues, I 100% guarantee that they would use it without a moment's hesitation.

Have you ever felt the "fight or flight" response? Maybe you've stepped out into the street without looking both ways and nearly missed getting hit by a car or perhaps you've had to speak in front of 1000 people and felt like you were going to puke, cry, and hyperventilate all at the same time. That's what anxiety feels like except it's not just a fleeting state of discomfort that happens once. It is something that can come on without much warning and it makes it very difficult to function. Trust me when I say that this person feels sad, guilty, and exhausted due to difficulties that anxiety causes them and the people around them. You don't need to know how to make them feel better and that's okay because it's not your responsibility.

If you want to be awesome, I have a few tips that can help you be the best support possible for this person when they are enduring a hard time. Firstly, don't take it personally. They might act very differently when they are having a "peak" in their anxiety. Take the things that they say and do in context. I'm sure you've been through a hard time before and acted in ways that aren't quite in line with your normal self. Asking them if there is anything that you can do to help is great, but don't always expect to get a clear response from them. Things can be confusing when the anxiety monster is hitting hard, so knowing what would help is not always clear. One question that most anxious people can give you an answer to is "do you need some space?" If they say yes, please give them a little room to breathe and let them know that you will be around if they need you. Try not to tell them it's all in their head, because they know that already. It doesn't make the pounding in their chest, the pain in their head, the hyperventilation, the sweating, or the racing thoughts any easier to deal with. There's no way that I can put you in their shoes, but I hope you believe me when I say that it's not as easy as just taking a breath and getting some fresh air.

Having anxiety does not mean that this person gets a blank slate to do or say anything that they want. You still have a right to be upset if they do shitty things but like I said before, try to take it in context. if you want to address the way that they are acting or the things that they are saying, maybe consider doing it when things have calmed down a bit. I also want make it clear that you don't have to understand them or agree with everything that they do to be supportive. This person's world feels chaotic and a good portion of their unease probably comes from feeling like they have no control over their environment and the things that happen to them. If they know that you are a constant that will be supportive no matter what happens, it can make a big difference.

Lastly, I'd like to tell you good job! If you are still in this person's life, then you aren't like the others who have run away or disappeared on them so far. They need supports on this journey and they really want you to be on their team. If you want to learn more about what this individual's experience with anxiety is like then I encourage you to ask them. I'm sure that when things are at their least crazy, they would be more than happy to sit with you and help you understand.

Sincerely,

Robert Duff, Ph.D. on behalf of the awesome anxiety warrior that gave you this note.