

Sarah Mallard Wakefield pt. 1

Do you believe anxiety is endemic in our society right now?

0:06

I do think there's a lot of anxiety, and I think there are a lot of reasons for that, but it is something that we're seeing increasing over time, and I think it is a concern and something that we need to address as a society and community, and not just in a therapeutic or you know, treatment framework, but really think about what we're doing as a community and society to to hopefully reduce anxiety over time.

Are terms like anxiety or overwhelm medical terms?

0:36

I think of anything as any way that someone describes their symptoms is helpful to me, and then trying to interpret that and gather more information. Those aren't specific words that we use in a diagnosis or alone in a diagnosis, but can definitely lead us to understanding what kinds of symptoms someone is having, so to know what additional questions to ask.

What constitutes anxiety or overwhelm?

1:01

When I think about what constitutes anxiety, anxiety is a typical emotion. We sometimes feel worried and we feel overwhelmed and those feelings are supposed to help us. They're supposed to help us plan. They're supposed to help us act. When I think about what is pathological about anxiety and overwhelm and those kinds of symptoms is when we feel paralyzed or we feel unable to act, or if we act in a way that is not helpful or constructive for ourselves. So I think you know, sometimes, especially in some of the wellness advertisements and things like that. The goal seems to be to never have a feeling like anxiety or overwhelm, which is unlikely and probably inappropriate for life. There are things that are anxiety provoking, there are things that are overwhelming, and what we want to do is have enough sense of skill and agency and community that we are able to handle those things, move through them. Know, there are people that we can rely on to help us with those tasks, and it's when we don't feel those things and then we get paralyzed or stuck in that anxiety and overwhelm that we see the need for more intervention.

Does these feelings show up in other ways throughout the body?

2:22

We are wired to have anxiety. We're wired to have a fight or flight system. These are helpful to us. They're supposed to be helpful so that we don't walk up and hang out with a tiger without, you know, thinking, what else could happen here? What do I need to do? We want to be able to run when we need a run. We want to be able to defend ourselves, if that's the option to us at the moment, but it is when our body feels like we need to fight or flight, and there really isn't an adequate trigger for that. And we see I treat lots of that. I think that's one of the primary things that I treat in all of my different clinical settings and I think there are a lot of triggers for that our brains are consuming a lot of information. I'm not so sure that we're exposed to more traumas than we used to be, but I think that we are exposed to more anxiety provoking content that may

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make those trauma exposures feel like they might happen more frequently, or they might they're more likely to happen.

What factors of modern society exacerbate these feelings?

3:34

It's hard for me to know that if they're really we're changing faster than we ever have or we just have more information about it. I think the thing that I know for sure is that no one has ever had the amount of information we do about the ills of the world or the changes that are happening. We have just when you see the advent of the 24 hour news cycle and the for profit news cycle, we see an increase in anxiety diagnoses, we see an increase in suicidal thoughts and suicidal ideation and deaths by suicide. And then you think about what happened with our little magic boxes and our purses and our pockets and the amount of the rapidness of that information that we're receiving at any time. I just don't think our brains were designed to receive information that quickly and process that many things and that many possible scary things at one time. And this is something that's really changed in our society, is the access to information, most of which we cannot act on, most of which we're just consuming without the ability to act on, and then feeling often very helpless with what's going on. And I'm not so sure that all of these tragic things haven't happened in the past, but we didn't consume them at the same rate that we are consuming them now.

Is the pace of modern society a cause of these issues?

5:12

It is but I also think it confers some excitement about that. We have some control over this. We can turn off the news. We can learn more skills about putting the phone down or not having as much access to it, or putting our own filters on there.

Why is it so important to connect with people in person and not just online?

5:31

I think that the less we feel connected as society, the less we see ourselves in each other, the more willing we are to otherize, and the more willing we are to say, Well, I must be right and you must be wrong. I think the more we are able to say, even if we disagree in this, our kids go to the same school, we have similar goals. We you know, we walk the same path around the neighborhood, those kinds of things that you're less likely to say, there's nothing we have in common, so we must be very different. And I think that is what happens when we are having a lot of relationships without that familiar context, or when we're having arguments with people that we don't know and I think the algorithms on the internet are also help sow divisiveness. You know, when we're hearing the same things and we're feeling like other people, you know, all people are thinking the way we are. When we find somebody thinking somewhat differently, we go, they're very they must be so wrong. Everybody thinks the way that I do. And I think that some of that is fed by those algorithms, and then we can it's easy to get in an echo chamber. And like I said, when you find someone who has a differing opinion, you think something must

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be wrong with them, instead of just that they have a different idea. And, why do they have a different instead of being curious? You know, you get cautious instead of curious. And, I'd like to sit down with people with different ideas and hear from them, and but we've gotten to a place where different ideas feel scary instead of provoke a sense of, do you know something that I don't know? And I could learn from you. And I think that the way the internet works, the way social media works, the way news channels work, feed, all of that.