




Anxiety and Rock Climbing

By: Logan Sherrer, Doctor of Occupational Therapy Student

Learning Objectives

1. Participants able to identify physical responses to anxiety and
2. Participants able to identify strategies to ease anxiety in relation to being on the the climbing wall
3. Participants able to recall information pertaining to anxiety
4. Participants can reframe climbing as an activity to reduce symptoms of anxiety



**What is
anxiety?**

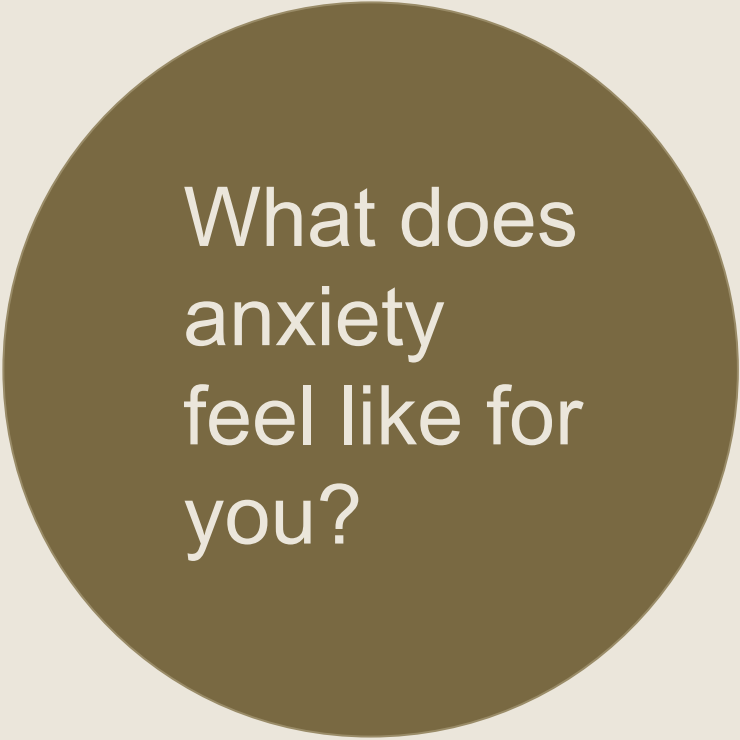
What is Anxiety?

- Anxiety is a NORMAL fear response to immediate or anticipated stressors
- Anxiety is the brain's natural response to stressors
- Anxiety may be classified as a generalized anxiety disorder when it occurs in situations where no threats are present and when daily occupations are impacted by the anxiety response

What does anxiety feel like?

Most common symptoms of anxiety:

- **Physical:** shaking, sweat, and impacted processing of sensory environment
- **Cognitive:** worry, reduced problem solving, and frustration



What does
anxiety
feel like for
you?

(Munir & Takov, 2020)



**What causes
anxiety?**



What causes anxiety?

Situational:

- Being outside of your comfort zone
- Anticipated stressor (job interview, deadline, etc.)
- Trauma response


Anxiety disorders:

- Social anxiety
- Generalized anxiety disorder
- PTSD
- OCD
- Panic disorder
- Specific phobias

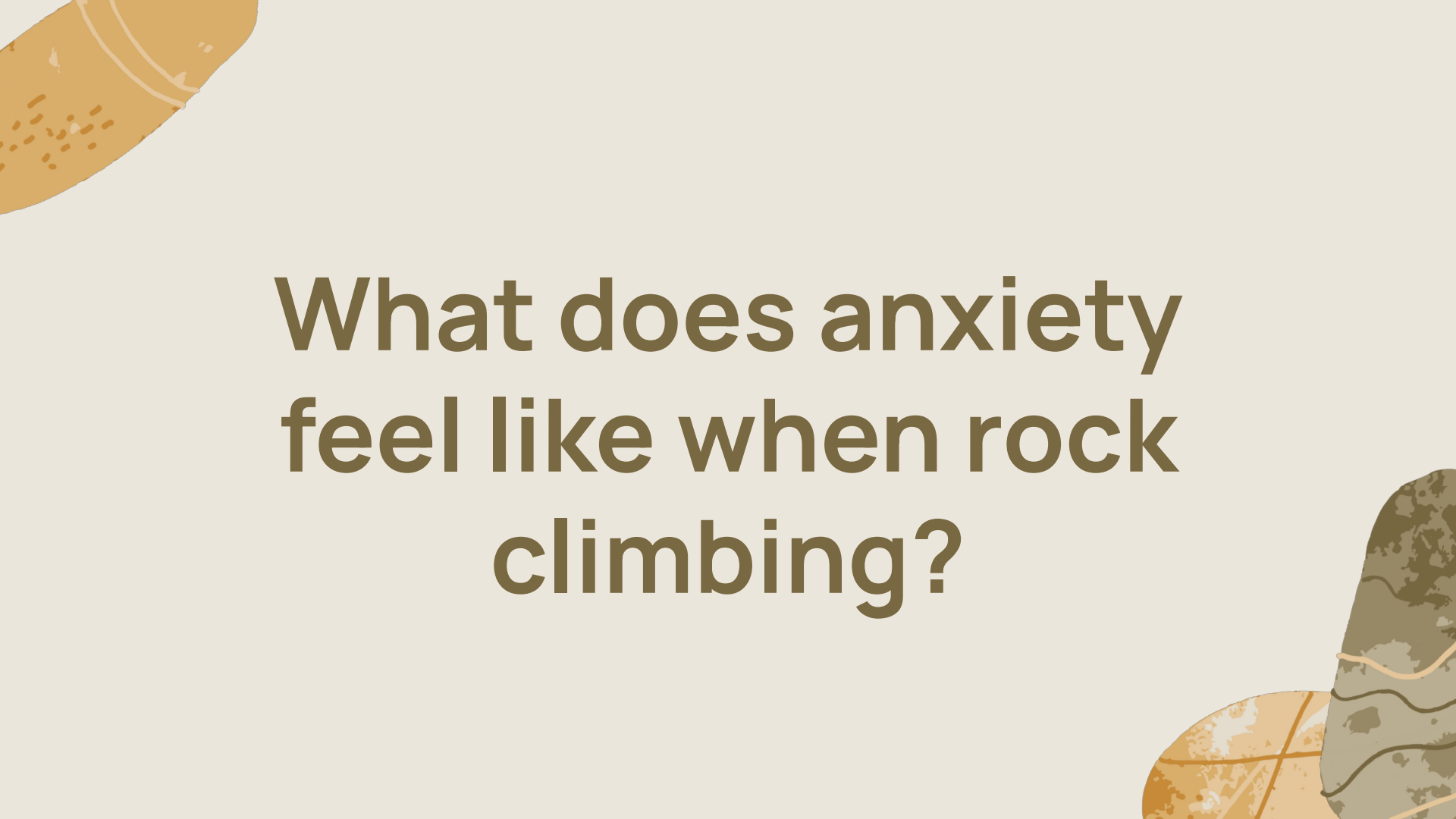
Feelings of anxiety may not only impact our ability to climb but also our ability to perform in other daily tasks

When do we have feelings of anxiety?

Remember that anxiety is
a normal response to
fear!



When do you
feel anxious?

The background features a light beige color with stylized rock formations in shades of orange and grey. The text is centered in a bold, dark brown font.


**What does anxiety
feel like when rock
climbing?**

Anxiety While Climbing


It is normal to feel anxious while climbing due to adrenaline, fear of falls, and increased physical challenge

Ways that anxiety may present when on the climbing wall:

- Panicked feeling and increased risk of making mistakes after missing a clip when lead climbing
- Physical shaking, commonly referred to as “elvis leg” in the climbing community
- Hesitation when making a risky move while bouldering



**How do you reduce
feelings of anxiety on
the climbing wall?**



Reducing anxiety

Whether it's in the moment while climbing or when stressors of life bring us down there are many ways proven to reduce anxiety:

- Breathing exercises
- Focus on the task at hand
- Communicate with friends or a partner
- Guided meditation
- Repeat exposure and practice
- Taking a break and step away
- Structure and routine

Strategies used to reduce anxiety while climbing can be applied to scenarios outside of the climbing gym or crag

(Christensen, 2023)

Reducing anxiety in daily life

Exercise

- Go for a walk
- Yoga
- Climbing

Lifestyle changes

- Establish routines
- Seek therapy or counseling
- Focus on tasks at hand

Mindfulness practices


- 333 rule
- Conscious breathing
- Daily meditations

Reducing anxiety while climbing


- Trust and communication with your climbing partner
- Come down off the wall and reassess
- Focus on one move at a time
- Take a moment to enjoy the view
- Climb often and with confidence
- Physical strategies:
 - Deep breaths
 - Reduce sensory input (close your eyes)
 - If on a long route, find a place to rest mid-climb



(Christensen, 2023); (Karg et al., 2020)



**What is your personal
experience with climbing to
reduce anxiety?**



Survey



Group Sign-ups

Thank you for your interest in The Spot's mindfulness series! If you want to learn more consider using the links below to sign up for one or more mental health groups led by Logan Sherrer, a Doctorate of Occupational therapy student.

[Denver](#)

[Golden](#)

[Louisville](#)

[Thornton](#)

**Additional readings: Current
research on the benefits of
climbing**

Evidence to support therapeutic benefits of rock climbing

- Exercise alone has long time been a proven way to reduce anxiety (Karg et al., 2020)
 - Exercise causes our body to increase heart rate and respiration to trick the mind into responding to a fear response even if something is not actually there
- Climbing as a form of exercise or recreation is found to be even more effective than traditional exercise alone (Karg et al., 2020)
 - Outlet for adrenaline
 - Clears the mind
 - Community engagement and support

Evidence to support climbing to reduce anxiety

Community engagement

- Top-rope climbing and bouldering both revolve around community or team work
 - Any form of rope climbing involves trusting your belayer
 - Simply discussing beta with friends or strangers while bouldering
- Engaging in a community for shared problem solving alone can reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression (Lamb et al., 2015)

Adrenaline

- Adrenaline seeking behaviors causes a chemical response in the brain that reduces symptoms of anxiety (Karg et. al., 2020)
- A clear mind on the climbing wall leaves less room for thoughts of life stressors

Cultural Considerations

- Evidence suggests that community-based exercise is an effective means to provide mental health support to marginalized and lower-socioeconomic communities (Lamb et al., 2015)
 - These individuals may not have as easy or comfortable access to traditional mental health services
 - Community engagement and exercise reduce anxiety symptoms
- Climbers should continue to provide a welcoming and culturally sensitive community (Naggy et al., 2022)
 - Supportive communities help to reduce external stressors
 - Access to a supportive group activity reduces symptoms of anxiety

References

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