



The Anxious Mama's Guide to Living a More Balanced Life

By Dr. Katie Gerst

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Whether you are a new mom or an old pro, anxiety can affect us all. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA), 6.8 million adults are affected by anxiety in any given year and women are twice as likely to be affected. A person with anxiety tends to have a difficult time controlling their worry which can be related to a number of issues such as family, children, relationships, money, work, health, etc.

Being a Mom is hard work. It's one of the toughest jobs on the planet. But that job becomes even more difficult when you struggle with anxiety and/or anxious thoughts. I know because I've been where you are right now. There was a time that I was so overwhelmed with my responsibilities that I became paralyzed with fear. I couldn't even get myself to eat, let alone take care of my family. Thankfully, through a great deal of introspection and self-growth, I've become the balanced mama I've always wanted to be. I am mindfully present with my family every day and achieving more of my goals than I ever thought possible.

That being said, I want to share my success with you! I want you to feel as present and balanced as I do. Here are a few of my tips and tricks that I've used consistently throughout the years to achieve that. I'm excited for you to get started and to hear how these techniques work for you. Please go to my [Facebook page](#) or send me an [email](#) to let me know your results!

~Dr. Katie

Panic Attack/Emergency Moment Techniques

THREE PART (4-7-9) BREATH

If you are familiar with yoga or meditation, you've probably heard of three part breath before. Breathing exercises in yoga are called pranayamas and they help bring awareness to your body. When you are focused on your breathing, it is difficult to focus on your anxious thoughts or feelings, thus providing you with a sense of calm. Consciously practicing this type of exercise also helps to bring positive changes to your mental, physical, and emotional well-being.

This technique is very easy and can be done anywhere, anytime. Start by taking a slow, long inhale through your nose for 4 seconds. Try to breathe into your chest, ribcage, and abdomen. Then hold this breath for a slow count of 7 seconds. Finally, release your breath slowly through your mouth for a count of 9 seconds. Attempt to push all of the air out of chest, rib cage, and abdomen. Pull your stomach and abdomen in and up in order to expel the air.

Do this until you start to feel calm. Don't worry if you cannot hold your breaths for the suggested time. It takes practice and you may have to work your way up to 7 and 9 seconds.



EXTERNALIZING

One of the best ways to stay in the present moment is to verbalize your senses out loud. This feels a little strange at first, but it works wonders. Similar to mindful breathing, when are focused on your immediate surroundings, it is very difficult for your mind to project into the future, thus decreasing your anxiety.

This technique is very simple and can also be done anywhere, anytime. Start by tapping into your senses and giving a detailed description of your surroundings *out loud*:

- Hearing – what sounds do you hear? Your children? The TV? Cars driving by? The wind?
- Taste – what taste do you have in your mouth? You can even grab a mint, a piece of gum, or a drink of water to help you refocus here.
- Sight – what do you see around you? Describe the shape and color of things.
- Smell – what do you smell? Sweet baby smells? Laundry detergent on your clothes? Fresh air?
- Touch – Are you holding anything? What does it feel like? Describe the temperature, the breeze, your clothes, whatever you feel.

The key is to do this exercise out loud, so that your brain is focused on the task of observing *and* verbalizing your observations. This way your brain doesn't have a chance to focus on your anxiety because it's busy with these tasks.



General Anxiety Techniques

CHANGE YOUR MINDSET

Mindset work is one of the most critical components of getting your anxiety under control. Changing your mindset takes a lot of work and time because you are trying to change negative habits that have been formed over a long period of time.

When a negative thought pops into your head, immediately label it for what it is: a negative thought. Then, break it down:

- Why am I thinking this?
- Do I know this to be true?
- Is this a real threat?
- What are the chances this is really going to happen?
- Has this threat actually happened to me before?
- If so, have I survived this threat before?

Breaking down your thoughts and looking at them for what they really are (negative thoughts), helps to put things into perspective. Aside from breaking down your negative thoughts, you can also change your mindset by focusing on more positive things. For example, use positive words when talking. Find the good in everything. Practice positive affirmations each morning by sticking post-it notes on your bathroom mirror with the following messages:

“There’s no way to be a perfect mother and a million ways to be a good one.” – Jill Churchill

I am learning to be a better mom with each new day.

I am doing the best that I can for my children and it is enough.

WATER! WATER! WATER!

You've probably heard a million times how important it is to drink water every single day. After all, your body is about 60% water. But did you know that dehydration can cause anxiety or make symptoms of anxiety worse? Approximately 75% of the U.S. population lives in a constant state of dehydration. That's crazy high! Luckily, it's an easy problem to fix.

When you're dehydrated, you might experience some of the following symptoms:

- Headaches
- Feeling faint
- Feeling tired or sleepy
- Mental fog
- Increased heart rate
- Dry skin
- Muscle fatigue and weakness
- Dizziness



Many of these symptoms can trigger panic attacks; however, adding more water to your daily routine can help reduce the frequency and intensity of panic attacks by giving your body the fuel that it needs to do its job.

Even if you don't experience panic attacks, dehydration can trigger anxiety because we tend to feel anxious when we feel that something is wrong with our health or bodies.

The amount of water you should drink daily varies if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, but women in general should consume about 72 ounces of water each day.

Balanced Mama Techniques

JUST SAY NO!

One of the most common issues anxious mamas experience is feeling overwhelmed. We are often the ones who over-commit ourselves because there is an expectation that we can and should do everything for everyone even if we don't want to. Sometimes you genuinely want to do everything. In fact, saying yes to other people makes us feel good. It's a part of our culture, especially for women. It makes us feel like we are giving back and being a team player, but saying yes to too many things means we may not have time for the things that mean the most to us. So guess what? It's ok to say no. Here's a helpful tip. Before you commit to something new, ask yourself the following questions:

- By saying yes to this, does this mean I have to say no to something that is more important to me?
- Do I actually have time to do this?
- Does this support my goals and top priorities?
- Is this something I actually want to do?

Only when we are clear about our goals and priorities, will we be able to confidently say yes to things that we know we should include in our lives, and say no to the things that we should not. Over time, this technique really helps to add balance to your life.



TIME MANAGEMENT

Most mamas just laugh when they hear the words “time management.” To say that you are overworked, over-committed, under-rested, and underappreciated is probably an understatement. I can totally relate. I finished my doctorate a few months after my second daughter was born, so I know exactly how difficult it can be to find time to do anything that isn’t related to childrearing or work. I also know how it feels to be going a million miles a minute, running around, doing all sorts of tasks, and yet feeling like I’ve accomplished nothing.

The truth of the matter is that anyone can do more with less time. You can probably find an extra 15 minutes of your day just for you! Here a few tips:

- Schedule sleep like you would anything else and do not be late!
- Set daily goals. Make sure they are realistic.
- Set a time limit for social media. It’s a major time waster!
- Establish strict work hours. Do not work outside of these hours!
- Delegate anything you can, whenever you can. Let it go!
- Meal prep if you can or make double portions some nights.
- Consider swapping play dates with another mom, so you can get some free time.

