



Wellbeing Insights

One of two reasons...

What makes you smile?

I wonder what comes to mind for you as you ponder this question? Maybe your first thought was being with other people – family, friends, colleagues, or pets. Maybe your mind turned to nature and spending time in the great outdoors, experiencing emotions such as awe and wonder. Maybe your mind turned to simple pleasures – music, a TV show, a cup of tea, or simply... chocolate!

I hope you enjoy the lightness of this question and I encourage you to pose this question occasionally to family members or friends and then sit back and appreciate the breadth of their responses. Unsurprisingly, you are likely to hear hundreds of reasons why people break into a warm smile.

What makes you anxious?

I wonder what comes to mind for you as you ponder this question? Maybe your first thought was being with other people....

I suspect if you asked this question to a range of different people you would once again hear a wide variety of answers. Sure, some common ones may appear such as public speaking, performing in front of a crowd or sitting exams through to spiders, cliff edges or unknown noises or shadows.

Can I suggest that all the reasons we feel anxious (or nervous, worried, concerned, uneasy, on-edge, or apprehensive) can be classified into two broad categories. It is 100% normal and natural to feel anxious for the following two reasons:

1. In response to feeling in danger.
2. In response to doing something meaningful and brave.

Both of these reasons are very real for every human, regardless of age, gender, culture, or religion. If you are feeling anxious in response to feeling in danger, we should thank our body and recognise this unpleasant emotion as part of our survival instinct. When real danger is present the correct response would generally be to remove yourself from the situation – stepping back from the cliff, or avoiding the dark alley at night.

However, when we are feeling anxious in response to doing something meaningful and brave, you should once again thank your body for the warning sign, but recognise that this is not in response to danger, but in response to meaning and purpose. On such occasions we are generally rewarded by moving forward, embracing the situation and leaning into the discomfort. The goal is not to push away the feelings of anxiousness, but to appreciate that these emotions are normal and that you can carry these unpleasant feelings lightly with you as you bravely go forward. It is common to feel anxious when giving an important talk, when you are performing in front of a crowd – that's because it's important, it matters to you.



The next time you feel anxious – which for me I know will not be too far away – check-in to see which one of the two reasons is the cause of your discomfort. In understanding the reason, hopefully you will know which way to turn.