Panic Attack Management

Note: A panic attack is NOT DANGEROUS.

- They can’t cause heart failure or cardiac arrest
- They will not cause someone to stop breathing or suffocate
- They will not cause fainting
- They can’t cause someone to lose their balance
- They will not cause someone to fall over
- They do not cause people to “go crazy”
- They can’t cause people to “lose control of themselves”

*(The Anxiety & Phobia Workbook, 2010)*

*If a student has symptoms of a panic attack, ring security for assistance, if needed.*

**What should I say and do if I know the student is having a panic attack?**

- **Reassure the student** that they are experiencing a panic attack.

- It is important that you *remain calm* and that you do not start to panic yourself.

- Speak to the student in a reassuring and calm manner, and be patient.

- Speak clearly and slowly and use short, clear sentences.

- Rather than making assumptions about what the student needs, ask them directly what they think might help.

- Do not belittle the student’s experience.

- Acknowledge that the terror feels very real, but reassure them that a panic attack, while very frightening, is not life threatening or dangerous.

- Reassure them that they are safe and that the symptoms will pass.
What is a panic attack?

A panic attack is a sudden rush of intense anxiety or fear together with a surge of frightening physical sensations and thoughts.

**Physical sensations can include:**
- pounding heart
- dizziness/faintness
- breathlessness
- chest pains
- numbness/tingling
- sweating
- shaking
- nausea

**Thoughts can include feeling like you may be:**
- out of physical and/or emotional control
- dying
- having a heart attack/stroke
- passing out
- going crazy

**Panic attacks are usually brief**, but may be very scary while they last. They can often seem to come “out of the blue”, which makes them even scarier.

While panic sensations are a natural response to danger, panic attacks are usually out of proportion to any actual danger the person may be facing at the time. They seem to have a life of their own.