



Conscious Life presents

# ANXIETY SUPER CONFERENCE

## In Therapy

### Tools to manage your anxiety

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#### **[00:00:00] Alex Howard**

Hi, I'm Alex Howard and welcome to this week's episode of *In Therapy*, where we follow real life people on their therapeutic journeys.

In this week's episode, we're meeting 22 year old Sanaya. Sanaya has been struggling with anxiety, which has really been limiting her ability to enjoy her life. And in this week's episode, we're going to get to some of the roots of what's been causing her anxiety, along with starting to build a plan for her journey to healing.

Stay tuned till the end for my top tip on why getting the right foundation in place is so important for healing and how to get started. If you haven't already, please like subscribe, click the bell icon to be notified as new episodes are released and follow my other social channels for daily inspiration and support.

Here's a little introduction to meet Sanaya.

#### **Sanaya**

So I'm Sanaya and I'm 22 years old. The reasons why I'd like to have therapy is probably because mainly my anxiety being the main issue. I have really big ups and downs and I find it hard to manage my stress.

The way that anxiety has really affected me is I have missed out on lots of things. Even when I have forced myself to go out and see my friends, I have moments where I'm just sat there and I feel like I'm not talking enough or they might think that I'm not what I used to be like. So it definitely comes up all the time and then I end up trying to book an uber home straight away and going home.

I haven't always been an anxious person, I don't think. I think definitely within the past year especially, I found myself having to be on my own a lot more. I think before COVID especially, I was such a social person, very outgoing, and I feel like the past year, 2 years completely knocked my confidence.

I would always have anxious moments during uni and things like that, but nothing like this, when I find myself not actually doing anything during the day and I'm still feeling anxious. It feels like there's always something wrong and I can't quite place my finger on what it is that's wrong, but it's just really, really wrong. It feels like the whole world is falling apart, but I just don't know what it is.

And I know that everything is fine, but you can't suppress this feeling. And I used to have different ways of coping with it, but now none of them work. Even if I go out for a run, I'll enjoy it whilst I'm out,

as soon as I come back, the feeling will slowly come back again, basically. So yeah, it's just hard to find ways of coping with it.

**[00:03:14]**

I'm definitely nervous and excited about working with Alex. I am really excited to start with him and get used to speaking with him and stuff like that and being really open. But, I am really nervous about talking about my feelings, which is something I probably haven't done very deeply for so long. So I'm a bit nervous about that and nervous about the first time meeting him, but mainly excited. It's a mix.

**Alex Howard**

Well, Sanaya, it's lovely to meet you. I imagine you're probably feeling a little bit like, oh my God, there's cameras, it's actually happening.

**Sanaya**

A little bit.

**Alex Howard**

Of course, I completely understand that.

Obviously you've had some conversations with Oliver and Rachael, I've heard a little bit second hand from them, but I'd love to hear a bit from you about why you're here. What would you like to get from the time that we've got?

**Sanaya**

My main reason for being here is definitely dealing with anxiety. Quite badly over the past year, I get really anxious, sometimes for no reason at all, sometimes because a social situation has, the thought of it has triggered me. I can literally wake up in the morning and just feel really anxious.

And so I guess that's my main issue that I kind of want to find out how to cope with it and just tame it so that I know how to deal with it and not necessarily experience it all the time and not let it affect me so much.

**Alex Howard**

Say a bit more about the history of the anxiety. If you can remember when you first, do you remember when you first experienced anxiety?

**Sanaya**

Definitely throughout sixth form, I was super carefree, it was great. And definitely throughout uni I started getting more and more anxious about things, but I was like, I was acting and I just passed it off as, oh, I've got that show, I've just got these nerves, I'm just nervous about it. And it was kind of something I could deal with and I thought it was very normal.

**[00:05:56]**

And then I think as I left uni very abruptly because of COVID, it was just like, oh gosh, everything that I thought was just so normal, like day-to-day life, like getting on a tube or something like that, it was all of a sudden so fragile.

And then throughout, COVID it was just, I would wake up, be so unproductive and then get really anxious about how unproductive I was. And then it was just like a cycle. And then I get anxious about, what have you eaten today? You're inside the house the whole day, you're just eating so much. And it was just, I don't know.

**Alex Howard**

So it sounds like there's definitely event specific anxiety. At uni there's anxiety about there's an upcoming show and anxiety about that, or there's anxiety around perhaps applying for jobs. Is there also a level of background anxiety that's there anyway?

If you think about times or places where you feel relaxed and sort of in the moment, do you still feel a level of anxiety that's there, or is there a sense that it goes down to pretty much zero and then there's an event that comes up and then the anxiety ramps up?

**Sanaya**

I think it literally just depends. I think I have days where I know why I'm anxious and it's because this is happening, this is coming up. But then I have days where even when I'm feeling great, I think I'm still like, oh, this could change any minute. And I get anxious about when I'm next going to get anxious.

**Alex Howard**

Right.

**Sanaya**

It's definitely happening a lot when meeting my friends. So I'll have a situation where, like the other day we went to an event and I was like, oh my gosh, I'm having so much, this is my first event since whatever, I'm having so much fun, all my best friends are here, this is so great when is it going to turn? When am I going to get anxious?

**Alex Howard**

So there's what I would call anticipatory anxiety. You're anticipating that you're going to feel anxious.

**Sanaya**

So I reassure myself, I can take myself home whenever I like, just get an Uber, it'll be fine. But once it's in my head, I try and push it to the back of my head, but it's just still there and I feel like I do that a lot. As soon as I have a feeling about something, I'm like, I'll just push it to the back and then it's fine for a bit and I can carry on and I have a great time with my friends.

**[00:08:38]**

And then, for instance, if I do last that long, I'll get home and I'll be like, oh gosh, I looked like that or I said that or they must hate me or something like that. It gets really bad when I have pushed it to the back of my head.

**Alex Howard**

If you don't push it to the back of your head and it's sort of there, what happens then?

**Sanaya**

If I'm at home and I'm just anxious, I do try and deal with it. I'll go and do some exercise, go for a walk or something like that. I feel like in public when I have gotten anxious, certain situations I've left early and my friends will be like, oh, are you okay? And I'll be like, yeah, I'm literally fine. I just want to go home. But I do have this thing inside which is like, oh, you never used to be like that, just stay a bit longer. So it's just so annoying because it's a constant battle regardless of what I do or how I feel.

**Alex Howard**

What are the places or circumstances where you feel the most relaxed? Thinking about it in advance, that's going to be totally fine. And then when you're there, it's fine. And afterwards it's also fine. What would be any of those places?

**Sanaya**

When I'm in bed and I know I'm going to sleep and I'm tired then it's great. And I usually put on a little podcast or something to kind of, because I do have nights where I'm lying in bed like, oh my gosh. But most of the time I am just so tired from the day that I stick on a podcast, it distracts me enough and I fall asleep straight away. And those are like the moments where I feel most relaxed, definitely.

In public situations, I don't really feel relaxed really ever. I power through but at the back of my head I'm like, oh gosh, what are you doing?

**Alex Howard**

It sounds like that there's a background anxiety that's there quite a lot of the time, and sometimes it comes more into the foreground and it kind of feels too much and so you take yourself out of the situation. Other times you're able to put it more into the background.

Say a bit more about the content of the anxiety. You're saying that it sounds like it's a lot tied to your appearance and how you think other people are judging your appearance, but run me through a bit more some of the anxiety thoughts that you would typically have.

**Sanaya**

Yeah. It is mainly about the way I look or the way I come across to other people. In terms of finding a job, when I'm at home and I'm feeling anxious I know I should really be applying for jobs and stuff like that, but it's just when I feel anxious, I'm just so unproductive. And it's just like this cycle.

**[00:11:43] Alex Howard**

So if you're at home and you're thinking about applying for jobs, what would be some of the actual thoughts? So thoughts like, you can't do it?

**Sanaya**

Yeah, I'm not going to get it anyway.

**Alex Howard**

Right, so what's the point in doing it because you're not going to get it.

**Sanaya**

Yeah, there's literally no point in doing this.

**Alex Howard**

How would you be feeling in your body? Whereabouts would you actually feel the feeling of anxiety?

**Sanaya**

My top half of my body. It can range from literally just my head and I'm just a little bit anxious, so it's just, what's going on up here? But when I am really anxious, it's just my top half of my body. I get shaky, my heart's going so fast, especially after I have a coffee. It's like that feeling..

**Alex Howard**

Adrenalized feeling.

**Sanaya**

And that can happen, I can literally wake up in the morning and then I've got this anxiety. Try and go out for a run or something, and sometimes it helps for the whole day but sometimes this kind of feeling does come back and I'm just like, why? I can't place my finger on what it is that is making me anxious.

**Alex Howard**

What do you feel emotionally? If you were to name any emotions you feel in that place? What do you think you feel?

**Sanaya**

Not good. I just feel sad.

**Alex Howard**

Is it a sadness of frustration. Like I don't want to feel this way. Why am I feeling this way?

**[00:13:10] Sanaya**

Sometimes. It's just purely I get angry about it, I get frustrated, but I think a lot of the time I just wallow in it, get into my bed and have a cry. I think I definitely do feel like, oh, I feel a bit helpless, like worthless. I just don't feel like... I just feel really down.

**Alex Howard**

Is there a sense of also feeling powerless? There's this thing that's happening and it's stopping you from moving forward to things you want to in your life. You don't know what to do about it.

**Sanaya**

Yeah. I feel like having no control stresses me out completely.

**Alex Howard**

Right.

**Sanaya**

So definitely when I'm not in control of how I feel, I can't control these feelings of being anxious. I have no reason for them. I can't control them. So, it makes it a million times worse, knowing that I'm just so out of control.

**Alex Howard**

What else has helped in the past? So you mentioned partly sometimes being able to explain why you feel anxious has been helpful. What else have you noticed has had a positive impact?

**Sanaya**

Movement.

**Alex Howard**

Exercise.

**Sanaya**

A lot over lock down when I was feeling anxious, I would just take myself out for a run and that seemed to sort me out. I felt great after. Going to the gym and things like that. When I could lift heavier than I did last week.

**Alex Howard**

You feel a sense of progress.

**[00:14:51] Sanaya**

It was such a good feeling, especially when I have nothing going on right now for me. So it was like, oh, going to the gym and it was a good feeling. It was a way of dealing with it, but I feel like now that I've got used to it, it's not this new thing that's working for me anymore. It's kind of like I struggle with it still and I take myself out for a run and I don't know, it just doesn't work anymore.

**Alex Howard**

Maybe, does it work perhaps on a physical level, but it's not enough to deal with the overall feeling of anxiety?

**Sanaya**

Yeah, I feel like it works and I feel like my brain is completely distracted and it's great. And then in the evening when I've slowed myself down, I'm not really doing anything, like watching some TV or something like that, then I'll get myself to bed and I'll just get really anxious all of a sudden again. And I guess it's not necessarily in my body, I don't feel it as much, but it's definitely still in my head.

**Alex Howard**

Yeah, that makes sense.

Where would you like life to be in 6 to 12 months time? So it sounds like part of what you're doing at the moment is applying for possible jobs. You've got a lot of time on your hands at the moment, which it sounds like is its own source of anxiety in a sense, because there's just not much distraction, but also the anxiety and frustration of wanting to feel like you're progressing, like you're moving forwards. And it sounds like there's a sense at the moment of feeling a bit stuck. Say a bit about that.

**Sanaya**

I feel like in a year's time I want to obviously have a job and be a bit less carefree. I know that I'm now 22, I feel like I'm an adult now. I have to start earning my own money and something that I really want to do. Just getting out of this headspace of, I don't want to do this or this is stressing me out and just doing it. Which is I feel like what I used to do, but I don't know what happened. And then all of a sudden it just loads and loads of thoughts going on in my head. So, I definitely want to be a lot more carefree about things and confident as well.

**Alex Howard**

One way to think about it is, let's say your mind is a bus, and right now there's a monkey driving the bus. So it's all over the place and it's overexcited, and then it's panicking. There's too much noise.

In a sense, the thing about anxiety is anxiety feeds anxiety. So when we get anxiety, it's almost like we tune our mind into radio station anxiety, and then we go looking for anxiety because that's what our brain has got trained to do.

**Sanaya**

Yes.

**[00:17:54] Alex Howard**

It's part of your brain called your reticular activating system, which is trained to look for patterns. So, for example, when you got your dog, you were telling me about earlier, you probably started seeing dogs everywhere, or you start seeing that breed of dogs everywhere.

It's like you get a new coat and suddenly you start seeing that new coat, or you start noticing coats everywhere because your brain is looking for those patterns. It's looking for things that are in tune with and familiar with what it's looking for.

So the more we get used to having thoughts and anxiety, the more we literally condition our mind. We train our mind to have thoughts and anxiety.

When you're in a place where you're in a natural, comfortable routine, you're training your mind to be in a calmer, more settled place. The problem is that all of our minds are being conditioned and trained all of the time, but we're not doing it consciously.

So we unintentionally train our mind to get more and more better and more skillful and anxiety and worry and this and that, because the more we do it, the more we get better at doing it.

The good news is that if you can train your mind to have anxiety, you can train your mind to be calm, but we have to have tools and strategies to be able to do that. Otherwise, what happens is that, in a sense, our mind is the bus and the monkey is driving it, and we're sat in the back just getting thrown around.

Learning to take some, I'm not such a fan of the word control because I need to be in control of my mind, but having ways of being able to influence our own thoughts and to change our state in and of itself calms things down a lot.

Like you were saying earlier, that if you can make sense of why you feel anxious, that alone calms things down. Because in a sense, in that moment, you don't feel as powerless to this thing that's happening.

The same is true that if you know that you've got a few go to tools and strategies that you know that when I feel anxious, I can do this thing and actually I feel less anxious when that happens, you have less anticipatory anxiety beforehand.

If you're going out to meet friends and your mind is like, but what if I get anxious and what if this happens? What if they think that? And you go, oh, but I know that I've got this thing that I do that actually helps calm it down, you're already going into it calmer. Does that make a certain amount of sense?

**Sanaya**

Yeah, that does. I feel like my way of coping was definitely moving my body of some sort and do some sort of exercise. But obviously I can't start exercising in front of my friends.

**Alex Howard**

Actually, it's funny. So moving your body is a really good strategy. If you weren't doing that, one of the things I'd be saying is use your body, that can really help. But exactly as you say, you can't really



exercise the minute you wake up, the minute you go to bed. You might become an Olympic level athlete, but it's not a sustainable way to manage it.

**[00:21:00]**

The reason why exercise works is firstly it moves the energy. So if you've got lots of anxiety that's bubbling, it just helps you move the energy.

What it also does is it changes your breathing. So when we get anxious, one of the things that happens is we don't breathe properly. We get more and more shallow in our breath and so our body goes into a state of anxiety because it's literally craving oxygen because we're not getting enough of it.

When we exercise, you have to breathe properly otherwise, if you're running and you don't breathe properly, you run out of steam within 20 seconds. So it changes your breathing. It's also through moving the energy in your body, everything then relaxes. All the tension that's being held on, all of that then is able to relax more afterwards.

So the strategies that I can teach you, that you can learn to help with anxiety, partly are just learning to work with things like your breath, learning to work with what's happening in your body, learning what's happening in terms of, what are the thoughts that are happening and how are those thoughts feeding other thoughts?

So you can start to see, I have that thought, and that actually triggers that thought, and that triggers those thoughts. The more awareness we have about those thought patterns, the more we can catch them, the more we can retrain that way of thinking.

So what we want to be able to ultimately do is for you to be able to learn to have tools and strategies that help you be more in the moment, more of the time.

And we're not talking about some perfect magic pill. To have a certain amount of anxiety is healthy and appropriate. So let's say you've got a performance coming up and you've not learned your lines or you've not practiced, you should feel a level of anxiety because that's what's going to get you to go, I've got this thing in three days, actually I need to spend...

So a certain amount of looking to the future and feeling caution or concern is appropriate. The problem is when it becomes disproportionate or when the anxiety or the fear that we have starts to paralyze and cripple us because in of itself is too overwhelming or too much.

So our objective together is not that you never have any thoughts of anxiety or worry or concern. Our objective is that you don't feel at the mercy of those thoughts and you don't have that sense of, oh my God, if this happens I'm not going to have a way of being able to manage it and work with it.

**Sanaya**

Yeah. That's the aim.

**Alex Howard**

I like to do things in stages and sequences. So it's not helpful for me to throw a massive toolbox for you at once. It's helpful to go through things that we put in place, building blocks along the way.

**[00:23:58]**

And I think our primary objective together, it sounds like initially, is to work on the anxiety. To get to the point that you have some more strategies and tools to work with it, that you feel calmer overall. And if you do have anxiety, you know that you have ways of working with it.

That alone may well be enough to have a meaningful impact on the self-esteem, self-worth piece as well, because the calmer you feel, the more capable you're going to feel, the more you're going to go out and do things that make you feel good about yourself that's going to help with that.

But it sounds like there's also a piece where you have quite a strong, what I call, inner critic. That voice in your mind that's judging you, criticizing you, telling you you're saying the wrong thing, you're doing the wrong thing. So doing some work with that I think would also be helpful as well.

It sounds like that you have an enormous amount of potential and desire and will to go and do the things that you want to do in your life at this point. But it sounds like the anxiety and the inner critic piece, it's almost like trying to run a marathon with a couple of big weights tied behind you and you're still doing it, the weight is still there, but you're just having to work a lot harder than ideally you would have to.

**Sanaya**

Yeah. That does sound like it.

**Alex Howard**

Part of how we're going to work together is I have a lot of the tools and the techniques and strategies that I work with filmed in online courses and videos and that sort of thing. So what we'll tend to do is less of me teaching you, spend less time teaching this and that in these sessions, we will do some of that. And a certain amount of me setting your homework that you go away and you watch bits, you start practicing some bits, and then you come back, and then we work with that together.

So we're going to look at motivation, we're going to look at having some meditation, building some awareness, and then putting in place a technique to start working with.

It may sound quite a lot. Do the best you can with it. This is not about, I don't want perfection to be the enemy of progress. We're not trying to get everything perfectly right. This is a journey that we are just beginning.

So when you come back next time, if it feels like nothing's changed but you've done the homework, I'm totally happy. I'm not expecting you to walk in and go, oh my God, I did this. That's wonderful. But that isn't the expectation.

The way that I work is a combination of taking the time to really decode what's happening. Like you and I together, we've talked some today. We'll talk some more about the sequence of what's happened in the past and how you felt, things that helped, things that haven't helped. So getting that clarity.

It's then having strategies and tools that you're empowered to work with. It's not about me doing something to you, it's about me teaching you things that you find effective to work with you.

**[00:27:22]**

And then as we get those tools and strategies in place, we can also look a bit more of who's the person you want to be. How do we support you in creating that life? What are the insights? What are the tools? What are the strategies that can help you create that?

So there's different steps and sequences of how we'll do things. The way that I work is very much collaborative. So I see the real power of this process, not being what happens when you and I sat here together, it's what happens when you're at home and you're reflecting what we've talked about, you're watching the modules, you're using the strategies and tools.

Because otherwise an hour every few weeks of you and I together is not enough to transform things. But what is enough is you taking that and putting that into action day-to-day.

**Sanaya**

Yes.

**Alex Howard**

That was me throwing a lot of words at you. What questions do you have for me?

**Sanaya**

I guess I don't really have any questions, really. I'm just excited to watch them and take note and put them into practice, I guess. But I don't think there's any questions.

Hi, so I just got back from my first session with Alex. It went well I think. I definitely felt quite comfortable with the cameras being there. Once I started talking, I just forgot that they were there. And also I felt strangely relaxed that other people were in the room.

And in terms of the homework, I'm intrigued to see what they're about, like what they have in them and what a difference that they make as well. And I do think Alex can definitely make a difference.

I want to get back to feeling a little bit more normal. I think he can definitely help and has the tools to help me do that. I think it went well, and I feel like it was needed.

**Alex Howard**

I hope you enjoyed meeting Sanaya. I'm super excited for you to come along with us on Sanaya's therapeutic journey in these coming months.

And here's my top tip. My top tip is we've got to get the right foundation in place upon which we can build the healing pathway. That's why with Sanaya, we're spending the time with her to really understand the different variables, different factors that have been influencing her anxiety, and then asking her to do some practical homework.

This is actually the first three modules of the RESET program. The first looking at her motivations, her commitment, the reason why she's going to follow through with this journey we're going on together.

**[00:30:21]**

And then in the second module, looking at having more of a sense of calming and settling her system using meditation and mindfulness. And this is so important to just get everything that little bit calmer to then start to build the new pathways, new ways of thinking and living from that place.

And then in module three, she's going to start to build her self-awareness and an understanding of the different patterns that are happening.

So the top tip I have for you is to make sure that if you're on any kind of healing journey, you have that foundation in place.

Now if at any point you'd like to go deeper into my work, you'll notice that all of the participants that come through *In Therapy* in between the sessions they're doing these modules from the RESET program. If you would like to sign up for and join the RESET program, it really is my flagship 12 week online coaching program. It's the best of what I know about creating deep and lasting change.

It's currently open for registration for the latest intake. I open it up a few times a year. So if you'd like to go on the same journey as Bev, Sanaya who you'll meet in the coming weeks in season three, you can find out more by clicking the link in the description below this video.

Next week in *In Therapy* we're going to be visiting again with Beverly who we met last week. Here's a taste of what's coming up next week.

Do you remember what happened to sadness when you were a little girl?

**Beverly**

I was loved, I was cared about but it fell off.

**Alex Howard**

How does it feel just as we talk about it together?

**Beverly**

It feels like it's just darkness stopping the light coming through.

**Alex Howard**

And of course, there wasn't much space for your light when you were young, was there?

**Beverly**

No.