

WHEN AVIATION PROFESSIONALS FEAR FLYING



Recognising and addressing anxiety in cabin and cockpit crew

Dr Lucas van Gerwen
drlucasvangerwen@gmail.com

CONTEXT

The hidden conflict

Aviation professionals work in a culture that prizes calm, control and reliability. For some crew members, fear of flying or work-related anxiety collides with the expectation that they must appear composed.

THE CENTRAL PARADOX

The people responsible for safety may feel least able to disclose fear.

Silence can preserve a professional image in the short term while increasing strain over time.

AIM

What this poster addresses

- How fear can remain hidden in safety-critical roles
- Why suppression and avoidance may maintain anxiety
- How symptoms may differ between cabin and cockpit work
- What a psychologically safe response can look like

SIGNALS

What may be visible

Emotional and cognitive

Persistent worry, fear of losing control, performance anxiety, intrusive scenarios and fear of failure.

Physical

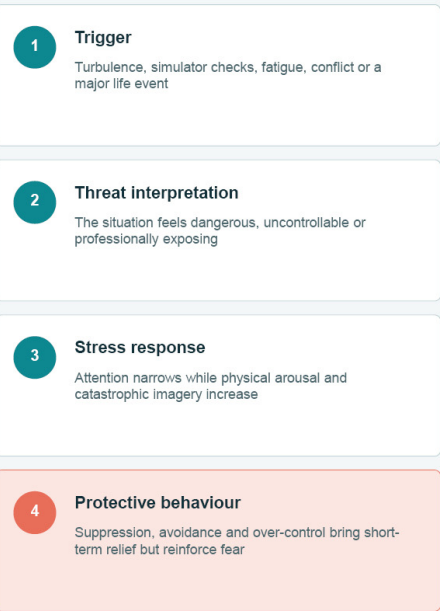
Racing heart, shallow breathing, muscle tension, fatigue and sleep disruption.

Behavioural

Avoidance, irritability, over-control, reassurance seeking, substance use or reluctance to report difficulty.

SHARED MECHANISM

The anxiety-maintenance cycle



Relief teaches the nervous system that avoidance was necessary, making the next trigger more powerful.

PERFORMANCE

Pressure changes how errors are managed

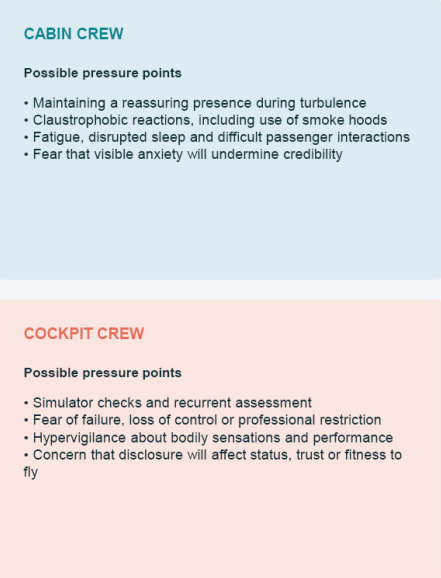
Moderate activation can support alertness. Once arousal exceeds the individual's coping range, attention becomes rigid, error detection weakens and recovery may become harder.



The goal is not zero anxiety. The goal is enough flexibility to notice, disclose and respond effectively.

ROLE-SPECIFIC PATTERNS

Same emotion, different pressures



RESPONSE

A psychologically safe pathway



KEY MESSAGE

Fear becomes more difficult to manage when the workplace demands silence.

Early recognition, confidential support and skills-based treatment can protect both wellbeing and operational performance.