

The Snuggle Is Real

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Kacie Willis, a 34-year-old audio producer in Atlanta, suffers from panic attacks with no known cause. She's tried cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), anti-anxiety medication, mindfulness meditation, and CBD oil. Although some of these have provided relief, one coping mechanism has consistently helped her manage her anxiety, particularly at night: Kasey Kangaroo, a stuffed animal she's had since she was four years old.

Willis can't quite pinpoint why her stuffed kangaroo helps her anxiety, but it does. "Even if I'm not holding it at night when I sleep, it's close enough for me to know it's there. Maybe that's the reason it helps with my anxiety—just the comfort factor, the familiarity."

Whether they're dealing with anxiety, stress, grief, isolation, or memory loss, countless people find solace in stuffed animals, weighted blankets, and other soft comfort objects. Researchers and product developers have noticed, and in turn have been creating products specifically designed to help alleviate certain ailments. There's now a [fluffy robotic seal](#) for people with dementia, a [weighted teddy bear](#) for grieving adults, and a cushion that mimics breathing to calm people down.

Because this is an emerging field, the science behind why certain objects soothe us is still being studied. But Dr. David Spiegel, associate chair of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Stanford University, says it makes sense that people find comfort in these objects. "We know children love stuffed animals—they're what we used to call a 'transitional object' between just being by yourself and being connected with another human," he says. Objects like these likely play a similar role for adults. "It's not surprising that humans can stimulate thoughts and feelings related to interpersonal contact with an inanimate stuffed object."

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