

Coping with anxiety

By
Lee Brosan
Brenda Hogan
Eloise Flight
Jeanette Freyland
Friederike Kult
Emma Lightning
Richard Van Heeswyk



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Introduction

Most people experience anxiety at some point in their lives. Anxiety is the emotion we feel when we think we are under threat and cannot cope with a situation. Common situations that might make people feel anxious are exams, job interviews or public speaking. Anxiety is an emotion experienced by everyone. But for some people anxiety can seem unbearable.

It can feel like anxiety is always there. Indeed, it can be experienced so intensely that it stops people doing what they want to do in life. Therefore, anxiety can be very distressing.

This manual is designed to help you understand anxiety. It also provides techniques you can try to help reduce your anxiety.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a normal experience, which although unpleasant, is harmless. Some examples of anxiety symptoms are: feeling nervous or on edge, an increased heart rate, shortness of breath, a dry mouth, trembling, sweating, nausea, light-headedness and thinking that something bad is going to happen. This is not an exhaustive list and there are many other common symptoms of anxiety.

Although unpleasant, anxiety can actually be very helpful. In fact it can warn and protect us when we are in danger. For example, most of us would feel anxious standing on the edge of a cliff without any barriers. The feeling of anxiety motivates us to move away from the edge, or be very careful if remaining on the edge. Therefore, anxiety alerts us to possible danger and prepares our body to respond to the danger. This is known as the 'Fight-or-Flight' response.

The Fight-or-Flight Response

The fight-or-flight response has evolved over millions of years to enable us to confront or escape danger. This response includes:

- breathing more quickly to get more oxygen to the muscles
- increased heart rate to increase blood flow to the muscles
- increased muscle tension to be able to react quickly
- digestion slows down
- saliva production decreases, causing a dry mouth
- a release of adrenaline, which can cause trembling
- sweating to cool the body down in anticipation of physical exertion
- the mind becomes focused on the threat or scans our environment for further threat

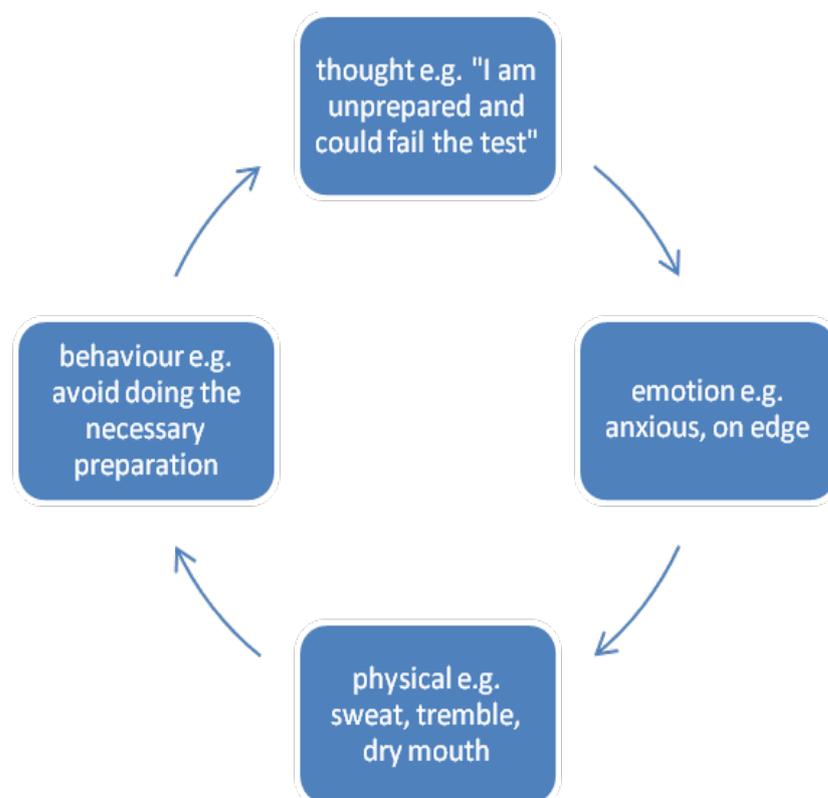
When the danger has passed, the body returns to a less anxious state.

When anxiety becomes a problem

As previously discussed, anxiety is normal, but sometimes it can become a problem.

Interestingly, our thoughts about a situation appear to contribute to anxiety becoming a problem. For example, we may think a situation is more dangerous than it actually is, or we may think a situation is dangerous, when in fact, there is no danger. Our thinking can trigger the fight-or-flight response, which can result in us feeling even more anxious. Subsequently, anxiety can affect our behaviour. For example, if we feel anxious in a situation we may want to avoid it. The problem with avoidance is that it does not enable us to find out if there was any real threat or danger. If we keep avoiding situations we will start to limit what we do in our daily lives.

The below example demonstrates how anxious thoughts can result in a vicious cycle of anxiety and avoidance. We have used the example of someone taking a test:



Let us look at the four components of anxiety in more detail:

Thoughts Our thoughts are filled with the possibility of something going wrong. We often see the worst case scenario or are afraid that something awful will happen. We think that we will not be able to cope and are unable to stop thinking about all the problems we have.	Emotions We may feel 'on edge', fearful, nervous, irritable, a sense of dread or apprehension.
Behaviour In an attempt to protect ourselves we may avoid certain activities. If we are already in a situation we may want to stay close to others or find a way to escape the situation.	Physical Our physical symptoms may get worse. For example we may experience: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• shallow, rapid breathing• tense muscles• increased heart rate• reduced appetite• difficulty sleeping

The next section of this manual will describe techniques you can try to help manage the four components of anxiety.

Anxiety can also get in the way of finding solutions to problems. Therefore, we have included a chapter describing how you can improve your problem solving skills.

The aim of this manual is to help you learn techniques that will assist you in reducing the impact anxiety has on your life.

Managing the physical symptoms of anxiety

We suggest three ways to manage the physical symptoms of anxiety:

1. Controlled breathing
2. Progressive muscle relaxation
3. Reducing caffeine intake

But first, let us describe how your anxiety can affect your breathing.

People often “over-breathe” when they are very anxious, which means your breathing becomes shallow and fast. This occurs as the fight-or-flight response prepares the body for physical exertion. Physical exertion requires muscle strength and activity, and this requires more oxygen to be pumped via blood to the muscles. Of course, we also acquire oxygen through breathing. When the fight-or-flight response is activated, breathing becomes shallow and fast in order to get more oxygen into the lungs to start preparing for physical exertion. This works very well, but only if the body does become active and burns off the oxygen. If this does not happen, the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood is disrupted – too much oxygen, not enough carbon dioxide. This is not dangerous and the body will correct the imbalance. In the meantime, however, there are some side effects:

- Light-headedness
- Dizziness
- Feeling faint
- Tingling sensations in the hands or feet
- Visual changes

Over-breathing

Often, people make the mistake of trying to breathe *more* when they start over-breathing, probably because they fear they are not getting enough breath. The reality is that trying to breathe more or gasping for extra breath will make the symptoms worse, not better. Again, it is not dangerous to breathe more, but it will result in temporary discomfort.

Controlled breathing is one way to counteract the symptoms of over-breathing. You can easily learn to correct over-breathing by focusing on breathing gently and evenly, through your nose, filling your lungs completely and exhaling slowly and fully. Controlled breathing may sound easy, but it actually takes practice. Using controlled breathing effectively can help decrease the physical symptoms of anxiety.

1. How to practice controlled breathing

Set aside some time when you will not be disturbed. Try to find a quiet and comfortable room which is a good temperature. This can be done either sitting in a chair or lying down. If you do lie down, be careful not to fall asleep!

1. Start by noticing your breathing. Is it fast or slow? Deep or shallow? Just tune in to how you are breathing in this moment.

2. Place one hand on your chest and one on your stomach. Breathe in slowly through your nose, allowing your stomach and chest to gently swell. You will know you are breathing deeply if both hands gently rise. There will be less movement in the hand on the chest.

3. Let each breath follow naturally. When the in breath has ended let the out breath happen when it is ready. Exhale slowly and gently.

It can be helpful to imagine letting go of any anxieties you have with each out breath. Imagine the worries dissolving or floating away. As you breathe in imagine a sense of health and well-being filling your lungs and stomach, and then your whole body.

4. Once you have got used to the rhythm of your breathing, try to keep your attention on the physical experience of the in and out breath. If you find your mind wanders and / or you start to feel anxious, gently bring your attention back to your breathing.

Carry on practicing your controlled breathing for the desired amount of time.

2. Progressive muscle relaxation

Under stress, the muscles in our bodies tense. Muscular tension causes uncomfortable sensations such as headache, stiff neck, painful shoulders, tight chest and difficulty breathing. The most effective way to control bodily tension is to learn how to relax in response to tension. With practice, you will become better at noticing when your muscles are tense, and will be able to relax them "on-the-spot" without having to tense them first.

How to practice progressive muscle relaxation

1. Sit or lie down in a comfortable and quiet surrounding.
2. Remove your shoes and loosen tight clothing.
3. Start by taking a couple of deep breaths. Allow yourself to be still for a few minutes, and let yourself start to unwind.
4. Focus on your breathing and let your muscles slowly start to relax.
5. Focus your attention on your hands and arms. Tense your muscles in this area, but not so much that you feel a great deal of pain. Notice what it feels like when these muscles are tight and tense. Tense for about 5 seconds.
6. Then relax the muscles in your hands and arms, let them become floppy and limp.
7. Notice the different sensations in your muscles from the tense state to the relaxed state.
8. Focus on the feelings of relaxation in your hands and arms for at least 20 to 30 seconds.
9. Then begin to move to the other muscle groups:
 - feet, calves, thighs
 - buttocks, stomach, back
 - shoulder, neck
 - jaw, eyes, scalp

For each muscle group repeat steps 5 to 8.

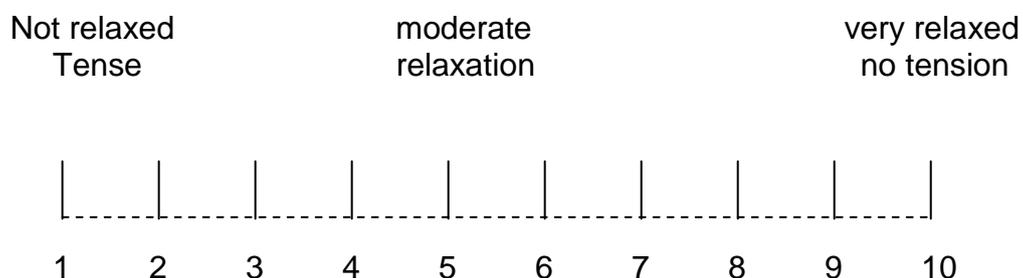
Relaxation tips

- Relaxation is a skill that takes practice. If you practice twice a day, you will start to notice that it becomes easier to relax, and that you become relaxed more quickly. Set aside 30 minutes so that you have ample time to practice and relax.
- Relaxation may be more effective when you practice alone without any interruptions.
- Once you have gone through each of the muscle groups, remain seated or lying down for a few moments to allow yourself to become slowly more alert.
- Focus your attention back to your breathing. Inhaling slowly through your nose and exhaling slowly through your mouth.
- Finally, when you feel relaxed and notice that your breathing is deep and regular, take your time and get up slowly.

Relaxation diary

On the following page is a relaxation diary to help you to discover where and when you are best able to relax. It will also help you monitor your progress.

Before doing the relaxation exercise, rate how relaxed you are feeling according to the scale given below. After completing the exercise, rate your level of relaxation again. You should also make notes about how you got on with the exercise. You can look at these notes to try and make your practice more effective.



Relaxation diary

Time and Place	Relaxation level before exercise	Relaxation level after exercise	Comments

3. Reducing caffeine intake

Caffeine can have a major impact on how anxious you feel. This is because caffeine is a stimulant that can have a very arousing effect on your body. If you have been struggling with stress or anxiety, the last thing you need to do is consume a product that makes the symptoms of anxiety even worse! People who get through a large amount of caffeine each day, sometimes find that reducing their caffeine intake helps to reduce their anxiety. Even people who drink a moderate amount of caffeine can notice improvements in anxiety simply by reducing their caffeine intake.

Caffeine is present in coffee, tea (including green tea and some flavoured teas), cola (and some other fizzy drinks – check the ingredient list to be sure), and chocolate. Think about how much of each of these items you consume each day. You may want to keep a “caffeine diary” for a few days to keep track.

Caffeine is addictive. This means that “heavy users” can become dependent on it – they need more caffeine to get the same effects, and experience withdrawal if they don’t get it. If you are consuming a large amount of caffeine, you may find it quite difficult to suddenly stop having it. Common withdrawal symptoms include headaches, fatigue and shakiness (as well as a strong urge to have a cup of coffee or tea!).

For this reason, it is a good idea to reduce caffeine intake gradually. For example, if you are currently drinking six cups of tea a day, try five cups a day for one week, and then four cups a day for the next week, and so on. You do not have to get rid of caffeine completely from your diet. For many people, small amounts of caffeine (for example, a cup of coffee or tea in the morning) do not have a major impact on anxiety. It is also fine to drink decaffeinated beverages, which are available in most supermarkets.

If you are having difficulties with sleep, it may be particularly useful to cut out caffeine intake completely in the late afternoon and evenings.

Managing your anxious thoughts

Anxious thoughts

You may have noticed that when you are anxious, you think about things in a different way from when you are calm and relaxed. Normal, everyday things can seem threatening and stressful, and you may think that “everything will go wrong” or that you will be unable to cope. You may even find yourself thinking about things that didn’t used to bother you, like why your partner is ten minutes late from work or whether that cough you have is really a sign of a serious underlying disease.

People who struggle with anxious thoughts tend to think that:

- It is very likely that things will go wrong
- When things go wrong, they will go dreadfully wrong
- When things go wrong, they will be unable to cope

The way you think about situations is extremely important in determining how anxious you feel, or even whether you feel anxious at all. Consider the following examples:

Example 1: *Susan was waiting for her teenage son Andrew to come home. He had promised to be home by midnight. As midnight drew closer, Susan began to have anxious thoughts about her son: Was he alright? What if something awful had happened? She could imagine horrific scenarios quite vividly. By the time it reached midnight, Susan was feeling very anxious. As each minute passed without Andrew arriving home, her anxiety levels continued to rise. She became convinced that something awful had happened and that she would be unable to cope. Andrew arrived home ten minutes late and explained that he had dropped a friend off on his way home, which had held him up.*

Example 2: *Mary was waiting for her teenage daughter Gemma to come home. Like Andrew, Gemma had promised to be home by midnight. When it reached 12 o’clock, Mary found herself wondering why Gemma was not home yet, which caused a pang of anxiety. She then reminded herself that Gemma had been a few minutes late on several occasions, and that the usual reason was that she had to rely on friends for a lift home. Her anxiety levels dropped and she continued to read her book.*

As you can see Susan’s thoughts were very anxiety-provoking: She thought that something had very likely gone dreadfully wrong and that she would be unable to cope. The more anxious she felt, the more anxious thoughts she had. She was trapped in a vicious cycle of anxiety. Mary, on the other hand, was able to think about the same situation in a much less anxiety-provoking (and more realistic) way. Therefore, she managed to decrease her anxiety levels. **The way you think about situations has a major effect on how anxious you feel.**

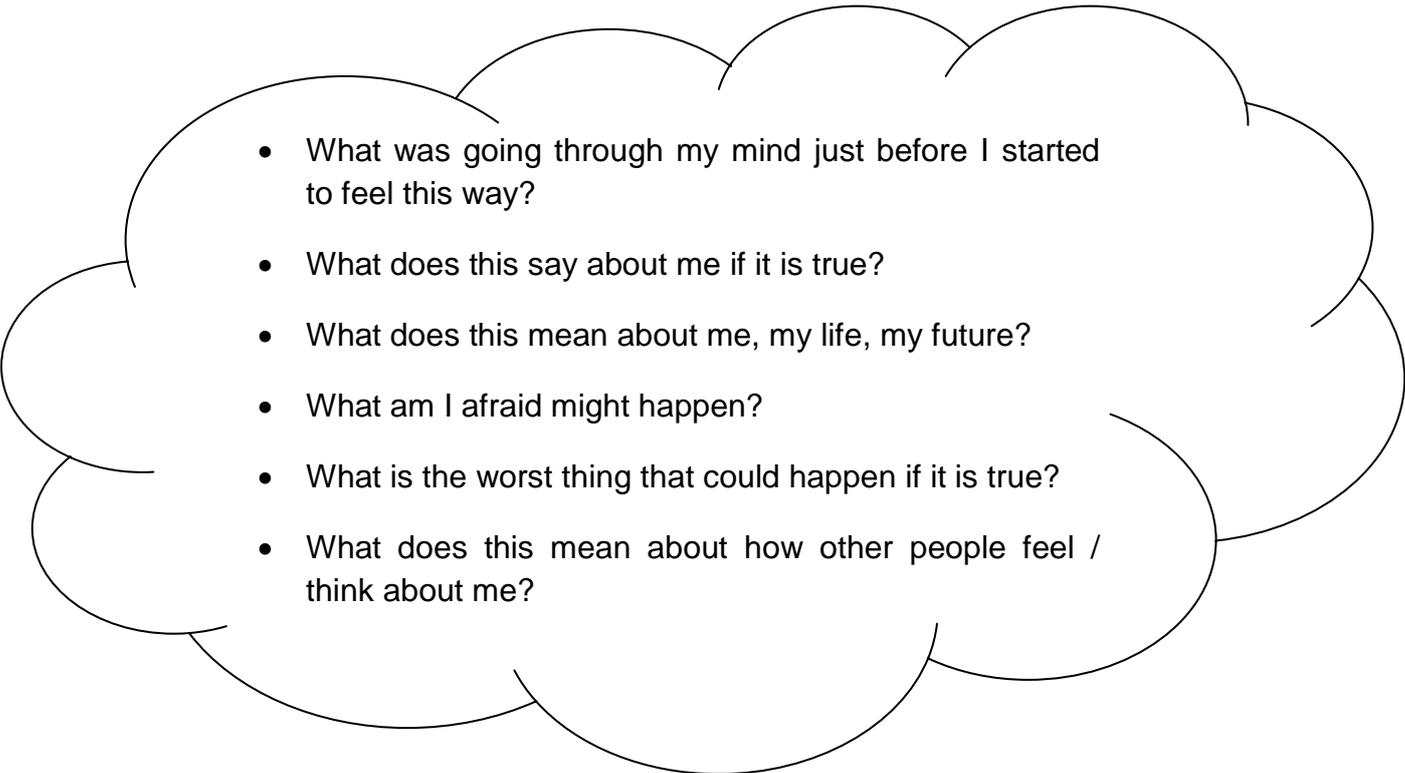
The impact of anxious thoughts on the emotions and physical symptoms of anxiety are clear. The trick is to break the vicious cycle between thoughts and anxiety. This can be done by thinking about things in a more realistic and constructive way.

Challenging anxious thoughts

There are two steps to successfully challenging anxious thoughts, which are detailed below. Firstly, it is important to identify anxious thoughts. Secondly, you need to challenge anxious thoughts by finding more realistic and helpful alternative thoughts.

Step one: Identifying anxious thoughts

In order to challenge an anxious thought, you first need to know the content of the thought. Identifying anxious thoughts can be difficult. Anxious thoughts may be very quick and automatic. At first, you may only be aware of your anxiety when you feel it. However, the more you practice identifying your thoughts the clearer your thinking patterns will become. Thoughts may take the form of words or sentences, such as “I can’t cope” or “what if ...”. You may also experience images or pictures in your mind, such as the image of a car accident or yourself doing something embarrassing. Both can cause high levels of anxiety. If you are finding it difficult to identify your thoughts, try asking yourself some of the below questions¹:

- 
- What was going through my mind just before I started to feel this way?
 - What does this say about me if it is true?
 - What does this mean about me, my life, my future?
 - What am I afraid might happen?
 - What is the worst thing that could happen if it is true?
 - What does this mean about how other people feel / think about me?

¹ From Greenberger, D. & Padesky, C. (1995). *Mind Over Mood: A Cognitive Therapy Treatment Manual for Clients*. The Guildford Press: New York.

To help you start to identify your anxious thoughts, it is useful to record the situations that make you feel anxious and the thoughts you have at the time. For example, write down what you were doing when you started to feel anxious. Then ask yourself, "what was running through my mind when I started to feel anxious?" If it was an image, or a picture in your mind, try to describe it clearly. Finally, write down how you felt – your emotions. See the below example.

Situation	What was going through your mind?	How did this make you feel?
<i>Friend cancels lunch plans</i>	<i>Maybe she is angry with me.</i>	<i>Worried, anxious</i>
<i>Meeting at work</i>	<i>My work isn't good enough. Everyone will think I'm incapable. I might get fired.</i>	<i>Anxious, panicky</i>

On the next page you will find a record sheet that you can use to keep track of anxiety-provoking situations, your thoughts and your emotions.

Thought record

Situation	What was going through your mind ?	How did this make you feel?

Step two: Challenging anxious thoughts

The next step is to try and evaluate whether or not your concerns are realistic and in proportion. Then to decide whether there may be a more helpful way of thinking about the same situation. A major problem with anxious thoughts is that they are based on exaggeration and guesswork. Therefore, learning how to develop alternative, more realistic thoughts, can help you break out of the vicious cycle of anxiety. The result of this should be that you feel less anxious and better able to cope with difficulties.

Challenging thoughts is not easy. The technique takes time and practice. The best way to learn how to challenge your thoughts is to use a 'thought record'. You will see an example on the following page, which completes the thought record that has already been started on page 16.

In the previous example, we had completed the first three columns of a thought record. The fourth column asks you to write down any evidence that supports your anxious thought. For example, the person completing the thought record on pg 19 noted that it was unusual for her friend to cancel. The fifth column asks you to write down any evidence that does not support your anxious thought. For example, this person had noted that actually her friend had been ill recently and had also cancelled other plans. Finally, in the sixth column, consider all the evidence and try to develop a more realistic alternative thought.

As you will notice in the example, it is helpful to rate your level of anxiety (0% meaning not anxious to 100% meaning extremely anxious) before and after you challenge your thoughts. This will help you decide if your thought challenging has been effective.

On page 20 and 21 there are some questions to help you find evidence that does not support your anxious thought, and questions to help you develop an alternative perspective.

Thought record

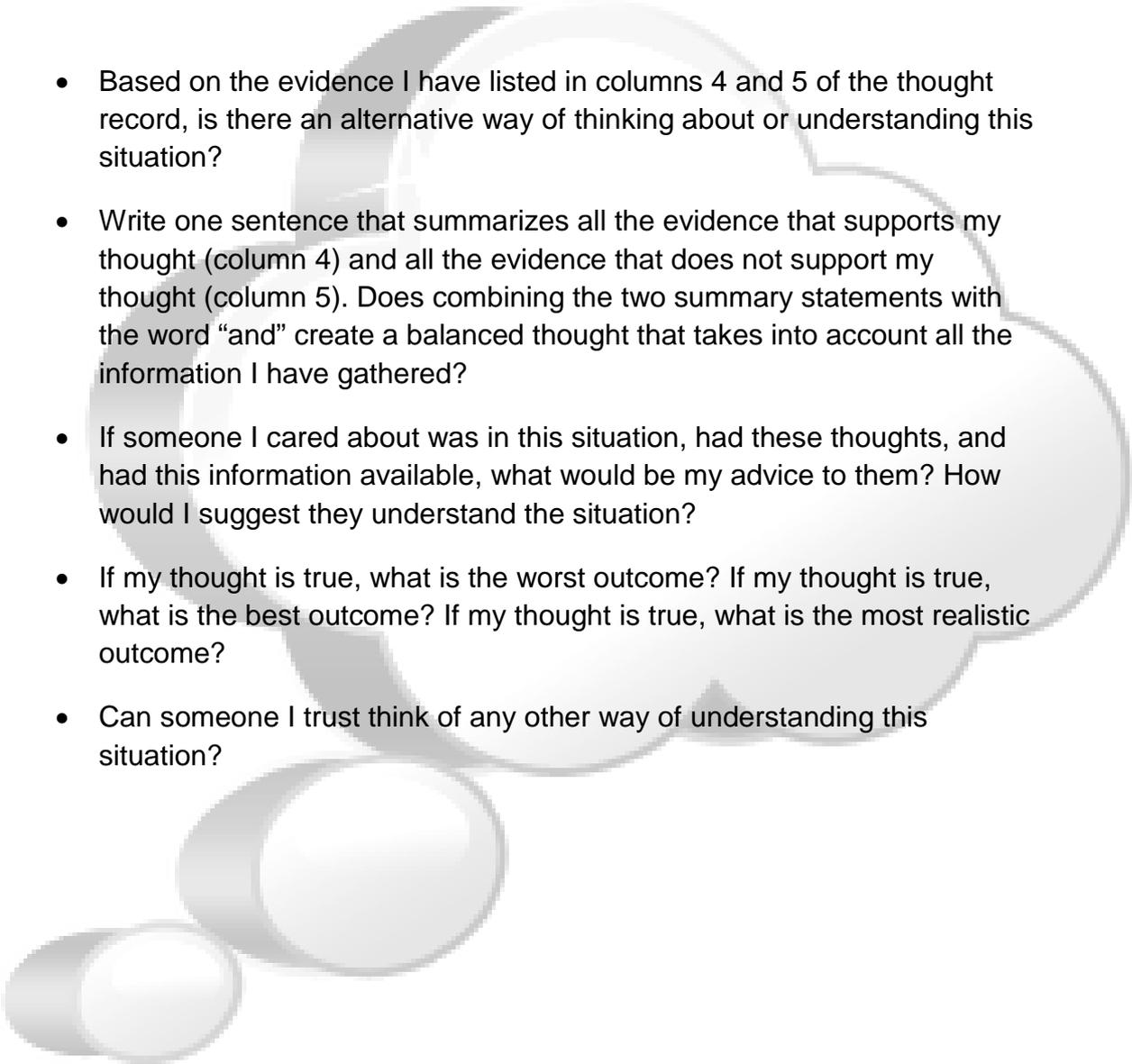
Situation	What was going through your mind?	How did this make me feel? (0 to 100%)	Facts that support the thought	Facts that provide evidence against the thought	Alternative, more realistic and balanced perspective	Outcome (re-rate emotion)
Friend cancels lunch plan	Maybe she is angry with me	Worried (60%) Anxious (70%)	Friend hardly ever cancels plans She has been a bit moody lately	Friend had said she has not been feeling well recently She has cancelled her plans for the weekend too	It is unlikely my friend is angry with me, it is more likely she is feeling unwell and therefore, cannot make our lunch plan	Worried (15%) Anxious (5%)

Questions to help you find evidence that does not support your unhelpful thought²

- Have I had any experiences that show me that this thought is not completely true all the time?
- If a friend had this thought, what would I tell them?
- If a friend was thinking this thought, what would they say to me? What evidence would they point out to me that would suggest that my thoughts were not 100% true?
- When I am not feeling this way, do I think about this type of situation any differently? How?
- When I have felt this way in the past, what did I think about that helped me feel better?
- Have I been in this type of situation before? What happened? Is there anything different between this situation and previous ones? What have I learned from prior experiences that could help me now?
- Are there any small things that contradict my thoughts that I might be discounting as not important?
- Five years from now, if I look back at this situation, will I look at it differently? Will I focus on any different parts of my experience?
- Are there any strengths or positives in me or the situation that I am ignoring?
- Am I jumping to any conclusions in columns 2 and 4 of the thought record that are not completely justified by the evidence?
- Am I blaming myself for something over which I do not have complete control?

² From Greenberger, D. & Padesky, C. (1995). *Mind Over Mood: A Cognitive Therapy Treatment Manual for Clients*. The Guildford Press: New York.

Questions to help you arrive at an alternative perspective³

- 
- Based on the evidence I have listed in columns 4 and 5 of the thought record, is there an alternative way of thinking about or understanding this situation?
 - Write one sentence that summarizes all the evidence that supports my thought (column 4) and all the evidence that does not support my thought (column 5). Does combining the two summary statements with the word “and” create a balanced thought that takes into account all the information I have gathered?
 - If someone I cared about was in this situation, had these thoughts, and had this information available, what would be my advice to them? How would I suggest they understand the situation?
 - If my thought is true, what is the worst outcome? If my thought is true, what is the best outcome? If my thought is true, what is the most realistic outcome?
 - Can someone I trust think of any other way of understanding this situation?

In summary, we have described the two main steps to help you manage anxious thoughts. These are: 1) identifying your anxious thoughts, and 2) challenging these thoughts. On the next page is a blank form to help you practice.

³ From Greenberger, D. & Padesky, C. (1995). *Mind Over Mood: A Cognitive Therapy Treatment Manual for Clients*. The Guildford Press: New York.

Thought record

Situation	What was going through your mind?	How did this make me feel? (0-100%)	Facts that support the thought	Facts that provide evidence against thoughts	Alternative, more realistic and balanced perspective	Outcome (re-rate emotion) (0-100%)

Managing worry

Worry

Worry is a major problem for many people who complain of anxiety. If you are a "worrier" you are likely to worry about lots of different things. You may find that you move from one worry topic to the next. So even if you manage to deal with one, you just move to another. What we need to do is to understand what keeps worry going. This seems to be something to do with what we believe about worrying.

For example, if you believe worrying is helpful you will continue to worry, and if you believe worrying is unhelpful and potentially dangerous, you will start to worry about worrying. Let's further explore our beliefs about worrying in the next section. We will discuss negative and positive beliefs about worrying.

Negative beliefs and thoughts about worrying

Some people are quite concerned about their worrying. As mentioned above, in effect, they start to worry about worrying. These worries are related to beliefs about the negative effects of worrying. They often fall into one of the following categories:

- 1. I'm worried because my worrying is "out of control".** You may have thoughts such as – "*I can't stop worrying*" or "*my worries are going to take over and control me*".
- 2. I'm worried that worrying is harmful.** You may have thoughts such as – "*I could go crazy with worrying*" or "*it's not normal to worry*" or "*If I keep worrying, I will have a nervous breakdown*".

To find out if "worrying about worrying" is a problem for you, try asking yourself the following questions:

- What is the worst that could happen if you continue to worry (or feel very anxious)?
- Do you think worrying could harm you in some way?
- Is worrying a problem for you?
- Can you stop worrying?

Beliefs and thoughts about the negative effects of worrying can be a major difficulty for people who struggle with high levels of anxiety. One reason for this is that these thoughts and beliefs lead to further worrying, which leads to increased anxiety and more worrying – yet another vicious cycle. Furthermore, these beliefs and thoughts are not helpful and like many other worries, may be biased and exaggerated.

“My worrying is out of control”

Another common concern for many people is the belief that their worry is uncontrollable. Let us try and challenge this belief below.

Firstly, try to think of a specific example of when you were very worried. Now ask yourself the following questions.

Was the worry uncontrollable?

Did you try to stop thinking about it?

Did you eventually stop worrying?

What happened to make you stop worrying?

Now think about your worrying generally. Think about what it is like when you are worried and anxious. Then ask yourself the following questions:

Do you eventually stop worrying?

Can you think of times when something happened (i.e., the phone rang) that interrupted or stopped the worry? What happened?

Can you think of times when you did something (i.e., turned on the television) that interrupted or stopped the worry? What did you do?

Have you ever been successful at stopping worrying by distracting yourself?

Now ask yourself; what does this suggest about your control over worry? Do you still believe your worry is uncontrollable?

The problem with trying to control your worries or thoughts

It is not uncommon for people who have distressing or anxiety-provoking thoughts to try to suppress their thoughts. People try “not to think” about it, or to push the thought “out of their mind”. You may have tried this. If so, what did you notice? Did it work?

The answer to this question is usually “no”. In fact, most people say that trying not to think about something tends to make them think about it even more! The distressing thought becomes even more intrusive.

It can be helpful to illustrate this point by doing the following experiment:

For the next minute, do NOT think about a pink elephant. It is very important that you do not let the thought or image of a pink elephant come into your mind.

What happened? Usually people who try this experiment say that they had difficulty not thinking about a pink elephant, or that an image of a pink elephant kept popping into their mind. This is because trying not to think about a thought makes you think about it even more.

So... what happens when you try not to think about a worry, or try not to think about something that might trigger a worry? It makes it more likely that you will start (or keep) worrying.

Controlled worry periods

We have demonstrated that trying to “just stop thinking about it” does not work, and can in fact make worrying worse. One way to combat the negative effects of worry suppression is to introduce controlled worry periods. The idea is to learn to postpone your worry. This will give you a greater sense of control and help worry become less intrusive in your life. Here’s what to do:

Controlled worry time

Pick a worry period. This is a set time, place and length of time to do all your worrying. Try to keep your worry period the same everyday (e.g. 6.00 p.m. dining room, 15 minutes). Preferably this will not be the hour or two before bedtime.

When you notice yourself worrying about something during the day, list your worries **briefly** (in a couple of words only).

Make the decision not to worry about it then and there, but save the worry for your set worry period. Bring your attention back to the present and what it was you were doing, reassuring yourself that you will deal with your worries later.

When the time arrives, allow yourself to worry for 15 minutes. Only spend the time worrying if you still feel it is necessary to worry. If the problem doesn’t seem important anymore, you needn’t spend time worrying about it.

Postponing your worries is different to trying to suppress your worries. When you postpone a worry, you are not telling your mind to stop worrying. Instead, you are asking your mind to move the worry aside for a little while so you can focus on other things. However, you will allow your mind to come back to the worry later.

It may seem like an effort to carry a notepad around to jot down your worries and commit to reflecting on the day’s worries at a set time every day. Indeed, typically people predict that they won’t be able to postpone their worrying. However people are often surprised that they are actually able to postpone their worries and experience a sense of control.

“Worrying is harmful”

Many people who have persistent problems with anxiety describe the following beliefs or thoughts about worry:

- worrying is harmful
- it is not normal to worry
- worrying can make me go mad or have a nervous breakdown

These beliefs and thoughts can be distressing, and not surprisingly, can increase anxiety. However, consider the evidence that suggests these thoughts are not 100% true. For example:

- most people report that worrying has, at some point, been distressing for them. Does this mean that most people have mental health problems? Of course not. Worrying is a normal experience.
- Is the stress caused by worry harmful, or can it result in a nervous breakdown? Consider that part of training an athlete or soldier is to place them in stressful situations that may cause worry. For example, competing in several races leading up to the Olympics, or battle exercises. If this was dangerous, would we train our athletes or soldiers in this manner? Of course not. Indeed, this type of training can enhance performance when faced with stressful situations.

Positive beliefs and thoughts about worrying

Although it might sound strange, many people have positive beliefs about worrying; they think it is a helpful thing to do. To help you identify your positive beliefs about worrying, ask yourself, are there any reasons why I shouldn't give up worrying completely? Positive beliefs about worry make it very difficult to “let go” of worrying. Some example of positive beliefs about worry include:

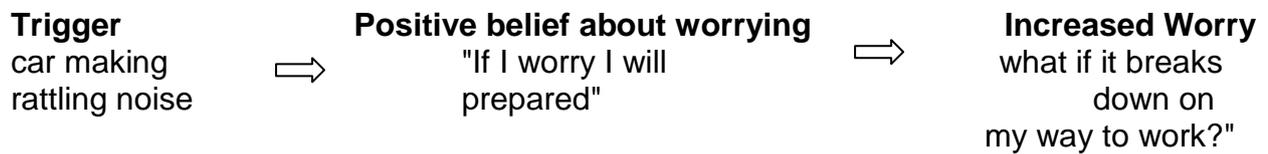
‘Worrying helps me solve problems ’

‘ Worrying helps me cope ’

‘ If I worry I can prevent bad things from happening ’

‘ If I worry I will be prepared ’

Write down any beliefs or thoughts you have about the positive effects of worrying in the space below.



Advantages and disadvantages of worrying

As we have discussed in the last section, you may have positive beliefs about worrying. However, if you believe that worrying is beneficial to you, then it will be difficult to stop worrying. A good place to start is to consider the advantages and disadvantages of worrying.

For example:

Advantages of worrying	Disadvantages of worrying
<i>Worrying helps me cope If I worry it will help me prepare in case the problem really happens</i>	<i>Worry makes me anxious and miserable I spend too much time worrying – it is a waste My worries are often unrealistic Most of the time the things I worry about don't happen</i>

Try filling in a table like this for yourself:

Advantages of worrying	Disadvantages of worrying

Challenging your positive beliefs about worrying

It can also be very useful to examine the evidence for your positive beliefs about worry. Ask yourself the following questions:

Do I have any evidence for my belief?

If so, is it possible that there might be an alternative explanation?

Do I have any evidence against my belief?

Can I think of any times in my life when I did not worry and events turned out positively?

Does worrying really prevent bad things from happening? Or make good things more likely? Or will good and bad things just happen regardless of whether I worry?

Does worry really help me cope, or does it interfere with my coping?

Would I be able to handle a bad situation if I had not worried beforehand?

When I am worrying, am I really problem-solving? Or am I just going over the same thoughts over and over again without coming up with a solution?

What are the real effects of worrying – how is it affecting my life?

How often does my worry really reflect reality? How often do I *over predict* the likelihood of something going wrong?

How often is my worrying really “worth it”?

If I stopped worrying, would it really mean I didn't care?

You can use these questions to help you complete the following exercise. Firstly, write down the positive belief or thought about worry you are going to challenge in the space below. Secondly, write down the evidence for and against this belief or thought.

My positive belief or thought about worry:

Evidence that supports this belief	Evidence that does not support this belief

You have now considered the advantages and disadvantages of worrying, and the evidence for your positive beliefs about worrying. Based on all this information, it may be helpful to come up with a new, more realistic thought or belief about worrying.

For example:

The belief "*if I worry I will be more prepared,*" could be replaced with:

"worrying does not really help me prepare to deal with problems. It just makes me anxious and I feel terrible. I am able to deal with problems whether I worry or not."

In the space below, try to write a more realistic, alternative belief for your positive belief or thought about worrying.

My alternative, more realistic belief about worrying:

Productive and unproductive worry

As previously discussed, we all worry from time to time. However most worry is unnecessary. Worry can be useful and **productive** when it pushes you to tackle and solve problems which need solving, leading to concrete specific action. **Productive** worry is about something that is plausible or has a reasonable probability of occurring. E.g. If you are going on a car journey, it is plausible and reasonable to ask yourself – “Have I got enough petrol in the tank? Have I got a map/directions?”. If you decide it is a problem that you can turn into action right now or very soon, e.g. fill up the car with petrol and get your map ready, this actually turns your worry into the beginning of a solution. However if your worry is “What if on my journey, my tyre bursts?”- this is implausible because it is (generally) very unlikely to happen and is therefore **unproductive**.

Some other examples of unproductive worry are:

"What happens if I get ill and can't look after the kids?"

"What if my boss is angry and then I lose my job and then I can't pay my mortgage and I lose the house and then my wife leaves me."

Exercise:

Think about your worries and use the following questions to help you decide if they are productive or unproductive⁴. Record your decisions in the table below.

What prediction am I making?

What is the problem that needs to be solved?

What specific actions can I take?

Do these actions seem reasonable?

Am I worrying about things over which I have little or no control?

Is this something with a very low probability of occurring?

Are my worries productive or unproductive?

Productive worry	Unproductive worry
<p>Productive worry leads to a “to do” list. Go to problem solving pg 34</p>	<p>To challenge unproductive worry you could try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a thought record pg 22• a controlled worry period pg 26• decide to just let the worry go and do something else instead of worrying

⁴ From Leahy, R. L. (2003). Cognitive Therapy Techniques: A practitioner’s Guide. The Guildford Press: New York

Problem solving

The six steps to problem solving

1. **Define the problem.** Be specific about the task ahead. Try to think of the different steps that need to happen to complete the task. Tackling the problem in stages can be more manageable.
2. **List solutions.** Think of as many ways of dealing with the problem as you can. No matter how silly the solution seems, the more solutions you generate the better!
3. **Evaluate the pros and cons of each solution.** Think about how practical the solutions are, how much help you will need to put them into action and how effective you think they are going to be. Rank your solutions in order of usefulness.
4. **Choosing a solution and planning to put it into action.** Decide how you are going to implement your chosen solution. Make sure your plan is manageable – you should have the time and resources available to carry it through. If the plan is not manageable, then it will be very difficult to complete.
5. **Do it.** Try out your solution, even if it is only the first step to solving the problem.
6. **Review the outcome.** If your solution works and is sufficient, congratulate yourself and remember this successful experience for the future. If your solution does not solve the problem, try to understand why. Perhaps you were over ambitious, not feeling strong that day, or misjudged someone else's response to you. Learn as much as you can from the experience and go back to your solution list and select the next one.

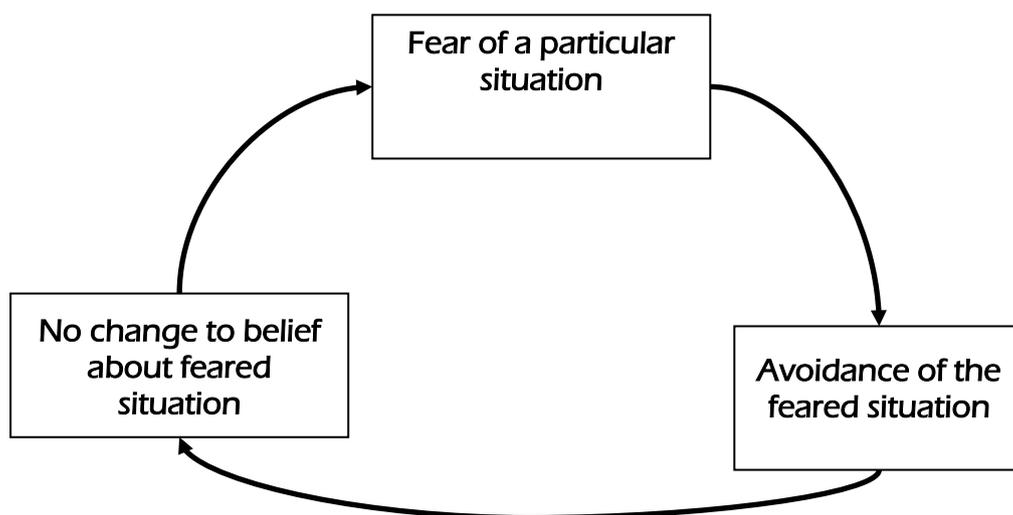
Managing avoidance

If you feel anxious it is understandable that you might want to avoid the situation that you fear. In the short-term this may provide relief from your anxiety. However, in the long-term avoidance worsens your anxiety and makes it less likely that you will face the situation in the future.

For example:

Sarah was due to meet her friends for a coffee. The day before she felt anxious and thought “I won’t be able to think of anything interesting to say.” Therefore, she decided not to go and meet her friends, which made her feel instantly relieved. However, the result of avoiding this situation was that Sarah felt even more anxious about meeting her friends the next time they invited her out for coffee. She still thought she would not have anything interesting to say!

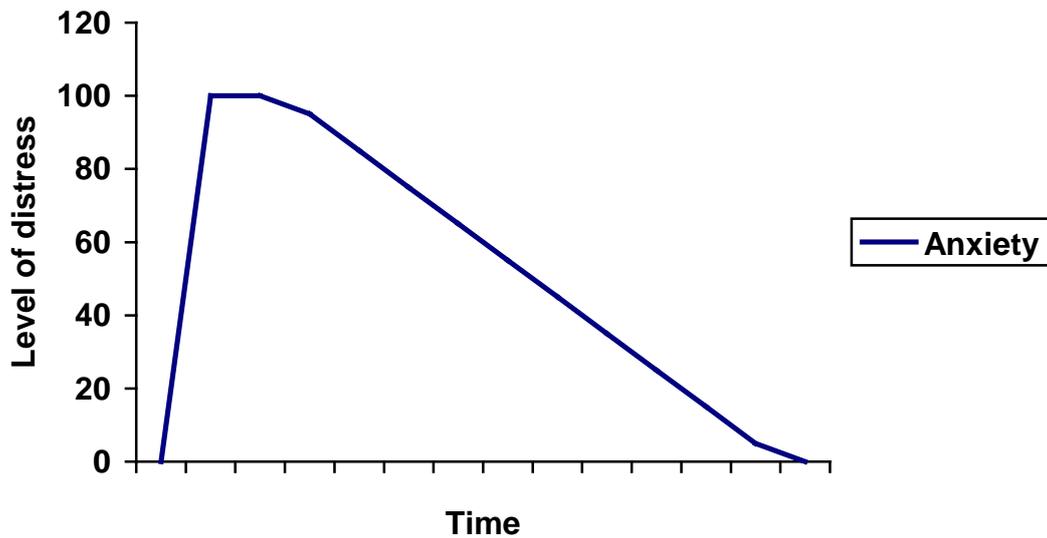
This is illustrated by the below cycle:



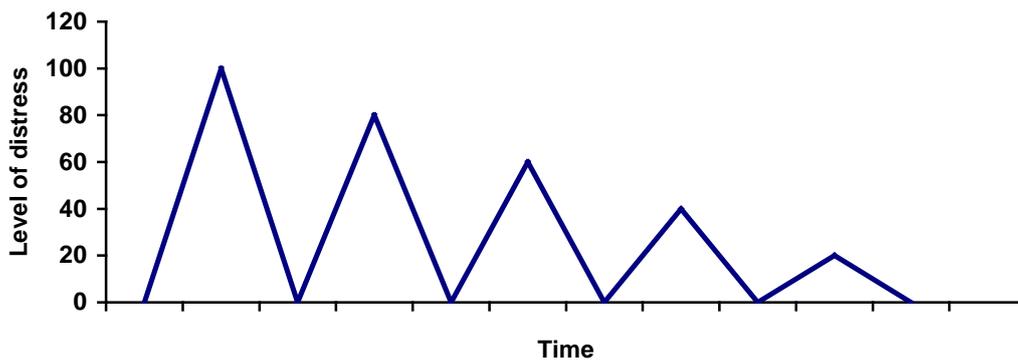
Other examples of avoidant behaviour are:

- Avoiding opening letters or bills for fear of what is inside.
- Avoiding writing assignments/doing tasks as you feel that you are unable to do them.
- Avoiding spending time with other people as you are concerned about how you come across.

In order to break out of this cycle you will need to try and face the difficult situation. For example, Sarah will need to try and meet her friends for coffee. If you are facing a fear, it is natural to feel anxious. You may need to take your time and take small steps towards facing the ultimate scary situation you have been avoiding (see pg 37 for advice about how to do this). You will find that if you are able to face your feared situation, your anxiety will come down, as shown in the graph below.



Consequently, when facing the situation again, your anxiety will be slightly less than before and may pass more quickly, as demonstrated in the graph below:



Summary

The aim of this manual is to help you understand anxiety and provide you with a variety of techniques to help manage your anxiety.

Unfortunately, there is no "quick fix" for anxiety. As you have probably realised from reading this manual, managing anxiety takes a lot of work. You will need to practice these techniques to maximise your chance of overcoming anxiety. Listen to how you speak to yourself. For example, telling yourself "I should have done better" or "anyone can do this" is not encouraging or helpful. Try to give yourself words of encouragement. After all, you are trying to tackle your anxiety, which is the first step on the road to success!

Another important thing to remember is that everyone has their "ups and downs". Some days your anxiety levels will be high, and other days they will be low. A task that seems easy one day, may seem impossible the next. A "bad" day or a setback, does not mean that you are not improving or that you will never get better. In fact, "bad" days or setbacks are opportunities to practice the techniques discussed in this manual.

Anxiety is a normal part of life. It is not reasonable to expect an "anxiety-free" life. As we have discussed in this manual, everyone experiences anxiety and worries from time to time. It is reasonable to aim to better manage your anxiety; having strategies to help you manage the "ups and downs" when they come.

At the back of this manual is a blank thought record for you to use. We hope you have found this manual useful and that it helps you feel able to better manage your anxiety.

Thought record

Situation	What went through your mind?	How did this make me feel? (0-100%)	Facts that support the thought	Facts that provide evidence against thought	Alternative, more realistic and balanced perspective	Outcome (re-rate emotion) (0-100%)

