

Activity Cards (Strategies)

Focus on Five

Square breathing

Worry time

Muscle Relaxation

Safe place

Thinking errors

Hunt the Evidence

Psychological service website

<http://www.northayr-edpsychs.co.uk/>

www.youth.anxietybc.com—interactive website aimed at teenagers

www.youngminds.org.uk – Tel: 020 7336 8445

simple, clear advice on mental health problems aimed at 8-16 year olds.

www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk Tel: 0800 838 587

free, confidential phone-line to call

when feeling down or stressed



UNDERSTANDING AND BEATING ANXIETY

Are you a worrier?

Do you worry about worrying?

Do you worry about things that might never happen?

Do you expect the worse?

Has worrying stopped you doing things you like?

This booklet is aimed at helping you to
identify symptoms of anxiety,
understand what it is, possible causes and what it feels like

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is the body's normal reaction to stress or danger. It originates in and relates to our early evolution as humans where the fight or flight response was a matter of life or death. We developed as hunter gatherers, therefore needed a means of response to keep us safe and avoiding danger e.g. you needed to be able to react quickly if a sabre toothed tiger was rushing at you seeing you as a tasty snack.

The stress response triggers a flood of adrenalin and increased blood flow to muscles which allows you to react quickly and strongly.

With this flood of adrenalin and increased blood flow to your muscles you would find that e.g. you could possibly lift an object which would normally be too heavy for you, to save your friend from being squashed, or that you could run much faster than usual to get out the way of danger.

Fast forward to modern times where we do not tend to have tigers chasing us – our bodies have not changed much nor has our physiology evolved greatly and we still experience early human stress responses. So if a number 11 bus comes hurtling down the road at you, the adrenalin kicks in to get you out of danger.



Managing unhelpful thoughts

There are ways we can help break the cycle, just like racing-car drivers control the speed and direction of the cars they drive, we can learn how to drive or control our thoughts and feelings. We can actually *choose* to think and feel about situations in ways that help us feel happier or braver, like choosing to think powerful thoughts about something that worries us. In the same way, we make ourselves stay sad or worried by choosing to think in unhelpful ways!

Ways to help you 'control' your thoughts....

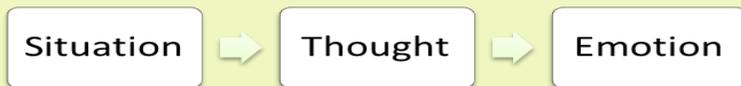
- Identify the thought
- Label it
- Find the evidence against / for
- Has the evidence affected your original thought (has there been a thinking error?)
- If somebody else was thinking this, what advice would you give to them?
- What would be your plan to cope if it did happen?

(See Activity card 6/6a for example)

What can help?

Thoughts and feelings can be thought of as our 'control centre' because our thoughts and feelings control how we do things in different situations.

For example a situation like having to wait in a long line may make you think 'why does this always happen to me' (Thought) – which may in turn make you feel angry/frustrated (Emotion). In other words, it is not the situation *itself* that makes you feel a certain way but our thought about that situation. Put simply - We feel the way we think.



This can become a vicious cycle – which can even create new situations that make an individual feel worse as described earlier.



But what we know from research is that firstly, we can work at becoming more aware of our thoughts and secondly we have the skills to be able to change these to more helpful thoughts.

Sometimes however, our stress response goes a little hay-wire and starts up even when we are not in danger or being threatened but we **feel** that we might be.

It is perfectly normal to feel anxious about things which are stressful like a big exam, going to a new school, starting a club for the first time, but sometimes the anxious feelings begin to generalise/spread to situations which are not normally considered mega stressful such as going to a party, getting on a bus etc.

Sometimes we may have a feeling of anxiety unexpectedly somewhere that we would not normally experience it. association between the feeling and the place or situation where may start to associate

our mind then associates that feeling with that place even though we were in no danger, and we can start getting anxious at the thought of going there again. There is then the possibility that an association is made between the feeling experienced and the place or situation in which it was originally felt.

An example - you are standing in the queue in a busy shop when you start to feel hot, agitated and that you need to leave quickly. The next time you have to visit that shop you feel a little worried that the same thing will happen again – you can then start getting anxious that you will get anxious when you go back to other shops which sets up a vicious circle of worrying about what might happen and then avoidance.

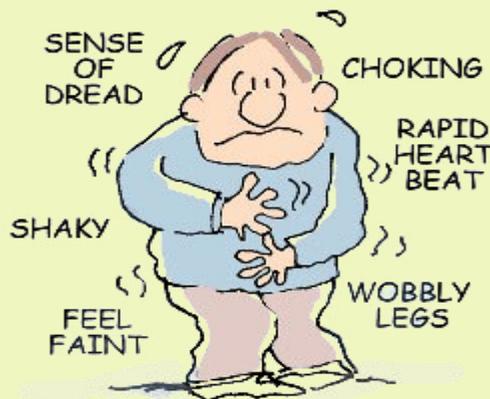
Often though, it will not be that shop that triggered the anxiety but something else entirely. It is just that we then associate the feeling with where we first noticed it.

We then get into a loop of negative thinking which affects our behaviours and emotions – more of this later.

Symptoms of Anxiety

While there are similarities in the symptoms experienced by different people there are also variations in how and where in the body individuals feel it most. Do any of these apply?

- Dry mouth
- Twitchy
- Butterflies in the tummy
- Dizziness
- Racing heart
- Shortness of breath
- Panicky
- Avoidance
- Easily flustered
- Sweaty hands
- Tight chest / muscles
- Fear
- Often thinking what if...
- Angry / Irritable
- Need to escape
- Wobbly legs
- Negative thoughts
- Can't concentrate /



Some of these symptoms are scarier than others.

A dry mouth is annoying when you are trying to speak out but a racing heart can feel very scary and can trigger thoughts such as 'I am having a heart attack', 'I am going to die' which does nothing to lessen the anxiety being felt.

- **FACT**—people do not die of panic attacks.
- **FACT**—there are techniques you can learn to take back control of your body.
- **FACT**—avoiding situations which make you anxious is not a good idea.

Don't let your feelings control you, you control your feelings!!