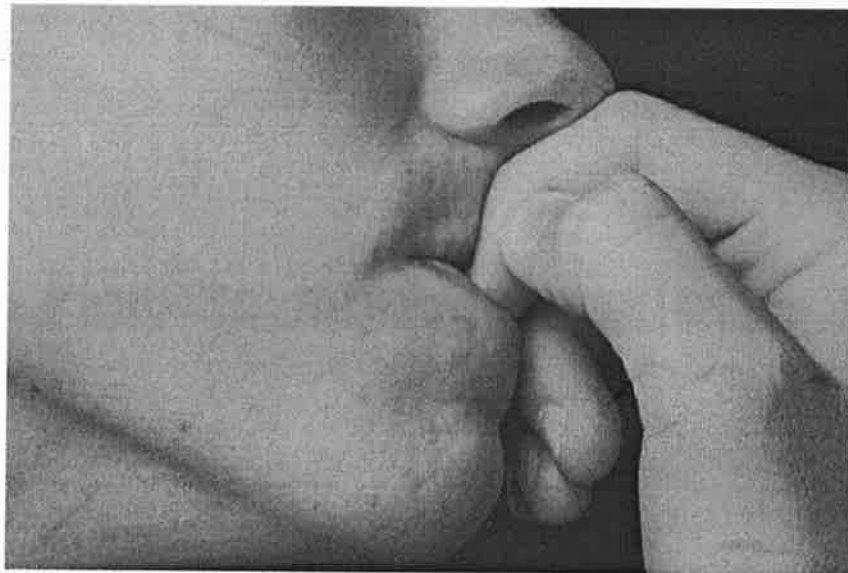


## How to manage anxiety



**A self-help guide for young people**



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**We hope that this booklet will help you find out:**

- What anxiety is and why we have anxiety
- How anxiety affects our body, thoughts and behaviour
- What we can do to overcome anxiety

## What is anxiety?

- Anxiety is the feeling we get when we are worried about or frightened of something.
- It causes changes in our body, our thoughts and our behaviour.
- Everyone feels anxious sometimes, it is normal and useful to have some anxiety in our lives.
- Having a little bit of anxiety can be helpful, for example, it can help us concentrate and think quickly in an exam or run faster in a race.

## What happens when we're anxious?

The first thing people usually notice when they are anxious is the changes in their body, things like:

- Breathing getting faster
- Having difficulty catching their breath
- Heart beating faster
- Trembling or shaking
- Muscles getting tense
- Feeling sick or 'butterflies' in your stomach
- Dry mouth or a tight throat
- Needing to go to the toilet more often
- Sweating more

Anxiety can also affect our thoughts and behaviour, for example;

- **Thoughts:** People might think things like "I can't cope", "I'm going mad", "I'm going to faint".
- **Behaviour:** They might leave situations that make them anxious or avoid them altogether.

If you are experiencing some of these things it is possible you have some symptoms of anxiety.

Keep reading to find out more about anxiety and what you can do to help overcome it.

## Why do we have anxiety?

- Anxiety is our body's way of protecting us from danger.
- It is like an alarm that tells our body to get ready.
- When we are anxious our body gets ready to run away (flight) or stay and fight, sometimes danger can cause us to freeze.
- This is called the 'fight, flight or freeze' response.



- Think about a caveman threatened by a lion.
- He needed to be ready for action; to fight the lion, run away from it or stay very still to hide.
- Anxiety would help prepare his body to do this.
- This is called the 'fight, flight or freeze' response.
- Our bodies still act in the same way today.



## The problem with anxiety



The problem is, our alarm system was designed to cope with things like lions which needed us to fight, flight or freeze.

Nowadays, the worries or stresses we have are different.

We might worry about things like: friendships, changes in our family, moving to a new school or exams.

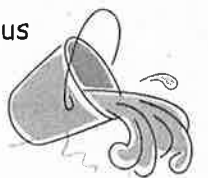
These things can trigger our anxiety alarm even though being ready to fight, flight or freeze won't help these kinds of worries. These situations aren't dangerous or threatening but **our body has got used to setting off the alarm.**

When our body gets used to setting off the alarm often, even just thinking about something that makes us anxious can set it off.

## What causes anxiety?

It is difficult to say what causes anxiety but there are lots of things that might be involved, for example:

- Some people generally tend to worry more than others (their alarm is easier to set off).
- Sometimes something in particular has triggered our anxiety, for example an upsetting or traumatic event.
- Stress or having big changes in our lives can also lead to people to feel anxious.
- Other times, lots of different things that have been stressing us out can cause us to feel anxious.
- Imagine your anxiety level is like a bucket, if lots of different worries and stresses are added to the bucket it will spill over at some point.



### **What makes us anxious?**

- All different kinds of things can make us anxious.
- We might feel anxious in one particular situation, for example if we have to talk in front of a room full of people, if we see a dog or when we are in a small space.
- Some people feel anxious in lots of different situations.

### **When does anxiety become a problem?**

Although having some anxiety in our lives is normal, anxiety can become a problem if:

- You feel anxious often or feel extremely anxious at times when there is no real danger.
- Anxiety stops you from doing things (e.g. you make excuses to leave situations or avoid doing something all together).

Anxiety is a common problem, research suggests that 1 in 6 young people will experience an anxiety condition at some point in their lives (Anxiety UK).

### **So, what can we do about anxiety?**

Firstly, you need to understand what anxiety is and why we have it (and you've already done that bit!)

Then there are 3 steps to being able to manage anxiety:

1. Understand what anxiety does to your body, thoughts and behaviour and what keeps it going.
2. Learn ways to change your anxious body, thoughts and behaviour.
3. Practise and use what you have learnt.

## PART ONE



Understanding what anxiety does to our body, thoughts and behaviour and what keeps it going

### Understanding anxiety and the body

Anxiety causes changes in your body as it gets ready for action.

These are some of the physical signs that you might experience when you are anxious:



- Breathing getting faster
- Having difficulty catching your breath
- Heart beating faster
- Trembling or shaking
- Muscles getting tense
- Feeling sick or 'butterflies' in your stomach
- Dry mouth or a tight throat
- Needing to go to the toilet more often
- Sweating more

What changes do you notice in your body when you feel anxious?

### Panic attacks

- Panic attacks are very strong physical signs of anxiety which can be frightening.
- People often think that something really bad is going to happen, they might feel like they are going to faint or think they're having a heart attack.
- In fact, it is the signs that our body is getting ready for action.
- For example, our breathing gets faster to pump more oxygen to our muscles but this can cause us to feel dizzy or faint.
- Thinking that something awful is going to happen only makes us more anxious which then makes the physical signs in our body worse.
- Panic attacks are unpleasant and can be frightening but the physical signs are not dangerous and will go away.

### If you experience a panic attack:

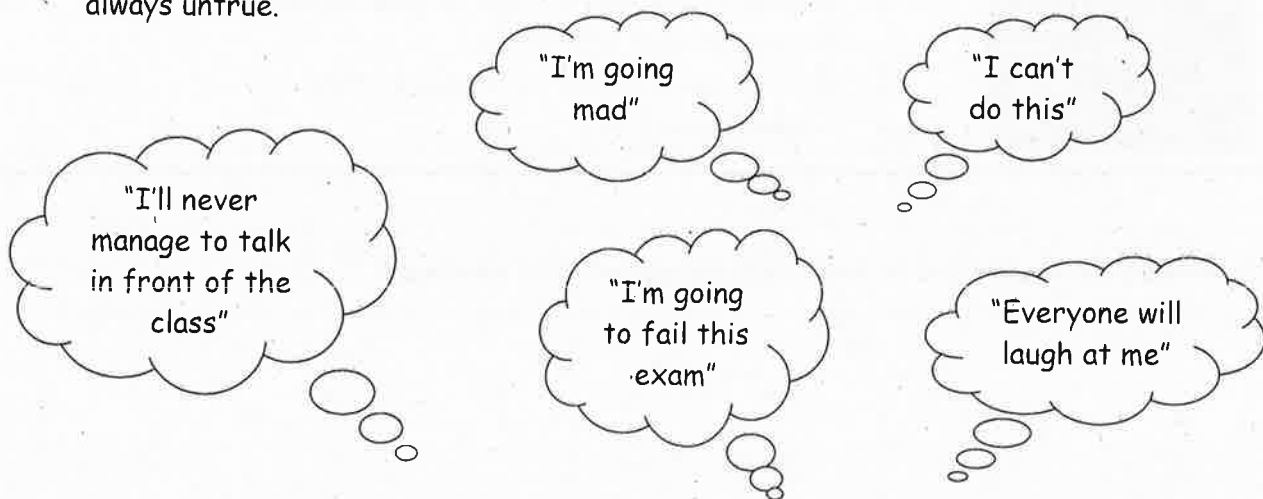
1. Remind yourself that panic attacks are not dangerous and the physical signs will go away.
2. Use relaxation exercises (see page...) to calm yourself down, slowing your breathing is especially important.
3. Change your anxious thoughts, use positive self-talk and distract yourself from the physical signs (see pages...).

There is also self-help booklet about overcoming panic attacks which you might find useful.

### Understanding anxiety and thoughts



- When we are anxious negative thoughts about things that **could** happen pop into our minds.
- These thoughts make us think we can't cope or that things are worse than they really are.
- They can go round and round in our head and **only make us feel even more anxious**.
- It is easy to believe these thoughts at the time but they are not helpful and are almost always untrue.



What negative thoughts do you have when you feel anxious? What negative thoughts do you have before situations that make you feel anxious? What do you think might happen?



## Understanding anxiety and behaviour

The unpleasant signs of anxiety in our body and anxious thoughts can cause changes in our behaviour (what we do).



They can make us:

- Want to get out of the situation as soon as possible
- Avoid the situation in the future
- Use 'safety behaviours'. These are things that we think make us feel less anxious (e.g. only going out when we have a friend with us or checking our body closely for physical signs or holding onto something to prevent us feeling dizzy).

Can you think of any situations you avoid? Or any safety behaviours you use?

**The problem is, safety behaviours and avoiding situations keep the problem going!**

- Avoiding situations and using safety behaviours can make us feel better in the short term but they only make things worse in the long term.
- In fact, they keep anxiety going.

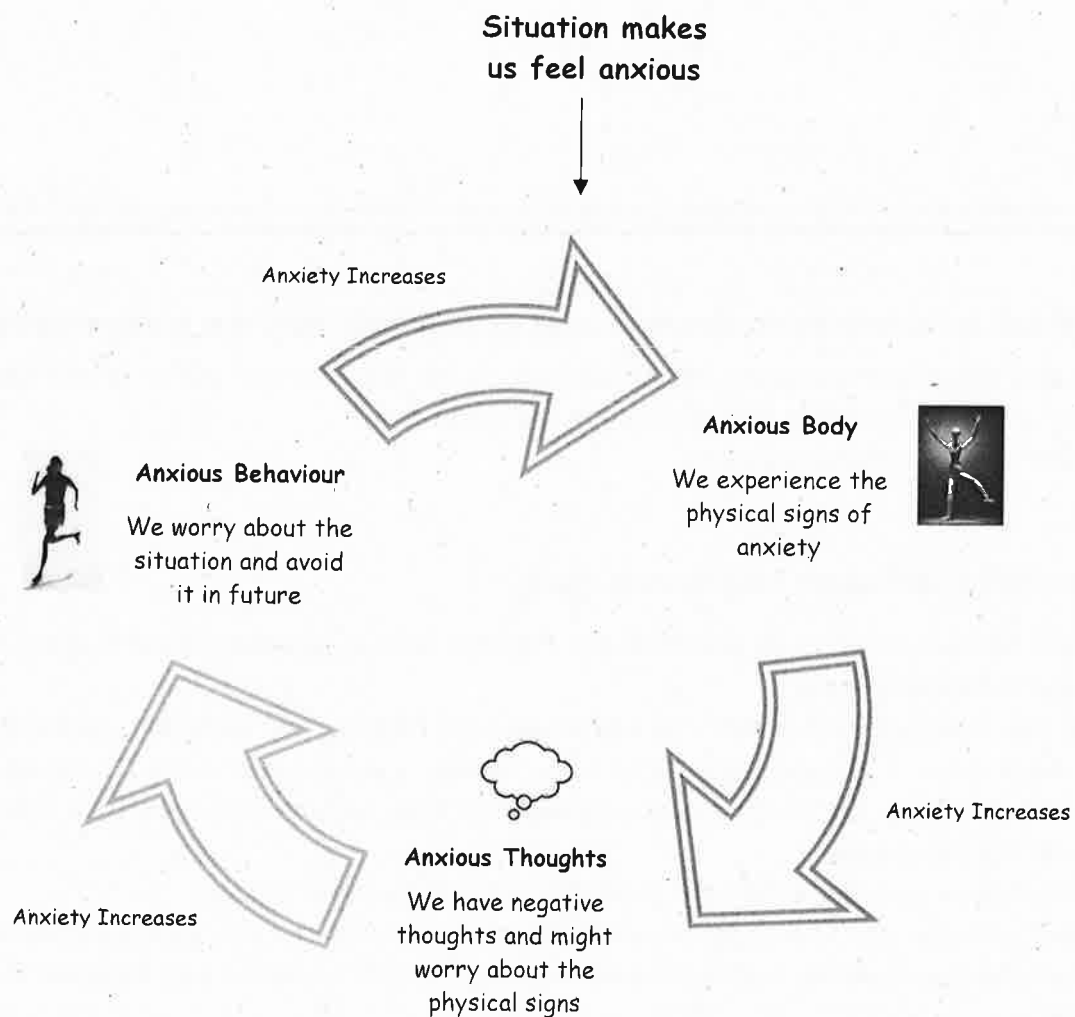
**How do safety behaviours keep anxiety going?**

- Safety behaviours trick us into thinking they are helping but they actually make things harder in the long term.
- They can make us think something bad would have happened if we hadn't used the safety behaviour (e.g. "if I hadn't monitored my breathing I would have fainted") and we don't get the chance to see that we probably wouldn't have felt anxious even if we didn't use the safety behaviour.
- Safety behaviours don't help our confidence about facing situations.
- Even if we cope well in a situation we will think it's because of the safety behaviour rather than because we managed really well, e.g. "I didn't feel anxious because Mum was there".
- If we rely on them, we are likely to get even more anxious sometime when we can't use our safety behaviour.

## How does avoiding situations keep anxiety going?

- It is natural to want to get out of the situation that made us anxious and to try and avoid it in future.
- But, by avoiding the situation we don't have the chance to see that it probably would have worked out well and we would have coped fine.
- We can't find out if we would even have felt anxious in the situation.
- The more we avoid something, the more we think that we can't manage it.
- It makes us feel even less confident about the situation in the future.
- **The more we avoid, the more powerful our anxiety becomes.**
- **Avoiding situations creates an anxious cycle**

### The anxious cycle:



In fact, our anxious body, thoughts and behaviour all make one another worse.

### **An example of the anxiety cycle - Joe's story**

Joe is anxious about going to school. He thinks that no one likes him and that he'll never do well in school (**anxious thoughts**). On the way to school his heart starts to race, he has butterflies in his stomach and he feels sick (**anxious body**).



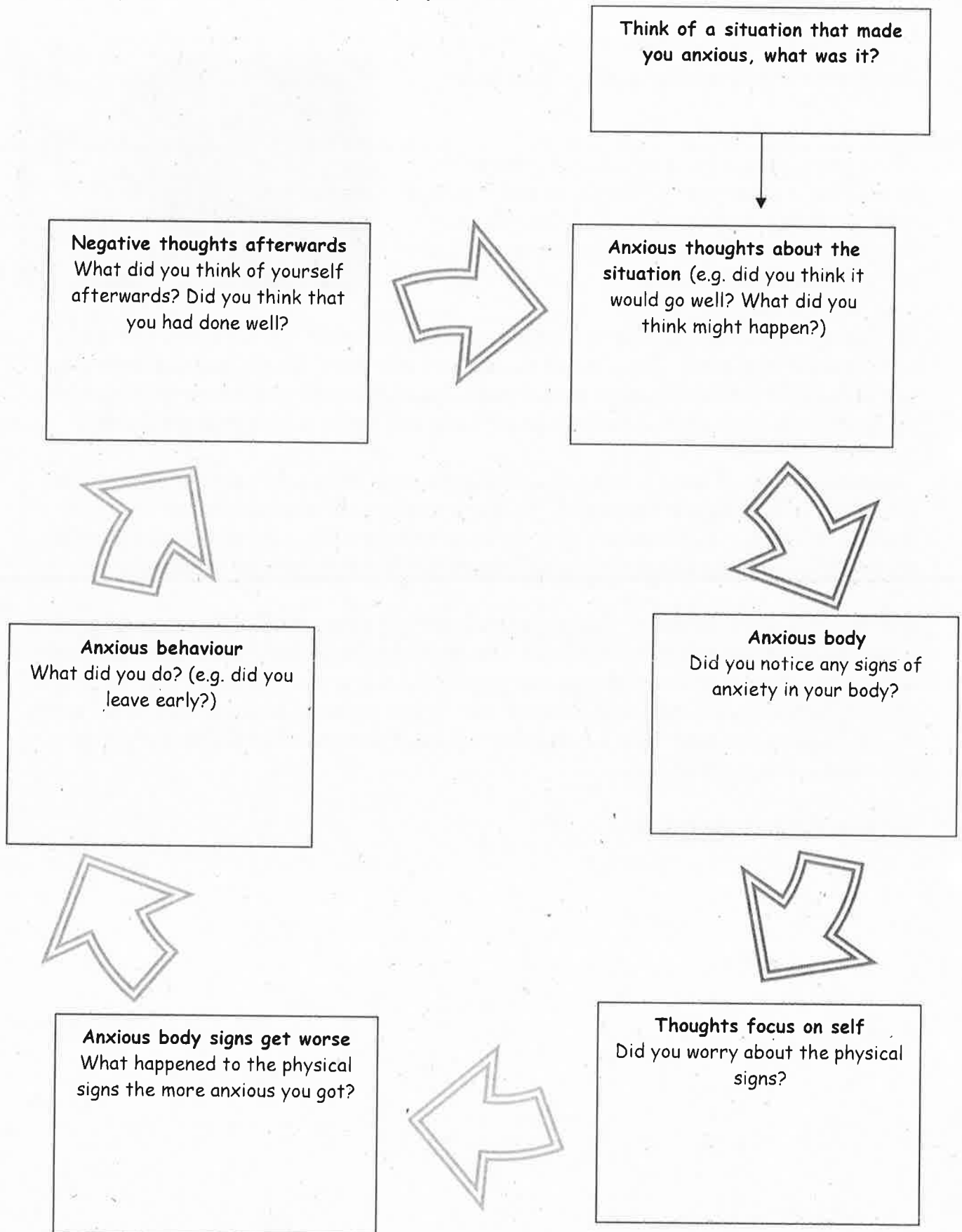
He thinks that he won't be able to cope in school and that everyone will notice how anxious he is (**anxious thoughts**). These thoughts make him even more anxious (**anxious body signs get worse**). The physical signs of anxiety make Joe worry even more; he worries about why his heart is racing so fast and worries about being sick (**anxious thoughts get worse**).

The physical signs of anxiety and anxious thoughts make Joe want to get out of school as quickly as he can (**anxious behaviour**). He starts to worry about going to school everyday (**anxious thoughts**). As his anxiety gets worse he tries to avoid going to lessons and some days he stays at home because the worry makes him feel sick (**anxious behaviour**).

**But**, by avoiding the situation Joe's anxiety will only get worse. The longer he avoids going to school, the more anxious it will make him. The physical signs of anxiety and anxious thoughts will get worse and this will encourage him to keep avoiding school. He won't have the chance to learn better ways to deal with his anxiety or to find out if his anxiety would have faded. As time goes on Joe Might start to feel anxious about going to other places too like going to the cinema or to football games.

**...and so the cycle continues.**

See if you can fill in your own anxiety cycle below:



Can you see how your thoughts, body and behaviour are going round and round keeping your anxiety going and making it worse?

## PART TWO

So, how do I overcome anxiety?



- To overcome anxiety you need to break the anxious cycle.
- This means making a change in each part of the cycle (thoughts, body and behaviour).
- By making these changes the cycle will stop and things will start to improve.
- The next part of this booklet has different ways that you can change your anxious thoughts, body and behaviour.
- It will take time and lots of practise for things to improve but stick with it and you should find it gets easier.

### By now you should know:

- What anxiety is and why we have it.
- What anxiety does to our body, thoughts and behaviour and what keeps it going.
- It's really important to remember that anxiety is a healthy and useful system which can sometimes be switched on at the wrong time.

## Changing your anxious body



### Relaxation

- Relaxation is a great way to change your anxious body (and anxious thoughts too!)
- It is impossible to be anxious and relaxed at the same time.

### What is relaxation?

- There are lots of different ways to relax.
- Relaxation can be spending time doing something that you enjoy for example, reading a book, going for a walk, doing exercise, spending time with friends or having a nice bubble bath.
- It's especially important to make time to do things you enjoy during difficult times when you might be feeling stressed or worried.

### Relaxation exercises

- Relaxation exercises can also help people to feel relaxed and calm.
- They can help to relax your body and thoughts.
- On the following pages there are 3 different types of relaxation exercises for you to try, these are: breathing exercises, muscle relaxation and imagination relaxation.



### What to do:

- Try to practise these exercises everyday at a time when you are not anxious until you get the hang of them.
- Find somewhere quiet and comfortable where you won't be distracted.
- Once you get used to them, try to use the exercises any time you feel anxious when you're out and about (e.g. you could try breathing exercises before an exam).
- It might be useful to keep track of your progress by keeping a diary of the relaxation exercises you try and how you felt.
- There is a relaxation diary at the end of this booklet (p.g. ...) or you could make your own.

## 1. Breathing Exercises

- When we are anxious our breathing gets faster.
- Learning to slow down and control your breathing will help you feel calm and relaxed and stop the unpleasant physical signs of anxiety.
- Breathing exercises can be very useful to use whenever you feel anxious, no matter where you are. No one will even know you are doing them.

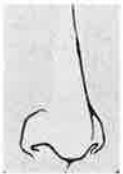


### Getting Ready:

Sit or lie in a comfortable position

Close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing

### What to do:



**Breathe in** slowly through your nose and count slowly (1...2...3...4)

You should feel your abdomen (the area under your ribs) expand as the air reaches the bottom of your lungs.

Hold your breath for a couple of seconds

Then **breathe out** slowly through your mouth (1...2...3...4...5...6)

You should feel your abdomen deflate and relax



Rest one of your hands on your abdomen, just below your ribs to feel it rising and falling with your breath.

Breathe like this for a few minutes until your breathing is nice and slow and you feel calm

Thinking words like "relax" or "calm" as you breathe out can also help

### At the end:

Try to keep the calm and relaxed feeling with you as you return to your day.

## 2. Muscle Relaxation

- When we feel anxious our muscles can become tense
- Stretching and relaxing your muscles can help you feel calm and relaxed

### Getting ready:

Sit or lie in a comfortable position

Close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing

As you breathe out, imagine the tension in your body flowing away



### What to do:

Starting with your feet, you are going to tense and then relax all the muscles in your body.

- Tense up your toes (squeeze them up), hold and then relax them.
- Repeat this at least once more.
- Next, tense up the muscles in your legs (your calves first, then your thighs) hold and then relax them, feeling the tension flowing away.
- Repeat the same thing for your bottom, stomach, shoulders (squeeze them up to your ears), then your arms, hands and face.
- Tense and relax each part at least twice.

**\* Stop at any time if you feel any pain or discomfort \***

### At the end:

Your body should feel heavy and relaxed and your breathing should be nice and steady.

Check that all parts of your body feel relaxed, if not, tense and relax those areas again.

Enjoy the calm and relaxed feelings and take these with you as you get up slowly and get back to the rest of your day.

### Troubleshooting:

- Some people find it difficult to continue breathing calmly at the same time as tensing and relaxing their muscles and hold their breath instead.
- Try to keep your breathing separate from tensing and relaxing your muscles as much as you can. This should get easier the more you practise.



### 3. Imagination Exercises



Imagining a calm and happy place or memory can help you to relax and get rid of anxious thoughts and worries.

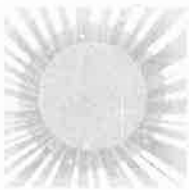
#### Getting ready:

Sit or lie in a comfortable position

Close your eyes and concentrate on getting your breathing nice and slow

#### What to do:

- Imagine a calm and happy picture in your mind
- It can be somewhere you have been before or somewhere from your imagination
- Maybe a beach, a beautiful garden, a tropical island or a peaceful river.
- Try and imagine all the details about the place;



- ♦ What can you see?
  - ♦ What can you hear? (e.g. sound of waves or birds or leaves rustling)
  - ♦ What can you smell? (e.g. pine trees or flowers or the sea)
  - ♦ What does it feel like? (e.g. maybe you can feel the sun warming up your skin or sand between your toes)
- Spend some time in this place feeling your body and mind relaxing
  - This is your relaxing place which you can use any time you feel anxious or worried

#### At the end:

When you feel relaxed and ready, slowly return to your day

Spend a few minutes focusing back on your surroundings

Take your calm and relaxed feelings with you as you go on with the rest of your day.



## Changing your Anxious Thoughts



- Lots of negative thoughts can pop into our heads when we are anxious.
- These make us feel even more anxious so it is really important to change these thoughts to break the anxiety cycle.

### 1. Don't worry about physical signs of anxiety

- The physical signs of anxiety are unpleasant and can be frightening but remember that they are not harmful and they will go away.
- Use your relaxation exercises to take control of the physical signs and help with anxious thoughts.

### 2. Distract yourself

- It is useful to take your mind off the physical signs and anxious thoughts
- Anything that uses your concentration should help to keep your mind busy.

You could try:

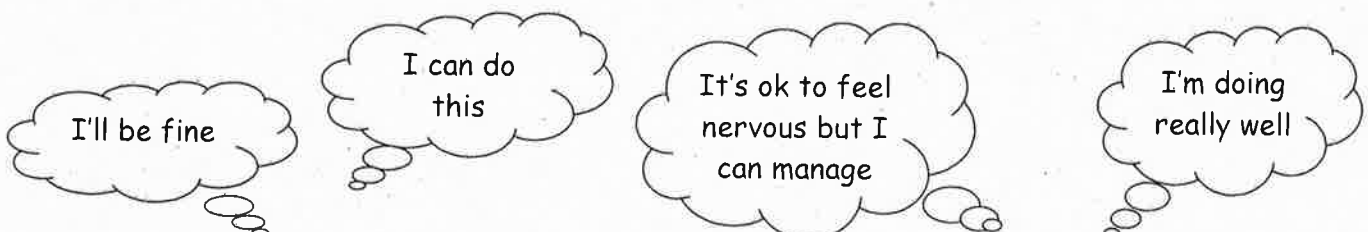


- ♦ Describing what you can see around you, e.g. how many colours can you see?
- ♦ Trying to memorise things around you or counting things e.g. how many blue cars can you see? How many people wearing glasses?
- ♦ Letter or word games e.g. thinking up as many animals or countries as you can for each letter of the alphabet or saying the alphabet backwards.
- ♦ Number games e.g. counting backwards from 100 in threes or saying times tables backwards.
- ♦ Reciting the lyrics of your favourite song in your head
- ♦ Reading or talking to someone with you.
- ♦ See if you can think up some more ideas!

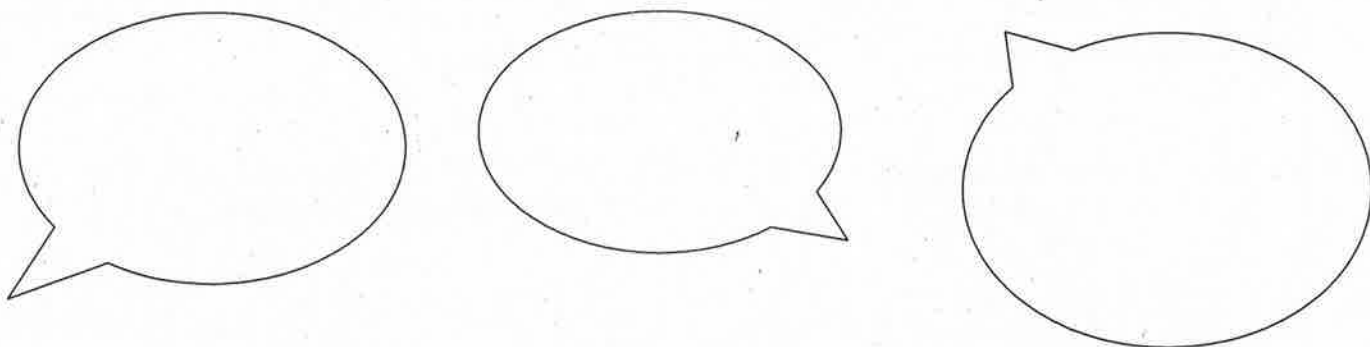


### 3. Try positive self-talk

- Think positive thoughts in your head to encourage yourself.
- Be your own coach and help yourself through the situation.
- Imagine you were trying to reassure a friend about something, what would you say to them?



Can you think of some other positive phrases that you could say to yourself?



You could also write down some of the sentences to look at any time you feel anxious.

4. **Focus on the positives:** sometimes we forget these and only think about the negative parts, for example we might remember feeling anxious in the supermarket but forget that we always cope well in the busy shopping centre.

**Don't worry about what might happen, remember it also might not happen!**

#### 5. Challenge negative thoughts

- Remember, the negative thoughts that we have when we're anxious are not usually true.
- Try to notice negative or anxious thoughts as they come into your head, challenge them and try and come up with a more balanced thought instead.

**How do I do this?**

- Start to notice the negative thoughts you have before a situation or when you're in the situation.


**Challenge the thought by asking:**

- ? What is the evidence that this thought is true?
- ? What is the evidence that this thought is not true?
- ? What would someone else say about the thought?
- ? What are the benefits of thinking like this?
- ? What are the costs of thinking like this?
- ? Is it helpful to think this way?
- ? Is there another way I could think about this situation?
- ? What would be a more helpful thought?

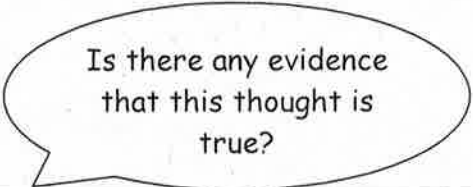
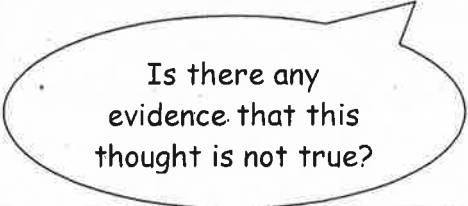
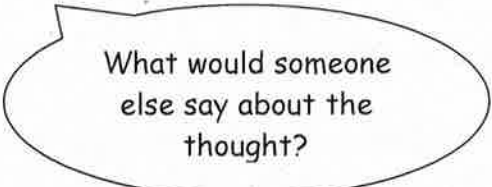

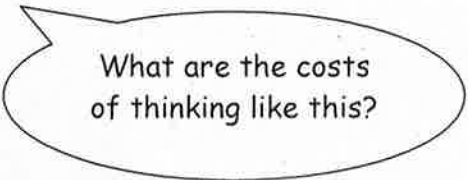

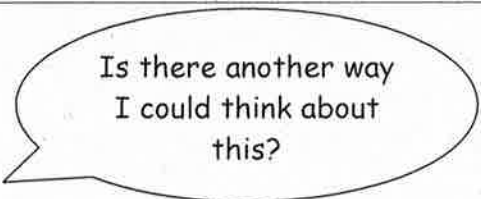



- Sometimes it's enough just to challenge thoughts in your head but it can also be helpful to write them down and challenge them on paper.
- On the next page there is an example of thought challenging and then space for you to practice challenging some of your own thoughts.

### An example of challenging anxious thoughts

<b>Situation:</b> One month away from exam time.	
<b>My anxious negative thought:</b> "I'm going to fail all my exams"	
What is the evidence that this thought is true?	"Well, I haven't studied as much as I could have, but I've never failed anything before".
What is the evidence that this thought is not true?	"I've always done ok in school and did well in my last exams. Even if I struggle with a couple of exams I'm very unlikely to fail them all".
What would someone else say about the thought?	"They would tell me that I'm doing really well in school and that I'll do well in my exams. My parents would tell me just to do my best."
Are there any benefits of thinking like this?	"No"
What are the costs of thinking like this?	"It's making me really anxious; I can hardly concentrate on my revision because I'm so worried. I'm starting to get short tempered and angry with my friends and family too".
Is it helpful to think this way?	"No, it's making it harder for me to concentrate and revise so it's making all of my worries worse".
Is there another way I could think about this situation?	"Yes"
 <b>My Balanced thought:</b> "I might not get perfect results in my exams but I've still got time to study hard and I'll do my best to pass them all".	

Give it a try - challenge some of your anxious thoughts!

Situation:	
My anxious negative thought:	
	
	
	
	
	
	
	
 My Balanced thought:	

## Changing your anxious behaviour

- Changing what you do is probably the most important way to overcome anxiety.



### Stop avoiding & get rid of safety behaviours

- When we feel anxious our natural reaction is to get out of the situation as quickly as possible.
- But we know that avoiding these situations only makes the problem worse.
- Safety behaviours trick us into thinking they are helpful but actually they make things more difficult in the long run and we can end up depending on them.
- By avoiding a situation that makes us anxious or using safety behaviours we don't get to see that it probably would have worked out well and we would have coped fine.
- We will worry more about the situation and feel even less confident the next time we face it.

### Instead, start facing the situation!

- To overcome anxiety we need to start facing the situations that make us anxious.
- It's best to do this in a slow and planned way.
- It can be frightening to face situations, especially if you've been avoiding them for a long time, but your new knowledge should help you to control your anxiety.

### How do I do that?

#### Take small steps

- Make a list of the situations that you avoid and put them in order of how anxious they make you feel.
- Start by facing a situation that makes you feel only a little bit anxious.
- You might want to start off by spending a short amount of time in the situation and then build it up gradually.
- In each situation:
  - Use your relaxation exercises
  - Use positive self-talk or distraction
  - Challenge any negative thoughts
- Practise each step as much as you need to until it doesn't make you feel anxious anymore.
- Work through all the steps in the same way until you reach the most challenging one.
- If you find a step really difficult you could try putting in smaller steps in between.
- For example, if the step was travelling on a bus you might try travelling on a bus for 1 stop first and then 3 stops the next time and so on.



### **An example of facing situations in small steps:**

Someone who gets anxious going out of the house alone might work through the following steps:

1. Stand at the front door for a few minutes
  2. Stand on the pavement outside their house for a few minutes
  3. Walk to the end of the street
  4. Walk round the block
  5. Walk to a nearby shop
- ...and so on



### **When facing your anxiety it is really important to:**

#### **1. Know that just staying in the situation helps**

- Anxiety can only go up for so long before it has to start fading.
- Just staying in a situation causes your level of anxiety to decrease by itself.
- It's as if your body gets used to the situation and learns that it is not dangerous and so your anxiety starts to fade.
- Every time you stay in the situation you will feel less anxious and the feelings will fade away quicker.
- It is important not to leave the situation when you are feeling very anxious.
- Use the things you have learned to help calm yourself down so you can leave feeling positive.



#### **2. Reward yourself!**

- Reward yourself for all the efforts you make towards facing your anxiety.
- Facing your anxiety can be difficult so you should be really proud of yourself when you do!
- Do something you enjoy as a treat (e.g. have a bath, watch a film, spend time with friends).
- You might like to record all your achievements in a diary and look back on your progress.



#### **3. Stay positive!**

- If things don't go as well as you had hoped don't worry about it; everyone has good and bad days.
- Just be positive and try again next time.



## Anxiety and your lifestyle

Your lifestyle can also affect anxiety. Having a healthy lifestyle and looking after yourself is another way which can help manage your anxiety.

### Try to:

- Make time to relax and do the things you enjoy
- Eat well
- Exercise regularly
- Get enough sleep



### The following things can make anxiety worse:

- Caffeine (in tea, coffee and fizzy drinks)
- Alcohol
- Drugs
- Not eating regularly or not eating enough
- Poor sleeping habits (not getting enough sleep, irregular sleeping patterns)
- Having lots of stress or changes in your life - even if you can't change this, making time to relax will help.

### Summary:

- Anxiety is our body's way of protecting us from danger by getting us ready for action.
- Although some anxiety in our lives is useful, at times anxiety can become a problem.
- To manage our anxiety we need to understand how it affects our body, thoughts and behaviour and learn ways to change these.

- By reading this booklet you should have learned new ways to manage your anxiety.
- It will take time and practise but if you stick at it, things will start to get better.
- If you feel like things aren't getting better or that you need more help to overcome your anxiety you should contact your GP who will be able to give you advice about other information or services that might be useful.



## My Relaxation Diary

Date	What did you do to relax?	How long did you practice for?	How relaxed did you feel from 1-10? (If 10 is the most relaxed)

## My Relaxation Diary

Date	What did you do to relax?	How long did you practice for?	How relaxed did you feel from 1-10? (If 10 is the most relaxed)