

EXAM SURVIVAL GUIDE

Beating Exam Stress

TEACHER PACK

Name:



Course aims

The aims of these sessions:

- ⇒ To understand anxiety and how it affects me.
- ⇒ To understand how my thinking affects how I am feeling and acting.
- ⇒ To develop coping strategies and learn about different tools to use to help reduce anxiety and manage exams.

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Questionnaire Information

This questionnaire contains 40 self-rated questions and 2 open-ended questions which measure triggers for stress, the effects of stress, and stress coping strategies.

All of these is split into factors, each measured through 2-5 questions. Knowing the scores within the different factors can help you tailor sessions to best suit the needs of the young people you are working with.

Triggers for stress

Factor	Relevant Questions
Environment	8, 31
Comparison – <i>peers and siblings</i>	9, 24
Ability – <i>knowledge and recall</i>	1, 10, 22, 25, 35
Meeting expectations – <i>parents', teachers', own</i>	2, 11, 26, 30
Self-worth – <i>ways of defining/measuring success, ability to take pride/self-congratulate, link between performance and relationships</i>	3, 13, 36, 40
Revision and Studying – <i>workload, time management</i>	12, 14, 21

Effects of stress

Factor	Relevant Questions
Physical symptoms – <i>stomach, sweat, shaking, sleep, breathing</i>	4, 15, 16, 20, 37
Focus – <i>concentration, distracting/intrusive thoughts</i>	17, 29, 39

Stress coping strategies

Factor	Relevant Questions
Support system - <i>home and school</i>	5, 28
Self-efficacy – <i>resilience, feelings of control, self-efficacy</i>	6, 7, 23, 32, 38
Coping strategies in place	18, 19, 27, 33, 34

Scoring the questionnaire

Complete the tables below for each completed questionnaire. In the 'Pre/post-course Scores' columns, **put the answers the young person gave to those question**, then add these answers together to give the total score for that factor in the 'Total' column. Having these scores should help you to tailor sessions, and measure the impact of the course at the end.

Reverse scoring

Question numbers in *orange* need to be reverse-coded. Use the table below to help you calculate the score.

Answer given	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Score	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Triggers for stress

Factor	Relevant Questions	Pre-course Scores	Total	As Percentage	Post-course Scores	Total	As Percentage
Environment	8, 31		/20	/100		/20	/100
Comparison – peers and siblings	9, 24		/20	/100		/20	/100
Ability – knowledge and recall	1, 10, 22, 25, 35		/50	/100		/50	/100
Meeting expectations – parents', teachers', own	2, 11, 26, 30		/40	/100		/40	/100
Self-worth – ways of defining/ measuring success, ability to take pride/self-congratulate, link between performance and relationships	3 , 13, 36, 40		/40	/100		/40	/100
Revision and studying – workload, time management	12, 14, 21		/30	/100		/30	/100
		FACTOR SCORE:	/200 (%)			/200 (%)	

Effects of stress

Factor	Relevant Questions	Pre-course Scores	Total	As Percentage	Post-course Scores	Total	As Percentage
Physical symptoms – <i>stomach, sweat, shaking, sleep, breathing</i>	4, 15, 16, 20, 37		/50	/100		/50	/100
Focus – <i>concentration, distracting/intrusive thoughts</i>	17, 29, 39		/30	/100		/30	/100
		FACTOR SCORE:	/80 (%)			/80 (%)	

Stress coping strategies

Factor	Relevant Questions	Pre-course Scores	Total	As Percentage	Post-course Scores	Total	As Percentage
Support system – <i>home and school</i>	5, 28		/20	/100		/20	/100
Self-efficacy – <i>resilience, feelings of control, self-efficacy</i>	6, 7, 23, 32, 38		/50	/100		/50	/100
Coping strategies in place	18, 19, 27, 33, 34		/50	/100		/50	/100
		FACTOR SCORE:	/120 (%)			/120 (%)	

What do you find the most stressful thing about school?

Pre:	
Post:	

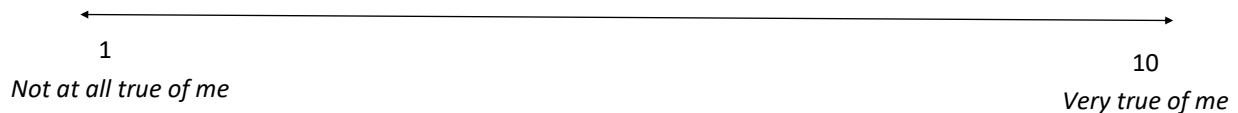
What strategies, if any, do you use to help you when you are anxious?

Pre:	
Post:	

Pre-course questionnaire

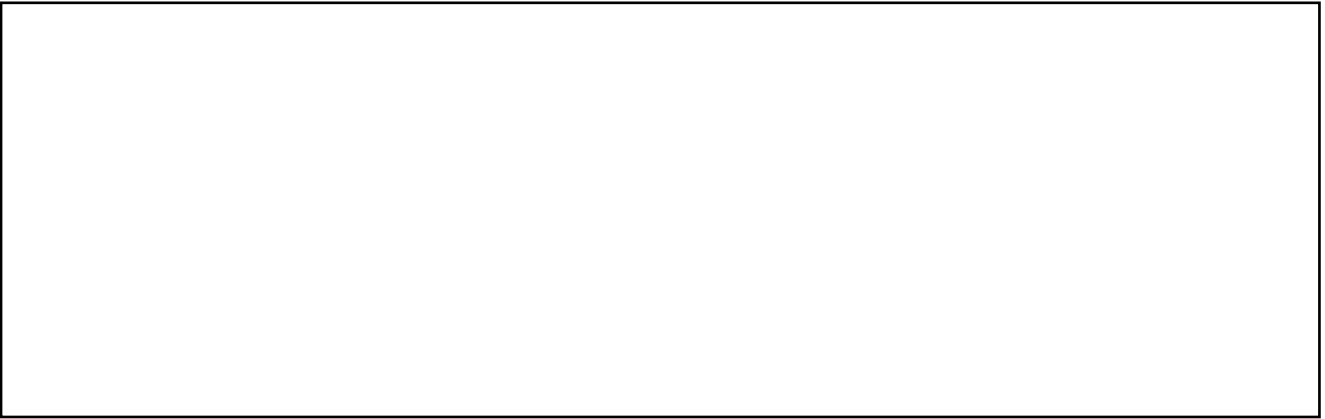
Name: _____

Read through each statement. Rate each item on a scale from 1-10, with 1 being 'not at all true of me' and 10 being 'very true of me'. Do not spend too much time on any one item; it should only take you about 10 minutes to complete.

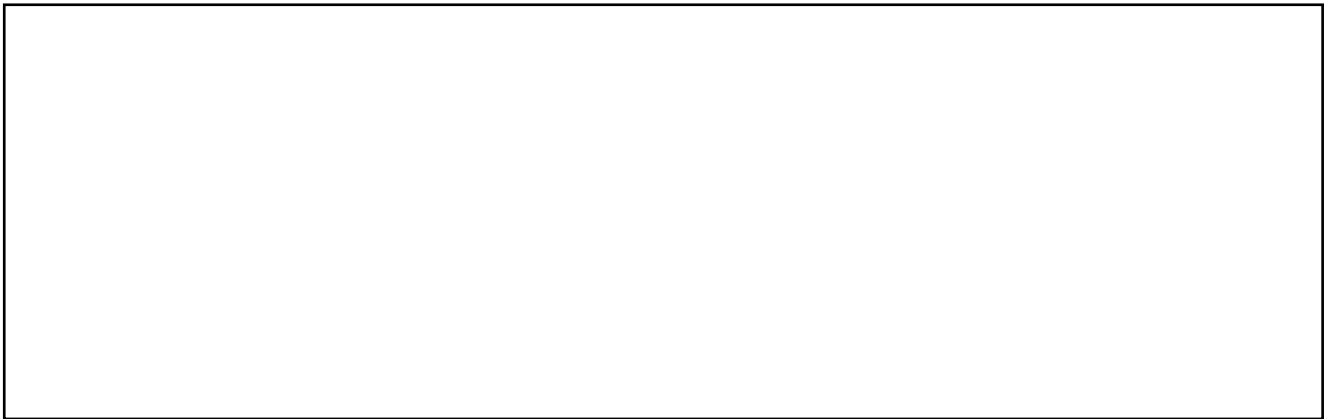


1. I find it difficult to do my best in tests or exams.
2. I worry what other people think of me.
3. I am proud of my school work.
4. When I have a problem, I get a funny feeling in my stomach.
5. I know how to get support at school when I need it.
6. I quickly give up when things go wrong.
7. I think about the worst things that can happen in an exam.
8. I am afraid of being in crowded places.
9. I worry that I will not achieve what my friends and family are able to.
10. My mind goes blank during tests or exams.
11. I worry that I will disappoint my parents and/or teachers.
12. I feel there are not enough hours in the day to do all the things that I must do.
13. I find it hard to imagine a successful future for myself.
14. I frequently have guilty feelings if I relax and do nothing.
15. When I have a problem, I feel shaky.
16. I have trouble sleeping the night before a test or exam.
17. I get bothered by bad or silly thoughts or pictures in my mind.
18. I look at challenges as a way to learn and improve myself.
19. I am good at shutting out anything that distracts me from a task.
20. When I have a problem, my heart beats really fast.

What do you find the most stressful thing about school?



What strategies, if any, do you use to help you when you are anxious?

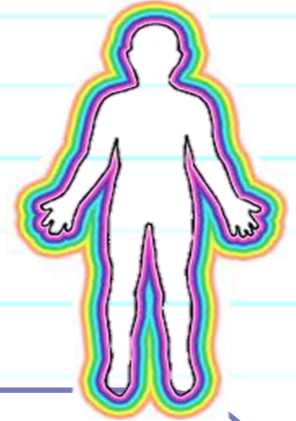


Session 1

Aim: To understand anxiety and how anxiety affects me

Why do we feel stressed and anxious?

- Emphasise that stress and anxiety are feelings that everyone experiences and that changes in our emotions are natural. There are things that we can all do to maintain positive mental wellbeing and help us manage when we feel overwhelmed.



“Stress is a perfectly normal response to events around us. Our ability to act impulsively and immediately is actually very important. This ‘fight and flight’ behaviour is a response to a stress hormone produced by our bodies called cortisol that triggers a reaction in order to keep us safe from harm. For our ancestors, this was essential for survival. A certain amount of stress can help us to be more alert and focused. However, in the modern fast paced world, too much stress, or constantly being anxious, is unhealthy for our lives and relationships. It makes us ‘hypervigilant’ a lot of the time. This means we are constantly on edge and looking out for the next threat. Feeling like this can mean we are constantly in ‘fight / flight’ mode and makes it very difficult to think clearly.

Over time, when we experience too many situations that have developed into triggers that make us feel stressed, we can begin to feel a lack of control in our life. In these circumstances, we are likely to experience low mood, feel less resilient, and have poorer mental wellbeing. “ - from [Healthier Minds](#)

- Play the following video, ‘The Happiness Trap’:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kv6HkipQcfA>



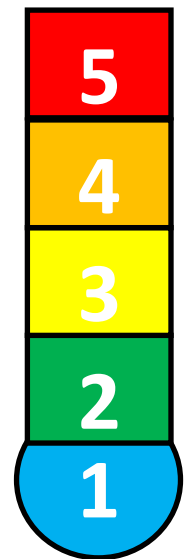
- Discuss the content of the video. Ask what the group thought of it and if they have any questions: what stood out to them; what resonated with them; what did they already know; what did they learn?

How anxiety affects me

- Explain that anxiety affects our body as well as our minds.
- Explain that the more we know about how anxiety and stress affect us physiologically, the more we can be aware of when we are starting to feel anxious or stressed.
- Talk about the different sensations and feelings people experience when they are anxious. Share your own experiences.
- Ask the group to fill out the table in their student booklet which lists possible physical reactions to anxiety: stomach-ache; headache; feeling hot; crying; fast breathing; tingly stomach/butterflies; tight muscles; dry mouth; laughing; needing the loo; ringing in the ears; twitching not on purpose; saying words or sounds not on purpose; sweaty palms; difficulty concentrating and increased heart rate. Use the diagram on p.11 for more ideas.

Task

- Encourage the group to keep a diary of times when they feel anxious or stressed over the next week. They can use the template (p.6-7 of the student pack), or make their own notes. They should note when (period 3, bed time etc) and where (school, home etc) they felt anxious and what potentially triggered feeling like this. Encourage them to reflect on what it felt like physiologically and what they did that made them feel better, even for a little bit. An emotion thermometer is provided in the template to help them measure how they felt (1= a wee bit anxious; 5 = very, very anxious)
- Emphasise that they do not need to share this diary if they do not want to. This is simply an activity to help them recognise how their emotions are affecting their bodies, and begin to think about potential triggers and solutions.



Relaxation

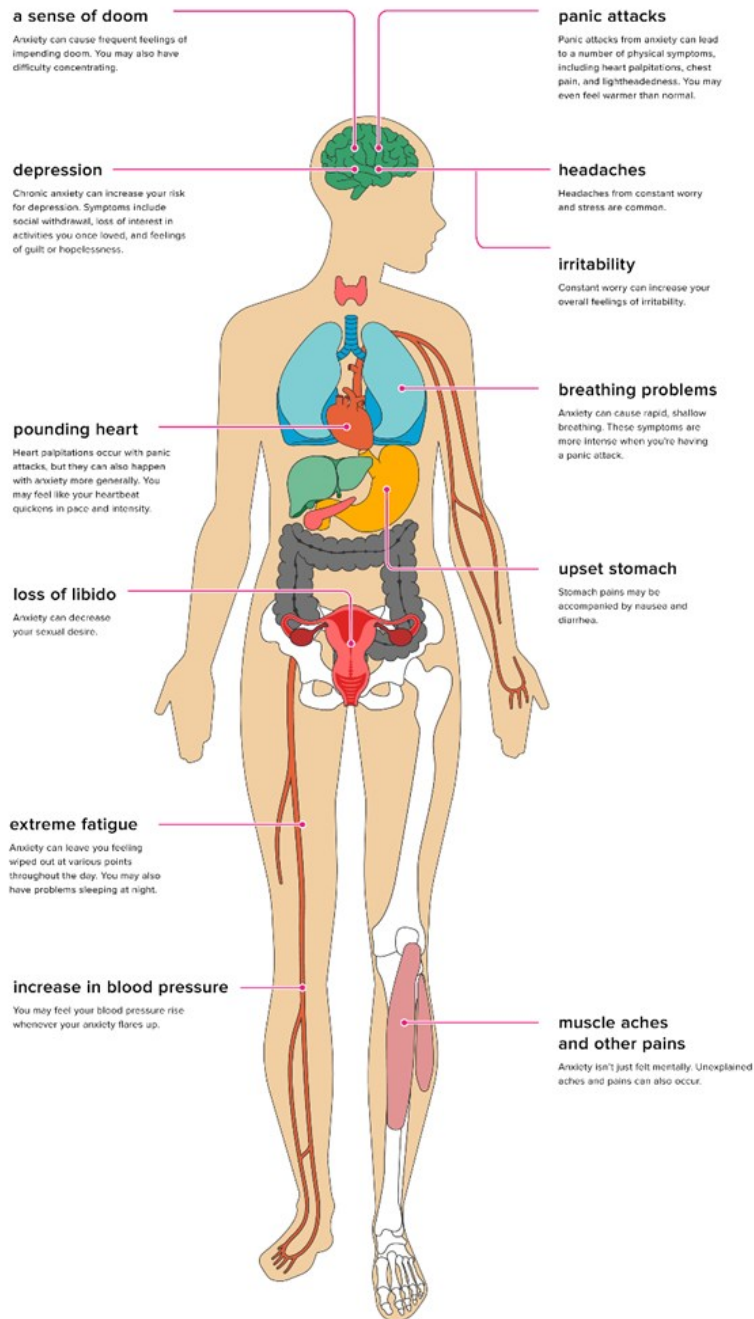
- End the session with a relaxing breathing exercise. Good examples and resources can be found here:
 - <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/er/healthierminds/resources/muscle-relaxation/>
 - <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/er/healthierminds/resources/apps/>
 - <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/er/healthierminds/coping-covid-19/useful-links/relaxation-strategies-2/>

The Effects of Anxiety

ON YOUR BODY

Everyone has anxiety from time to time, but chronic anxiety can interfere with your quality of life. While perhaps most recognized for behavioral changes, anxiety can also have serious consequences on your physical health.

Read on to learn more about the major effects anxiety has on your body.



healthline

Session 2

Aim: To better understand what aspects of exams make me anxious and to think about different tools to reduce the anxiety around exams

- Before you start today's session, take some time to discuss what the group learned from filling out their diaries from Session 1.

Triggers

- Discuss what it is specifically about exams that makes the young people anxious. Encourage them to also think about the lead-up to the exam—study leave, preparation, classes—and what makes them feel particularly anxious. Share your own experiences.
- Emphasise that anxiety and stress around exams is a normal experience but that we can learn strategies and tools to help us manage it.
- Encourage the group to fill out the table on p.8 of the student booklet with the parts of an exam that makes them feel anxious. Ask them to rate each thing that they have written on a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the most anxiety provoking).

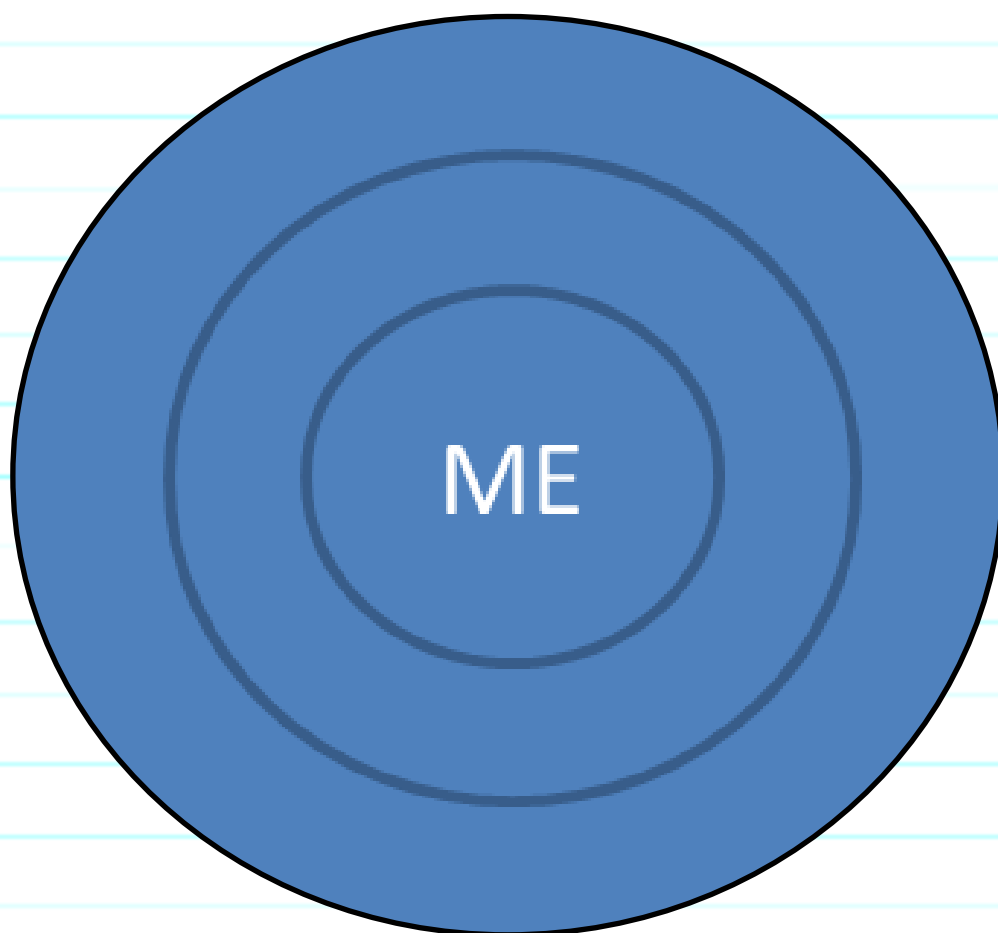
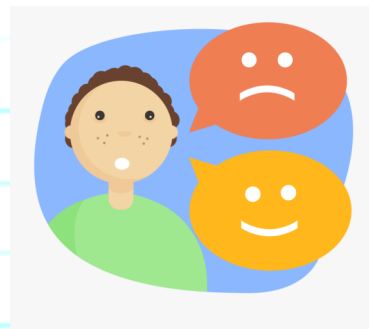
Tools

- Discuss times when the group have felt anxious around exam time, or class tests. What happened? What did they feel? How did they manage the situation?
- Discuss what or who makes the group feel better when they are anxious. The group can make notes in their student booklet under the headings: What makes the feelings go away? Who makes the feelings go away? What do I do that helps? Talk about activities that can clear the mind, distract them or bring enjoyment, and any coping strategies that have worked for them in the past.
- Help them to realise that they are probably already using strategies and tools to help themselves—whether they realise them as that or not. Talk about who they might go to for a listening ear or what extra-curricular activities they may already do. Share your own experience about what strategies you use when you feel anxious, especially if you have any tools that relate to your own exam experiences.
- Look again at the table in the student booklet. What could the young people do to move one or two points down the scale for each item?
- Try to link strategies to the physical symptoms (discussed in Session 1) that they help to ease.



My Inner Circle

- Talk about who the group likes to talk to or be with when they are stressed.
- Point out that they may speak to different people about different types of anxieties, e.g. school, health or family worries. Some people can make us feel better when we feel anxious, and some people make us feel worse. Those who make us feel better might validate our feelings, take our minds off it, or provide a listening ear.
- Using the diagram in the student booklet (p.11), ask the group to think about and write down who is in their 'circle'. Some people may be in their inner circle (those they are closest to) and others further out. These people can include friends, family, school staff, club leaders, sports coaches, and anyone else that the young people trust. Talk about your own positive experiences of being supported by the 'inner circle' in your life.



Relaxation

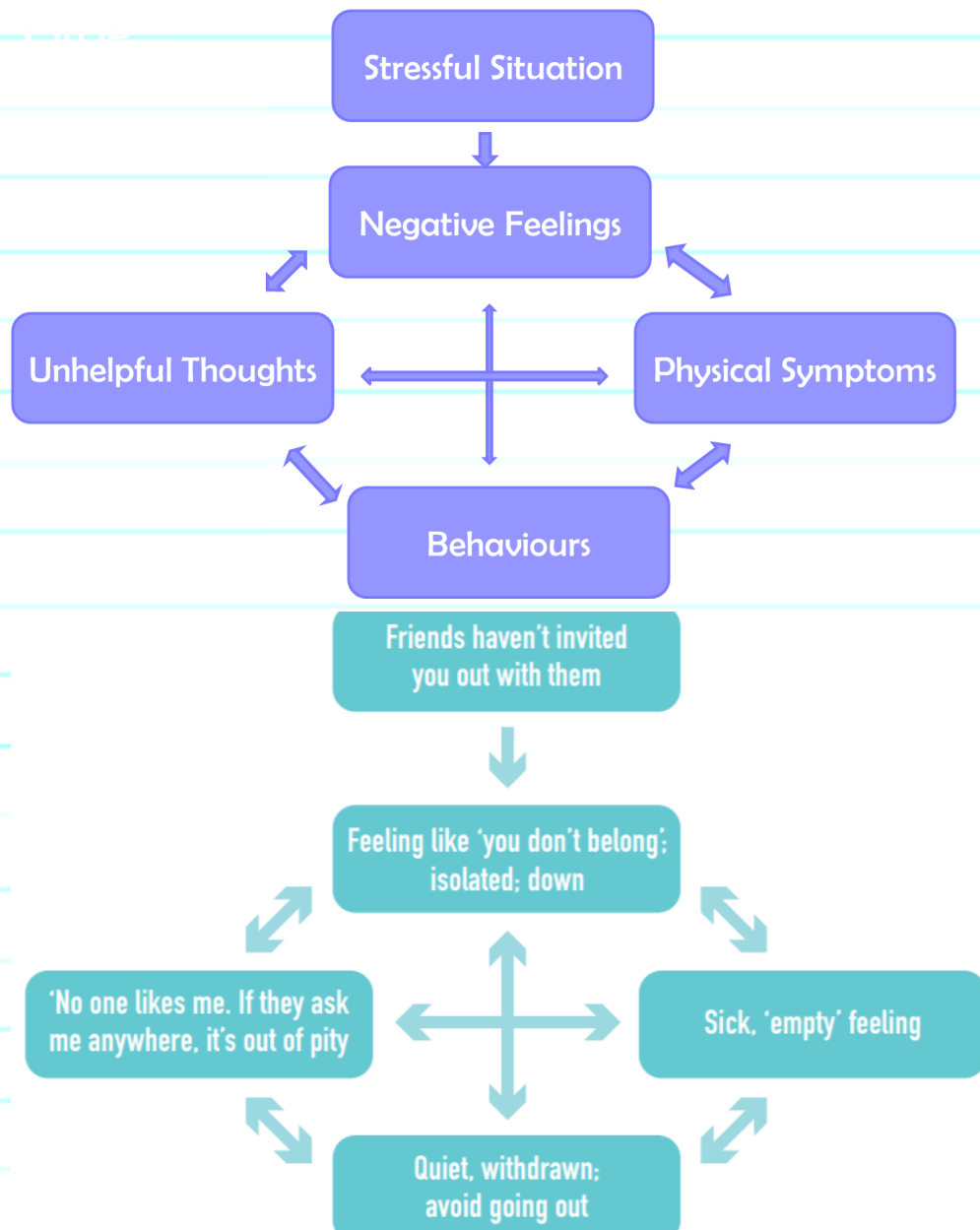
- End the session with a relaxation activity. See Session 1 for ideas.

Session 3

Aim: To understand how my thoughts, feelings and behaviours are interlinked and to explore the vicious circle.

The Vicious Cycle

- Explain that our thoughts, feelings and behaviours are all interlinked. This can make it easy to fall into a vicious cycle.
- Talk through the example below.

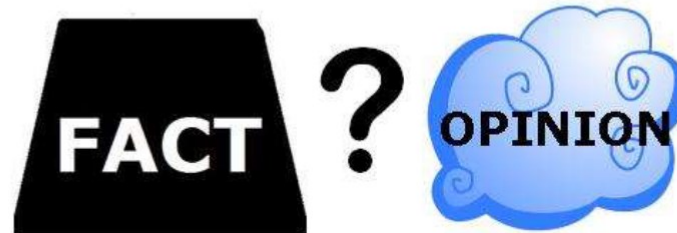


- Point out that just as thoughts, feelings and behaviours can negatively affect one another, we can also change one of them e.g. Unhelpful Thoughts to positively affect the others, and break the vicious cycle.

Unhelpful Thinking

- Explain that not all of our thoughts are helpful or factual. Sometimes we can think very negatively, jump too quickly to conclusions or think we can 'mind-read'. When a thought comes in to our head, it is useful to consider whether it is a fact or opinion.
- Discuss the difference between facts and opinions. Use the image below for ideas.

FACT or OPINION



FACT

- Evidence to support its truth
- Undisputable
- Driven by rational thought
- Head

OPINION

- Based upon a belief or personal view
- Arguable
- Driven by and reinforced by emotion
- Heart

- Below are some examples of common unhelpful thinking styles. There are further examples on p16. Discuss if there are any in particular that the group relate to. Share your own experiences.

The following gives some examples of types of thinking errors and unhelpful thoughts:	
Thinking errors	Unhelpful thoughts
Predicting the Future Catastrophising What If	What if I fail all my exams? I know the party will be a disaster
Jumping to Conclusions Taking Things Personally Mind Reading	He's not rung back – he doesn't like me
Focusing on the negative Ignoring the Positive Filtering	Everyone is saying I'll never make it No one likes me
Black and white thinking All or nothing Perfectionism 'Should' thinking	That was a complete waste of time They all hate me I should always get full marks
Over-generalising	I failed it so I'm useless

Unhelpful Thinking Styles

All or nothing thinking



Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'

If I'm not perfect I have failed

Either I do it right or not at all

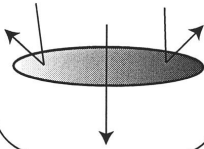
Over-generalising

"everything is always rubbish"

"nothing good ever happens"

Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw

Mental filter



Only paying attention to certain types of evidence.

Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes

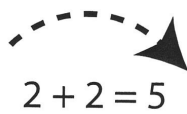
Disqualifying the positive



Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another

That doesn't count

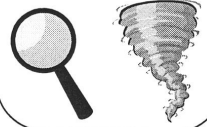
Jumping to conclusions



There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:

- **Mind reading** (imagining we know what others are thinking)
- **Fortune telling** (predicting the future)

Magnification (catastrophising) & minimisation



Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophising), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important

Emotional reasoning



Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true.

I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot

should must

Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed

If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration

Labelling



Assigning labels to ourselves or other people

*I'm a loser
I'm completely useless
They're such an idiot*

Personalisation

"this is my fault"

Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault. Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault.

Breaking the cycle

- Explain that we can actually have some control over our thoughts. If we change how we think about or view a situation, we can change how we feel about it, and how we subsequently behave.
- Ask the group to think about a time when they have felt anxious or stressed. How could they think differently if they were in a situation like that again? How would that affect their feelings or behaviour?
- Go back to the example on p14. What thinking error is occurring here? What else could someone think in this situation? It might be helpful to get the group to think about what they might say to a friend who was in that situation.
- Discuss how thinking in a different way about this situation would subsequently affect feelings, physical symptoms and behaviour.
- Highlight that the circumstance hasn't changed, but that a small change in thinking has drastically affected the outcome.
- Talk about strategies the group could use to help manage unhelpful thinking. Some ideas are below.


STOPP

TAKE A BREATH

OBSERVE: What am I thinking?
What am I reacting to?
What am I feeling in my body?

PULL BACK: Put in some perspective. See the bigger picture. Is this fact or opinion? How would someone else see this?

PRACTISE WHAT WORKS: What's the best thing to do for me, for others, for this situation?



Task

- Ask the group to make note of thinking errors that they make over the next few days.

Relaxation

- End the session with a relaxation activity. See Session 1 for ideas.

ABCDE

A

ATTENTION !
Notice what your mind is saying

B

BELIEVE ?
You don't have to believe everything you think !

C

CHALLENGE
Question your thoughts.

- Consider a new perspective.
- What's the evidence for the thought?
- Is this thought fact or opinion?
- What's the helicopter view?
- What's another way of looking at this?
- How might someone else see this?

D

DISCOUNT
Let the unhelpful thoughts go.

E

EXPLORE options.

Choose the best response. What shall I do now? Do it **mindfully**.

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www.getselfhelp.co.uk www.get.gg

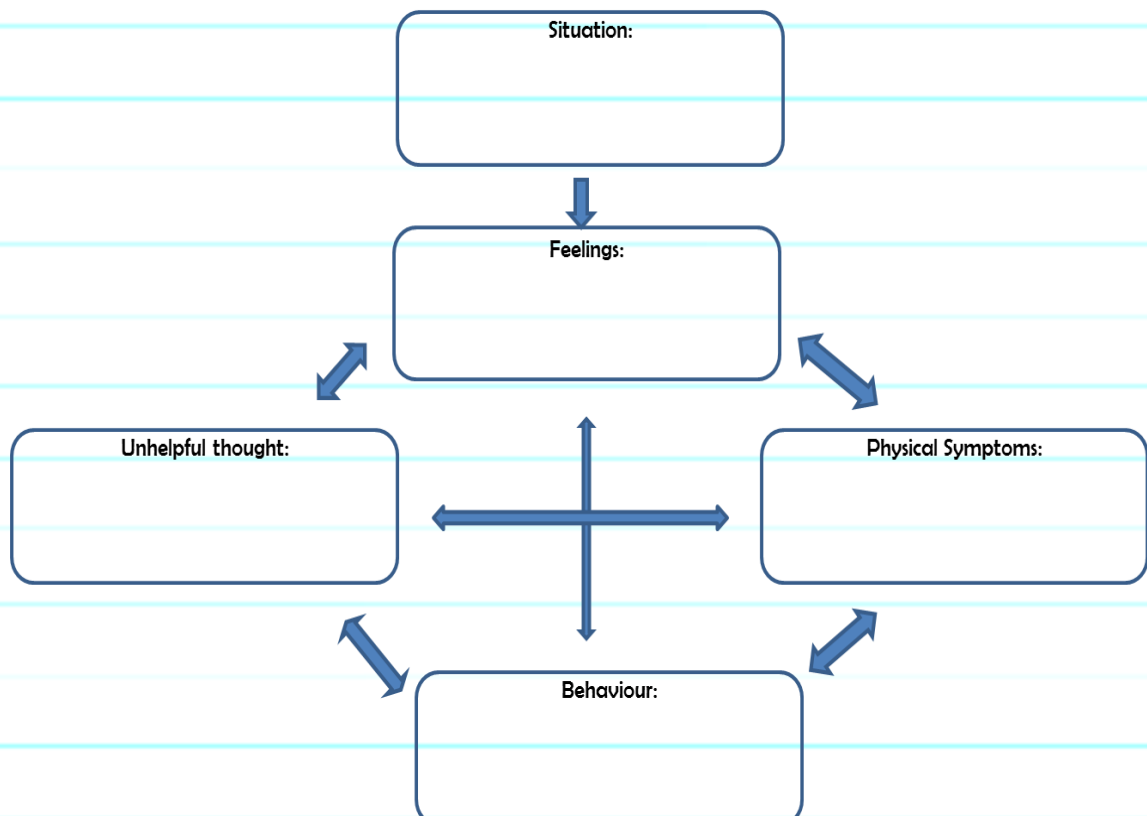
Session 4

Aim: To understand how my thoughts, feelings and behaviours are interlinked; to explore the vicious circle (2).

- Before you begin this session, discuss what the group noticed when doing their task from Session 3.

Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviours

- Remind the group of how our thoughts, feelings, physical symptoms and behaviours influence each other (from Session 3).
- Think about some exam-related situations. Some examples are listed at the top of p.19, but you can also use examples a young person suggests or that the group has previously discussed.
- Using the diagram below as a template, talk about unhelpful thoughts that would be likely to come into our heads in that situation, then ask the group to fill in how those thoughts would affect the other components.
- Explain that everyone experiences unhelpful thoughts. We cannot always stop these thoughts popping into our heads, but we can challenge them.
- Ask the group to fill out another template using the same situation but with changed thinking.
- Reflect together on the impact of challenging unhelpful thoughts.



Example situations:

- ⇒ You open the exam paper and do not know the answer to the first question.
- ⇒ Your friend tells you how easy she thinks a subject is that you are finding really difficult.
- ⇒ You get your prelim marks back and they are not as good as you hoped.

Having a Plan

- Explain that the more we understand ourselves and our bodies, the better we can manage stress and anxiety. Understanding and anticipating how our body reacts when we're anxious can help us to manage stressful situations better in the future. In the midst of a stressful situation, it can be difficult to think about tools that help us, or positive thinking styles. It is good, therefore, to consider times in the future when we might feel anxious (particularly those we will encounter multiple times, like exams) and prepare how we will manage that. This will help us to feel in control and empowered.
- Encourage everyone to look over the notes they've made in previous weeks and collate together as many useful ideas as possible: tools, relaxation activities, people in their inner circle, ways of managing unhelpful thinking etc.
- Look at the example cards on p20. Discuss what is written. Does the group find any of the examples helpful? Would they do anything differently.
- Remind them that part of this exercise is working out what works for *them*. Some things that are stress-inducing for some people, may be reassuring for others (e.g. discussing an exam with friends afterwards).

Task

- Ask the young people to fill out their own cards with strategies for before, during and after exams (templates are on pages 20-23 of the student booklet). This task can either be done during the session or set as homework to allow more thinking time.
- Reassure them that this is partly a thinking exercise and any strategies or ideas they write down are not set in stone. If some of the young people will be sitting exams for the first time and don't have previous experience to reflect on, reassure them that their strategies can be revised and updated.
- Encourage the children to share some of their strategies with those in their inner circle who support them. Suggest that they display their cards to remind them that they are equipped to manage the exams. They might also want to have separate sheets for different exams/subjects.

Relaxation

- End the session with a relaxation activity. See Session 1 for ideas.



The Night Before an Exam...

I can do this to help my body relax:

Have a bath.

Listen to calming music.

I can talk to this person:

My mum.

My dad.

I should avoid this:

Going on social media in the evening.

These will also help me to feel better:

Going to bed early.

Going for a walk.

Stopping revising before 9pm.

On the Day of an Exam...

I can do this to help my body relax:

Breathe deeply in through my nose and out through my mouth.

I can talk to this person:

My maths teacher.

My best friend.

I should avoid this:

Reading my notes in the hour before the exam.

These will also help me to feel better:

Eating a good breakfast.

Listening to motivational music.

After an Exam...

I can do this to help my body relax:

Spend some time outdoors.

Do a mindfulness exercise.

I can talk to this person:

My pastoral support teacher.

My mum.

I should avoid this:

Going through my answers with a friend.

These will also help me to feel better:

Finding a quiet place to sit and relax.

Plan something I enjoy to look forward to.

Example:

Session 5

Aim: To reflect on what I've learned.

Before you begin the session, ask if anyone in the group is comfortable sharing some of what they wrote on their planning cards. Discuss people's different strategies.

Summing up

- Discuss the following questions as a group, and encourage the young people to write their own answers in their student booklets.
 - What have I learned about myself during this course?
 - What can I use going forward?
- Ask the group to look back at the triggers that they wrote down in Session 2 (p.8 of student booklet).
 - Do they feel better able to manage those situations now?
 - What has changed?
 - What have they learned to do now that they might not have considered before?
- Use the rest of the session to answer any questions.
- Ask the group if there is anything else they would like to discuss, and finish any activities leftover from previous sessions.
- Remember to distribute the Post-course Questionnaire.

Relaxation

- End the session with a relaxation activity. See Session 1 for ideas.



Post-course questionnaire

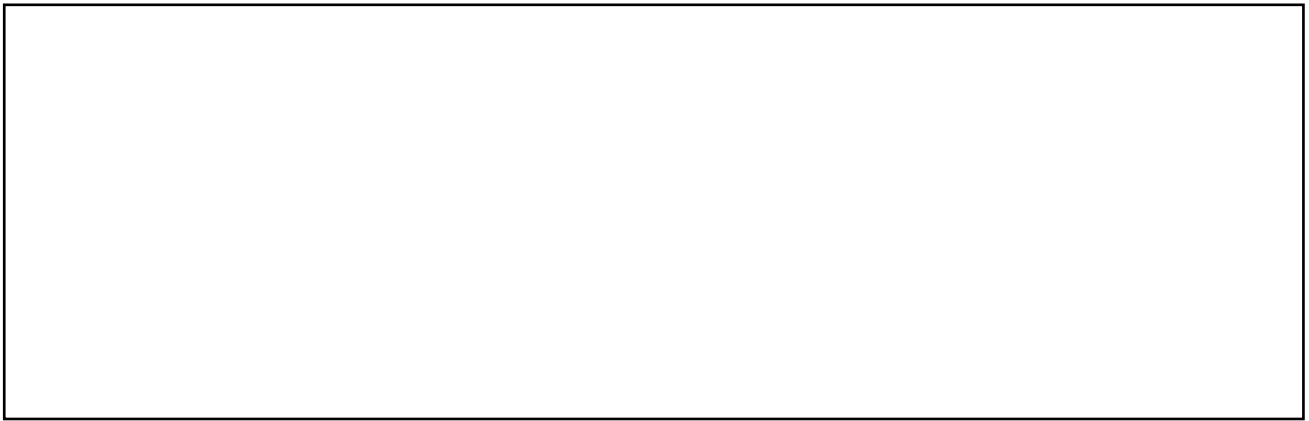
Name: _____

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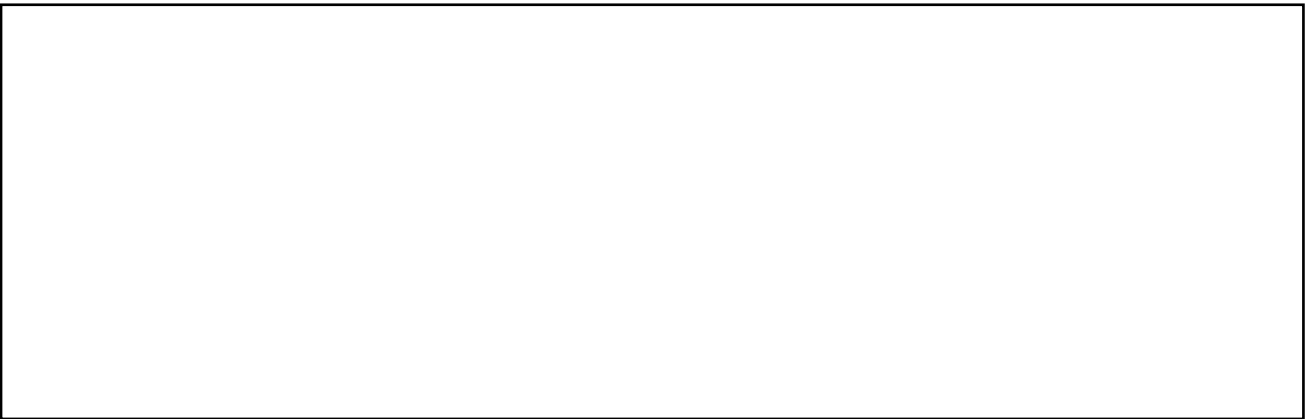


1. I find it difficult to do my best in tests or exams.
2. I worry what other people think of me.
3. I am proud of my school work.
4. When I have a problem, I get a funny feeling in my stomach.
5. I know how to get support at school when I need it.
6. I quickly give up when things go wrong.
7. I think about the worst things that can happen in an exam.
8. I am afraid of being in crowded places.
9. I worry that I will not achieve what my friends and family are able to.
10. My mind goes blank during tests or exams.
11. I worry that I will disappoint my parents and/or teachers.
12. I feel there are not enough hours in the day to do all the things that I must do.
13. I find it hard to imagine a successful future for myself.
14. I frequently have guilty feelings if I relax and do nothing.
15. When I have a problem, I feel shaky.
16. I have trouble sleeping the night before a test or exam.
17. I get bothered by bad or silly thoughts or pictures in my mind.
18. I look at challenges as a way to learn and improve myself.
19. I am good at shutting out anything that distracts me from a task.
20. When I have a problem, my heart beats really fast.

What do you find the most stressful thing about school?



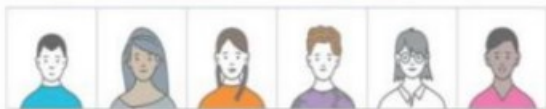
What strategies, if any, do you use to help you when you are anxious?





<https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/er/PsychologicalService/>

HEALTHIER MINDS 



<https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/er/healthierminds/>