

EXAM SURVIVAL GUIDE

Beating Exam Stress

STUDENT BOOKLET

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.

What would I like to learn?

Your teacher may ask you to complete a form before you start these sessions. This will help them ensure the sessions best support you, and allow them to measure impact. Write in the box below any personal goals or targets you may have.

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Session 1

Aim: To understand anxiety and how anxiety affects me

Why do we feel stressed and anxious?

- Stress is a perfectly normal response to events around us.
- A certain amount of stress can help us to be more alert and focused. Some exam nerves can have a positive effect. There are healthy amounts of stress and anxiety that we can feel. These motivate us to try hard or spend time revising.
- To feel stressed and anxious about exams is a perfectly normal response. Once you have accepted that exam anxiety is a natural part of the exam experience, you can begin to use your anxiety to help your performance.
- Too much stress, or constantly being anxious, is unhealthy and detrimental to our lives and relationships.
- We can learn coping strategies to help us manage anxiety and stress.



Notes:

How anxiety affects me

How does your body respond when you feel stressed or anxious? Do you experience any of the things below? See the diagram on p5 for more ideas.

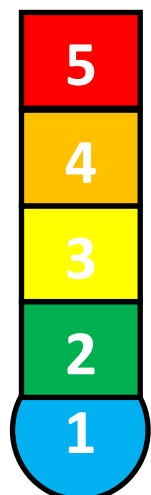
Stomach-ache	
Headache	
Feeling hot	
Crying	
Fast Breathing	
Tingly stomach /Butterflies	
Tight muscles	
Dry Mouth	
Laughing	
Needing the loo	
Ringing in my ears	
Twitching that I don't do on purpose	
Saying words or sounds, not on purpose	
Sweaty palms	
Difficulty concentrating	
Increased heart rate	
Fatigue	
Other:	

Task

It is good for us to be aware of how we are feeling and how anxiety is affecting us. One way of recording this is an 'emotion thermometer'. You can measure how anxious you felt at this anxious time from

1 = a wee bit anxious to 5 =really, really anxious

Over the next few days, keep a diary (you can use the template on p.6-7) of when you are feeling anxious. When (period 3, bed time etc) and where (school, home etc) do you feel anxious? What triggers it? What does it feel like in your body? What makes it go away a little? Fill out the emotion thermometer to show how anxious you felt.

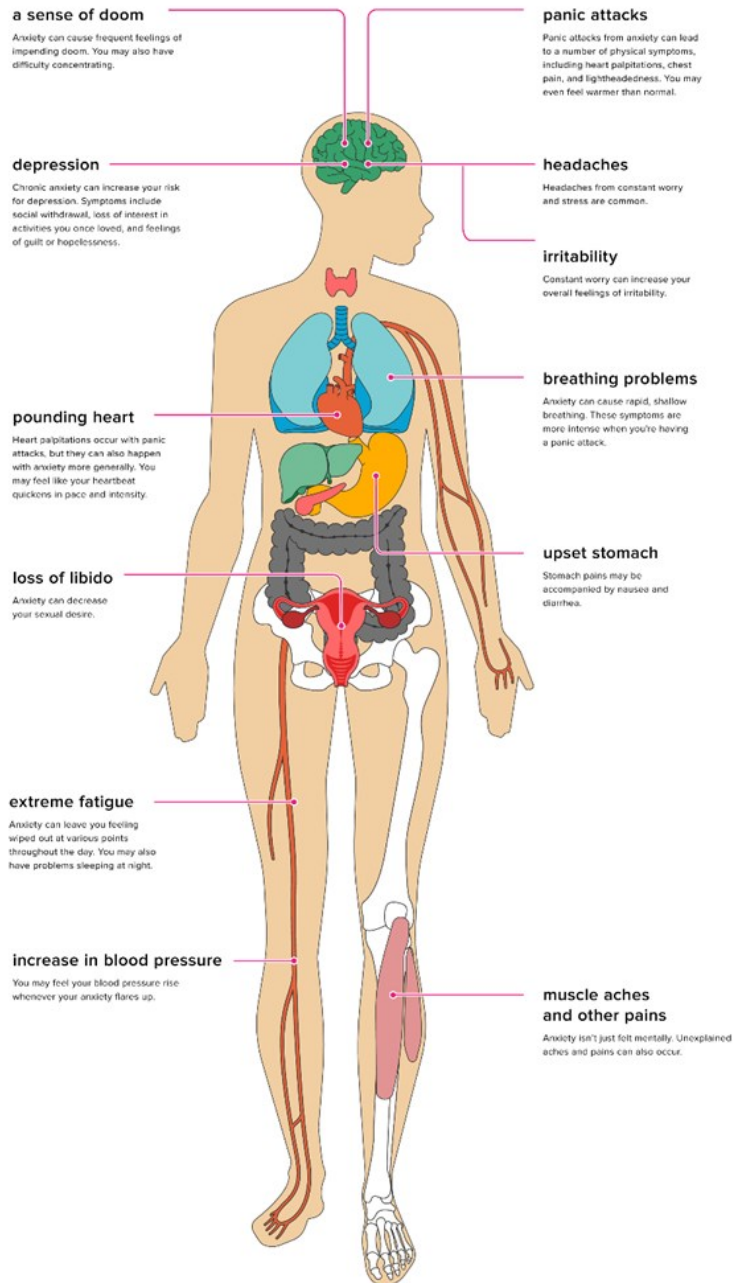


The Effects of Anxiety

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

Date _____

Today I felt anxious at _____ I felt anxious because _____

_____ . It made me

feel _____

_____ but _____

_____ made it feel better for a little bit.

5
4
3
2
1
0

Date _____

Today I felt anxious at _____ . I felt anxious because _____

_____ . It made me

feel _____

_____ but _____

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5
4
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_____ made it feel better for a little bit.

5
4
3
2
1
0

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

Triggers

What parts of an exam make you anxious? (e.g. *worrying I'll forget everything when I read the questions*).

- Write these in the table, and then rate them on a scale of 1- 10. (10= the most



Tools

- Think about who or what makes you feel better when you are anxious.

What makes the feelings go away?

Who makes the feelings go away?

What do I do that helps?

There are different ways of reducing anxiety. Being able to identify your triggers and how you respond to them helps you to find strategies that work better for you. Once you understand that there are different ways of reducing anxiety (some of which you are probably already naturally doing), then you can address these feelings before they start negatively affecting you.

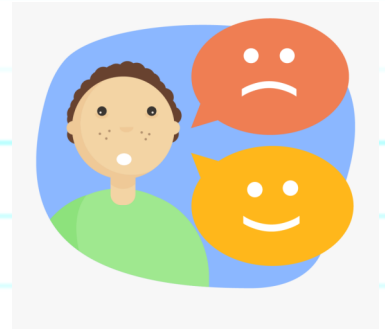
- Think about the parts of an exam that make you anxious that you wrote down earlier. What strategies do you already use to help you manage those different parts of an exam?

Trigger	Strategies

Notes:

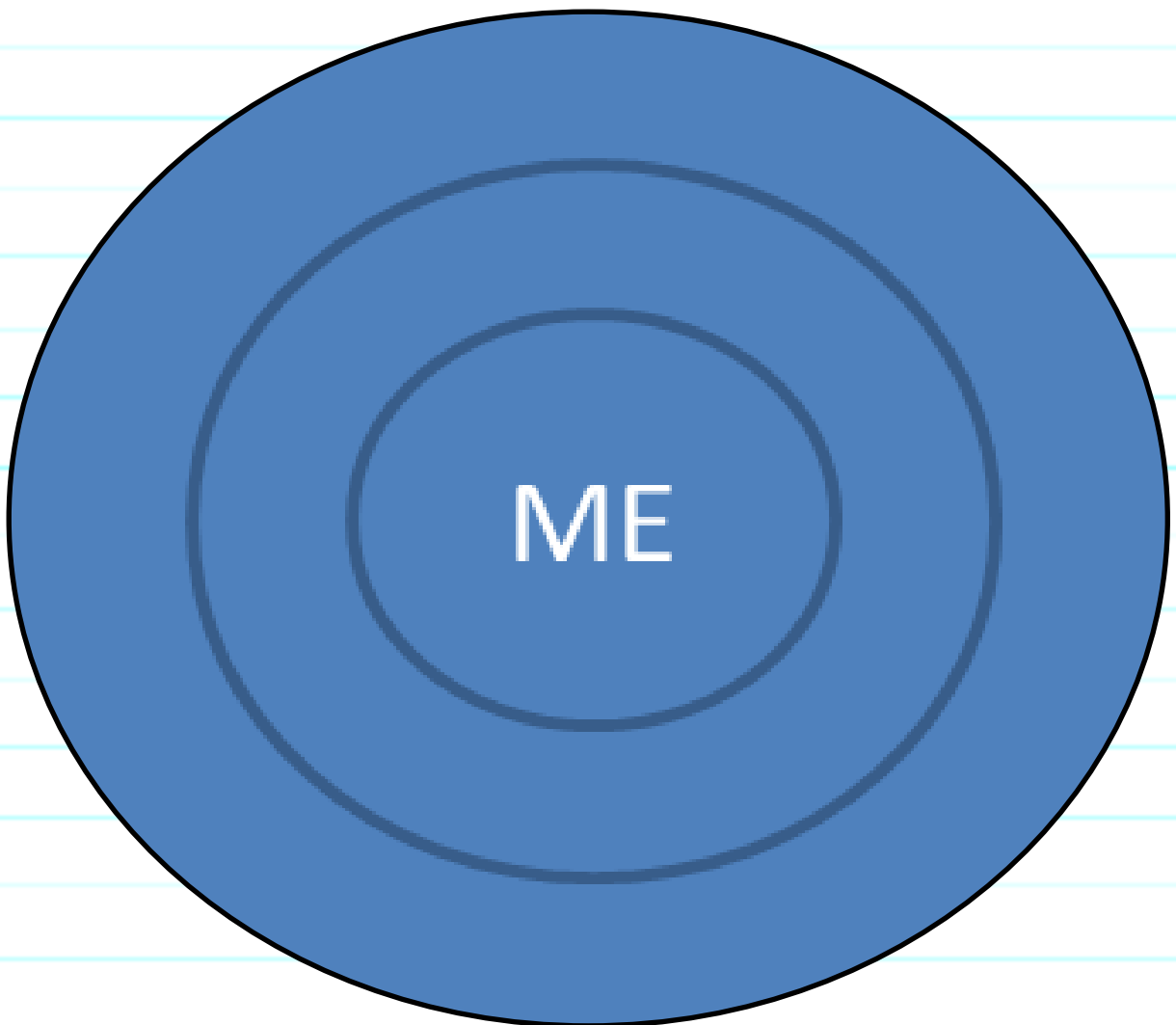
My Inner Circle

Who do you like to talk to or be with when you are stressed? These can be friends, family, other adults that you trust or someone in your class . What is it about those people that make you feel better? Is it because they talk to you about things? Or because you enjoy seeing them? Or because they take your mind off things and make you feel a bit lighter?



Some people—often unintentionally—make us feel worse when we are stressed and we find it easier to talk to other people instead. Also, other people may have different coping strategies or revision styles, and this can make us doubt our own. We can learn from each other, but it is important that you find strategies that work well for *you*.

- Below is a diagram of your 'inner circle'. Think of all the people closest to you and add them to the circle, putting the ones that you are closest to nearest the centre.



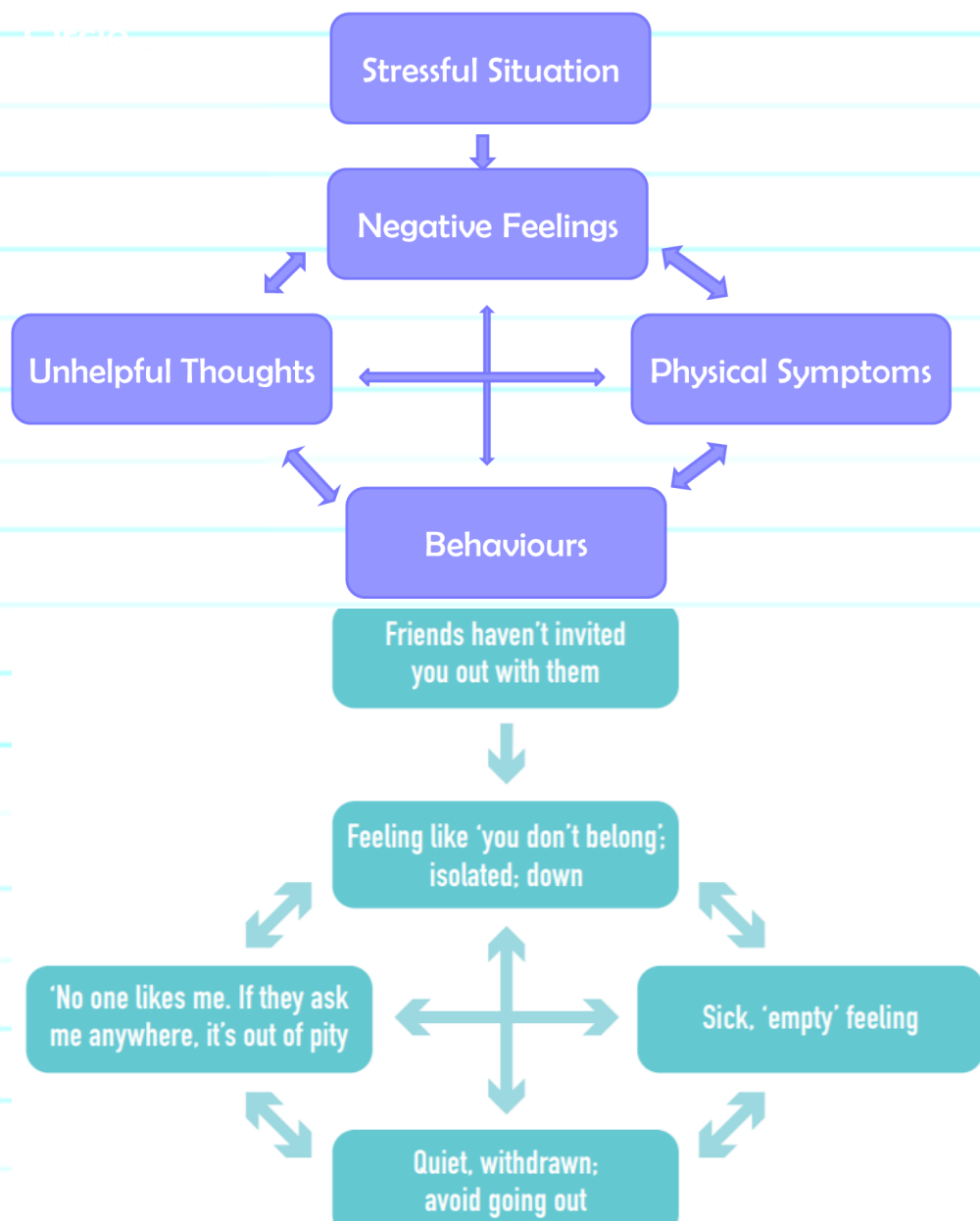
Session 3

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

The Vicious Cycle

Our thoughts, feelings and behaviours are all interlinked. This can make it easy to fall into a vicious cycle.

- Look at the example below. Can you relate to a scenario like this?



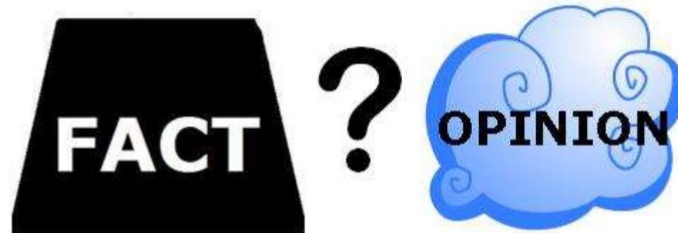
- Thoughts, feelings, physical symptoms and behaviours can all negatively affect one another. But, we can also change our thinking to create positive effects and break the vicious cycle.

Image Source: [Healthier Minds](#)

Unhelpful Thinking

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. The picture below helps to explain the difference.

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 p14.

- Do you relate to any of these? Can you think of any other examples? Which ones are common around exam time?

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

Image sources: [Get Self Help](#) [Healthier Minds](#)

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

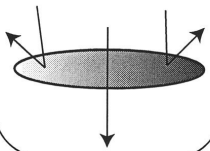
Over-generalising

"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

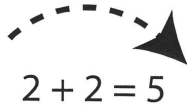
Disqualifying the positive



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

That doesn't count

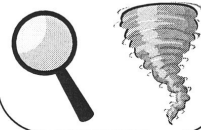
Jumping to conclusions



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

The good news is, we can actually take control of our thoughts. By recognising unhelpful thinking styles and changing how we think about, or view, a situation, we can change how we feel about it, and how we subsequently behave. Eventually positive thought patterns will become more natural.

- Think about a time when they have felt anxious or stressed. How could you think differently if you were in a situation like that again? How would that affect your feelings or behaviour?
- Go back to the example on p12. What thinking error is occurring here? What else could someone think in this situation?
- What strategies do you, or could you, 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?



ABCDE

ATTENTION !

Notice what your mind is saying

BELIEVE ?

You don't have to believe everything you think !

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?

DISCOUNT

Let the unhelpful thoughts go.

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

Task

- Over the next few days, try to be more aware of thinking errors that you fall into. Make notes if you find that helpful.

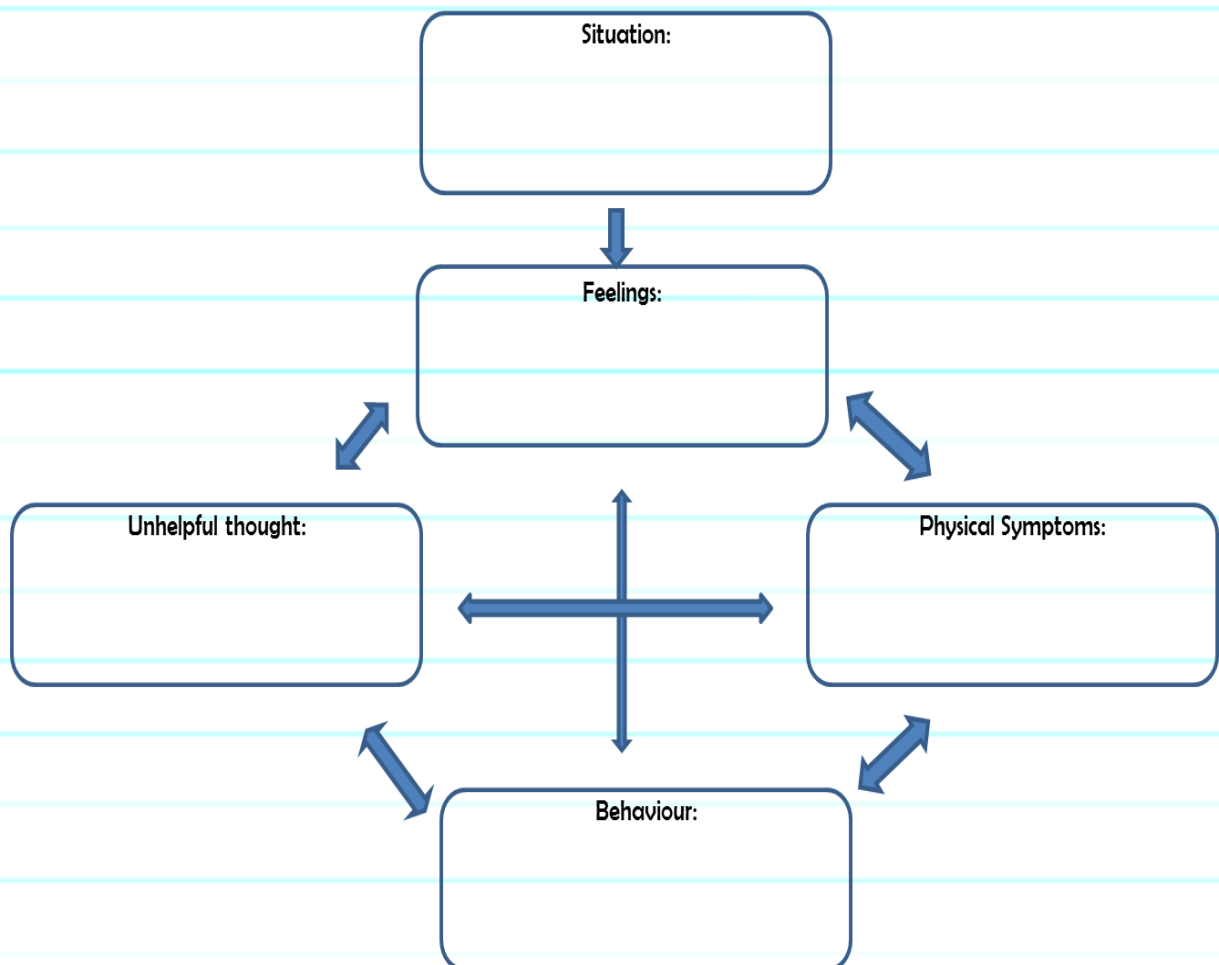
Notes:

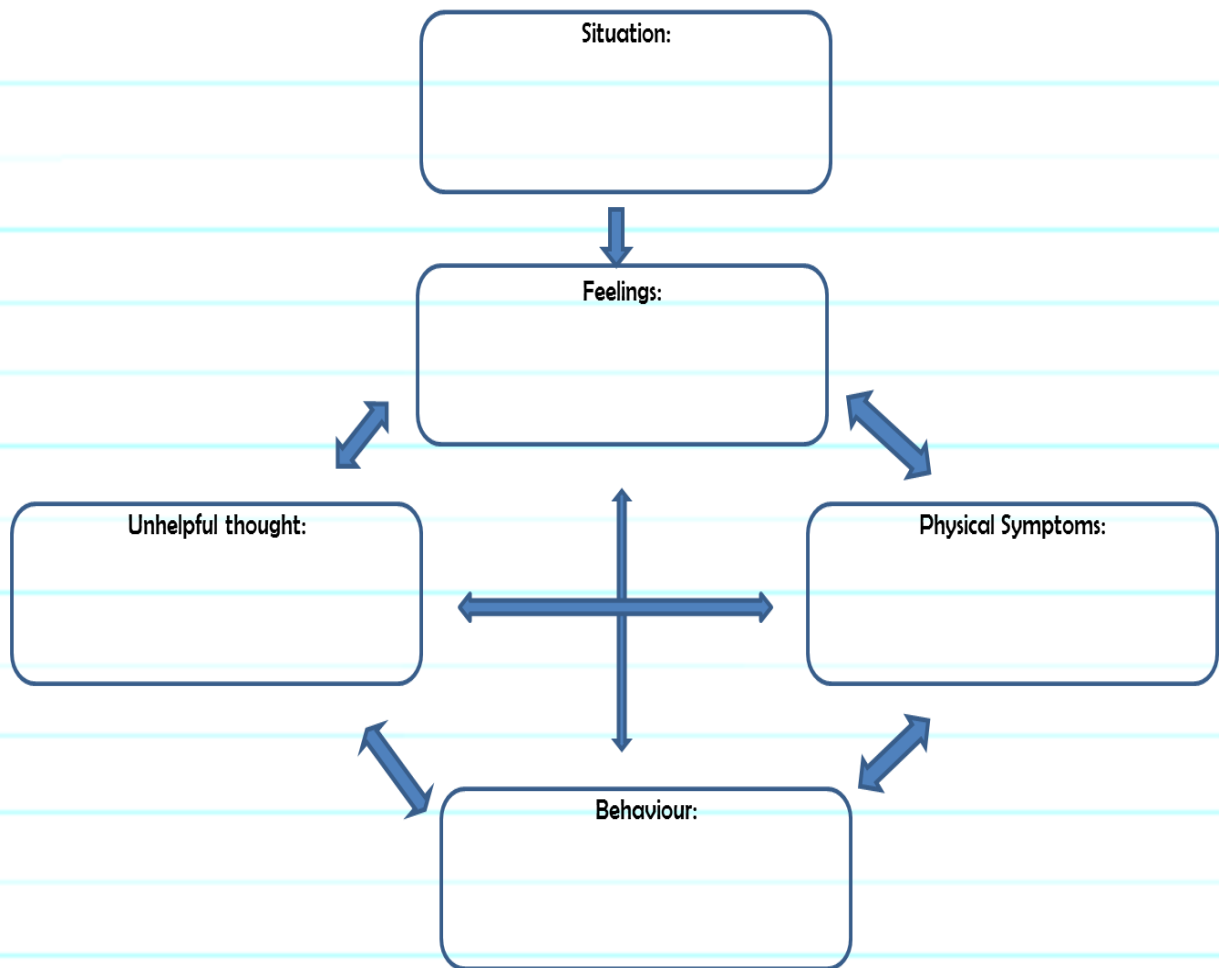
Session 4

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

Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviours

- Choose an exam-related situation Using the diagram below as a template, write down unhelpful thoughts that would be likely to come into your head in that situation. Then fill in how those thoughts would affect the other components.
- Remember, everyone experiences unhelpful thoughts. But, if we recognise them for what they are we can challenge them.
- Fill out the template on the next page using the same situation but with changed thinking.
- What is the impact of challenging unhelpful thoughts?





Having a plan

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 think about times 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.

- Look at the example cards on p18. Discuss what is written. Do you relate to any of the strategies? Would you do anything differently?
- Remember that the point of this exercise is working out what works for *you*. Some things that are stress-inducing for some people, may be reassuring for others (e.g. discussing an exam with friends afterwards). So pick strategies that will make you feel better, even if the rest of the group choose different ones.

Task

- Think about all the things you have discussed over the past few sessions: tools, relaxation strategies, your inner circle, managing unhelpful thoughts etc.
- Fill out the card templates (p19-22) with strategies you could use before, during and after exams. These strategies can be changed or updated at any time.

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:

The Night Before An Exam...

I can do this to help my body relax:

I can talk to this person:

I should avoid this:

These will also help me to feel better:

On the Day of an Exam...

I can do this to help my body relax:

I can talk to this person:

I should avoid this:

These will also help me to feel better:

After an Exam...

I can do this to help my body relax:

I can talk to this person:

I should avoid this:

These will also help me to feel better:

The Night Before an Exam...

I can do this to help my body relax:

I can talk to this person:

I should avoid this:

These will also help me to feel better:

On the Day of an Exam...

I can do this to help my body relax:

I can talk to this person:

I should avoid this:

These will also help me to feel better:

After an Exam...

I can do this to help my body relax:

I can talk to this person:

I should avoid this:

These will also help me to feel better:

Session 5

Aim: To reflect on what I've learned.

Summing up

What have I learned about myself during this course?

What can I use going forward?

- Look back at the triggers that you wrote down in Session 2 (p.8).
 - Do you feel better able to manage those situations now?
 - What has changed?
 - What have you learned to do now that you might not have considered before?

- Look at your goals on p.2. Did you achieve what you wanted to? What else would you like to know? Use this session to ask any questions you have.





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HEALTHIER MINDS 



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