

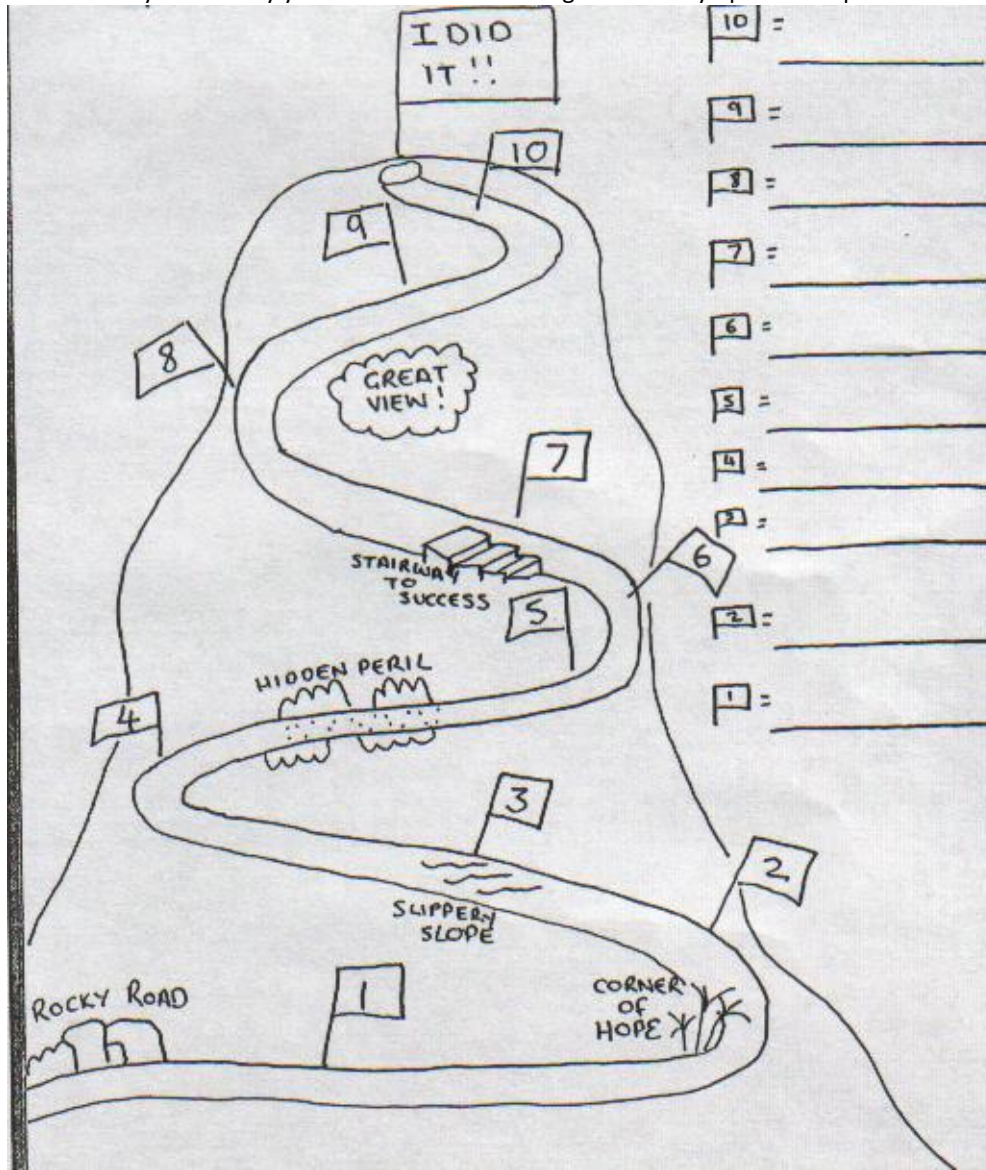
Understanding and Coping With Anxiety

Contents

What is anxiety?	1
What happens when you become anxious?	2
When anxiety takes control	3
Body awareness	4
Model of anxiety	5
How can I cope with anxiety?	
1. Breathing techniques	7-8
2. Relaxing your body	9-10
3. Distraction	11-14
4. Face your fears	15-16

Example:

- Your road to recovery takes you up this mountain.
- Each flag represents one of your fears or anxieties.
- To beat your anxiety you have to collect the flags all the way up to the top.



16

What is Anxiety?

- Anxiety is our body's natural response to danger or stress. It is very common and completely normal to feel anxious sometimes. Anxiety is crucial to our survival as it gets us ready to either run away, or to stay and fight potential danger. We call this reaction the '**Fight/Flight Response**'.
- When we are getting ready to 'fight/or flight' our bodies release a hormone called '**Adrenaline**'. This surge of adrenaline can sometimes cause physical sensations in your body and we will talk about this a bit later in the booklet.
- It's important to remember that anxiety itself can't hurt you, but it can make life difficult when it becomes out of control.
- **Anxiety can be useful when:**
 - we cross the road
 - when we take exams
 - when we play competitive sports
- **Anxiety can cause us problems if:**
 - we have too much anxiety,
 - if it comes along at the wrong time,
 - or if it stays with us for too long after the danger has passed.



1

What happens when you become anxious?

Anxiety triggers **changes in your body**, **changes in your mind**, and **changes in your behaviour** that help you cope with danger, to try to keep you safe.

1. Changes in Our Body

When we become anxious or stressed, adrenaline is released. This adrenaline can cause certain feelings in our bodies. See if you recognise any of them, as they are all normal reactions to anxiety:

- Tense Muscles
- Racing Heart
- Fast Breathing
- Sweating



2. Changes in Our Thoughts

When you are anxious or stressed, your thoughts might also change. For example you may:

- Become pre-occupied with the problem
- Feel the problem is worse than it actually is
- You might not notice other things around you



3. Changes in Our Behaviour

- Running Away
- Avoiding situations, people or places that make us anxious
- Becoming aggressive

In general, these changes in our body and in our mind are normal and helpful because they help to keep us safe.

But, we can run into problems if the anxiety doesn't switch itself off when the danger has passed, or if we feel anxious when there is no real danger around.

Facing your fears

When we are feeling anxious, we will often try to avoid things that make us anxious. But this won't help in the long run. To beat anxiety and take back control, you have to learn to face up to things that make you anxious.

Although this might seem scary at first, you **can do it** by breaking it down into small manageable steps.

Here is an example of how you can beat anxiety...

Climbing Fear Mountain

Think of beating anxiety as being like climbing up a mountain. If you try & run all the way up in one go, it will be too hard. But if you climb it a bit at a time, having rests in between, it will be much easier. The easiest way to climb the hill is this:

Break down the activity/situation that you are scared or anxious about into smaller easier parts.

Rate these activities or situations from 1-10, i.e. things that make you least anxious to things that make you very anxious.

Write each one of these on a flag on the mountain, with the easiest ones beginning at the bottom.

Start by practising the very easier step first.

Only go on to the next step when you feel nice & comfortable with the step before.

Remember: If things get too hard, you can stop and have a rest, but you need to keep going to get to the top.

4. You can use this space to draw or write something that helps you relax...

When anxiety takes control

If our anxious feelings aren't switched off or if they come at the wrong time, they begin to feel unpleasant and uncomfortable.

See if you recognise any of these sensations:

Body Feelings

- Pains in your muscles
- Trembling
- Weak Legs
- Finding it hard to breathe
- Your heart is pounding
- Sweating
- Butterflies in your tummy
- Headaches or tummy aches

Thoughts

- You begin to always fear the worst
- You worry that the problem will be there forever
- Your thinking becomes very negative
- You become afraid
- You might believe you have a physical problem
- You might not be able to concentrate, make more mistakes or become forgetful.
- You might have a tendency to over-react to situations

Behaviours

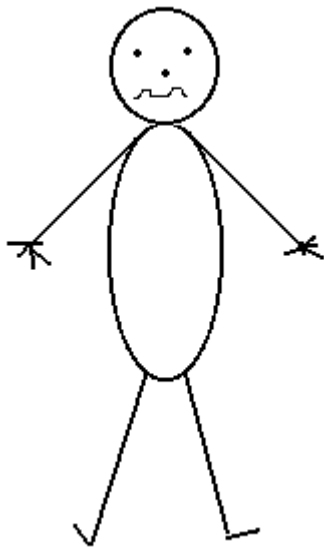
- Problems with sleeping or eating
- Clumsiness
- Being irritable, short tempered, or aggressive.
- Hurting yourself as a way of reducing your anxiety

These feelings can cause us major problems in our everyday lives, and we need to learn how to cope with them and to take back control!!

Body Awareness

It is very important that you learn to recognise the signs that you are becoming anxious. By recognising them early, you can do something about them to stop them taking control & becoming overwhelming.

Have a think about you and your body. What signs have you noticed when you are feeling anxious or worried?

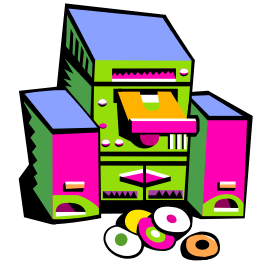


3. Try Activities to Distract Yourself

Lots of people find that one of the best ways to reduce their anxiety is to distract themselves with an activity. Some examples are listed below, however, you may like to come up with some distractions of your own.

1. Listen to music
2. Play a game
3. Watch a video
4. Go for a walk
5. Phone a friend

6.
7.
8.
9.
10.



2. Imagine yourself in a nice calming place:

When you start to become anxious or tense, imagine a place that is calm and peaceful, where you have happy memories. Alternatively, you can imagine a make believe place to go to. Keep this image in your mind as you practice your breathing exercises. Here is an example that someone could read to you as you relax.

The Beach



Close your eyes. "Imagine you are on your own, strolling along a sandy beach early in the morning. The sun is shining brightly and the rays of the sun are warming you up. There is no one around on the beach and you are on your own. The warm sand is soothing under your feet as you take in the fresh, clean air of the sea. The waves are rolling gently towards the beach and you can hear the freshness of the sea breeze just cooling you down.

You begin to make your way slowly towards the edge of the sea as the sea water washes over your feet. Your feet feel cool and you feel refreshed and relaxed, just standing there for a minute. If you look out to sea, you can see a little fishing boat just sailing across the gentle sea and hear the hum of its engine. It is a peaceful sight as you watch the sun across the horizon and take in a few more deep breaths.

Slowly, you begin to make your way back up from the sea and across the beach, listening to the rolling waves and seagulls flying in the sky. Ahead of you are some palm trees, and you make your way towards them to have a rest. It's nice and cool under the shade of the palm trees as you sit, calm and relaxed. You look out to sea watching the gentle waves rolling in, the calm and peaceful sea, and the sunrays glistening over the water.

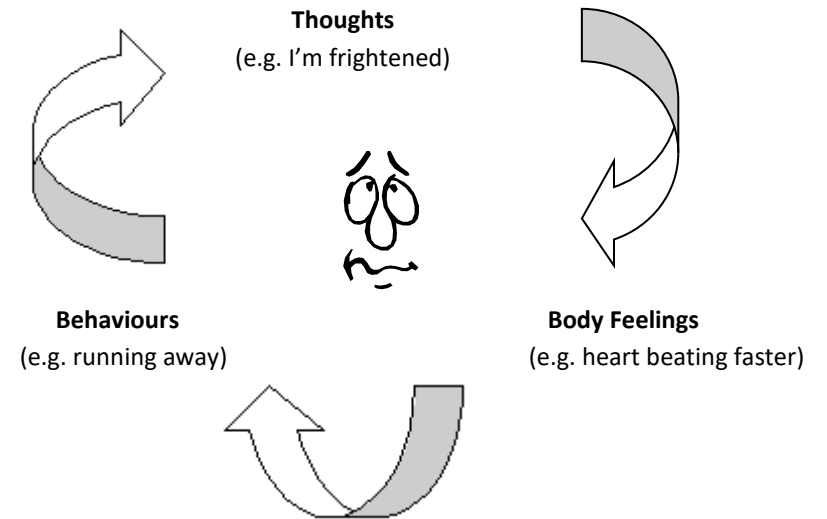
As you rest there, just take a few deep breaths of the cool air. Feel yourself calming down and being more at ease, as you sit there. As you watch the waves, let go of any worries or concerns you may have, let them flow away with the waves. As you let go of all these worries and concerns, feel yourself becoming more and more calm and relaxed. Just give yourself a few moments to sit quietly and rest.

In a few minutes, imagine yourself getting up from where you are and making your way up from the beach. We will be returning to our starting point now, and in your own time, and at your own pace, open your eyes, take a deep breath, and give yourself a good stretch."

12

Model of anxiety

Anxiety is like a vicious circle where our thoughts, body feelings and behaviour are all connected.



The way we can beat anxiety is by breaking the circle!!

But...

- One of the most common ways people deal with anxiety is to run away from or avoid things that make them anxious in the first place.
- This isn't helpful to you in the long run; the more you avoid it, the more anxious you become about it.
- We have to face up to the circle before we can break it.

We need to think of more useful ways of helping you to break the circle and beat your anxiety...

**Here are some
things you can do which
will help you cope
with your anxiety,
and help you take control...**

Distract yourself

When we become anxious we sometimes get lots of worrying thoughts going round in our head. To beat anxiety we need to learn to take our mind off those worrying thoughts. One way we can do this is by distracting ourselves with an activity. Here are some ways you can use distraction

1. Imagining a colour – (close your eyes for this exercise)

Think about the colour yellow.... think about all the nice things you can think of that are yellow, the warm yellow of the sun on your face, the pale yellow of a sandy beach, the soft yellow feathers of a duckling. Think of the warmth of yellow

Now the yellow turns to orange.... imagine bright orange of flowers in the field, the flickering orange of an open flame, the warm soft orange of a ginger cat curled up on your lap. Think of the vibrance of orange

Now the orange changes to red.... imagine bright red geraniums in a window box, warm red embers of coal, red specks of poppies sprinkled in a field. Feel the strength of red.

Now the red deepens to purple..... think of the pale lavender and violets in the garden, the bright purple of a gem in a ring, the deep purple of the sky at night. Feel the soothing power of purple.

Now the purple fades to blue.... picture the clear blue water of a sheltered bay, sky blue forget-me-nots, the high blue sunny skies. Feel the calm of blue.

Now let green slip into your mind.....imagine the green of the new spring grass, the damp green of misty hillsides, the clear bright green of flashing emeralds. Feel the freshness of green.

Then think about the colour that soothed you the most.

Yellow, Orange, Red, Purple, Blue, Green.

Stay with the colour and let it fill your mind, as you begin to relax.

3. Try to relax your muscles

Make sure you are sitting or lying in a comfortable position when doing these exercises, and that you are wearing comfy clothes. The aim is to tense and relax different muscles in your body, to:

- Help you recognise the difference between feeling tense & relaxed
- To help fully relax your muscles
- Work through each of the muscles in your body in turn, doing each part **TWICE**.
- Each time you relax a muscle, notice the change from tension to relaxation

HANDS: Close your hands tightly into a fist, tense them & hold, then relax & let your hands go floppy.

ARMS: Bend your arms at the elbow and touch your shoulders with your hands, tense your arms & hold, then relax & let your arms go floppy.

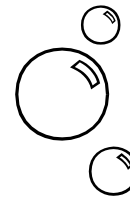
SHOULDERS: Hunch your shoulders up to your ears, right up as high as they'll go, hold, then relax & let your shoulders go floppy.

FACE: Clench your teeth tightly together, hold, then relax
Wrinkle your nose up, as far as you can, hold, then relax
Shut your eyes tightly, screw them up, hold, then relax

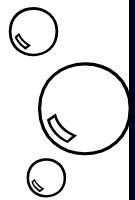
STOMACH: Take a big deep breath, hold for 3 seconds & tense your tummy muscles, then breathe out slowly & relax.

LEGS: Point your toes downwards, hold, and then relax. Point your toes upwards, hold, then relax.

Now just check for any tension remaining. Are your hands relaxed? What about your arms, shoulders, face, stomach & legs. If any tension is still there, just let it go and allow the areas to relax a little bit more.



Breathing



When you become anxious and tense, your breathing becomes shallow and fast. This can make you feel sick, light headed, dizzy, and less able to cope.

To beat anxiety you need to learn to **slow down your breathing**.

Here are some exercises to help you...

Take nice deep, slow breaths in through your nose, and out through your mouth. Remember, the key is gentle, slow breathing. Keep going until you feel nice and calm.

i. Count your breathing:

Breathe in nice and slowly through your nose, and as you breathe out through your mouth count ONE,

On the next breath out count TWO,

then THREE, then FOUR.

Then begin again at ONE.

Keep going until you begin to feel nice & relaxed.

ii. Think of a word:

Think about a word that makes you feel relaxed, for example 'calm', 'happy', 'sunshine' 'relax'. Every time you breathe out, concentrate on your word and repeat it in your head, or out loud. Try to make the word last for as long as you breathe out & let it relax you as much as possible.

Happy

Relax

Calm

iii. Control Your Breathing:

For this exercise you will need to learn to breathe in and out quite slowly. Take a slow breath in for the count of FOUR. Then hold your breath for a count of FOUR. Then breathe out for a count of FOUR. Keep repeating this until you begin to relax

iv. Bubble Breathing..... breathing the fun way!!

A good way to practise breathing out slowly, is to blow bubbles.

You can buy bubbles in the shop or make your own mixture using washing up liquid and a bit of water.

Try and breathe out very slowly & **make one big bubble.**

If you get lots of **tiny little bubbles** you're blowing **too fast**



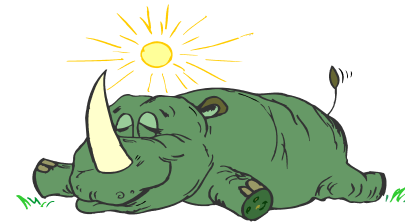
Relax your body

When we become anxious or worried, our muscles become tense and sore, our heart might start racing, it becomes hard to breathe, and we might get butterflies in our tummy.

Tension is a vicious circle too because the more anxious we are the more tense we are, but then the more tense we are, the more anxious we are!!!!

We need to learn how to relax our muscles so that we can beat anxiety and have more control over the way our body feels.

Here are some exercises to help you relax :



1. Massaging Your Head

- Put both your hands on your forehead with your fingers touching in the middle.
- Gently move your hands outwards towards your ears, repeat this a couple of times. Then move your hands gently down the sides of your nose and across your cheeks.
- Gently place your fingertips on each temple, use small circle movements to massage the sides of your head.

2. Massaging Your Shoulders & Neck

- Cup your hands around the sides of your neck, just below your ears. Then move your hands down your neck & over your shoulders, as though you are brushing away the tension.
- Cup your hands over your shoulders, just by your neck. Use small circle movements to massage your shoulders, don't press too hard.

