



THE DOOR TO UNDERSTANDING

ANXIETY



THEDOOR.ORG.UK



HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

In this booklet you will find information about anxiety, a bit about what can cause it, what it can feel like and hints and tips on how to deal with it.

For each part of the booklet there are bits to read and places where you can write down your thoughts, feelings and ideas. This is your personal copy so feel free to underline, get your highlighters out or doodle in the margins.

There are no rules about how you use it as long as you make it work for you.

WELCOME

Before we go any further, **congratulations** for asking for help!

Asking for help it is a sign of your **strength** not your weakness, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise.



WHAT YOU MIGHT BE FEELING

Anxiety is different for different people. For some it is a constant dread that something is about to go wrong, for others it is a crippling fear of something that, on the surface, others find unthreatening. Some of the things you may feel are things like: waves of feeling hot or cold, shaking, sweating, some people go bright red, others feel a bit sick or have butterflies in their stomach, whilst others find it difficult to breathe or even freeze! However you feel your anxiety, you have our sympathy.

It is awful and can make life a struggle and could lead to other more serious problems. So well done for reaching out. Accepting you need some help or support is the hardest step to getting your life back.



WHEN AND WHERE DO YOU FEEL LIKE THIS?

Write or draw, choose things from the paragraph above or put it in your own words

HOW DO YOU WANT TO FEEL?

Write or draw, perhaps start with: I want to feel...



WHAT'S GOING ON?

Feeling scared is a perfectly natural thing and sometimes it can save our lives. You are not alone. Anxiety is increasingly common, especially in young people like those your age.

Feeling fear is something we are born with, although it is firstly restricted to the fear of falling and the fear of loud sounds. Other fears are learnt as we go through life. Some are helpful but some, as you know, are not.

Back in the days when humans lived in caves, a new cave could either be a wonderful warm and safe place to live or could contain a Sabre-toothed Tiger. So our body prepares for either eventuality. It pumps adrenaline into our blood, preparing us to run or fight our way out, hence the shaking or freezing. It opens the blood vessels to our muscles, preparing for extreme exercise, and opens the pores of our skin to allow us to cool down the body if it has to run, hence the feeling of hot and cold. It also shuts down certain organs to concentrate on escaping.



This is why you can feel many unpleasant sensations when you are anxious, such as the shakes, hot or cold sweats or unpleasant feelings in your stomach, hence the upset stomach or butterflies. On top of all this, our brains take over our breathing to get as much oxygen as possible to help fuel the fight or the run, hence the shortness of breath, difficulty breathing and possibly some light-headedness.

When faced with a threat like a Sabre-toothed Tiger, these feelings are very useful. It gets us ready to run away or fight the tiger. Nowadays there are very few Sabre-toothed Tigers around but unfortunately we can learn to react like this to everyday things and this can get in the way of enjoying life.

If you are standing in a beautiful stream on a lovely sunny day, you will normally find this a very relaxing thing to do. However, if suddenly something horrible, like a dead animal floats past you, for a moment, you will feel differently. After a while, with lovely clear water flowing past, you will relax again. But if a second or even third dead animal floats past, suddenly this stream will no longer be a pleasant place to stand and you will jump out. This stream will no longer be a nice place for you but will make you anxious, no matter how much people assure you that the stream is safe to stand in. Your brain is starting to expect something nasty, even when there is no reason to!

When you have a lot going on in your life, this feeling can happen more and more and can start to restrict the life you lead and even develop into further problems like depression or self harming.

WHICH SENSATIONS DO YOU EXPERIENCE MOST OFTEN?

Make a list or perhaps draw some of them.

WHEN DID IT START? WHAT DO YOU THINK/FEEL WHEN YOU ARE LIKE THIS?

It's not a test, there are no right or wrong answers



WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT?

For many people the hardest thing is to accept that some fears they feel are not genuine or not in proportion to the risk. Often it takes time to realise why others don't understand why they are so scared of something.

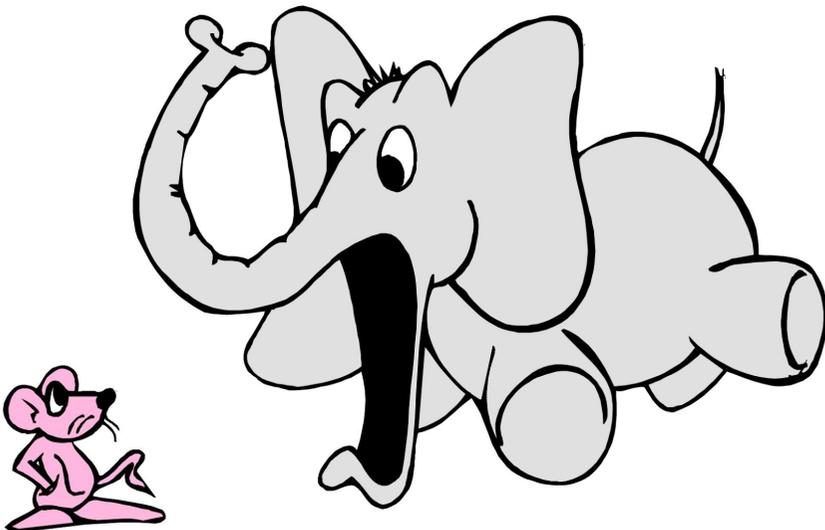
If you have reached out for help it means that you have taken the step of accepting the thought that people around you may be right.

Congratulations! Recognising this takes courage and without this state of mind it will be very difficult to get these feelings under control.

As well as reaching out to us for help, it may be worth talking to your doctor about how you are feeling, if you have not already.

They can help you decide the best way to deal with how you are feeling.

As fear is a normal and vital feeling, we don't want to stop it completely but to keep it under control and to help you realise when the fear is genuine and when it is exaggerated. This will take time, but in due course you will see the feelings coming and deal with them. In fact you can learn to use them as a warning that you need to pay more attention to looking after yourself. It can be a good measure of your mental health.



TOP TIPS FOR YOUR BRAIN?

If your anxiety is based around certain things, like school or getting on a bus, you can learn to cope with it by slowly training your brain to see that what you fear is not that much of a risk to you. Some of this can be done by talking to people, someone you trust or professionals. Choose someone who will be sympathetic and supporting as they will be pushing you to do something you don't want to at times. The process will be to get you slowly used to the thing that you fear, a bit at a time, like going into the sea up to your ankles, then your knees, then your waist etc, or by staying with the fear for 5 minutes, then 15, then 30, then an hour. As you realise you can handle it you will gain more confidence until you find you are no longer afraid.

If you are unfortunate enough to start feeling anxious about many things or even everything, you can still fight back. This often comes from a growing feeling of not being able to cope. But even general anxieties can be overcome and soon things will feel less and less threatening as you find out you can cope with almost anything because you are amazing!



WHAT ARE MY BIGGEST FEARS RIGHT NOW?

Make a list or draw the things that are scaring you or you are worrying about.



CHANGING YOUR WAY OF THINKING

Whether your anxieties are general or more specific, the key to getting them under control is to change your thought process. For most people this will be done by some form of talking therapy. Some peoples reaction to being offered “talking therapy” is how will just talking about it help? Well trust us when we say it does and has helped many people so long as they are prepared to give it a go.

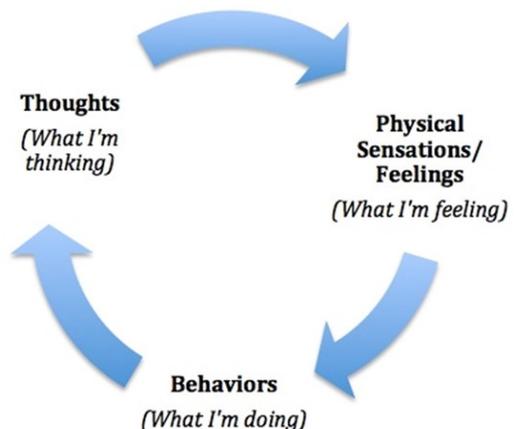
There are many forms of talking therapies like:

- Mentoring
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)
- Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT)
- Counselling
- Group work.

Check them all out and with your doctor’s help (if you want) decide which is best for you. If one does not work for you, do not give up, try again or try another.

You will find one that works for you.

The basis of these therapies is to help you change the way you think and therefore how you react to things, because your reaction is based on what you feel which is based on what you think.



WHAT AM I WORRIED ABOUT
JUST NOW?

WHAT WOULD I LIKE TO HAPPEN?

WHAT AM I AFRAID WILL
HAPPEN?

HOW LIKELY WILL THIS HAPPEN?



IS IT REAL?

In the meantime, if something is worrying you or you think something is going wrong, question if these fears are real. Challenge why you think this, what evidence do you have? For or against. Think of other more positive outcomes, are they also more likely to happen?

If you don't like school for example, you may start to get an unpleasant physical reaction to school like the shakes or stomach aches, so you will dislike school more and really want to leave and before you know it, you walk out.

But if, when you start to get those feelings, you tell yourself it is just your anxiety and there is nothing to worry about, you will worry less and will be less likely to react to the feelings. Soon school will not cause such negative feelings and you will start to relax. You are now starting to control your thoughts and get control of your anxieties.

At the end of the day, anxious thoughts are your brain either predicting the future or reading people's minds. **Both of these are beyond us!**



TAKING CONTROL

To take control it's useful to use 'Scaling Down'.

When a feeling of anxiety starts, it will make you think about your feelings more and this will make you feel even more anxious, which starts a vicious circle that is hard to break. So what starts as a mild wobble can turn into an anxiety attack. But you can put this process into reverse by talking your feelings down. If you are starting to feel anxious, tell yourself, "it is not as bad as before, in fact it is quite mild, I can handle this!" Similarly you can score the feeling on a scale of 1 to 10 then challenge the score, "actually that was only a 6 and last time it was a 7 so it's getting better!"

WHAT 3 THINGS CAN I DO TO TAKE CONTROL?

They can be big or small, try and relate them to the things you said you feared.

1.

2.

3.



All the best as you take control of your life again. It will take patience, some hard work from you and probably some support from others, but you can do it and it will be worth it. The most important advice I can give is to keep practising whatever strategy you choose as the more you practice, the easier it will be to use it effectively when you are in an anxious state. Now you can start to enjoy life again!

WHAT IN THIS BOOKLET CAN YOU RELATE TO?

There are no right or wrong answers here, so just be true to you

WHAT ELSE MAKES SENSE?

You might not relate directly to it but what have you read that makes sense and might be useful in the future



MY ACTION PLAN

What are the top 3 things that I want to work on after reading this booklet?

1.

2.

3.

THINGS I'D LIKE TO BE ABLE TO DO TO HELP ME GOING FORWARD

Write or draw the things you want to do.



WAYS TO GET HELP

IN A CRISIS

If you are in danger call one of these numbers:

The Samaritans 116 123

The Police 999

HELP FOR HELPING YOURSELF

If you are just looking for some extra support then there are lots out there. Some will suit you, some will not, so here are some websites to start your search:

onyourmind.nhs.uk

ticplus.org.uk

mind.org.uk

gloscounselling.org.uk

talk2gether.nhs.uk

youngminds.org.uk

USEFUL READING

You can borrow them from a library or pick up your own copy.

Stress-Related Illness by Tim Cantopher

Anxiety: Panicking about Panic by Joshua Fletcher

Calm by Fern Cotton

Happy by Fern Cotton

NOTES:

Some space for you to write or draw anything else that is useful to you about anxiety.



For more information about The Door

visit thedoor.org.uk , call 01453 756745 or message us @TheDoorStroud

