

Keep a diary of your achievements.

Remind yourself what you have done to cope with your anxiety. This is all good evidence for the fact that you can overcome anxious thoughts and feelings.

Talk to people.

Talking to people can be a good distraction from anxious thoughts. Be careful though – a bit of reassurance is good, but over time, it can become a safety behaviour and will just keep the anxiety where it is.

Argue.

Not with other people, but with the anxiety. Anxiety will try and give you thoughts that aren't true. See if you can think of some good arguments to use when you feel the anxious thoughts creeping in.

Keep a diary.

This will help you think about what has made your day good or bad. Write down your achievements too, so you can see that you have things to be proud of.

Panic Attacks

People who get very anxious sometimes experience panic attacks. This is when anxiety feels completely in control and might make you feel like you are having a heart attack. If you have a panic attack, you do not need to go to hospital. It will stop after about 20 minutes maximum. Here's what you can do to help:

- Deep breathing to help calm down your body. Focus on each breath with all your concentration
- Try and stay in the situation if you can
- Ask someone to talk to you – they can remind you to breathe, or just chat to you about anything
- Put your feet on the floor and remind yourself where you are. This is called grounding, and helps you come back to normal

My Coping Plan

Try and fill in this blank copy of the cycle with your own thoughts and feelings. You can add some coping strategies, or "exits" to help you plan how you will break the cycle.

Things I can do:

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How other people can help me:

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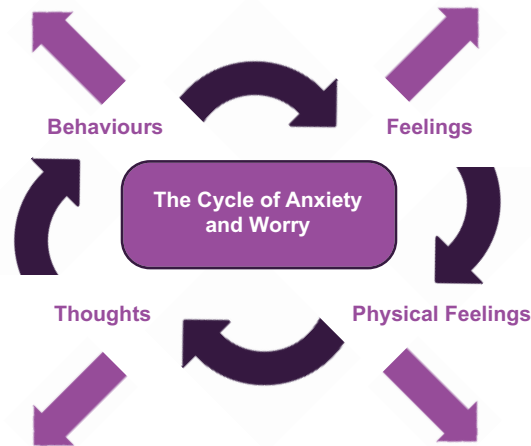
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Things I can tell myself:

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Anything else that might help:

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The Meadows
Sexual Assault Referral Centre

Managing ANXIETY

The aim of this guide is to help young people who have experienced a distressing incident manage the thoughts and feelings that they may have.



Managing Anxiety

When something bad happens, lots of people might notice that they feel stressed, worried and anxious afterwards. Some things might seem scary, like being on your own, or even being around people.

Anxiety can make us want to avoid things. Although this is tempting and feels like the safest thing to do, it will only make the anxiety worse over time.

Worry can be a good thing. If you have an exam, the worry will give you the boost you need to revise. However, if worry becomes out of control, then there are things you can do to manage this.

The guide will talk you through ways to help deal with worry and stress, and will tell you about:

- What anxiety / worry is
- Signs and symptoms
- Coping strategies
- Developing your own coping plan



Signs and Symptoms

It is normal to worry about things in life. This might be exams, new situations, or speaking in front of a group of people. A little bit of anxiety isn't a bad thing - it helps us survive and stay alive.

However, sometimes anxiety takes over and actually causes more problems. Here are some ways severe anxiety might affect you:

- **Physical feelings in your body** - heart racing, shaking, feeling hot, dry mouth, feeling sick, panic attacks
- **Thoughts** - something bad is going to happen, I can't cope, I can't do it
- **Feelings** - stressed, worried, scared, on edge
- **Behaviour** - Avoidance, safety behaviours (things that you think help)



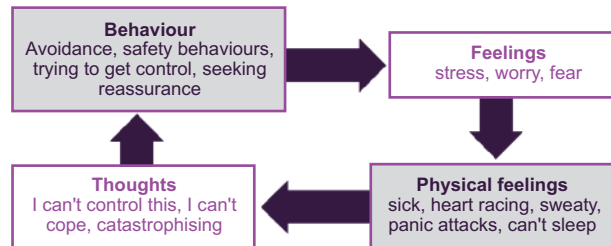
Safety behaviours are common when someone has high anxiety. These are things you do to manage the anxiety. So if you are anxious about school, you might stay off sick. If you're scared someone might harm you, you might check all the doors and windows are locked before bed.



These feel helpful in the beginning. But long term, they actually increase anxiety and make it harder to fight.

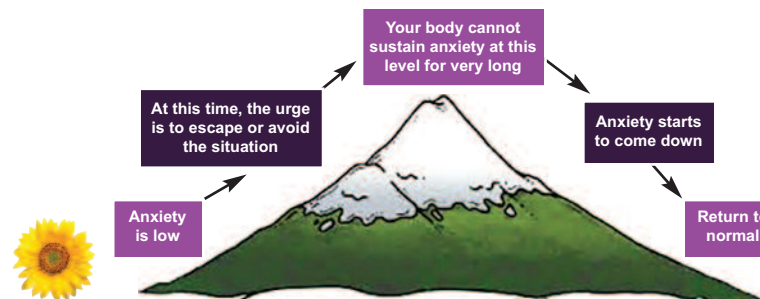
Understanding Anxiety

Anxiety goes round and round unless you do something different to address it. If you understand how it works, you can start to think of ways to manage in differently. Otherwise the cycle just keeps going.



The Anxiety Mountain

This is how anxiety works in your body. Think about when you have had an exam, or something else you've been really worried about. The anxiety will get bigger and bigger the closer you get to the exam, but what you will usually find is that once you are in the exam, your anxiety comes down and then gradually goes away. Really high levels of anxiety don't stay around for a long time - your body can't cope with that.



Coping Strategies

Many of the coping strategies that seem to help with anxiety early on actually keep the vicious cycle of anxiety going. Having many different coping strategies to try will help you gain control over the feelings you are having.

Relaxed breathing.

It sounds obvious, but try and take some deep breaths as soon as you feel anxious. When your body goes into anxiety mode, you will automatically start breathing faster, which doesn't help. Focus on taking deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth.

Make a list of your fears.

Try and put them in order from biggest to smallest. Then you can work on the smaller fears first to build up your confidence. This will show you that you do have the skills to cope with things you are worried about.

Self-talk.

What can you say to yourself when you feel your anxiety building?

- You can cope with this
- Take deep breaths
- I am safe
- I can control this

The trick with this is to do it early. Once you reach the top of the anxiety mountain, you're going to find it hard to listen to your thoughts as your physical and emotional feelings take over.

Stop being negative about yourself.

Don't judge yourself for how you feel - anxiety is a normal reaction, especially when something frightening has happened or is happening.

