

How To Beat Anxiety

SELF HELP WORKBOOK

*Hampshire specialist child and
adolescent mental health service*



Sussex Partnership

NHS Foundation Trust



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INTRODUCTION

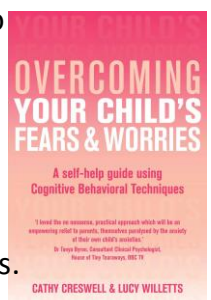
WHY DO I HAVE THIS BOOKLET?

Everyone has times in their life when they feel nervous or worried. In fact almost 2 in every 5 people worry about something at least every day. For some people though, they worry and feel anxious a lot more and it can seem to take over their lives. A lot of anxiety is just habit, and with practice we can change these habits or make new better ones. Having some anxiety can be really good because it keeps us safe. When we have lots of anxiety it can stop us doing things that we want to do and make us feel bad about ourselves. If anxiety stops you doing what you want, this book is for you.

HOW DO I USE THIS BOOKLET?

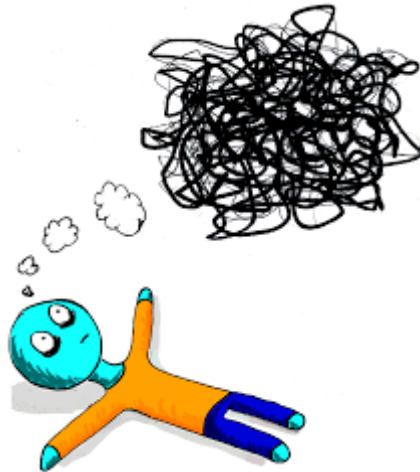
This book tells us why we have anxiety and some ways to make us feel better. There are 6 parts of the book and you should do 1 a week. Each part will give you some tasks to practice so that you know what you need to do when you start to feel anxious. It is helpful to have someone older, like your mum or dad, to help you understand and practice.

The adult who is helping you might find it useful to use these ideas alongside a book called 'Overcoming your child's fears and worries' by Cathy Creswell and Lucy Willetts.



WEEK 1

ALL ABOUT ANXIETY



Why do I feel anxious?

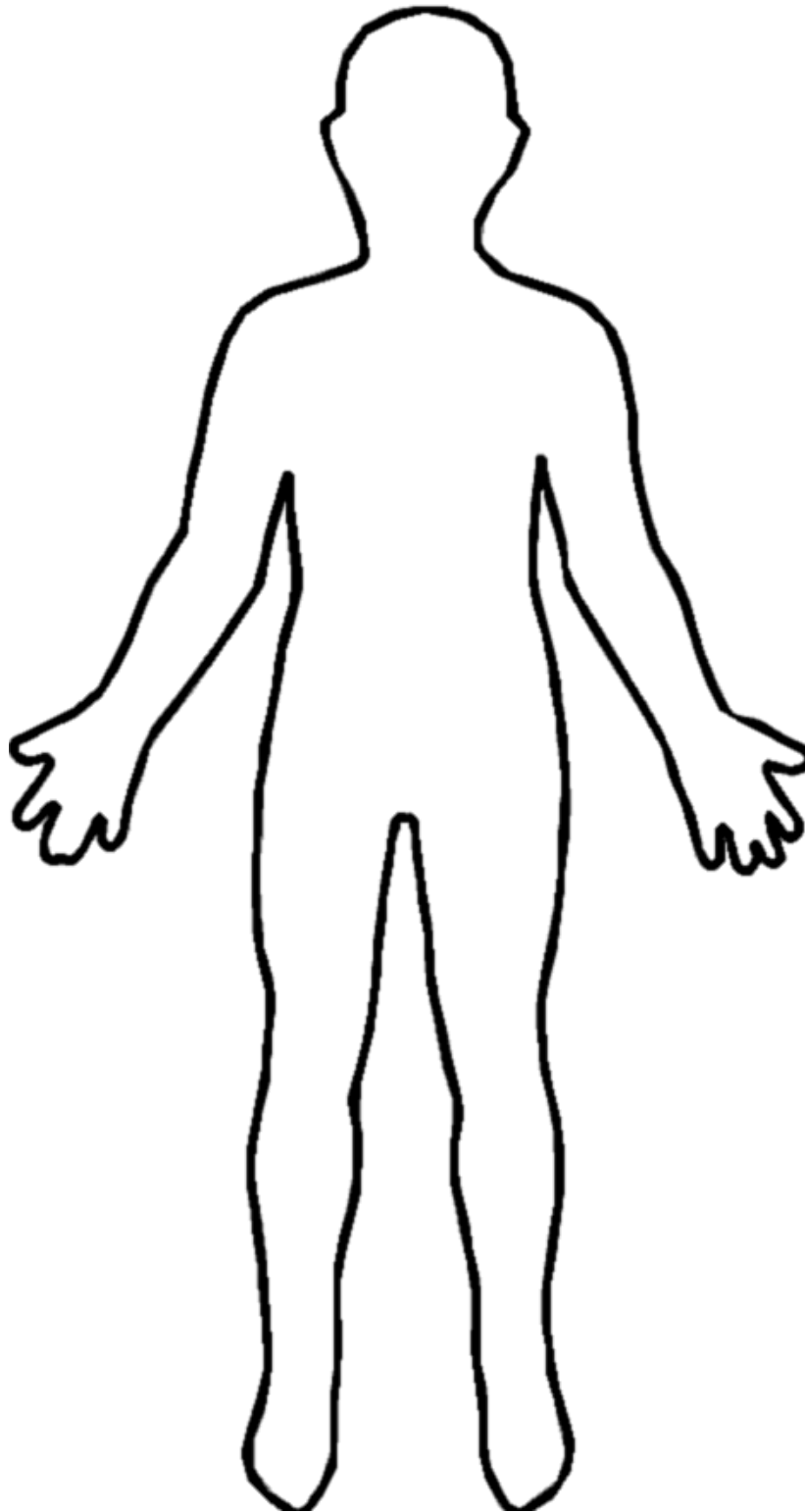
Our body is made up of different organs and body parts that keep us alive. Body parts that work together are grouped into systems. Our brain is always working, it knows what is happening inside us, and around us so that we are ready to quickly respond to a situation.

When we are happy and relaxed our body works fine, but when our brain notices danger it sends messages to all our different body systems to change our bodies from being relaxed and to put our body into alert. This physical response to danger is called fight, flight or freeze- fight means we are ready to face what makes us scared, flight means that we run away from the danger and freeze means we get stuck to the spot and are not able to move.

This switch between 'All Fine' and 'Flight/Fight/Freeze' is looked after by The Cave-Man! The Cave-Man has one job – to keep you safe. Back when there were dinosaurs, humans used to live in caves and the jungle, where there were a lot of dangers. If they saw a tiger or fire, they needed their bodies to quickly be ready to fight for their life, run for their life, or freeze so they weren't seen. Back then, always being alert was helpful, however these dangers have gone now but our body still responds the same way- even if what we see isn't really dangerous. Because things inside our body change when our brain notices danger, sometimes we feel funny inside.

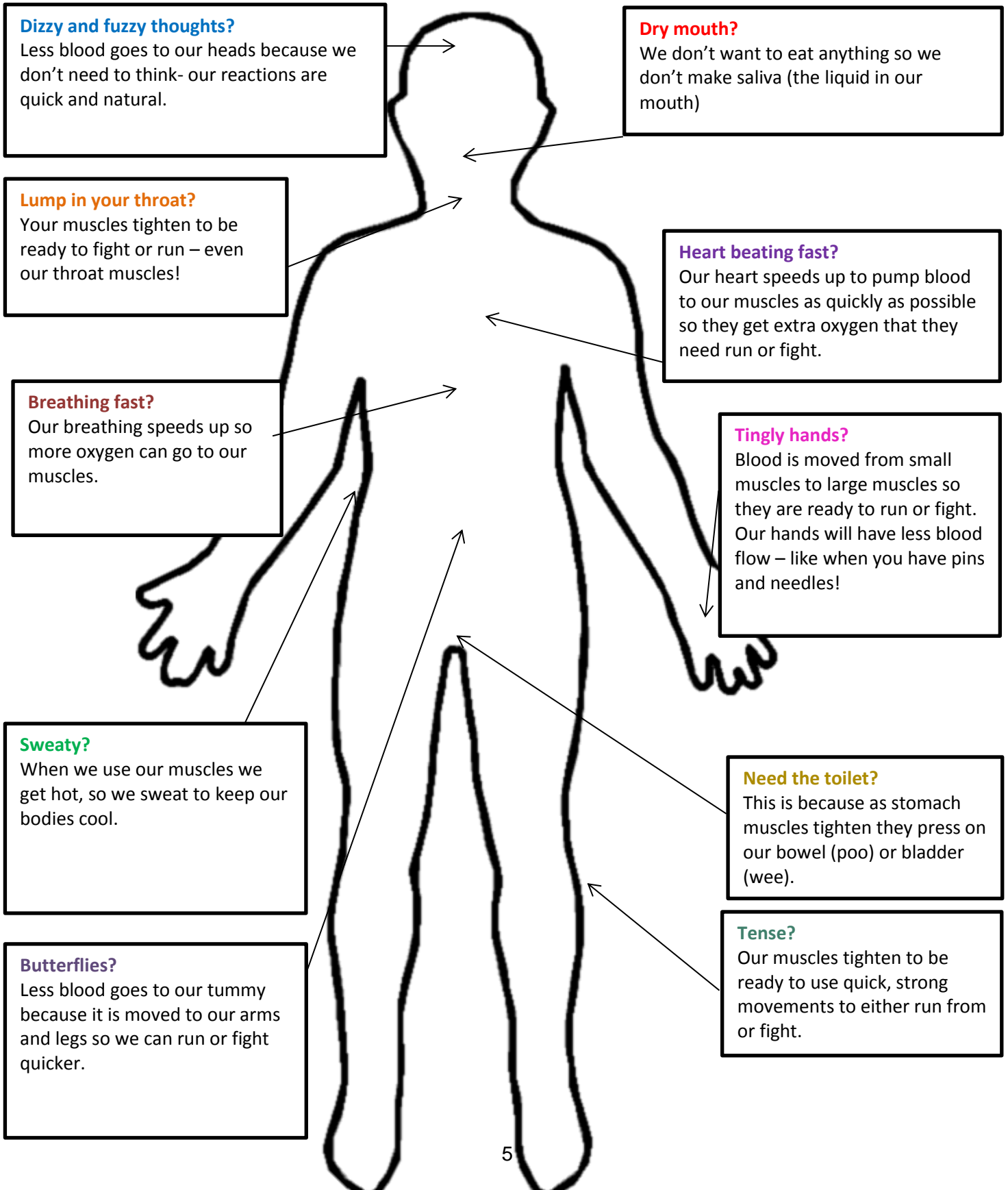
Activity 1 – Week 1

Below is a picture of a person. When you feel anxious, what changes do you notice in your body? You can write how you feel or using different colours, colour in the bits of your body where you feel a change.



Activity 1 explained

Changes in our body happen because our body releases something called adrenaline. This helps us get ready to fight or flight (run away). These are some of the changes that happen:



Can anxiety hurt me?

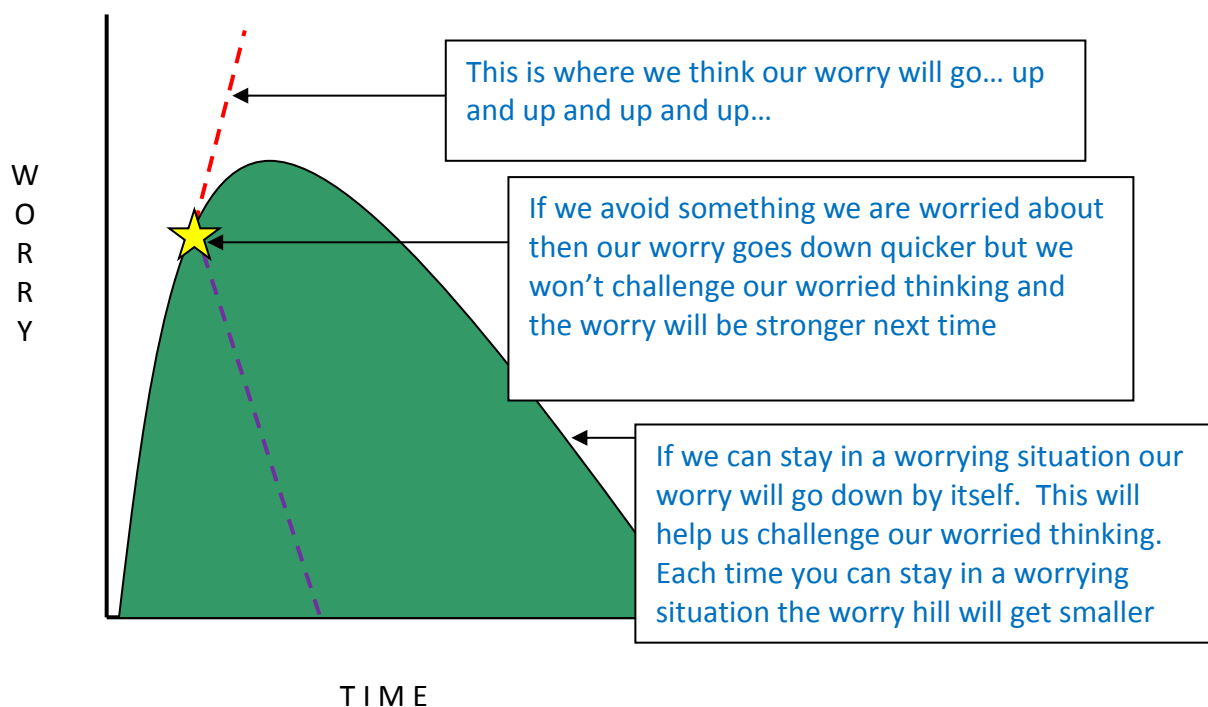
It can be embarrassing to have a fight or flight reaction to something that our friends don't think is dangerous or scary. If we don't know about the changes in our body, we might think they mean something is wrong with us, and not that they are happening to protect us.

Next time you feel your anxiety rising, try to focus on the changes that happen in your body. Remind yourself why these changes happen and how they used to help humans when we were in danger.

What if my anxiety feels out of control?

Below is a picture of the Worry Hill. The Worry Hill shows how anxiety will rise over time, peak (get to the top), and then come down again. The top red dotted line shows how some people think will happen to our anxiety if we stay in the situation. This line keeps going up and doesn't come down. As our anxiety goes up, we may think we might faint or something bad will happen to us. The more we notice that our anxiety will start to come down after a bit of time, the easier it is for us to stay with our anxious feelings- we know nothing bad will happen to us!

THE WORRY HILL

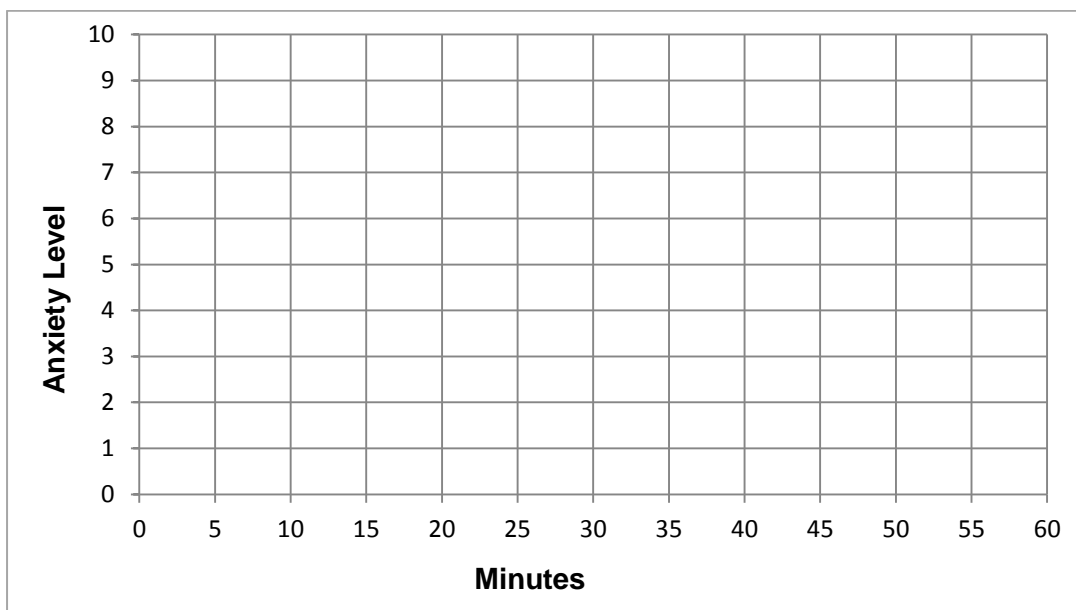
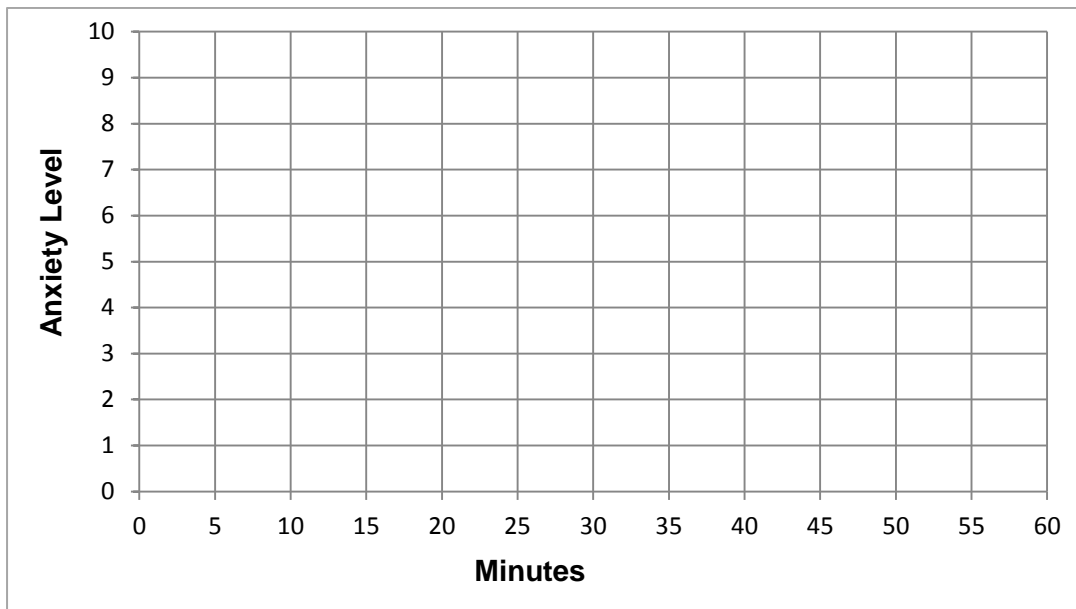


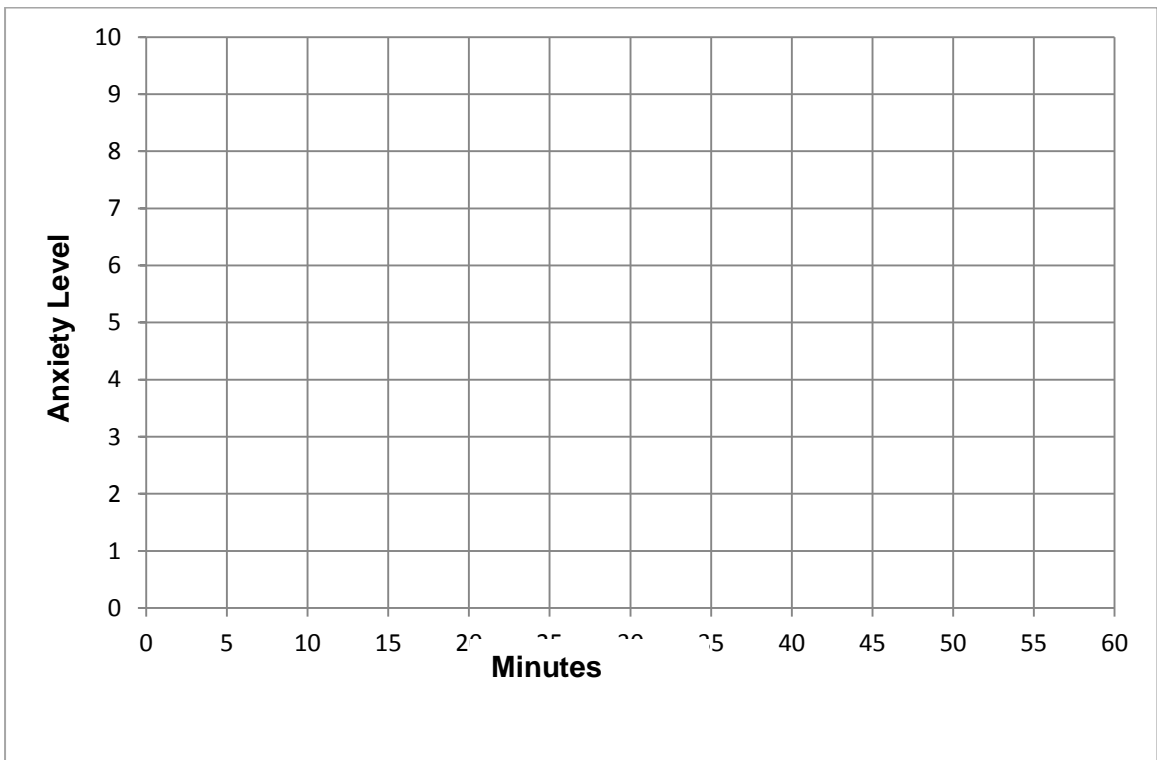
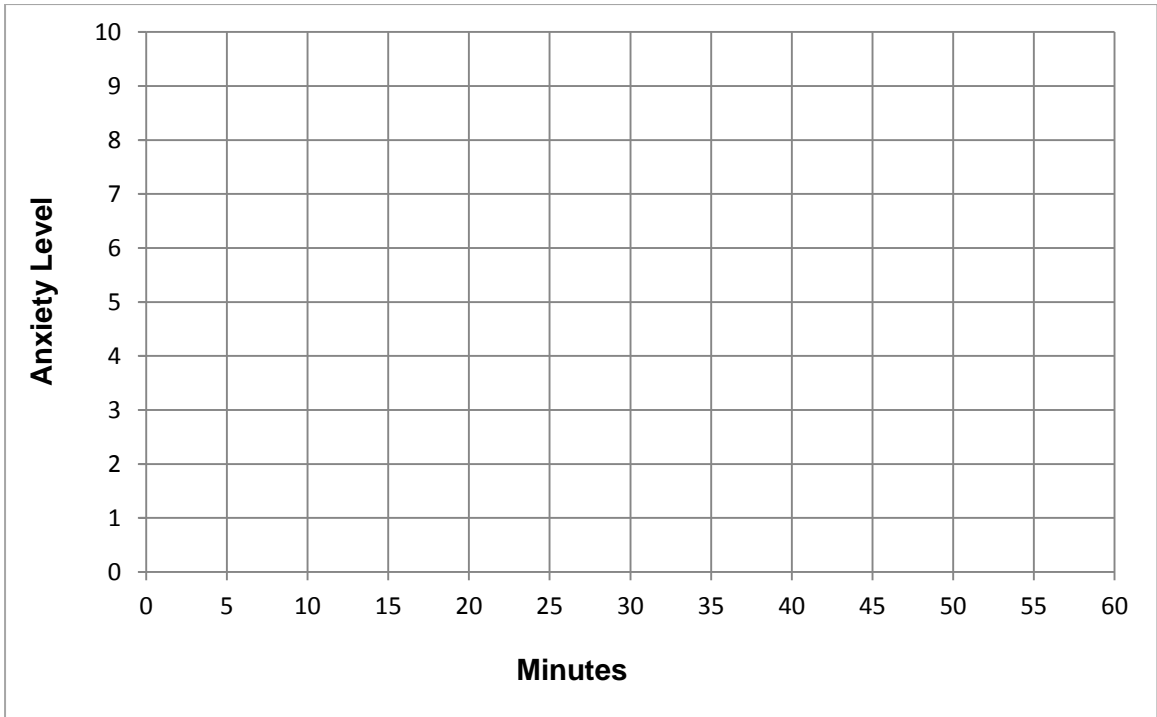
Practice Task

The Worry Hill Exercise

This week, we will try to do the worry hill when you are in a situation when you become anxious. Notice what is happening inside your body. Try to remember why these changes are happening. Remember that these changes won't hurt you and your body is doing it to keep you safe.

Draw a cross on the graph below as you start to become anxious, and then keep putting crosses on until it is back to normal. Sometimes this might be quick and sometimes it might take a long time. If you can, try to write down what made you anxious.





WEEK 2

BREATHING



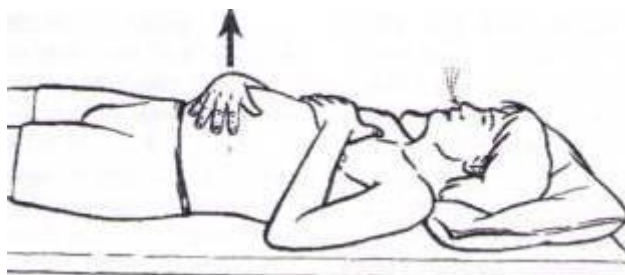
Why is breathing important?

Most people who have anxiety breathe too fast (hyperventilate) but don't know they are doing it. When we breathe too fast we take in too much oxygen. Because our brain notices there is more oxygen in our lungs than we need, it thinks this is a sign that there is danger so the rest of our body goes into fight or flight mode.

One way to help reduce anxiety is to practice calm breathing. This different type of breathing also helps anxiety to go down quicker when we get worried.

How do I change my breathing?

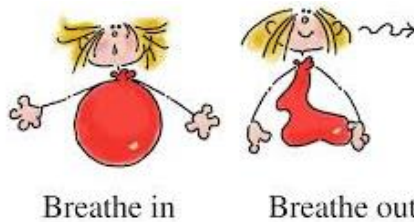
The best way to change your breathing when your anxiety increases is to use relaxed breathing. The time we are most relaxed is when we are asleep- our breathing is slow and deep.



Activity 1 – Week 2

Relaxed Breathing

When we practice relaxed breathing, we must try to breathe slowly and deeply. Before you start, lie down and make yourself comfortable. Imagine that there is a balloon deep in your belly that you need to blow up. Take a slow breath in through your nose and so the air goes into your tummy to fill up the balloon. Imagine the balloon is getting bigger as you breathe the air into it. Breathe out again slowly through your mouth. As you breathe out the balloon gets smaller again. Try this for a few breaths, focussing on breathing in slowly while filling up the balloon in your belly.



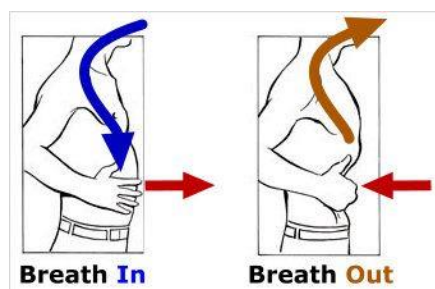
Activity 2 – Week 2

Another way of practicing relaxed breathing is to blow bubbles. Either ask someone if you can have bubble mixture, or imagine you are holding a bubble wand. Take a deep breath and try to blow the biggest or most bubbles possible. If you breathe too fast you will only get small bubbles, or bubbles that burst quickly.



Am I breathing deeply enough?

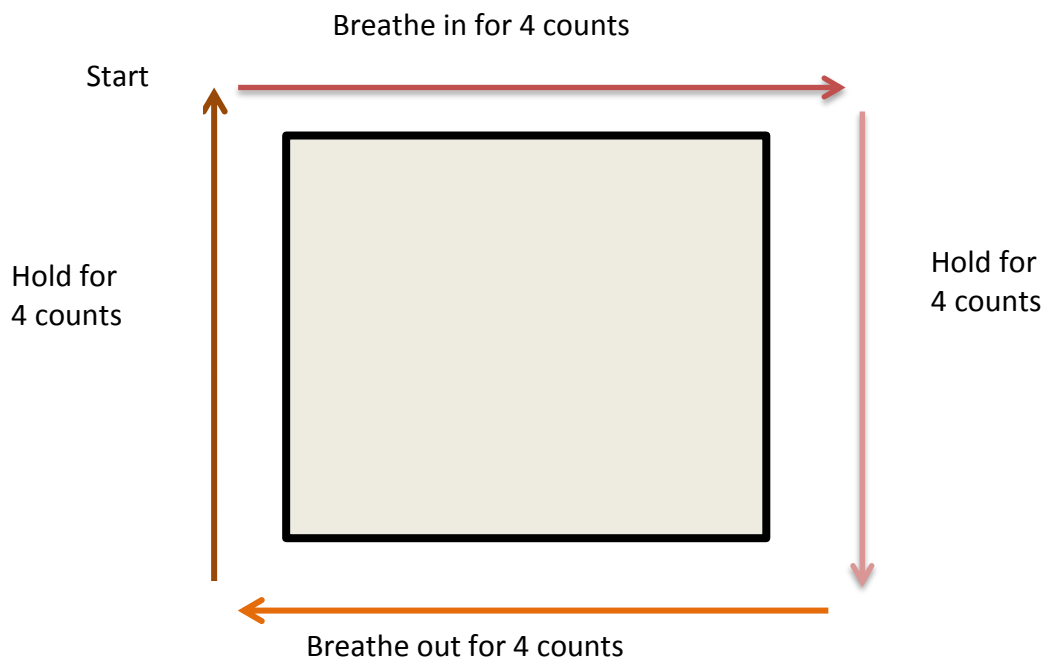
A good way to tell if we are breathing deeply is to pay attention to our chest and tummy. Our tummy's should get bigger when we breathe in and smaller when we breathe out. If our breathing is not deep enough, only our chests and not our tummy's will get bigger.



Practice Task

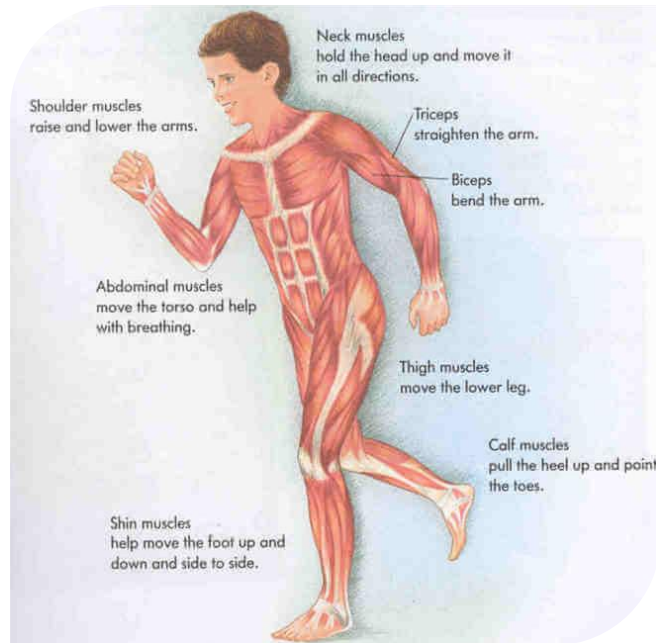
Square Breathing

Once you can do relaxed breathing you are ready to use it in an activity. Look at the picture below. Starting at the top arrow, breathe in for 4 slow beats following the arrow along the top side of the square. Now hold your breath for another 4 slow beats following the arrow down the right side of the square. Now breathe out slowly for 4 slow beats, following the arrow along the bottom side of the square and then hold your breath again for another 4 slow beats following the arrow back up the left side of the square. Practice this for several rounds.



WEEK 3

MUSCLES



In week 1 we learned about all the changes that happen in our body when we see danger and our fight or flight reaction. Last week we learned to reduce anxiety by breathing differently. This week we are going to learn how to reduce anxiety by using our muscles.

Why are muscles important?

We know that our brain is always looking for danger by noticing our environment and what is happening in our body in case there are signs of fight or flight. Our muscles are also gives signals to our brain about whether we are anxious. We learned in Week 1's 'Activity 1 – Explained', when we need to fight or run our muscles get tense (tight) so we can be ready for action. Some people tense their muscles (make muscles tight) without knowing they are doing it, this can make the brain think that we are anxious. We need to notice if we are tensing our muscles so we can relax. Being able to relax can also help us feel better if we have lots of headaches or tummy aches.

How do I relax my muscles?

Relaxing our muscles is a skill, so if we practice we can get better. If we tense our muscles on purpose we can feel what it is like. If we relax the muscle by letting go we can feel the difference. When we practice we can make our muscles really tight and then really loose so we know what they both feel like, with lots of practice we can know if we are tensing our muscles even if they are only a little bit tight.

Activity 1 – Week 3

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

For this exercise, we will make a muscle tense and then relaxed, and then do the same for another muscle. Before we start, make sure you are comfortable. Try to do some relaxed breathing first so you are relaxed.

Each time you squeeze a muscle, try to stay tight for 5 seconds before relaxing. Do each step 2 times before you go to the next one. Notice how your muscles feel when they are tense and when they are relaxed.

- 1) Toes and legs: Pretend you're on a sandy beach. Squeeze your toes into the sand. Feel the wet sand squish between your toes, using the muscles in your legs to squeeze your toes into the sand as hard as you can.



- 2) Bottom: Squeeze your bottom really hard so it becomes smaller.



- 3) Arms: Pretend that you are lifting a very heavy weight up to your chest. Clench your fists and lift them so they touch your shoulder, then tense your arms.



- 4) Shoulders: Lift your shoulders up really high, so that they touch your ears.



- 5) Face: Scrunch up your nose as tight as you can, making lots of wrinkles in your face



To finish pretend you're a rag doll, with no bones or muscles. Let your body go floppy. Notice how good it feels to be relaxed.

Practice Task

Practice doing the Progressive Muscle Relaxation at least twice this week. You may want someone to read each step to you while you practice, or you may want to do it yourself. Make sure you really squeeze your muscles for 5 seconds before letting go.

WEEK 4

CALMING THE MIND



So far, we have learnt about what happens in our bodies when we are anxious. This week we are going to learn about what anxiety does to your mind and how we can become relaxed.

What does an anxious mind look like?

When we are feeling anxious, sometimes we have worrying thoughts racing through our minds making it hard for us to focus on anything. This can affect our lives by making it hard for us to complete schoolwork, talk to friends, and even just relax and watch a film! Racing thoughts at night can also make it harder to sleep. These thoughts can be about anything and they can be almost impossible to stop depending on how anxious you are. When we learn how to stop thoughts racing through our mind, we are one step closer to being in control of our anxiety.

How can I stop these racing thoughts?

When our minds are racing with thoughts and we can't focus on anything else, a quick way to calm our minds is to distract ourselves. When we distract ourselves we stop thinking about our worrying thoughts and focus on something else. We also start focusing on now and not wondering 'what if'?

Below are some activities that you can use when you find your mind racing and you can't control your thoughts.

Activity 1 - Week 4

The 54321 Exercise

Look around you and notice 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can feel, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste. For example, if you are holding an apple you might notice it's colour, whether it has a stalk, what sound it makes when you tap it or bite into it. You might notice whether it is smooth or has bumps, what it smells like and how it tastes- is it sweet, bitter, watery? How do you feel now?

You can make this exercise even more relaxing by imagining a calm place and think of what you would see, hear and feel if you were there.

A CALM FOREST



A CALM FIELD



A CALM BEACH



Activity 2 – Week 4

The pencil case exercise







Take some deep breaths. Take something out of your pencil case. Imagine that you are an alien and you are not familiar with the object. Using all 5 senses, describe the object you are holding in as much detail as possible. What does it feel like? Does it make a sound? What does it sound like? Does it smell? What does it remind you of? What does it look like? What colours does it have? What does it feel like? Repeat this activity with different objects until you feel calmer. Below are a few pictures to get your started.



Activity 3- Week 4

The A-Z Exercise

Take some deep breaths. Choose a category and then go through the alphabet (A through to Z) and think of a word to match using every letter. Here are some example categories, but you might have others you can think of:

-  types of animals
-  things you like to eat
-  activities
-  places
-  names
-  celebrities

How do you feel now? If you need more time to calm your mind, you can do it again with a different category.

Practice Task

Pick one of the activities and try to do it every day, even if you are not anxious.

WEEK 5

BECOMING A THOUGHT DETECTIVE



Last week we looked at how we can distract ourselves if we have thoughts that make us worry. This week we are going to learn about the type of thoughts we can have. Everyone has good and worrying thoughts that pop into their heads during the day.

What is a Positive Automatic Thought?

Positive automatic thoughts are helpful because they encourage us. For example, before starting to play a game of football you may think “I’m really great at this!” This positive automatic thought will make you feel good and you may try to get the ball lots.

What is a Negative Automatic Thought?

Negative automatic thoughts can make it hard to do things. For example, before playing a team game you may think “I’m really bad at this!” This negative thought will make you worried about playing and you may try not to get the ball.

Activity 1 – Week 5

There are lots of types of negative thoughts. Sometimes we might only have 1 type and sometimes we may have lots of types. Look at the list of some negative thinking styles on the next page and tick the ones that you do.

Mental Filter

When we only notice things that match what we believe. Sometimes we might notice something that doesn't match, but we then think that is only a 1 off and won't happen again.

E.g. "My mum only spends time with my brother" and then if she spends time with you thinking "it's a one off, only because my brother isn't here".



Mind-Reading

Thinking we know what others are thinking without them saying anything. We normally think that other people are thinking bad negative things about us.

E.g. "They are laughing because I look stupid", when actually people are laughing because someone told a funny joke.

Prediction

Thinking we know what will happen in the future.

E.g. You may feel nervous going to a party and think "I can't go because nobody will talk to me". This prediction may stop you from going to the party, when actually you could have made new friends if you went.



Compare and despair

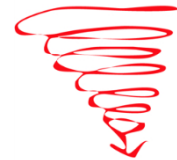
Seeing only the good and positive things in others and thinking we are not as good. We are not able to see the good things in us that other people might not have.

E.g. looking at a person in your class and thinking, "wow their hair always looks so nice. Mine always looks terrible. I'm so ugly".

Catastrophising

Imagining the worst possible thing will happen. When we have 1 thought that leads to another negative thought, that leads to a more negative thought.

E.g. "My friend didn't wave when I saw her at the shop. Why didn't she wave? Maybe she doesn't like me? Maybe she isn't really my friend?"



Emotional Reasoning

Thinking that the way we feel inside is because of what is happening around us.

E.g. "I feel bad so it must be bad!" "I feel anxious so I must be in danger."

What can I do about Negative Automatic Thoughts?

It is important to learn how to stop Negative Automatic Thoughts as they can stop us from living our lives the way we would like, which can make us worried and sad.

The best way to do this is to challenge our negative thoughts. It can be hard to challenge thoughts, but it makes it easier if we pretend to be someone else looking in on the problem. There are 3 steps when challenging a thought.

Step 1 - Look for evidence to that agrees or disagrees with it

When we notice that we have a negative thought, we can start to challenge it by asking these questions:

- ✚ What happened before I had this thought?
- ✚ Has this happened before? How often?
- ✚ Is this thought helpful?
- ✚ Am I only noticing the negative things?
- ✚ How likely is it to happen?

Step 2 - Consider other options

Once we have found evidence to show the thought is wrong, we can now think of other ways to see the situation. These questions might help:

- ✚ What else could happen?
- ✚ What would I think of someone else if it happened to them?
- ✚ What would I tell my friend if it happened to them?
- ✚ What would someone else think if it happened to them?
- ✚ Is there another reason that what makes me anxious might happen?

Step 3 - Reach a conclusion

Now that we have challenged the thought and thought of some other options, we can decide if we want to keep the original negative thought, or swap it for a more positive one by asking:

- ✚ *Is this thought true?*



Practice Task

What are some negative automatic thoughts that pop into your head during the day?
Let's have a go at challenging them and see if we can find a better one!

Negative Automatic Thought 1

Step 1 – Look for evidence to agree or disagree with it

-
-
-

Step 2 – Think of alternative thoughts

-
-
-

Step 3 – Reach a conclusion

Negative Automatic Thought 2

Step 1 – Look for evidence to agree or disagree with it

Step 2 – Think of alternative thoughts

-
-
-

Step 3 – Reach a conclusion

-
-
-

WEEK 6

DEALING WITH TRICKY SITUATIONS



Last week we learned how to notice the types of thoughts we are having and then challenge the unhelpful thoughts. This week we are going to focus on how to plan for positive results in situations where we usually feel anxious – tricky situations.

What is a tricky situation?

Tricky situations can be different for every person. Someone might find asking their parents if their friends can come round tricky. Someone else might find being called a mean name tricky. Someone else might find putting their hand up in class tricky.

What role do Negative Automatic Thoughts play in tricky situations?

As we know, negative thoughts can make us feel and act a certain way, especially in a situation where we feel anxious. We have learnt how to challenge our negative thoughts- this is important because otherwise we might do or say something that makes a tricky situation.

Activity 1 – Week 6

How negative thoughts create tricky situations

On the next pages are two situations where the people have an automatic negative thought and react to the other people. Read the story and answer the questions.



Sarah is in class, not sure who to play with. Jaina walks up and says to Sarah “Hey, your hair looks great today”. Adam is standing behind Jaina and starts to giggle. Sarah thinks “Jaina doesn’t mean it – they are actually teasing me and that is why Adam is laughing”. Sarah wants to stand up for herself and acts without challenging her thought, and says to Jaina “Well your hair looks gross”.

What is Sarah’s negative automatic thought?

What do you think will happen?

What is Sarah feeling?

How do you think Jaina now feels?

It is very likely that Jaina would feel hurt and not want to play with Sarah. It is also likely that Adam would feel sad for Jaina and not want to play with Sarah either. Sarah wouldn't have anyone to play with and would feel like she had been teased by people who are mean.



Matt is playing football. Sonia comes and tackles Matt for the ball and kicks Matt in the ankle. Matt is very angry and thinks “she did it on purpose that was unfair”. Instead of telling the referee, he shouts and pushes Sonia.

What is Matt’s negative automatic thought?

What do you think will happen?

What is Matt feeling?

How do you think Sonia now feels?

Sonia would be upset at Matt for hitting and shouting at her. Matt would be asked to leave the pitch. The team would be annoyed they had less players. The referee would think Matt is a dirty player.

Activity 2 – Week 6

How challenging thoughts can prevent tricky situations

We now know that our thoughts and feelings affect our behaviour. We also know how to challenge automatic negative thoughts. However, if we can't stop our reaction in time, the result will always be the same.

If Sarah knew how to stop and think about the situation before she answered back to Jaina, the situation could have a different ending. If Matt knew how to stop and think about the situation before he pushed Sonia, that situation could have a different ending.

Sarah is in class, not sure who to play with. Jaina walks up and says to Sarah "Hey, your hair looks great today". Adam is standing behind Jaina and starts to giggle. Sarah thinks "Jaina doesn't mean it – they are actually teasing me and that is why Adam is laughing".

Help Sarah challenge her thought below.

Negative Automatic Thought

Step 1 – Look for evidence to agree or disagree with it

- ---
- ---
- ---

Step 2 – Think of alternative thoughts

- ---
- ---
- ---

Step 3 – Reach a conclusion

What is the result now?

Sarah stops for a moment to challenge her thought. "I can't read Jaina's mind so how do I know she doesn't mean it. And Adam is looking the other way so it is more likely that he is laughing at something over there than at my hair". Now that her thought has been challenged she feels much better about the situation and thinks Jaina is being friendly. Sarah says to Jaina "Thanks, you look good too! What are you all up to this lunchtime?" Sarah and Jaina become friends and Jaina has a new group of friends to play with at lunchtimes.



Matt is playing football. Sonia comes and tackles Matt for the ball and kicks Matt in the ankle. Matt is very angry and thinks "she did it on purpose that was unfair".

Help Matt challenge his thought below.

Negative Automatic Thought

Step 1 – Look for evidence to agree or disagree with it

- ---
- ---
- ---

Step 2 – Think of alternative thoughts

- ---
- ---
- ---

Step 3 – Reach a conclusion

What is the result?

Matt stops for a moment. The referee blows his whistle to pause the game. Sonia brings the ball back to Matt and says "Sorry, it was an accident. Are you ok?" They shake hands and Matt says "I'm fine thanks". The referee gives Matt a free kick and Matt scores a goal. Matt's team are happy with Matt for scoring an extra goal. Matt and Sonia become friends.



Practice Task

Look back at the negative thinking styles and think about what automatic negative thoughts you have the most. Write the thought and challenge it in 1 circle and then write a positive thought in the circle next to it. You can cut these out and keep them with you for the times when thought challenging is hard. You may want to read the positive thoughts every day, before the negative thought has a chance to happen. Have a look at the example to help get started.

Negative Thought: I am boring and nobody likes me

Challenge: I have friends, they invite me to spend time with them, there is no reason for them to pretend to like me, they wouldn't bother if they didn't like me

Positive Thought: I am an interesting person and I have friends who enjoy spending time with me

Summary

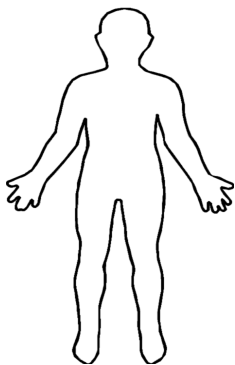
In this book we have looked at what anxiety is and how it can affect us. We learnt that our brain is always on the look-out for danger and that if it thinks it notices something e.g. a dog or a big crowd, it makes our body change so we are ready for fight or flight.

We have also learnt that our thoughts can affect how we feel. Sometimes we are used to thinking in a certain way- we might have a negative thinking style. Negative thoughts can happen automatically. If we can have a thought and react without challenging it, this can lead us into tricky situations or make us more anxious. It is important to try to notice what we are thinking so if we have a negative thought we can challenge it and see if it is really true.

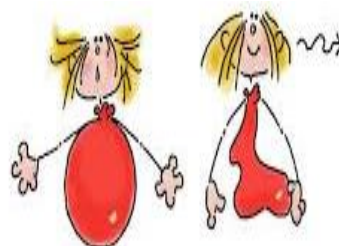
We have also learnt that our breathing and body can change how anxious we feel. If we have tense muscles, our brain thinks that we are in danger. When we are anxious, it is important to try to relax our muscles- squeezing and relaxing- and change our breathing so it is deep and slow.

It is important to remember that all the skills that we have learnt will need to be practiced lots so they become like good habits. You might not see a change in yourself straight away, but if you keep practicing then over time change will happen.





When you feel anxious, remember that your body is doing what will help in a dangerous situation- you aren't going to choke or have a heart attack.



Breathe in Breathe out

Practising breathing slowly and deeply can really help you feel calm – imagine a balloon in your belly that you need to fill up.



When you tense your muscles and then relax them you can learn how to recognise when your body is feeling anxious. Thinking about relaxing your muscles will make you feel more relaxed.



If your mind is racing and you can't switch your thoughts off you can distract yourself – describe items in your pencil case, think of a calm place and describe it, use the alphabet to think of items in a theme.



When you find yourself worrying about a situation you can be a thought detective. Try to discover what negative thoughts are making you feel bad, and then challenge them.



When you are worrying about a situation, you can use your thought challenging to help you think about differently. Plan what you will do to help you react more positively. Remember your positive thought cards!

Feedback Form

We hope you have found this booklet useful and have noticed that you feel anxious when doing things that used to make you worried. We want to make sure that this booklet is the best it can be so it can help lots of people, so please tell us how you found it. When you have finished, please ask someone to post it back to the clinic. Thank You.

1. How helpful did you find this guide?

Not
Helpful

Very
Helpful





2. What did you find most helpful?

3. What was not so helpful?

4. Is there anything you would change to make the booklet better?

Yes **No**

If yes, what would you change?

5. Do you want to tell us anything else?
