

Skills to cope with anxiety

You can end the fight-or-flight anxiety response before the symptoms become too extreme. These skills *will* require practice to work effectively, so try not to wait until the last minute to try them out. These can be most effective if tried in a specific order:

1) STOP



Don't just react, as your emotions may try to make you act without thinking. Take a step back from the situation in your mind and physically. Notice what is going on inside and outside of you. What is the situation? What are your thoughts and feelings? What are others saying or doing? What physical changes are happening for you?

2) Cool down

Lower your body's temperature (as anxiety is a 'hot' emotion). Try the following:

Cold drink Fresh air Remove jumper/jacket Fan
Cold water/cool gel pack over eyes and upper cheeks



3) Slow down

Regulate your breathing (as anxiety leads to increased heart rate and breathing rate). Try the following (repeating the step several times):

- ◆ Breathing in through nose for 3 seconds, out through mouth for 5 seconds.
 - ◆ Imagine breathing around a rectangle: short side=breath in, long side=breath out
 - ◆ Imagine breathing in a colour you like, and breathing out a colour you don't like
- Relaxing your muscles can help to address the tension that comes with anxiety:

While breathing in, tense your muscles (without causing cramp) and hold for 5 secs;
notice the tension in your body;
while breathing out say the word RELAX in your mind;
let go of the tension;
notice the difference in your body.



4) Re-focus your mind

Use simple tasks to re-orientate your attention, distracting from the anxious thought:

- ◆ Counting backwards/counting patterns
- ◆ Pick a colour or shape and count how many of these you can see in the room
- ◆ Count 10... (pick a category and name 10 things)/work through the alphabet
- ◆ Grounding - notice something you're experiencing through each of the 5 senses (5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing you can taste)



5) Relax

Do what you find relaxing - warm bath, listening to music, colouring, going for a walk, imagining you are somewhere/doing something you enjoy and find relaxing.
Be kind to yourself!

Some questions to think about:

What advice you might give to a friend in the situation?
Is how your feeling being led by your opinion rather than facts?

Challenging Anxious Thoughts

Anxiety can be a healthy emotion—it forces us to focus on our problems, and work hard to solve them. But sometimes, anxiety grows out of control, and does just the opposite. It *cripples* our ability to solve problems. When this happens, **irrational thoughts** often play a role.

In this exercise, we will practice catching our irrational thoughts, and replacing them with rational alternatives. With enough practice, this will become a natural process that can help you manage anxiety.

Describe a common situation that triggers your anxiety:

example: "giving a speech in front of a crowd" or "driving in rush hour traffic"

Anxiety distorts our thinking by causing us to **overestimate the likelihood of something going wrong**, and **imagine the potential consequences as worse than they really are**. Sometimes, just taking a moment to think about these facts can help us recognize our irrational thoughts.

Imagine you are faced with the anxiety-producing situation from above. Describe the...

Worst outcome:
Best outcome:
Likely outcome:

Imagine the worst outcome comes true. Would it still matter...

1 week from now:
1 month from now:
1 year from now:

Usually, anxious thoughts focus on the worst possible outcomes, even when they aren't likely. For example, a person who is nervous about giving a speech might think: *"I am going to forget everything and embarrass myself, and I'll never live it down."*

As an outside observer, we know that an alternate, more rational thought might be: *"My speech might only be OK, but if I do mess up, everyone will forget about it soon enough."*

Using your own "worst outcome" and "likely outcome" from above, describe your...

Irrational thought:
Rational thought:

harmLESS – First Step Plan

Young person's name:

Date:

- **If you were worried** about yourself you could talk with

- Friend.....
- Adult.....

- If you are feeling down these might **help you to ride out this feeling**

- Distracting activities (e.g. music, gaming, reading),
- Mood lifting activities (e.g. watch comedy, play instrument, internet)
- Physical activities (e.g. walking, running, cycling, dance)
- Social activities (e.g. text or talk to friends, social media)
- Other activities (e.g. playing with pets, hobbies, cooking)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

- If you want **more information** these links might be helpful

- Information and advice about local support from "**on your mind**" (www.onyourmind.org.uk)
- Free online support from **Kooth** (www.kooth.com)

- We will meet again to talk about how you are feeling on

Helpers name:

harmLESS – Support plan

Young person's name:

Date:

- I will **let** who is helping you know how you are feeling

- **If you were worried** about yourself you could talk with

- Friend
- Adult
- Professional involved

- **If you were very worried** about your safety or had hurt yourself

- Talk with your GP
- Go to the Accident and Emergency Department

- If you are feeling that you might hurt yourself these things might **help you to ride out this feeling**

- Distracting activities (e.g. music, gaming, reading),
- Mood lifting activities (e.g. watch comedy, play instrument, internet)
- Physical activities (e.g. walking, running, cycling, dance)
- Social activities (e.g. text or talk to friends, social media)
- Other activities (e.g. playing with pets, hobbies, cooking)

1.

2.

3.

- If you want **more information** these links might be helpful

- Information and advice about local support from "**on your mind**" (www.onyourmind.org.uk).
- Free online support from **Kooth** (www.kooth.com)

Helpers name:

Copy for Young person, Helper, Supporter