

# ***Student Wellbeing***

## ***How to Manage Your Anxiety***

### ***Understanding Anxiety -***

#### ***Predicting the Future:***

When we are feeling anxious, it is common for us to spend a lot of time thinking about the future and predicting what could go wrong, rather than just letting things be. In the end most of our predictions don't happen and we have wasted time and energy being worried and upset about them. For example:

- Assuming you will perform poorly at your job interview.
- Spending the week before an exam predicting you will fail, despite all your hard work studying and your previous good grades.

#### ***Mind Reading:***

This means that you make assumptions about others' beliefs without having any real evidence to support them. For example:

- My boss thinks I'm stupid.
- People think I'm weird.

Such ways of thinking naturally make us apprehensive.

#### ***Catastrophising:***

People commonly 'catastrophise' when they are anxious...essentially blowing things out of proportion. For example:

- They assume that something that has happened is far worse than it really is (e.g. that their friend is going to dislike them because they cancelled a night out).
- They may think that something terrible is going to happen in the future, when, in reality, there is very little evidence to support it (e.g. I'm going to get into serious trouble for calling in sick).

#### ***Focusing on the Negatives:***

Anxious people often have a tendency to focus on the negatives which keeps their anxiety going. For example:

- They focus on the one person at work who doesn't like them, ignoring that they are very popular with the rest of their colleagues.

#### ***Should Statements:***

People often imagine how they would like things to be or how they 'should be' rather than accepting how things really are. For example:

- I should have got an A in History.
- I should never be anxious. Unfortunately when we do this, we are simply applying extra pressure to ourselves that can result in anxiety. Instead it can sometimes help to accept that things can't always be perfect.

**Over Generalising:**

Based on one isolated incident you assume that all others will follow a similar pattern in the future. For example:

- When enrolling on a college course, you meet a future classmate who you find irritating. As a result, you worry that everyone in the class will be the same and you won't make any friends.

**What If Statements:**

Have you ever wondered "what if" something bad happens? For example:

- What if I have a panic attack at the party?
- What if I don't make friends when I start my new job?

This type of thought can often make us avoid going places or doing the things that we would like.

**Labelling:**

Do you find that you attach negative labels to yourself? For example:

- I'm weak.
- I'm a waste of space.
- I'm always anxious.

Labels like these really influence how we see ourselves and can heighten our anxiety levels.

**Do any of your unhelpful thoughts follow some of these patterns? Jot down any examples you can think of into the box below:**

| Unhelpful Thought  | Category                  |
|--|---------------------------|
| e.g. "My boss thinks I'm useless"<br>"My anxiety means I'm weak" | Mind Reading<br>Labelling |

## 1) Challenges to an unhelpful thought

Now you can challenge your unhelpful thoughts by asking these questions.

### *Is there any evidence that contradicts this thought?*

- I've always done well in my previous exams.
- I've been scoring well in my coursework.

### *Can you identify any of the patterns of unhelpful thinking described earlier?*

- I'm 'predicting the future'. I have no evidence to suggest I'll fail.

### *What would you say to a friend who had this thought in a similar situation?*

- I'd say don't be silly, you've always done well. As long as you've studied hard, you should be fine. Besides, you can only try your best.

### *What are the costs and benefits of thinking in this way?*

- Costs: It's making me feel sick with worry.
- Benefits: I can't really think of any.

### *How will you feel about this in 6 months' time? In 4 years' time?*

- I'll probably look back and laugh. I probably won't remember this.

### *Is there another way of looking at this situation?*

- I've always done well in the past so I should be ok. I can only do my best anyway; after all I've studied hard. At worst, I'll just have to re-sit next year.

Once you have asked yourself these questions, you should read through your answers. Try to come up with a more balanced or rational view. For example:

*Worrying about failing is doing me no good. I've always done well before so I should be fine, especially since I've prepared properly.*

**Try to apply these questions to the unhelpful thoughts that you notice. It can help to reduce your anxiety levels.**



## Activity: Thought Capturing & Balancing Thoughts...

| Anxious/Worried/Limiting Thought                                | Balanced Thought   |
|---|--|
| <i>"I'm stupid. I can't do this"</i>                            | <i>"I'm not stupid, I'm feeling worried, that's natural. I have made it this far and done everything that has been asked of me to the best of my ability."</i> |
| <i>"I don't know what I'm supposed to be doing"</i>             | ...  |
| <i>"I'm going to fail"</i>                                      | ....   |
| <i>"Everyone else knows what they are doing except for me."</i> | ...  |
|   |  |

## 2) Problem Solving

You might find it more difficult to cope if you have lots of problems that you can't seem to get on top of. This can have a clear impact on our anxiety levels. Struggling with unresolved problems can often make us feel worse. We can end up worrying or ruminating over our problems without finding a way to resolve them. This can make us feel even more upset, and can end up interfering with our sleep.

It can help to develop a structured way of working through a problem. Beginning to overcome some of your problems might help you to feel better. You can improve your problem solving skills by learning to apply the steps outlined here.

- **Limit the time you spend worrying - Scheduling! Regain control...**
- **Identify the problem(s) - found out what you're working with...**
- **Come up with possible solutions...**
- **Choose a solution...breakdown the solution...try and review the solution...**



- Realise that a solution may be outside of your control...

### 3) Relaxation

It is important to make time to relax and do activities that are enjoyable. This can help to reduce your anxiety levels by calming the body and mind. It can also help you to sleep. Without taking the time to unwind, it is easy to feel overwhelmed and stressed.

Relaxation can involve doing something that you enjoy, or just being by yourself. Good examples might be reading a book or having a bath. Exercise is also particularly effective at helping us to relax. What you do does not really matter. Try to choose something that you will look forward to and that gives you a break. Doing an activity that you enjoy will also give you less time to spend worrying. Here is a list of activities that might help you to relax.

Suggestions:

- Do some exercise (e.g. swim, cycle)
- Read a book
- Watch your favourite TV show
- Go to the cinema
- Do something creative (e.g. draw, paint)
- Visit a friend or family member
- Have a bath

Try to add some of your own ideas into the box below. You will know what works best for you.