

Mental Wellbeing Series

Anxiety First Aid Kit

Fast Ways to Deal with Anxiety



WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety is a mental and physical reaction to perceived threats. In small doses, anxiety is helpful. It protects us from danger and focuses our attention on problems. But when anxiety is too severe, or occurs too frequently, it can become debilitating.

SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY



Uncontrollable worry



Excessive nervousness



Sleep problems



Muscle tension



Poor concentration



Increased heart rate



Upset stomach



Avoidance of fear

TYPES OF ANXIETY

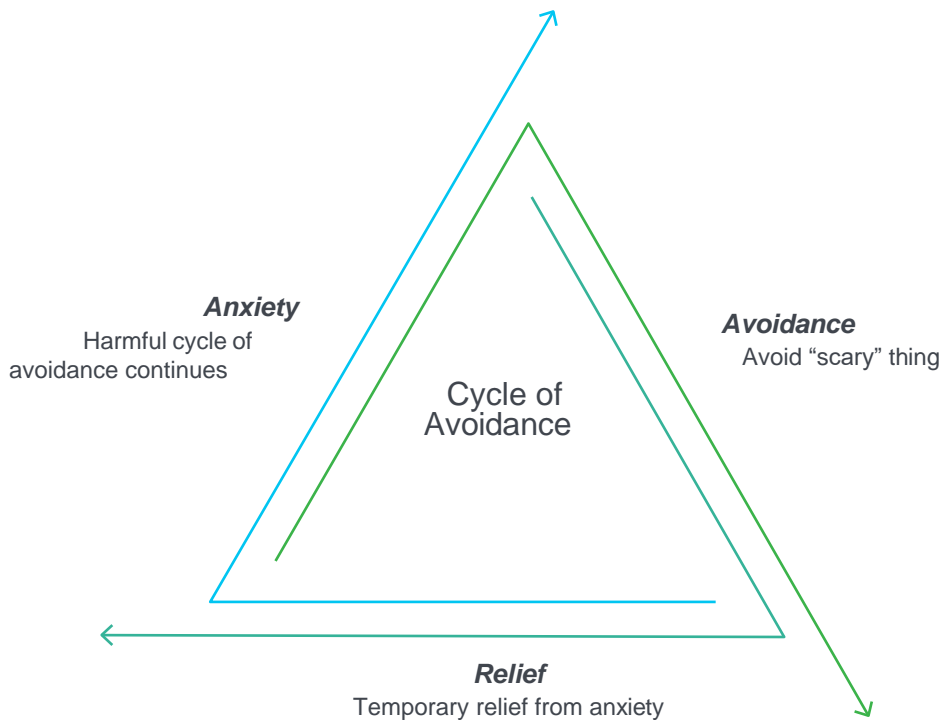
Generalized Anxiety: An excessive amount of anxiety or worry in several areas of life, such as job responsibilities, health, finances, or minor concerns (e.g., completing housework).

Phobias: A very intense fear of a specific situation or object, which is out of proportion to its actual threat. For example, a fear of giving speeches, or of spiders, could be considered a phobia.

Panic: An extreme anxious response where a person experiences a panic attack. During a panic attack, the individual experiences numerous physical symptoms, and is overwhelmed by a feeling of dread.

How Anxiety Grows

Anxiety drives people to avoid the things that scare them. When a “scary” thing is avoided, there is an immediate but short-lived sense of relief. However, the next time a similar threat arises, it feels even scarier. This creates a harmful cycle of avoidance, and worsening anxiety.



HOW IT WORKS

The Anxiety First Aid Kit comes in two parts:

1. Emergency Care for Anxiety – A one page set of instructions for when anxiety is sky high or you’re having an anxiety attack.
2. Five worksheets to build resilience for when your anxiety is under control.

Tip

Print off “Emergency Care for Anxiety” and carry with you **at all times**.

Emergency Care for Anxiety

Steps to take in the event of an anxiety attack.

1. STOP

Do not just react. Stop! Freeze! Do not move a muscle.
Your emotions may try to make you act without thinking.
Stay in control!

2. TAKE A STEP BACK

Take a step back from the situation. Take a break.
Let go. Take a deep breath.
Do not let your feelings make you act impulsively.

3. OBSERVE

Notice what is going on inside and outside you.
What is the situation?
What are your thoughts and feelings?
What are others saying or doing?

4. PROCEED MINDFULLY

Act with awareness.
In deciding what to do, consider your thoughts and feelings, the situation, and other people's thoughts and feelings.
Think about your goals.
Look inwardly and assess what actions will make it better or worse?

Deep Breathing

This is a relaxation technique performed by purposefully taking slow, deep breaths. When practiced regularly, deep breathing provides both immediate and long-term relief from stress and anxiety.

Practice once a day for one week and this will give you a brilliant tool to use when your anxiety is elevated.

How Deep Breathing Works

During periods of anxiety, the body triggers a set of symptoms called the stress response. Breathing becomes shallow and rapid, heart rate increases, and muscles become tense. In opposition to the stress response is the relaxation response. Breathing becomes deeper and slower, and the symptoms of anxiety fade away. Deep breathing triggers this response.

Worksheet Activity

Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes, if you would like to do so. When you're learning, try placing a hand on your stomach. If you breathe deeply enough, you should notice it rising and falling with each inhalation and exhalation.

1. **Inhale.** Breathe in slowly through your nose for four seconds.
2. **Pause.** Hold the air in your lungs for four seconds.
3. **Exhale.** Breathe out slowly through your mouth for six seconds.
Tip: Pucker your lips, as if you are blowing through a straw, to slow your exhalation.
4. **Repeat.** Practice for at least two minutes, but preferably five to ten minutes.

Tips

- If it isn't working, slow down! The most common mistake is breathing too fast. Time each step in your head, counting slowly as you do so.
- Counting out your breaths serves a second purpose. It takes your mind off the source of your anxiety. Whenever you catch your mind wandering, simply return your focus to counting.
- The times we use for each step are suggestions and can be lengthened or decreased. Lengthen the time if it feels natural to do so, or decrease the time if you feel discomfort.

Challenging Negative Thoughts

Challenging irrational thoughts can help us change them. Here is how:

Worksheet Activity

Answer the following questions to assess your thoughts:

Is there substantial evidence for my thought?

Is there evidence contrary to my thought?

Am I attempting to interpret this situation without all the evidence?

What would a friend think about this situation?

If I look at the situation positively, how is it different?

Will this matter a year from now?

How about five years from now?

Thinking Errors

Thinking errors, commonly known as cognitive distortions, are irrational beliefs that contribute to uncomfortable emotions and unwanted behavior.

This worksheet is an introduction to cognitive distortions. Using simple language and plenty of examples, this worksheet describes nine common thinking errors. These include mind reading, feelings as facts, blowing things up, and more.

Worksheet Activity

Work through the questions making a note if this applies to you.

- **Ignoring the Good**

You pay more attention to bad things and ignore when something good happens.

Examples:

- *You get one answer wrong on a long test, and all you can think about is the mistake.*
- *You score two goals in your soccer game, but all you can think about is the shot you missed.*

- **Blowing Things Up**

Making a big deal out of something small, or making something a little bit bad seem like the worst thing ever.

Examples:

- *You get a stain on your new shoes and you think they're ruined and can't be worn anymore.*
- *"I'm not able to see my friends on Friday. My life is horrible!"*

- **Fortune Telling**

Thinking you know what will happen in the future, and that it will be bad.

Examples:

- *"I know if I ask her to the dance, she's going to say no."*
- *"I bet no one will come to my birthday party."*

- **Mind Reading**

Believing you know what someone else is thinking, or why they are doing something, without having enough information.

Examples:

- *“People are looking at me. They probably think my shirt is ugly.”*
- *“Emma didn’t invite me to her party. I bet she thinks I’m weird.”*

- **Negative Labelling**

Having a negative belief about yourself and thinking it applies to everything you do.

Examples:

- *“I’m a loser so my artwork stinks.”*
- *“I’m so stupid. Everything I say is dumb.”*

- **Setting the Bar Too High**

Thinking that you must be perfect in everything you do, otherwise you’re no good.

Examples:

- *“If I don’t get an A on every test, I’m not smart.”*
- *“I have to win every tennis match I play, otherwise I’m worthless.”*

- **Self-blaming**

Blaming yourself for anything that goes wrong around you, even if you had nothing to do with it.

Examples:

- *When your basketball team loses a game, you think it’s entirely your fault.*
- *“Alicia is sad today. I probably did something to upset her.”*

- **Feelings as Facts**

Believing that if you feel something, it must be true.

Examples:

- *“I feel ugly, so I must be ugly.”*
- *“I feel like I’m a bad friend, so I must be a bad friend.”*

- **“Should” Statements**

Believing things have to be a certain way.

Examples:

- *“People should always be nice to me.”*
- *“I should always be happy. I should never be sad.”*

Healthy vs. Unhealthy Coping Strategies

Coping strategies are the actions we take to deal with stress, problems, or uncomfortable emotions. Unhealthy coping strategies often provide instant gratification or relief, but have long-term negative consequences.

In contrast, healthy coping strategies don't always feel good in the moment, but they contribute to long-lasting positive outcomes.

The Healthy vs. Unhealthy Coping Strategies worksheet was designed to help you understand the importance of using healthy coping strategies, and then guide you toward applying this knowledge in your life.

EXAMPLES OF UNHEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES	EXAMPLES OF HEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES
Drug or alcohol use	Exercise
Overeating	Healthy eating
Procrastination	Talking about your problem
Sleeping too much or too little	Seeking professional help
Social withdrawal	Relaxation techniques (e.g., deep breathing, meditation)
Self-harm	Using social support
Aggression	Problem-solving techniques
Acting out sexually	Being honest about feeling
Overspending	Taking personal responsibility
Beating yourself up	Being kind to yourself

Worksheet Activity

Describe a problem you are currently dealing with:

Describe your **unhealthy** coping strategies.

1

2

What are the **consequences** of using them?

1

2

Describe your **healthy coping strategies** you use or could use and how they make you feel.

1

2

3

Describe what **stops you** from using these healthy strategies.

1

2

3

Strengths Exploration

Those who know their strengths and use them frequently tend to have more success in several areas. They feel happier, have better self-esteem, and are more likely to accomplish their goals.

To use your strengths effectively, it's important to have a clear idea of what they are, and how they can be used. Some of your greatest strengths might be easy to recognize, while others go unnoticed because they feel ordinary to you (even if they aren't).

Strengths

In this worksheet you will identify your strengths and ways in which you're already using them. Additionally, you will explore new ways to use your strengths to your advantage.

Worksheet Activity

Circle your strengths from the choices below, or add your own at the bottom:

Wisdom	Artistic Ability	Curiosity	Leadership
Empathy	Honesty	Open Mindedness	Persistence
Enthusiasm	Kindness	Love	Social Awareness
Fairness	Bravery	Cooperation	Forgiveness
Modesty	Common Sense	Self-Control	Patience
Gratitude	Love of Learning	Humor	Spirituality
Ambition	Creativity	Confidence	Intelligence
Athleticism	Discipline	Assertiveness	Logic
Optimism	Independence	Flexibility	Adventurousness

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RELATIONSHIPS

Romantic relationships, friendships, and family

1 List the strengths you possess that help you in your relationships

2 Describe specific times your strengths were able to help you in a relationship

3 Describe four new ways you could use your strengths in relationships

PROFESSIONAL

Past and present

1 List the strengths you possess that help you in your profession; past or present work, school, or other professional endeavors

2 Describe a specific time your strengths were able to help in your profession

3 Describe new ways you could use your strengths in your professional life

PERSONAL FULFILLMENT

Hobbies, interests, and pleasurable activities

1 List the strengths you possess that help you achieve personal fulfillment

2 Describe a specific time your strengths were able to help you with personal fulfillment

3 Describe two new ways you could use your strengths for personal fulfillment