

# USEFUL EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH WELLBEING RESOURCES

## Anxiety

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/a/anxiety>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks/anxiety-disorders/>

<https://www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/about-mental-illness/learn-more-about-conditions/anxiety-disorders/>

<https://mentalhealth-uk.org/help-and-information/conditions/anxiety-disorders/what-is-anxiety/>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/the-mindful-self-express/201506/9-ways-calm-your-anxious-mind>

## Coronavirus and coping

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-anxiety-tips/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/talking-to-your-child-about-coronavirus/>

## Anxiety

Anxious thoughts can overwhelm you, making it difficult to make decisions and take action to deal with whatever issue bothers you. Anxiety can also lead to overthinking, which makes you more anxious, which leads to more overthinking, and so on. How can you get out of this vicious cycle?

We all experience anxiety and stress, and that's a good thing. If we didn't, we would not be human and would be unable to protect ourselves and our loved ones from danger.

For example, imagine that while driving you notice another car speeding, looking like it was going to run a stoplight. If you get anxious and experience a "flight or flight" reaction of what could happen, you will react quickly by stepping on the brake and might very well avoid an accident!

Although the above example shows that anxiety can be a friend in times of danger, often anxiety is maladaptive when it goes on overdrive long after the threat of danger is over. Some people cannot get themselves back to a calmer baseline as anxiety remains high – even though there is no longer any objective threat.

Anxiety on overdrive can make us actually feel sick, can cause us to hyperventilate, our hearts to race, while disturbing our concentration and our sleep and even can cause panic attacks.

Most often anxiety results from not actual threats, but our exaggerated fears of what might happen. When we are overly anxious, danger lurks in our minds and not from the outside.

“It would be awful if I mess up” “If I lose this job I might never get another job.” “If she leaves me, I couldn’t handle it.” “If I say something stupid in the meeting, people will think I’m stupid.” “It would be terrible if I make a mistake.” “I’m nervous that he’ll get angry at me.” “I can’t mess this up.”

### **Attempt Cognitive Distancing**

Try to see your anxious thoughts as guesses, not as facts. Your mind is trying to protect you by predicting what could happen—but just because something could happen doesn’t mean it will. Look at objective evidence: How likely is it that the negative outcome will actually happen? Is there anything good that might happen instead? And which do you think is most likely to happen, based on past experience and other information you have about the situation?

### **Label Things**

Label the type of thought you are having, rather than paying attention to its content. Watch your thoughts and when you notice a judgment (e.g., how good or bad the situation is), go ahead and label it as Judging. If you notice a worry (e.g., that you are going to fail or experience a loss) label it as Worrying. If you are criticising yourself, label it as Criticising. This gets you away from the literal content of your thoughts and gives you more awareness of your mental processes. Do you want to be spending your time judging and worrying? Are there less judgmental or worried ways to see the situation?

### **Stay in the Present**

Is your mind regurgitating the past? Just because something negative happened in the past doesn’t mean it has to happen today. Ask yourself if the circumstances, or your knowledge and coping abilities, have changed since the last time. As an adult, you have more choice about whom to associate with and more ability to identify, pre-empt, or leave a bad situation than when you were a child or teenager.

## **Broaden Your View**

Are you focusing too narrowly on the threatening aspects of a situation, rather than seeing the whole picture? Anxiety makes our minds contract and focus on the immediate threat without considering the broader context. Is this situation really as important as your anxiety says it is? Will you still care about this problem in 5 or 10 years? If not, then ease up on the worry.

## **Decide Whether a Thought Is Helpful**

Just because a thought is true doesn't mean that it is helpful to focus on—at least not all the time. If only 1 in 10 people will get the job you seek, and you keep thinking about those odds, you may become demotivated and not even bother applying. This is an example of a thought that is true but not helpful. Focus your attention on what is helpful and let the rest go!

## **Use deep calming breaths**

Deep breathing is one of the most immediate steps you can take to calm anxiety.

When we are anxious, we tend to tense up, leading to rapid and shallow breathing. Using deep calming breaths can help us immediately calm down our physiological response to our racing thoughts. Deep breathing involves diaphragmatic breathing.

Breathe slowly through your nose and release your breaths slowly through your mouth. Consciously extend your abdomen while taking deep breaths instead of taking shallow chest breaths.

How can you tell if you are breathing deeply? Put one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest – when you breathe in, the hand on your stomach should be moving up and down while the hand on the chest stays relatively still.

To help concentrate on your breathing, imagine a colour as you breathe in and out.

Count slowly either forwards or backwards for up to the count of 10 as you breathe in and as you release your breath.

Use a mantra you repeat on each breath, such as the word RELAX or CALM.

## **Write it out**

Whether you keep a journal or occasionally write out your thoughts, writing can be very therapeutic. These are some reasons why writing can be so helpful in quelling your anxiety on overdrive.

Writing things down on paper or on the computer helps you crystallise and eliminate unhealthy ways of thinking, replacing them with healthier alternatives.

By writing out your thoughts, you will gain the objectivity needed to recognise and change unhealthy perceptions.

Writing your thoughts down makes you face them and keep focused. It makes your thoughts and issues tangible in the real world rather than in the recesses of your mind.

Writing helps problems become more solvable. Just like with many math or physics equations, some problems are just too complex to figure out in your head.

## **Don't go it alone**

Research has shown that those people are happier if they have a strong sense of social support.

When you are anxious, reaching out for support and help can be very calming:

Call a friend and share your upset.

Seek professional help.

Find one person with whom you can self-disclose.

In times when you are less stressed is a time to work on building a support network.

## **Talk nicely to yourself**

Anxiety is correlated with unhealthy thinking which often entails self-deprecation and self-criticism.

Berating yourself for being too anxious, for example, will only put kerosene on the fire of your anxiety.

Use self-compassion to be kind and nurturing to yourself. Instead of thinking "I am an idiot for getting so worked up," reassure yourself as you would a friend

with words such as “I don’t blame you for being so anxious – you’ve gone through a lot and I have faith I will get through it stronger and wiser.”

Replace words of discouragement into words of encouragement.

Instead of shaming yourself for being so anxious, show yourself some love and unconditional acceptance.

And last but not least, literally give yourself a big bear hug!