Coping with Anxiety

You are NOT alone
Introduction

Anxiety: sometimes you can see it, sometimes you can’t. Sometimes it looks like something else; sometimes people think we are unsociable, miserable, scared, irrational, physically unwell. The truth is, anxiety can look and feel different for each of us.

How do we begin to cope, or live better, with anxiety? This booklet will not give you a magic wand to rid you of this awful condition. Nor will it give you all the answers. This booklet is designed to open your mind to thinking a bit more ‘outside the box’, to view your anxiety differently.

Hopefully, this booklet will give you the power to learn that YOU are in control of your anxiety, it does NOT control you – and that is more powerful than any magic wand!
Some other ways that we can grow our ‘bailing out cup’ and build up our ‘coping tool box’ for the future. The more things in the tool box, the better equipped you will be to overcome the demon which is anxiety.

Looking after yourself to reduce your vulnerability:
- Keep physically well
- Balanced diet
- Good sleep hygiene
- Set and achieve goals

Learn mindfulness

Breathing exercises

Remember your values: what do you value in life? Use these to motivate yourself to get through difficult times

Distraction activities: do things you enjoy

Write down your worries, emotions and feelings

Talk to someone

Create a coping plan:
- **Green**: signs that you know you are well
- **Amber**: signs that you are doing less well
- **Red**: signs that you are struggling

Share these with someone you are able to talk to, so they are able to recognise when you need help.

Band of light exercise

type in ‘band of light by Dr Natalie Ma’ on YouTube – this is a mindfulness exercise that engages your whole body, ‘scanning’ it for tension and allowing you to control that tension. Give it a try.
Grow your ‘bailing out cup’

So how do we go about building and growing a bailing out cup? Everyone’s cup will be made of different stuff, as we all have different ways of coping. Some things will work for you, others won’t, and some will need practice.

### Breathing Exercise

1. **Sit comfortably** & rest your arms and shoulders. Try to relax any tension that might be there.
2. **Close your eyes** and take some deep breaths: in through your nose and out through your mouth.
3. **As you are breathing**, try to notice whereabouts in your body you are breathing from. Make a conscious effort to fill from the bottom of your lungs.
4. **So you should feel** your belly expand a little, as though your stomach is filling with air.
5. **Then, just lengthen your exhalation** a little, so you are breathing out a bit more, before breathing in again.
6. **Notice how your body feels**, then return your breathing to whatever feels most comfortable.
7. **Repeat** steps 5 & 6 again.
8. **Take a deep breath in** and out once more then when you feel comfortable, open your eyes and bring your attention back.

### Safe Place Visualisation

- Think of a place you have been that makes you feel safe and relaxed
- Close your eyes and take some slow, deep breaths. Concentrate on the breath as it flows in through your nose and out through your mouth
- Now slowly use each of your 5 senses to imagine what it is like to be in this place.
- Take your time and go into detail with each sense.
- When you are feeling calmer, return to the present with some controlled breathing.

### Radical Acceptance

[Search for ‘passengers on a bus’ ACT metaphor on YouTube]

Acceptance is one of the most important skills you can learn. Radical acceptance means that you accept something completely, without judging it. To radically accept the present moment, means that you must acknowledge that the present moment is what it is, due to long chain of events and decisions made by you and by other people in the past. It doesn’t mean giving up and accepting all the bad things, but acknowledging what is, and has been.
According to mind.org.uk, “anxiety is what we feel when we are worried, tense or afraid – particularly about things that are about to happen, or which we think could happen in the future. Anxiety is a natural human response when we perceive that we are under threat. It can be experienced through our thoughts, feelings and physical sensations.”

Anxiety can take over your body – mentally and physically. It can cause you to be fearful, both rationally and irrationally. It can also force us to go into ‘fight or flight’ mode; where we intrinsically run from it, or battle it. It can pin us up against a wall and make us feel like those walls are caving in on us. It’s scary and it is OK to feel scared.

Mind.org.uk tells us “most people feel anxious at times. It’s particularly common to experience some anxiety while coping with stressful events or changes, especially if they could have a big impact on your life.”

You may feel generally anxious; on edge, sometimes you may not be able to understand why, or what is driving it. You might feel anxious about a particular thing, such as going on public transport, leaving the house or talking to certain people. Some common symptoms include…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sweating</th>
<th>Dry mouth/throat</th>
<th>Churning stomach</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faster heart rate</td>
<td>Aches and pains</td>
<td>Restlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insomnia</td>
<td>Teeth grinding</td>
<td>Nausea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowel changes</td>
<td>Panic attacks</td>
<td>Sex drive changes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intrusive thoughts</td>
<td>Feeling of doom</td>
<td>Change in appetite</td>
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Is it a problem?

So we know the basics of what anxiety is, but when does it become a problem?

Can you relate to any of the symptoms? How much are they affecting you? Some people measure whether it is a problem by looking at:

- How much does it impact on your daily life?
- Does it stop you from doing enjoyable things?
- Does it prevent you from doing essential things?
- How often do you feel this way?
- Is it having an impact on your home or work life, or relationships?

Before anyone is able to tackle a demon, they need to recognize the demon. Before you take on this battle, think about the impact it is having. Focus on the change you want in your life. Keep that focus, throughout your battle.

As it is for many, anxiety may be just a part of your life, which you have accepted is part of ‘you’. Some of us are naturally more anxious than others and sometimes that can be a good thing. However, it is important to develop some skills to notice when the ‘usual amount’ of worry tips over into a less controllable form.

If your anxiety is continually causing you issues with day-to-day aspects of your life, such as those noted below (not exhaustive), you may want to think about speaking with a health professional.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Looking after yourself</th>
<th>Holding down a job</th>
<th>Forming relationships</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance relationships</td>
<td>Trying new things</td>
<td>Enjoying leisure time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keeping yourself safe</td>
<td>Regular insomnia</td>
<td>Self-harm</td>
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Looking at our experience of distress or anxiety in a different way can be helpful. Imagine that the tap with the water turns on when we have a trigger; this might be getting on a train, leaving the house, going to work etc. The water goes into our cup and, if we don’t bail that water out, it will build up and spill over. When our cup spills over, we may resort to unhelpful way of coping, for example isolating ourselves, not going to work, arguing, excessive spending, drinking lots of alcohol etc. Quite often, these sorts responses will not take away our anxiety or fix our triggers, rather add to them, causing a vicious cycle. So what can we do instead?

We can create ‘evaporation’ – these are the things that we do, every day, not necessarily for our mental health, but to look after ourselves. For example, eating healthily, brushing our teeth, getting enough sleep, exercising, washing, changing clothing etc. Although it may seem like these things don’t impact your mental state, if you stopped doing them, you would probably notice a change in your mood. We can’t see evaporation, but, it does slowly take water out of a cup doesn’t it?

We can build a ‘bailing out cup’ – the bigger the cup the better! Our cup can be built using helpful coping techniques. The more we learn these and practice, the bigger and stronger our cup. Explore these on the next page...
A journey, not a destination!

Remember that our mental wellbeing is not black and white, it is a continuum. We will experience wellness and we will also struggle, in different amounts, throughout our lives. By looking at our mental health on a scale, rather than black and white, we can not only notice when we are beginning to struggle, but also to have smaller steps and aims to improve our state of mind. The scale also gives us some ability to measure our distress in a way that is personal. Everyone’s 10 and 0 will be different depending on their past experiences. Don’t compare yourself, create your own scale to stay aware of your own mental wellbeing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most distressed</th>
<th>Least distressed</th>
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<td>10</td>
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Further support

If you need more support, or want to learn more about self-help techniques and improve your wellbeing, try out some of these:

**Samaritans**: 116 123

**Suffolk Mind**: www.suffolkmind.org.uk

**Support during COVID-19 pandemic**: www.healthysuffolk.org.uk/COVIDHub

**Living life to the full Suffolk**: www.llttf4suffolk.com

**Suffolk Wellbeing Service**: www.wellbeingnands.co.uk/suffolk

**NSFT 24/7 Mental health crisis line**: 0808 196 3494

**Staff support line**: 0300 123 1335

Open seven days a week 2-5pm to those working for the NHS and care homes in Norfolk and Suffolk.

www.healthysuffolk.org.uk/COVIDHub

This booklet has been produced by Cat Ritson RMN from the Care Home Initiative Team hosted by East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust.