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Email: info@frasac.org.uk

Website: www.frasac.org.uk

Opening Times:

Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm

Further information & advice:

Rape Crisis Helpline
Freephone 08088 01 03 02
(6pm-midnight daily)
www.rapecrississcotland.org.uk

National Phobics Society
08444 775 774
(9.15am-9pm)
www.phobics-society.org.uk

No Panic
0808 808 0545
(10am-10pm daily)
www.nopanic.org.uk

Anxiety Care
0208 478 3400
(10am-3pm Mon & Wed)
www.anxietycare.org.uk

Mind
0845 766 0163
(9.15am-5.15pm daily)
www.mind.org.uk/information

First Steps to Freedom
0845 120 2916
(10am - 10pm Mon-Thurs
10am - midnight Fri-Sun)

**Fife Rape & Sexual
Assault Centre**

(FRASAC)

**YOUNG
PERSONS'
PROJECT**

**COPING WITH
ANXIETY, STRESS &
PANIC ATTACKS**

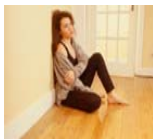
WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety is a normal healthy reaction and something we all experience from time to time. Most people can understand feeling tense, uncertain and, perhaps, fearful at the thought of sitting an exam, going into hospital or starting a new job.

Short-term anxiety can be useful. Feeling nervous before an exam can make you feel more alert and enhance your performance. However, if the feelings of anxiety overwhelm you, your ability to concentrate and do well may suffer.

Symptoms of anxiety include some of the following:

- * **Mood disturbance** - irritable, quick tempered, easily upset, 'fly off the handle' very easily
- * **Sleeping difficulties** - insomnia, bad dreams, recurring dreams
- * **Fatigue** - exhaustion, easily tired
- * **Loss of motivation and interest** - 'can't be bothered doing anything'
- * **Unreal feelings** - 'everything around me seems strange and unreal' 'I feel different—like in a dream'
- * **Very sensitive to noise** - noises you used to tolerate are now very irritating
- * **Absent minded** - unable to concentrate or forgetful
- * **Clumsy** - poor co-ordination
- * **Indecisive** - can't make up your mind about even small matters
- * **Restless** - agitated, fidgety, can't sit still
- * **General loss of self-confidence**
- * **Nagging doubts and fears** - constantly checking on things already done



8. See each panic attack as an opportunity to learn how to cope with these - with practise you will learn better how to cope.
9. When the panic begins to fade, congratulate yourself for having stayed in the situation and put up with it.
10. Now begin to concentrate again on what you were doing before the attack.

Thinking about the type of worry you have using the exercises above may help you stop worrying. However, some worries are very difficult to get rid of and keep going through your mind.

OTHER TIPS

- * **Sit in front of a fan or open window** - the breeze will ease your heart palpitations or shortness of breath.
- * **Reassure yourself** - "I've been through this many times and nothing bad has happened"
- * **Lower your gaze** - often when you're panicking the stimulus from around us seems overwhelming. Light seems brighter, noises louder etc. A good technique is to look at the floor until the panic has passed.
- * **Talk to someone or get them to give you a hug.** A touch can be very reassuring and comforting.
- * If at home, listen to music, do breathing exercises, read, watch TV or write in a journal. **Don't just sit and focus on the symptoms.**

Remember, don't add more stress or feelings similar to panic, by having caffeine, nicotine or other recreational drugs. They are definitely not recommended to anyone who has an anxiety disorder and will only make you feel even more anxious.

SETBACKS: Hardly anyone recovers from panic attacks without having at least one 'setback'. If, after a time of feeling better, you suddenly have another panic attack, there's no need to fear that you are back to square one. **DON'T GIVE UP !**

TIPS FOR COPING WITH PANIC ATTACKS

The best advice that can be given is to **let the panic happen and wait until it passes**. It will pass, you may carry on feeling anxious but the panic feelings will go, very quickly, though it may seem like a very long time to you.

THE GOLDEN RULE IS NEVER TO LEAVE A SITUATION UNTIL THE FEAR OR PANIC HAS STARTED TO GO DOWN.

When you feel panicky, run through the following rules in your mind or, if you prefer, make a copy of them to carry with you to read at the time:

1. Wait and give the fear time to pass without fighting it or running away from it. Just accept it, let it happen and let it pass.
2. Remember that panic feelings are only normal reactions that are exaggerated. They are not harmful or dangerous—just very unpleasant. Nothing worse will happen to you or others.
3. Notice what is happening in your body **now** when you are panicking, not what you fear *might* happen.
4. Accept the feelings. Let them run through you and they will disappear more quickly.
5. Cup your hands over your mouth and nose. Breathe slowly in - hold for count of 7 - slowly let it out. Follow this with a few normal breaths and repeat as long as necessary. This works in the same way as breathing into a paper bag but it's a lot more discreet and can help to stop you hyperventilating
6. Monitor the level of your anxiety: 10 (worst) to 0 (least). Watch the level go down.
7. Consciously relax your tense muscles. Feel yourself relaxing.

The 'fight or flight' reflex: Anxiety and fear are actually important for survival because they act as a mechanism to protect the body against stress or danger. They trigger the release of hormones like adrenalin which causes your heart to beat faster to carry blood where it's most needed.

Your senses become heightened and your brain becomes more alert. These changes enable the body to take action and protect itself in a dangerous situation, either by running away or fighting a foe.

However, your body also reacts in the same way to situations you find threatening, but which you can't deal with by fighting or running away. Situations like public speaking, sitting your driving test or having an injection.

WHY ARE SOME PEOPLE MORE ANXIOUS THAN OTHERS?

Anxiety can be triggered by a number of factors. Something distressing may have happened to you in the past, and because you were unable to deal with the emotions at the time, you may become anxious about encountering the situation again, in case it stirs up the same feelings of distress.

Feeling anxious can also be a learned response. You may have grown up in an environment where those around you have tended to worry a lot and to be anxious. We all become anxious under pressure, but one person may succumb more easily than another, because of a mixture of personality, current circumstances and childhood experiences.

On a day-to-day basis, caffeine, excess sugar, poor diet, drug misuse, exhaustion, stress and the side effects of certain medications can also cause anxiety, After a while, people can start to fear the symptoms of anxiety, especially feeling out of control. This sets up a vicious circle.

It may be difficult to get rid of anxiety. Once you have become anxious for whatever reason (and there may well have been a very good reason in the past), the anxiety tends to remain, even though there may seem to be no cause for it at the present time.

This is because it has become a habit; you have got into the habit of worrying and of expecting difficulties; it also becomes a habit to avoid those things you know will be difficult. Your body also gets into the habit of being tense and react anxiously to all kinds of situations.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF ANXIETY?

- * **PHYSICAL EFFECTS:** increased muscle tension can cause discomfort and headaches. Breathing rapidly may make you feel light-headed and shaky and give you pins and needles. Rising blood pressure can make you more aware of a pounding heart.

Changes to the blood supply affecting your digestive system may also cause nausea and sickness. The effects on your nervous system may result in an urgent need to visit the toilet and butterfly feelings in your stomach. You may also sweat or get a dry mouth.

- * **PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS:** these include fear, heightened alertness, being on edge, irritable and unable to relax or concentrate. You may feel an overwhelming desire to seek the reassurance of others, to be weepy and dependent. The way you think can be affected: you may fear that the worst is going to happen and slot everything that occurs into a pessimistic outlook on life. For example, if a friend is late, you worry that they have had an accident or don't want to see you, when in fact their train was just delayed.

To cope with these feelings people may start smoking or drinking too much, or misusing drugs. They may start avoiding certain situations, and maintain relationships that either support their anxious outlook or help them avoid situations they find distressing.

PANIC ATTACKS

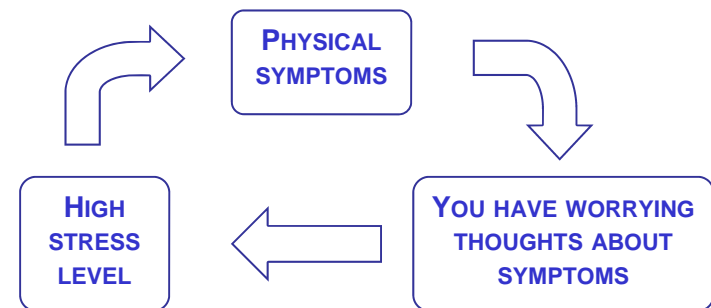
WHAT ARE THEY?

At times anxiety can reach such a peak that you may have a panic attack. This is a very frightening experience. The physical symptoms become extremely uncomfortable, to the extent that the person feels something terrible is going to happen such as collapse, dying, going crazy or somehow losing control of themselves completely. Panic, like fear, is a combination of physical symptoms and frightening thoughts.

The important thing to know about anxiety and especially about the terrible panic feelings is that they are **not** actually dangerous: they are **not signs of going crazy or of being very ill**. They will **not** lead to serious illness, mental or physical.

Panic feelings can come on as if 'out of the blue'. Panic can also be set off in reaction to places or situations and, often, thoughts. The panic reaction will die down quickly if allowed to. Usually, however, it is kept going by the frightening thoughts they cause, such as, 'I am having a heart attack' or 'something terrible is going to happen to me'.

The vicious circle of worrying thought and physical symptoms can be seen in the following diagram:



Sometimes we aren't fully aware that these frightening thoughts are flashing through our mind. They occur very quickly and often, just below our level of consciousness. It's important to try and recognise these thoughts and the role they play in creating and maintaining anxiety.

WAYS TO DISTRACT YOURSELF

You can only pay full attention to one thing at a time. Keeping yourself busy will leave no room for worry. Below are some useful hints on how to distract yourself. **Do not use distraction techniques to avoid dealing with your worries.** Go through the steps in the previous page before using the following distraction techniques:

- * **Physical Activity**: exercising, cleaning the house.
- * **Mental Games**: doing puzzles, crosswords, reciting a poem or a song, counting backwards from 100
- * **Focus On Your Surroundings**: concentrate on a specific detail of the world around you, for example, make words out of car number plates or guessing what people do for a living.
- * **Clear Your Head—Ready For Bed**: people often worry more at night so plan your days ahead.
 1. Set aside about 20 minutes after your evening meal.
 2. Sit in a quiet room with a notebook and pencil and think about how the day has gone. Write down the things you achieved.
 3. Write down problem areas and anything you haven't finished. Write down the way you intend to tackle each of these and when you'll do so. **Don't do anything about them just now.**
 4. If you keep thinking about things on your list when you're in bed, remind yourself that you have already written down a plan for the worry.
 5. If it is a **new** worry, **get out of bed** and add it to your planning list. Tell yourself that bed is not the place to worry and that you will look at it closely the following day.
- * **Box In Your Worries**: Set aside a regular half an hour every day and worry as much as you like during this "worry time". If you start to worry at any other time, postpone it until "worry time" (write it on your notepad if you want) and refocus on what you had been doing.
- * **Share Your Worries**: worries do not survive well outside our heads. Talking with a friend can help you see the bigger picture and help with finding possible solutions or planning actions.

- * **PANIC ATTACKS**: sometimes anxiety can take the form of a panic attack. This is the rapid build-up of overwhelming sensations such as a pounding (and sometimes irregular) heartbeat, feeling faint, sweating, nausea, chest pains, breathing discomfort, feelings of losing control, shaky limbs and legs turning to jelly. It can make people afraid that they are going mad, blacking out or having a heart attack. They may be convinced they are going to die during the attack, making this a terrifying experience.

Panic attacks may sometimes occur for no reason and people may not be able to understand why. They may feel as if their mind has gone totally out of control. There is a more detailed section on Panic Attacks later in this booklet.

- * **HEALTH PROBLEMS**: Long-term anxiety is bad for your health. It can weaken your immune system, lowering your resistance to infection. Increased blood pressure can cause heart or kidney problems and contribute to the chances of having a stroke.

You may also experience digestive difficulties, along with other health problems. Depression and anxiety often appear together, to the extent that doctors sometimes treat them in the same way.

- * **IMPACT ON WORK, LEISURE & RELATIONSHIPS**: You may find it difficult to hold down a job, develop or maintain good relationships, or simply to enjoy leisure time. Sleep problems may further aggravate anxious feelings and reduce your ability to cope.

For some people anxiety becomes so overwhelming that it takes over their lives. They may experience severe or very frequent panic attacks for no apparent reason. Some may develop a phobia about going out and about, or may withdraw from contact with people, even their family and friends. Others have obsessive thoughts or repetitious behaviour, such as washing their hands. Problems of this kind are known as panic or anxiety disorders.

HOW CAN I MANAGE MY ANXIETY?

There are lots of things that you can do to reduce your anxiety to a more manageable level. Taking action may make you feel more anxious at first, but facing up to anxiety and how it makes you feel, can be the first step in breaking the cycle of fear and insecurity. It's important to remember how much better you will feel when you can begin to relax, take control and lead a fuller life.

- * **CONTROLLING THE SYMPTOMS**: they can be controlled by breathing and relaxation techniques and by replacing distressing, negative thoughts with positive, peaceful ones. These can be learnt from books, video and audio tapes, through counselling, attending relaxation classes and on the internet. Contact your GP for help accessing either individual or group session help.

- * **ASSERTIVENESS TRAINING**: learning how to handle difficult situations and to stand up for yourself can make you feel more confident and, therefore, more relaxed. Some people find that learning self-defence makes them feel safer. To find out about classes, ask at your local library.

- * **COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES**: these can help you to relax, sleep better and deal with the symptoms of anxiety. Yoga, meditation, aromatherapy, massage, reflexology, herbalism and hypnotherapy are some of the methods people have found helpful.

- * **HEALTHY LIVING**: Avoid stimulants such as coffee, cigarettes and alcohol which can promote anxiety. Eating a healthy diet and getting plenty of sleep can also make a big difference to your ability to cope with stress. Eating well and regularly may also have a very beneficial effect, because unstable blood sugar levels can lead to jittery feelings that contribute to your state of mind.

- * **The calculator**: Ask yourself “**How much worry is this worth?**” Make sure you don't spend more worry on your problem than it's worth. You need your time and energy for more important things. Maybe some time you would have spent worrying could be used for **doing** something instead.

When you have thought about these 3 points, decide if your worry seems unimportant. If so, try to stop worrying and distract yourself by keeping physically active, go for a walk, clean the house, do a crossword, sing songs, count backwards from 100, make words out of car number plates.

Sometimes your attention may drift, however, if this happens, say to yourself that you have done all you can for now. Remind yourself that there is nothing more that can be done today and shift your attention back to your task.

2. **The Unlikely**: A lot of worriers ask “**What if...**” questions. All kinds of terrible things could happen today or tomorrow but most things are very unlikely. Tackling existing problems is hard enough. Do not waste time, energy and happiness on problems that do not exist.

3. **The Uncertain**: Often we don't know how something will turn out. Many things we worry about have not yet happened and we can only take action once we know what has happened. For example, worrying that you may have failed a test or exam is not going to improve the results. It is only once the results are released that you can decide what, if anything, needs to be done.

4. **The Uncontrollable**: We have no control over many of the things we worry about. For example, worrying that you are getting older does not change the fact that in a day's time you will be a day older. This will be the case even if you worry as hard as you can.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF: Remember, supporting someone else through emotional problems can be very rewarding, but can also be frustrating. Make sure you look after yourself and have a break, especially if you are living with the person.

Their anxiety may stop them from doing things, but it shouldn't stop you as well. You should not feel guilty about doing things on your own. If you are enjoying life you will find it easier to be loving and supportive.

WHY WORRY?

Useful worry prompts action - All other worry is pointless

Is It Worth Worrying About?

There are 4 things that are not worth worrying about, but they account for a lot of our worries: the unimportant, the unlikely, the uncertain and the uncontrollable. Ban these from your life and you will worry less:

1. **The Unimportant** - when you find yourself worrying, start to question yourself instead. Ask yourself “**How important is the thing that I am worrying about?**”

There are 3 points to help you answer this question:

- * **The 5-year rule:** Ask yourself “**Will this matter in 5 years time?**” This is a way of looking at your worry from a long-term point of view. You can view your worries in different ways; will this still be a concern in a week/month/year?” You can then prioritise any important worries.
- * **The measuring rod:** “**Where on a scale of bad experiences is the thing I'm worried about?**” Think about a very bad experience you have had. How does your current worry feel when compared with this?

- * **EXERCISE:** exercise uses up the adrenalin and other hormones that are produced under stress, allowing muscles to relax. Also, certain brain chemicals are released during exercise, which can enhance your mood. It can also change the focus from your mind to your body.

Walking, swimming and cycling allow you to be active at your own pace and you can do them alone or in company. If you don't want to exercise in front of others, do it at home; dance, stretch or move along to music or a video.

- * **TALKING:** It can help your feelings to talk to a friend or family member about what's making you anxious. You may find that they have encountered a similar problem and can help talk you through it.

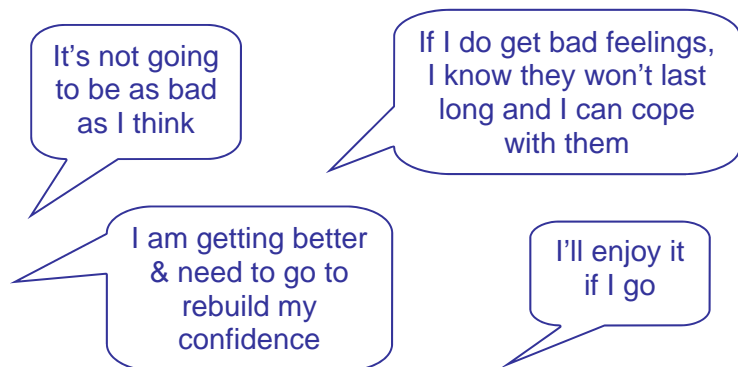
If you would rather speak to someone impartial who you don't know, or find it hard to speak to people face to face, see the back page of this booklet for details of organisations you can call anonymously.

- * **WRITE A WORRY LIST:** try writing a list of what's troubling you. People often become worried about events that are quite improbable. You might find it difficult to see just how unlikely something is, when you are preoccupied with it.

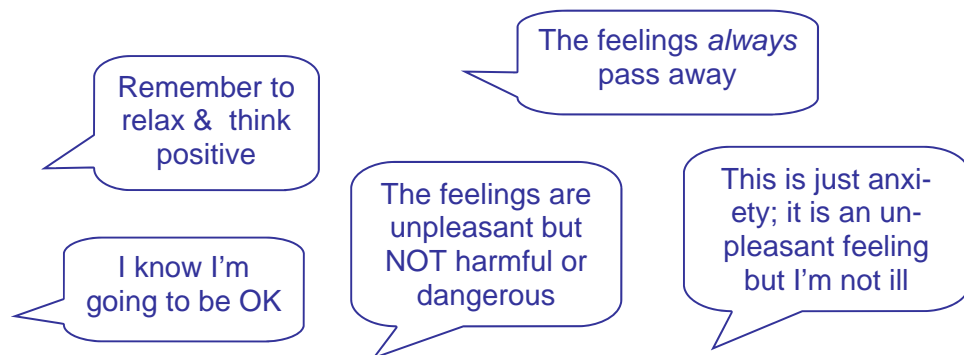
If you keep a list for a few weeks of what you're concerned about, you might find it helpful to go back to your list a few weeks later and cross things off that didn't happen. This could reassure you that worries do just dissolve. Some people find it helps to tear up, burn or destroy their list.

POSITIVE STATEMENTS FOR COPING WITH ANXIETY

* **PREPARATION FOR GOING OUT**



* **COPING WHEN YOU'RE OUT**



* **PRAISE FOR YOURSELF**



HOW CAN OTHERS HELP?

* **YOUR GP:**

Medication: Medication can't tackle the root cause of the problem, but it can bring some relief until other forms of treatment can be put in place. Because of the problems of dependency with some medication, your GP will normally only prescribe these for a short period and at a low dosage. Some of the side effects include feeling sluggish, being unable to concentrate and not caring about anything. If extreme worrying turns into a state of continuous anxiety, your GP may prescribe antidepressants or minor tranquillisers.

Talking Treatments: These can help you to understand and deal with the root causes of your anxiety and to find strategies for coping. They have proved to have longer-lasting benefits than other treatments for anxiety problems. Ask your GP if there is a practice counsellor available, If not, if your GP refers you, you may be able to access talking treatment on the NHS.

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is a short-term therapy which encourages you to develop positive ways of thinking and to construct strategies for managing anxiety so you feel in control.

- * **FRIENDS AND FAMILY:** it can often be difficult for friends and family to help people with anxiety problems. People with severe anxiety often feel very negative about themselves. Keep reminding them of their good points. Being supportive can be a question of finding the right balance. You need to accept the person as they are and not push them into situations that are beyond them. Yet, at the same time, you should avoid being too protective and assist them to overcome small challenges. In this way, they can build up their self-confidence and feel in control.

If someone is distressed, they may need reassurance that it's OK to cry. Letting out feelings can relieve tension. Laughter is relaxing; helping your friend to have fun may be one of the most useful things you can do for them. Sometimes physical closeness, such as a touch or a hug, can be very comforting.