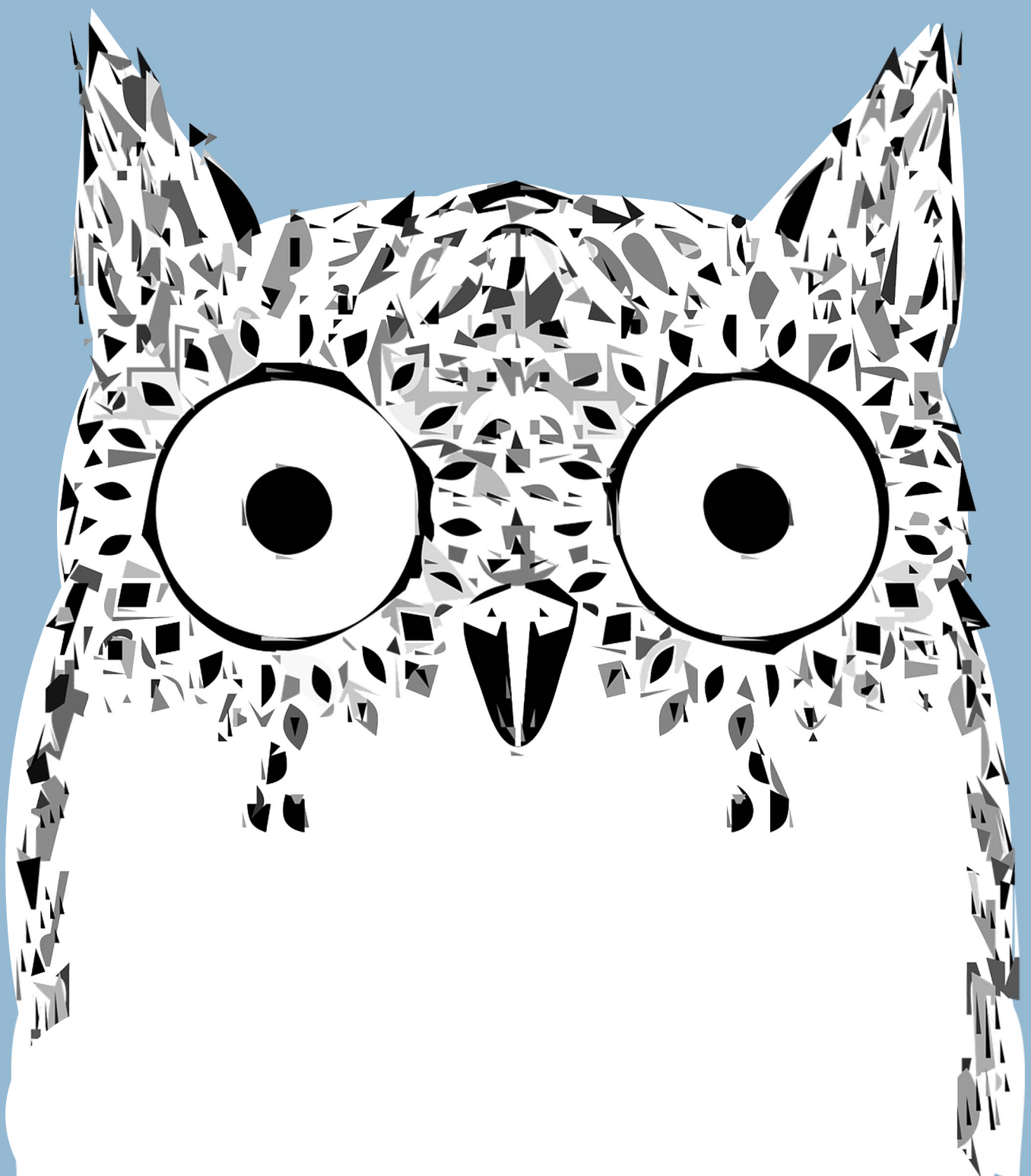


# Managing Anxiety

Virtual self-help guide



**Anxiety is not an uncommon problem. Approximately one in ten people will meet with their GP each year to discuss issues related to anxiety.**

**There are many different factors that can lead to increased levels of anxiety but two of the main components are the amount of stress you are under, (which for a student can be quite significant at varying points throughout the year) and your own personality type, developed both biologically and through learnt behaviour.**

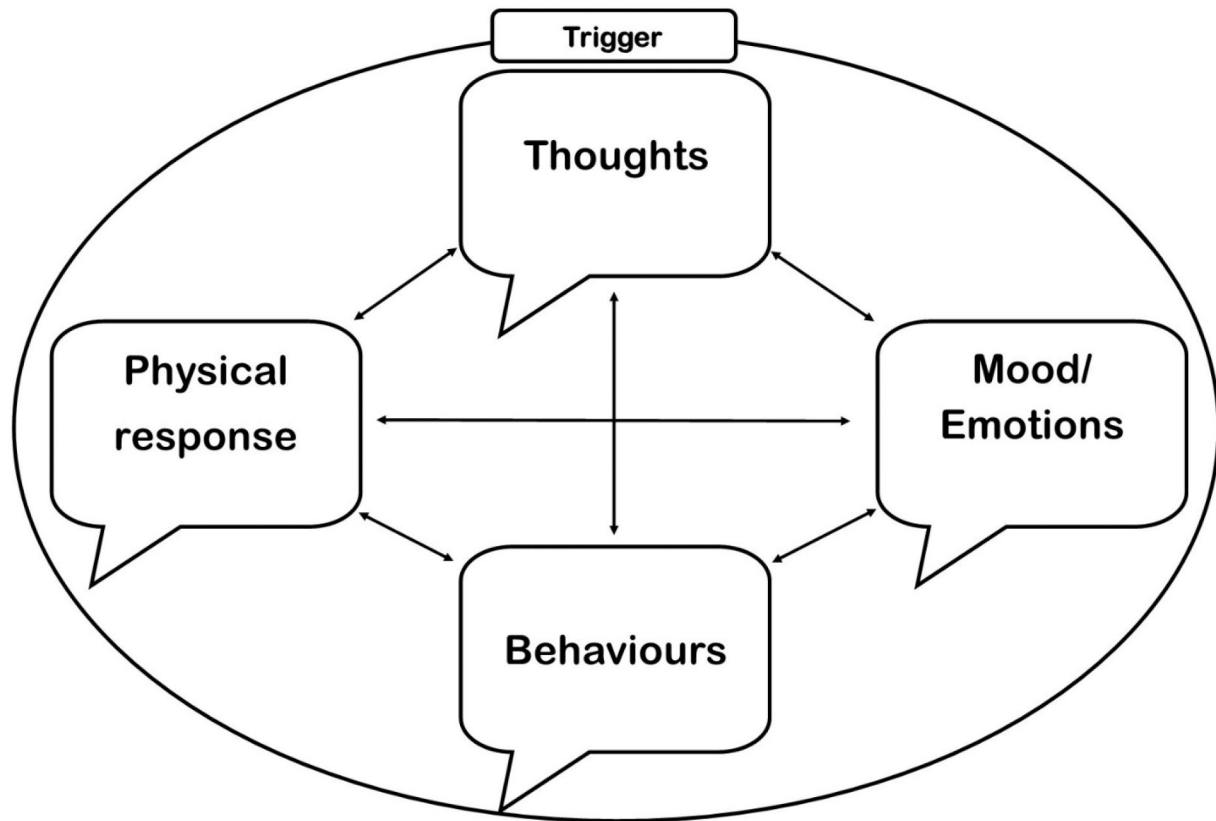
**Anxiety is a completely normal response to a situation we may see as threatening or frightening. The problem comes when the level of anxiety is no longer rational in comparison to the event. Unfortunately, anxiety can very quickly and easily manifest into a problem for someone.**

**Over the next few pages will be some useful tips, suggestions and resources on managing anxiety.**

A blue-toned landscape with mountains and clouds, serving as a background for the bottom half of the page. The mountains are silhouetted against a lighter blue sky with soft, white clouds. The overall color palette is various shades of blue, from deep navy to light sky blue.

# Understanding Anxiety

**Below is the Anxiety Maintenance Cycle  
(i.e. Anxiety Hot Cross Bun):**



**This cycle demonstrates what happens to us when we are experiencing anxiety in response to a triggering event.**

**First of all, we begin to have certain thoughts which are usually fairly unhelpful patterns of thinking i.e. “I’m going to make a mistake and look silly”. We then begin to experience emotions such as fear and panic, and physical symptoms such as heart palpitations, sweating and the need to use the loo. This then impacts what we do as a result and we may display behaviour such as isolating ourselves or avoiding the situation entirely.**

**The arrows in the diagram indicate that each one effects the other. So if one gets worse, so do the others. However, similar to this, if one eases and improves, so will the others.**

# Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety (examples)

Thoughts	Mood/Emotions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>` I can't do this'</li><li>` I am going to make a fool of myself'</li><li>` Everyone thinks badly of me'</li><li>I have upset that person'</li><li>`They just think I'm stupid'</li><li>`I am going to pass out'</li><li>`There's something wrong with me'</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Fear</li><li>Panic</li><li>Low mood</li><li>Frustration/Anger</li><li>Shame</li><li>Guilt</li><li>Embarrassment</li></ul>
Physical Responses	Behaviour
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Heart palpitations</li><li>Increased need to use the toilet</li><li>Sweating</li><li>Nausea</li><li>Headaches/Dizziness</li><li>Fatigue</li><li>Changes to sleeping/eating</li><li>Panic attacks</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Avoidance</li><li>Overcompensation in other areas</li><li>Using alcohol/drugs</li><li>Isolation</li><li>Agitation/pacing/unable to relax</li><li>Safety-seeking (even if unhelpful)</li><li>Withdrawal</li><li>Poor self-care</li></ul>



# Unhelpful Thinking Patterns

**Unhelpful thinking patterns** (sometimes referred to as **negative thinking styles**) are the things which pass through our minds when we are faced with a challenging situation or trigger event. Quite often, these are natural thoughts, beliefs and predictions but they are not always accurate, rational or helpful to us. See below for some examples.

**Mind reading** – Assuming we know what others are thinking . We are more likely to be assuming they are thinking badly of us.

**Fortune telling/jumping to conclusions** – Predicting or assuming we know the future or outcome of the situation, where it usually results in something awful/unpleasant.

**Personalising** – Believing bad or negative things are happening as a result of something we have done. Also known as blaming.

**Black or white thinking** – Things will either be horrendous, or ok - ignoring the possibility of a middle ground/grey area.

**Tunnel vision** – Only focussing on the negative things, even when surrounded by positive or happy experiences/comments/conversation.

**Overgeneralising** – If things don't go to plan in one area of our lives, we assume we are terrible at everything else.

**Catastrophising** – Blowing things out of proportion and losing perspective.

**Critical-self** – Picking ourselves apart and finding fault in ourselves, even if we have accomplished something good.

**Compare and despair** - Constantly comparing ourselves to other people and feeling upset when we believe we don't measure up.

**Any of these sound familiar? If so, this is perfectly normal. We all fall into the trap of unhelpful thinking patterns, but the first step to challenging them is to notice when we are thinking this way.**



# Coping Strategies

## Distraction

Whatever it is that takes your attention away from the triggering event temporarily is a distraction. Some examples are:

- Talking to a friend
- watching a movie or listening to music
- Physical activity/exercise
- Looking out of the window and finding an object that starts with each letter of the alphabet.

Yes the problem will still be there, however distraction is a temporary escape which helps ease some of the emotions and physical sensations that come with anxiety or low mood etc. The idea being that once these symptoms have eased you can then go back to the problem and be able to think slightly more rationally about it.

## Breathing Exercises

The purpose breathing exercise is to try and reduce some of the unpleasant physical symptoms that tend to be associated with feeling anxious, low in mood, stressed etc.

One of the most widely used technique is the 4-4-4 exercise. This is when you breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, and then breathe out for 4 seconds. By counting, your mind will be focussed on this rather than your anxiety. It's better to practice this even when not feeling anxious as it is a skill to learn. Your thoughts will wonder, and that's ok, you just need to bring it back to your breathing and the counting. You can do this for as long as you need to. This is also a technique for when experiencing panic attacks.

## Validating feelings

Trying to fight feelings and emotions can often intensify them. Beating yourself up for feeling a particular way will make you feel even worse. For example, don't think of a polar bear on a bus – you're thinking of it right? Trying to fight thoughts and feelings exaggerates them.

By validating and accepting the way you are feeling as a rational response to the situation, the intensity of your feelings will be alleviated.



## Challenging negative thinking styles

Ask yourself the following:

- Am I focusing on only the negatives that can come from the situation rather than some of the positives?
- Am I jumping to conclusions?
- Is my thinking fact or opinion?
- Is there any evidence to suggest what I am thinking is true?
- Am I assuming I know what others are thinking?
- Am I exaggerating the situation?
- Am I thinking in only black and white? Is there a middle ground?
- Is there another way to think about this situation?
- Am I minimising my ability to cope or manage?
- What would I say to my best friend right now? What would my best friend say if they knew what I was thinking?
- What are the costs and benefits to me of thinking in this way?
- Realistically, what is the worst that can happen and how will it affect my life?
- How will this all seem to me in a week's time/month's time/year's time?
- Having considered the above, what is the most helpful thing I can do next?

## Worry time

Try allocating time to worry. This can be particularly helpful if you spend a lot of time sitting alone ruminating on thoughts.

Instead of resisting the urge to worry about things, or trying to stop it all together (which is actually quite unrealistic), allocate time each day (maybe 30 mins) where you can purposely devote time to focussing on those worrying thoughts, and perhaps even look at problem solving.

Try writing the thoughts down when you have them to re-visit in worry time. Sometimes, you may find that when it reaches the worry time, the issue is not as intense or catastrophised as when you originally thought of it.

At the end of the allocated time, a breathing exercise can help to bring you back to the present.

## Looking after yourself/Self-care

When you are worrying about things or feeling low in mood, self-care can easily go out of the window and can be much harder than normal to do.

Getting enough sleep, eating properly and regularly, exercising, spending time with others, relaxing, getting fresh air – these are just some of the fundamentals that keep us feeling well. All these things will affect our concentration, energy levels, memory and motivation.

## Positive self-talk

Practicing positive self-talk is a technique for breaking negative thinking habits. It involves replacing negative thoughts and beliefs with positive ones. Examples include:

- I can do this
- I have managed situations like this before
- If I do get bad feelings, I know that I can cope
- The feelings are unpleasant but they are not going to harm me
- I will feel better once I have done it
- It's natural to feel this way
- Others will be feeling this way too

Constantly having negative or derogatory thoughts about ourselves is an easy pattern to fall into, but unfortunately we cannot escape our own thoughts. Therefore we need to be our own cheerleaders, but it is going to take practise and will be hard at first.

## Setting a routine and goal setting

People who are experiencing problems with their mental health more than likely have fallen out of a routine as a result.

Work on planning your days and physically writing it down – the night before is better so you can wake up and just follow your plan.

Your plan needs to be realistic, especially if feeling low or anxious.

If a task is hard (even if it is something you can usually do), break it down and then break it down again. Small manageable tasks are important. If a goal is too big, you are more likely to not reach it and end up feeling worse.



## **Grounding techniques**

Grounding is a technique that can help someone be 'brought back' to the present. It can help when feeling distressed, particularly when feeling unreal or detached from reality.

A good technique is to use the 5-4-3-2-1 technique with all senses. It does not matter in which order but for example, 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste.

## **Keeping a diary or journal**

A mood diary can be very helpful when you are not sure why you feel a certain way or what causes it. Jot down every time you have a change in mood (even a good change), what was happening at the time, time/day, who was around you, and how intense it was. This can help you identify a pattern to your emotions

Another useful diary technique is to write down worries. A bit like with worry time, it can help to write down how you feel to address later so you can try and problem solve. It can also help to write down negative thoughts so that you can actively try to change them to positive ones.

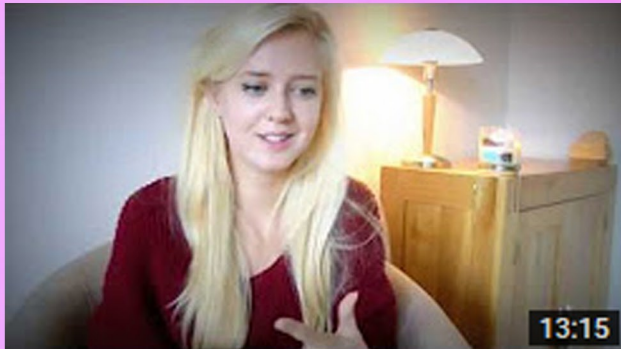
## **Open up and seek support**

Opening up can be extremely helpful as it allows you to get things off your chest and rationalise them in the process.

Whether it is a friend, family member, health professional or academic, try speaking to someone. There is a huge range of University services, support services and self-help material available to help you begin to manage your anxiety better.

If you don't know who to speak to, try coming to a drop-in session at the Student Wellbeing Centre or consider your GP.

# Useful Resources



**Click on the video to listen to Lucy talk about her personal experiences with anxiety, and what she learnt from a course of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Lucy explains how you can put some of the tips and advice she learnt into action.**



**In this Ted Talk, Jordan talks about living with high-functioning anxiety, and although she appears confident to others in high pressure situations, on a day-to-day basis, she can find some things extremely difficult.**



**Anxiety UK works to relieve and support those living with anxiety and anxiety-based depression by providing information, support and understanding. Click [HERE](#) to access the website.**



**Click [HERE](#) to read the MIND guide on 'Anxiety and Panic attacks'.**



**Click [HERE](#) to access a self-help guide by Moodjuice which you can print and work through in your own time.**

# Useful Apps



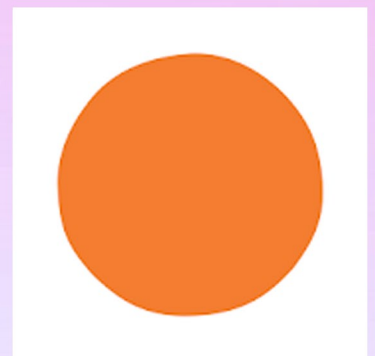
**SAM: Self-help for anxiety management (free)** - Users of the this app are encouraged to build their own Anxiety Toolkit of SAM resources that they find helpful and to draw on this for regular practice in managing situations that are associated with anxiety. Available in iOS and Android.

**7 Cups: Anxiety & Stress Chat (free)** – This app allows you to talk to trained active listeners who can offer you 24/7 emotional support when feeling sad, lonely or stressed. As well as this, the app offers new coping skills for you to learn. Optional in-app purchases available. Available on iOS and Android.



**CALM (free)** - It should come as no surprise that Calm is designed to help you be calm. With stunning backgrounds that you can stare at for ages, and a range of meditations, Calm provides a space for you to get away from it all, without having to go anywhere. Optional in-app purchases available. Available in iOS and Android.

**Headspace (free)** - Headspace is a comprehensive meditation app, with guided and unguided meditations to help you through all phases of your life. The free app offers ten sessions, however there is an optional in-app subscription which allows you to access may more hours of extra content. Available on iOS and Android.





# Drop-in:

Monday-Friday between 12-2pm  
Thursday (term-time) between 5-7pm

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