

Coping with anxiety

A young person's guide to understanding
and managing worry and anxiety



What you'll find in this workbook

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Introduction

As humans we all experience feelings of anxiety which can impact different areas of our lives. This workbook has been designed to help you learn about why humans experience anxiety and explore how anxiety looks and feels for you. The workbook will also focus on developing different ways of challenging anxiety and includes exercises and worksheets to practice these skills and techniques.

To help you develop your skills each session of the workbook will include a take-home task. There is no right or wrong answer to the tasks but we know that the more we practice something the more changes we notice.



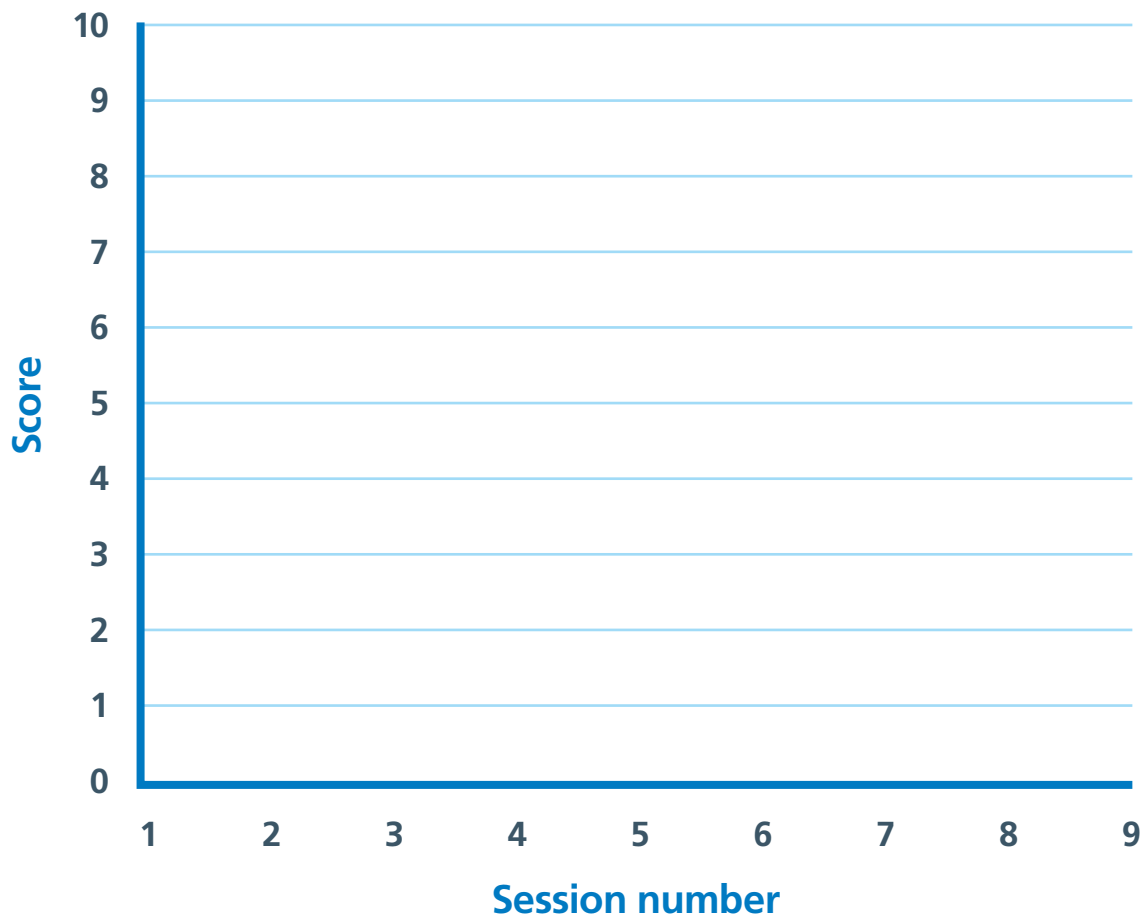
Exercise one: Complete the 'My Workbook Plan' below to plan when you are going to complete the take home tasks:

I'll start at this time...	I'll complete the tasks in this location...	I can talk to the below people if I need help or feel stuck...

Plotting on the graph

At the start of each session in this workbook there is a 0-10 rating scale to rate different areas over the past week including: your mood, college, friendships, home and anxiety. A score of 0 would indicate difficulties within this area and a score of 10 would indicate no difficulties within this area.

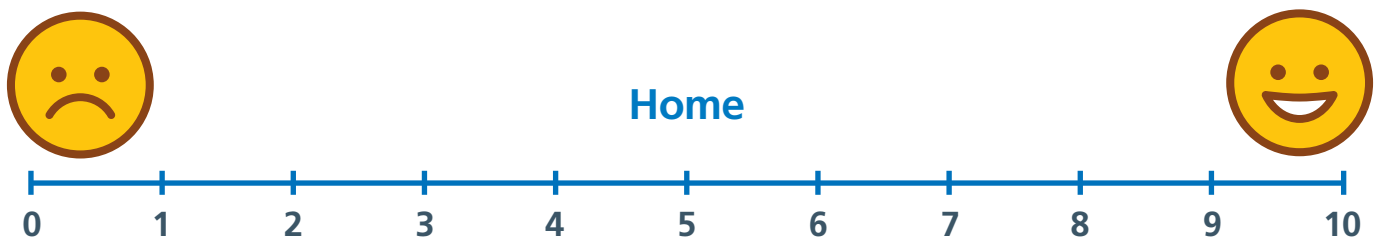
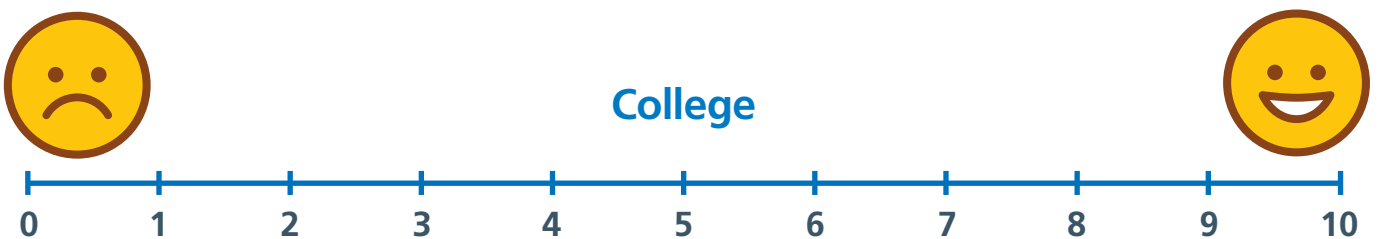
Using the below graph as an option you can plot your weekly anxiety 0-10 rating to create a visual representation of any changes throughout the sessions.



Session One: What is worry and anxiety?

How am I feeling today?

Out of 10 (10 being very happy and 0 being not happy at all) rate your mood and how you are feeling about school/college, friendships and home.



It is important that when starting this workbook we recognise that we all experience anxiety and worry at points during our lives; it can cause us to feel nervous, on edge or frightened and may occur more often in certain situations.



Exercise two: Describing anxiety

Anxiety can look different for everybody therefore take a moment to use the space below to make a note of how you would describe anxiety for you; this could include things such as different words, emotions, images or colours.

Anxiety can be an unpleasant experience which can include difficult thoughts, feelings and physical sensations. Throughout this workbook we will look more closely at each of these areas however let's begin by looking at what role anxiety plays in keeping us safe and when this can become unhelpful.

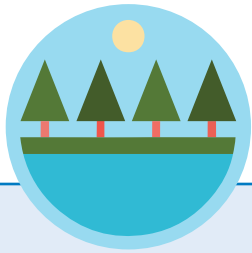


Exercise three:

Let's take a look at some examples

1. James is walking next to a lake, he feels anxious that he is too close to the edge and may fall in, therefore, he moves away to a place of safety to reduce this risk.
2. Charlotte is due to see her friends at the weekend, however, this means taking a bus journey to meet them. Going on the bus makes Charlotte feel anxious, therefore, she has decided not to go and stays at home instead.

Consider the differences between the two examples and what role anxiety is playing for James and Charlotte. Is anxiety being helpful to them in these situations or has it become unhelpful and impacting their life?



Take home task: Triggers to your anxiety

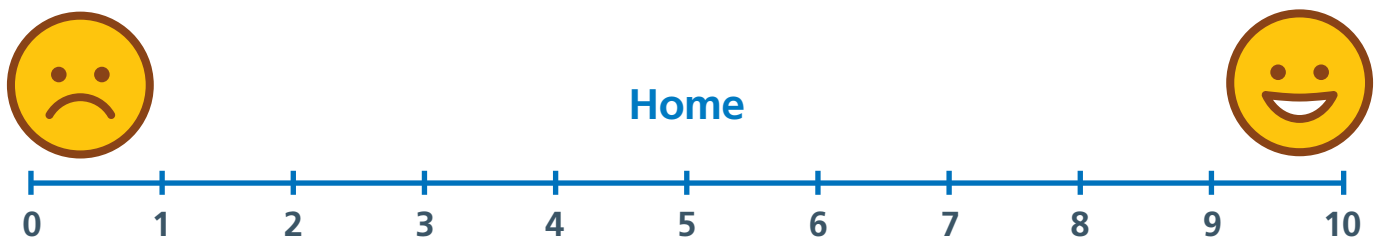
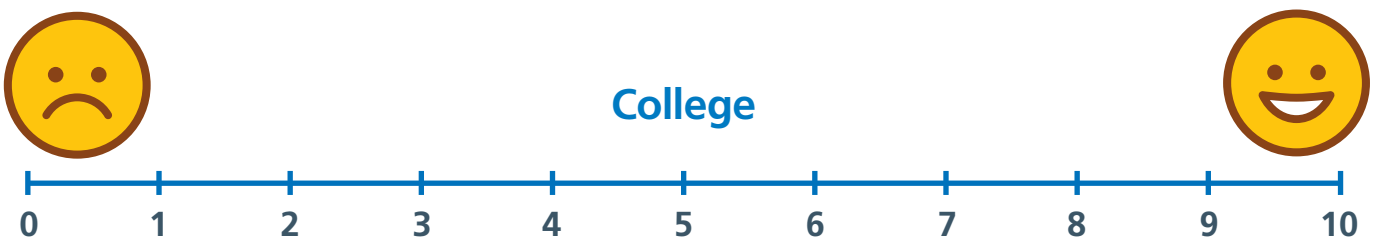
- Can you identify situations where you have experienced feelings of anxiety or worry.
- These may be times when anxiety has kept you safe or times when it has been unhelpful and has had a negative impact on your life.

What happened?	Where?	When?	Who was I with?

Session Two: The vicious cycle of anxiety

How am I feeling today?

Out of 10 (10 being very happy and 0 being not happy at all) rate your mood and how you are feeling about school/college, friendships and home.



The vicious cycle of anxiety

The cycle of anxiety is a way of breaking down the thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and behaviours which occur when we are in anxiety provoking situations. It can be a helpful tool to explore how the different areas are linked and how we can often feel 'stuck' in the cycle which maintains our feelings of anxiety.

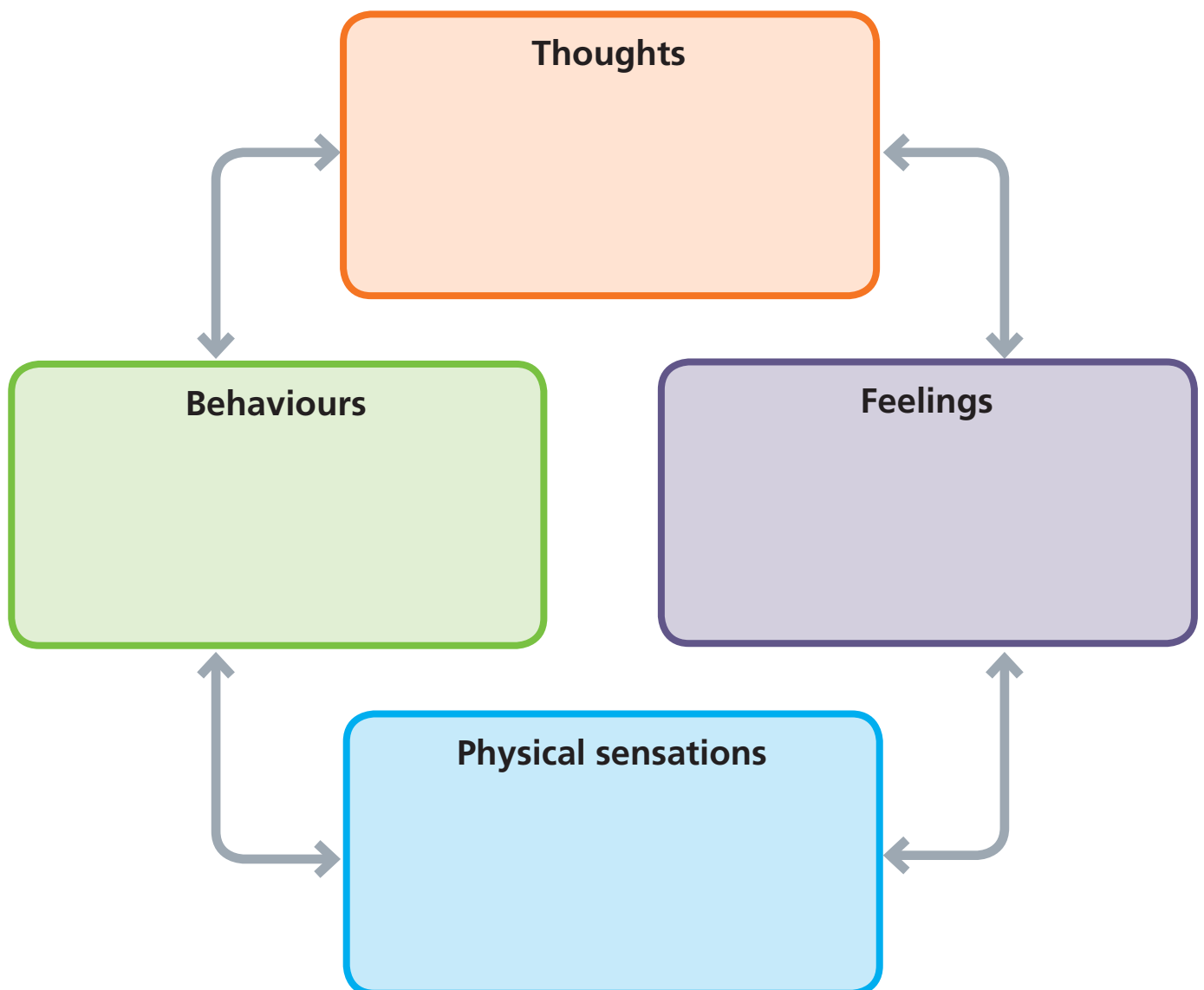
It is important to remember the vicious cycle of anxiety can look different for everybody.

Lets look at an example:

Sam is due to stand up in the front of the class to present a piece of his work. He suddenly thinks "I can't do it, I'll forget something and mess it all up." He starts to feel shaky, tense and scared. Sam's behaviour changes as they pace up and down the corridor before the presentation. During the presentation Sam talked really fast to finish it sooner and did not look up from their notes.



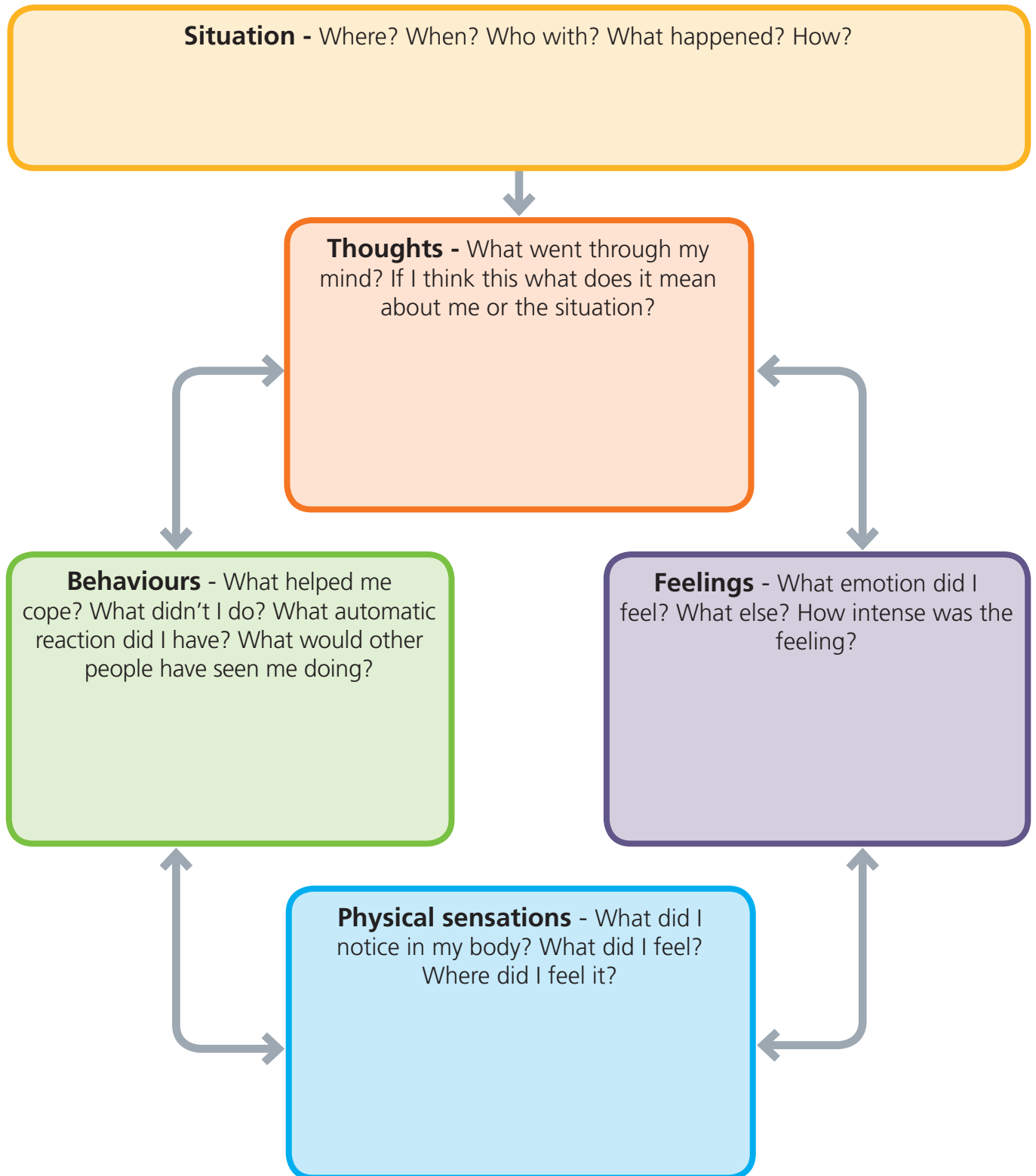
Exercise four: Using Sam's scenario identify the different thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and behaviours they were experiencing.



Let's look at your anxiety cycle more closely...



Exercise five: Take a moment to think about a situation where you felt anxious or experienced someone being anxious.



Do you notice any links between the different areas?
Where could the cycle be broken?



Take home task:

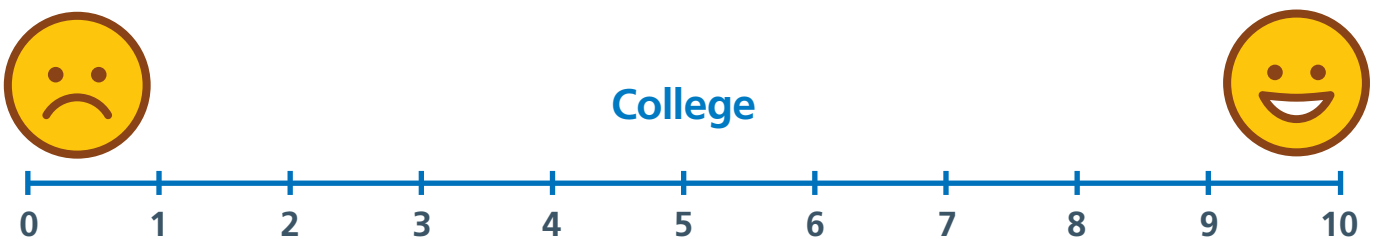
Using your anxiety cycle can you identify any other thoughts, feelings, physical sensations or behaviours which you experience, it might be helpful to consider different situations to the one used in your cycle and see if there are any similarities or differences.

Thoughts	Feelings	Physical sensations	Behaviours

Session Three: What happens in the body?

How am I feeling today?

Out of 10 (10 being very happy and 0 being not happy at all) rate your mood and how you are feeling about school/college, friendships and home.



When we were cavemen and women we may have been faced with lots of dangerous situations that might threaten our life. Our brain wants to make sure we stay alive so has had to develop a quick way to respond to danger. This is called fight, flight or freeze response.



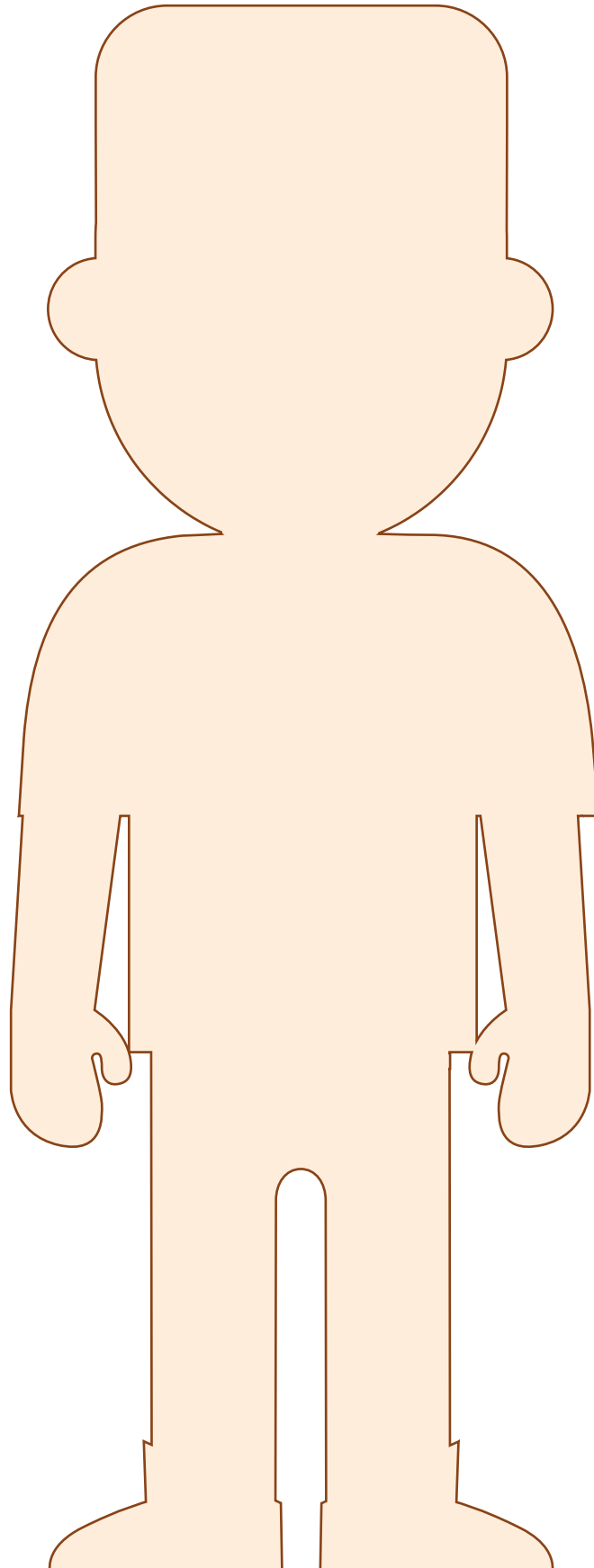
The fight, flight or freeze system is like our internal alarm system that detects threat and responds quickly with lots of physiological changes in the body. These changes happen automatically and are outside of our control. At times it needs to be this way (for example when a car is racing towards us) but it can become difficult when our alarm system is firing when there is no immediate threat or danger. Sometimes our own thoughts and body sensations can be enough to set our alarm off.



Exercise six: Note down here things that you think might trigger your fight / flight / freeze response.

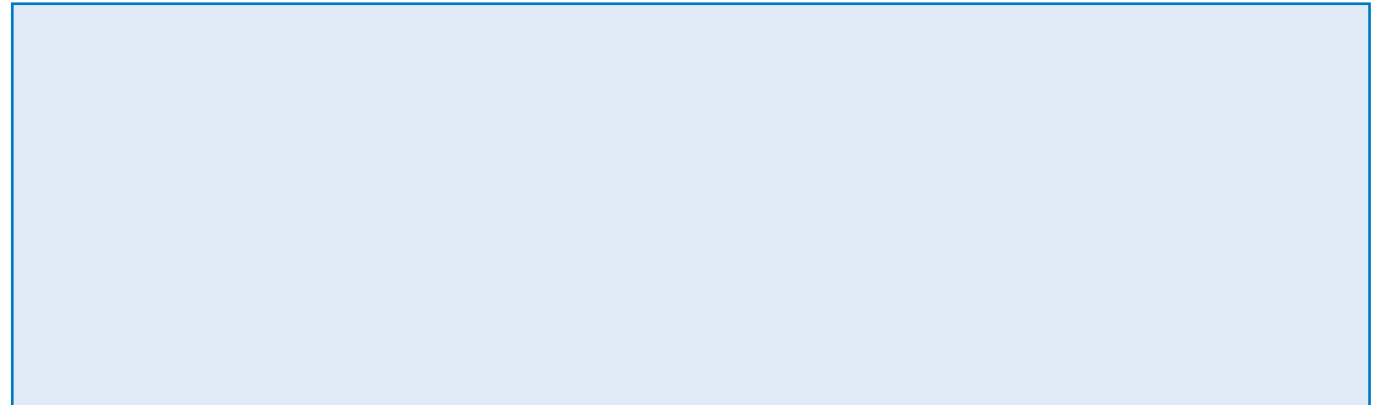


Exercise seven: Use the body map below to label the physical symptoms you experience when feeling worried or anxious. Use arrows to identify where on your body you feel these sensations.





Exercise eight: These physical symptoms we experience when anxious can be easily explained by how our body reacts to the fight / flight / freeze response. Check out these interesting facts below. Are there any that surprise you?



Head dizzy / light headed

Result of our faster breathing.

Breathe fast and shallow

Helps us take in more oxygen which is then transported around the blood system. Sometimes experience a choking feeling.

Stomach churns

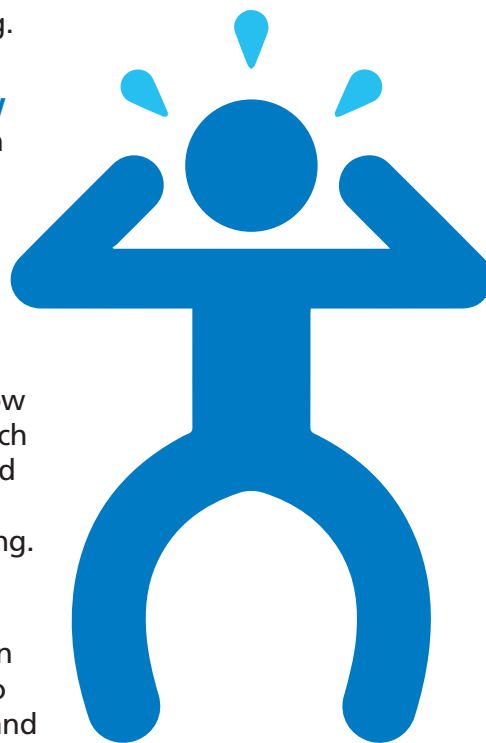
Adrenaline reduces blood flow and relaxes muscles in stomach and intestines (blood diverted to limb muscles) causing nausea, butterflies or churning.

Muscles tense

Blood containing vital oxygen and glucose energy, is sent to the big muscles of the arms and legs - ready for fight or escape. Can also cause aches and pains.

Brain hijacked

Thoughts race which makes it hard to think clearly and rationally. Feelings of being 'unreal' or detached.



Eyes widen

Allows more light in - improves (or blurs) vision.

Mouth dries

Caused by narrowing of the blood vessels.

Heart beats faster and palpitations

Blood pressure and pulse increase as the heart pumps more blood to the muscles, allowing us to run away or attack.

Body heats and sweats

A side effect of all the speeded up systems is that the body rapidly heats. Sweating allows the body to cool again, and to become more slippery to allow escape.

Hands tingle - legs tremble ('jelly legs')

Blood is diverted to large muscles, and small blood vessels constrict, causing tingling, trembling or numbness.

Bladder relaxes

Inner sphincter muscle relaxes so we might feel urge to pass urine. Outer sphincter remains under conscious control (except in rare terror situations).



Take home task: Exploring my physical symptoms

Use the diary below to record any physical sensations of anxiety you experience this week.

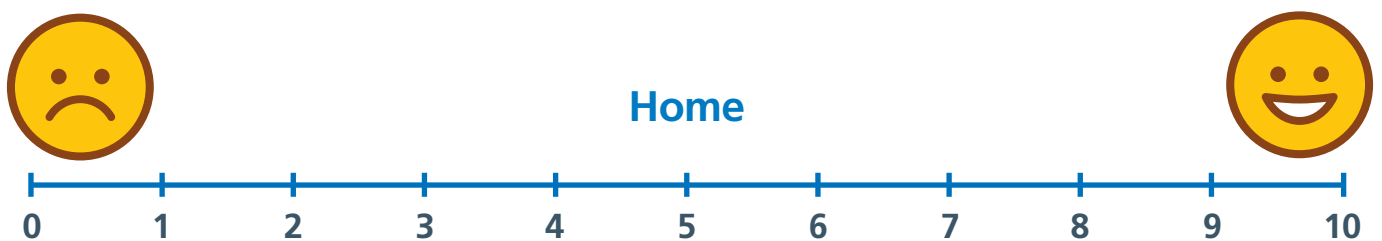
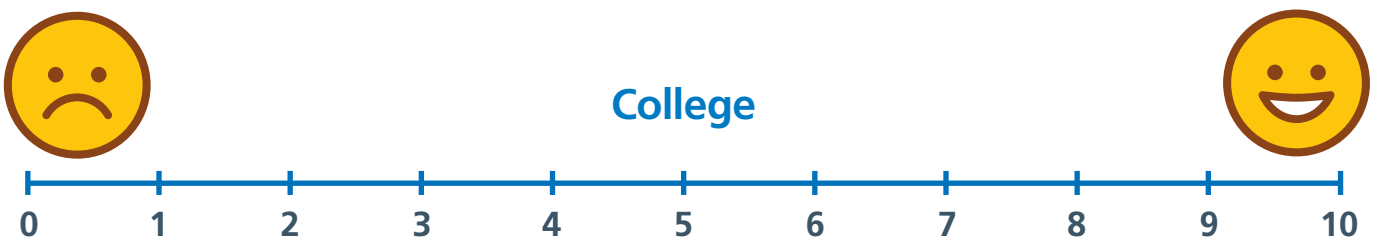
1. Try to record close to the time you notice the sensation, so that you don't forget.
2. Note down the day or time.
3. Note down or draw how it felt. Where did you feel the sensation?
4. Reflect on this – did it pass? Try to reassure yourself that this is normal reaction to an automatic system in our body. Your body is just doing its job and ensuring you are safe!

Day/time	Where did you feel this? Where on your body did you feel this sensation? What word, colour or image would I use to describe this physical sensation?	How did I feel? What word, colour or image would I use to describe this physical sensation?	What might be the physiological cause? Use the session information to consider the physiological causes for these sensations

Session Four: Unhelpful thinking habits

How am I feeling today?

Out of 10 (10 being very happy and 0 being not happy at all) rate your mood and how you are feeling about school/college, friendships and home.



The first step to challenging our thoughts is being able to catch our unhelpful thoughts and examine them using our thinking brain.



Exercise nine: Take a look at one of your cycles that you mapped out for feelings of anxiety (in session two). Pick one example and focus on the thoughts box only.

Are these thoughts helpful or unhelpful? Why?

Thoughts can be tricky as we have so many of them and they happen automatically. We also tend to believe that because we think something it must be 100% true and a fact. When we look more closely at our thoughts we can notice some common unhelpful thinking styles.



Exercise ten: Take a look at the list on the next page and see if you can identify the unhelpful thinking styles that you might have experienced. Write them in the box below:



Take home task: Triggers to your anxiety

- Keep practicing catching your unhelpful thoughts by using the thought record on the next page.
- Identify if you are falling into any unhelpful thinking patterns.
- We will look at challenging your thoughts to gain a more balanced perspective later in the workbook therefore it may be helpful to continue to keep a thought record moving forwards to strengthen these skills.

Unhelpful thinking styles

Mind reading

When we assume that we know what others are thinking - usually about us.

Where is the evidence? Are these my own thoughts?

Prediction

We believe we know what is going to happen.

Ask myself "am I making predictions"?
How likely is it?

Compare and despair

When we see the good in others but only the negative in ourselves.

What would be a more balanced way of looking at this?

Critical self

Self-criticism, putting our self down, see mistakes as all our fault.

I'm being hard on myself, am I really responsible for the situation?

Black and white thinking

Believe things can only be one of two ways, good or bad, right or wrong.

Allow for grey areas. Widen my spectrum of beliefs.

Catastrophising

When we believe that the worst possible thing will happen.

Question myself - what is more likely to happen?

Mountains and molehills

When we exaggerate a negative outcome or minimise a positive one.

How would it appear to someone else?
Check out the bigger picture.

Emotional reasoning

Feeling anxious means there must be danger.
Feeling bad means things must be bad.

The feelings are a reaction to my thoughts - an automatic brain reflex.

Mental filter

When we see only the negative - we have our 'gloomy' specs on.

Am I only aware of the bad things? Take my 'gloomy' specs off and take a more realistic look.

Judgements

Judging things around us rather than describing what we actually see.

Try to find another perspective, an alternative way of seeing an event.

Key point!

Sometimes one thought can be an example of lots of different unhelpful thinking styles.

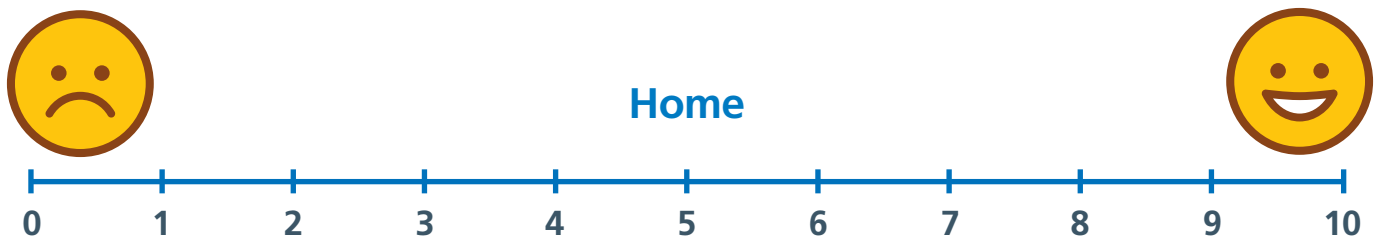
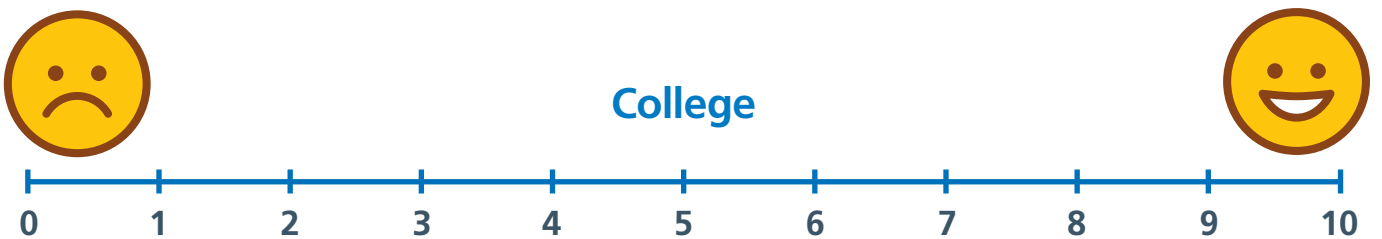
Thought record

Situation	Thought	Unhelpful thinking style	Balanced thought

Session Five: Building self-esteem and challenging thoughts

How am I feeling today?

Out of 10 (10 being very happy and 0 being not happy at all) rate your mood and how you are feeling about school/college, friendships and home.



Sometimes when we are experiencing difficult emotions we can have critical thoughts and say unkind things to ourselves. Critical thoughts are a bit like having a bully on our shoulder telling us horrible things and pointing out all of our mistakes.



Exercise eleven: Think of a time that a friend was upset or felt cross with themselves.

Write what happened here:

What did you say to your friend in this situation?



Often we can find it easier to say reassuring and kind things to other people however it can be harder to say them to ourselves. Using the 'what would I say to a friend' can be a helpful technique to use when looking at the unhelpful thinking styles and balanced thoughts in your thought record from Session 4.



Exercise twelve: Kindness role model

If this exercise felt like a hard one to do, perhaps think of someone in your life—either a friend, a family member or even a celebrity that you look up to as being kind and caring.

Who have you chosen as your 'kindness role model' and why?

What would your role model say in this situation?

Next time you feel cross or upset with yourself ask would I, or my kindness role model, speak to a friend in this way? If the answer is no then try not to speak to yourself in that way either. Use some of the examples you wrote above to help you **treat yourself as you would treat your friends.**

Balancing perspectives: Taking off the dark sunglasses

When we feel overwhelmed by our emotions it can feel like we are wearing dark sunglasses. These sunglasses filter out all the positive and make it hard for us to see the bigger picture. One way of challenging our thoughts is to get some balance and pay attention to the positives we might be overlooking.



Take home task: Gratitude diary

- To help us balance our perspectives, write at least one thing you are grateful for each day in the diary on the next page.

Gratitude diary

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

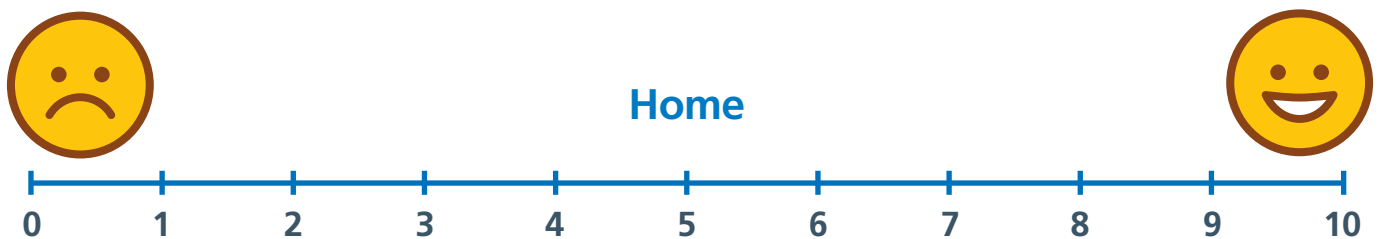
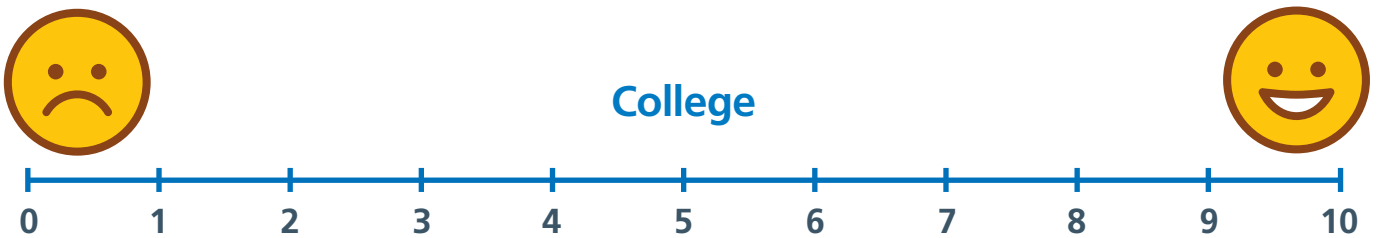
Saturday

Sunday

Session Six: Facing our fears

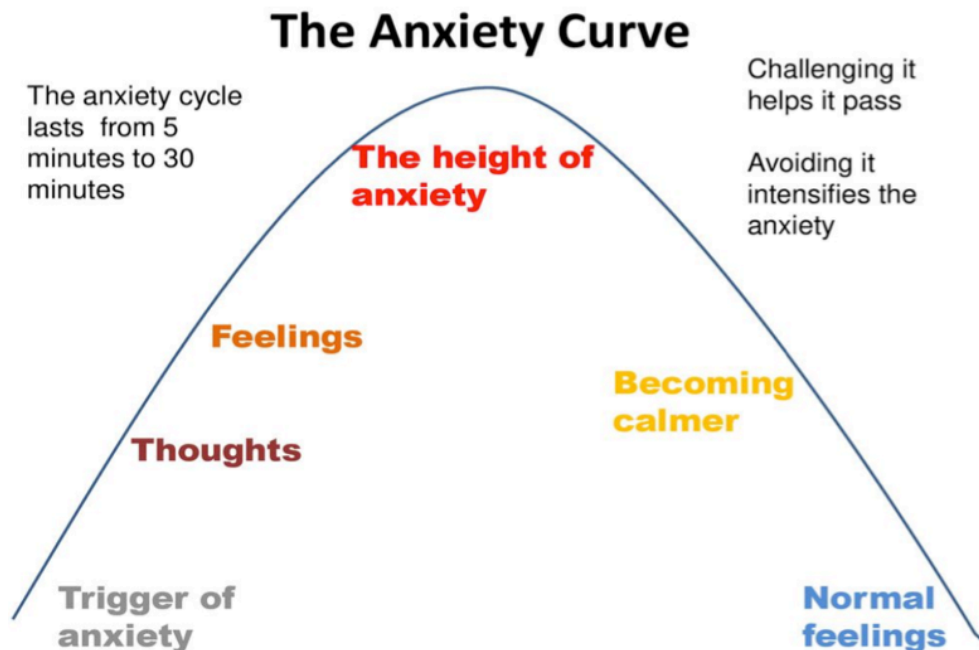
How am I feeling today?

Out of 10 (10 being very happy and 0 being not happy at all) rate your mood and how you are feeling about school/college, friendships and home.



As well as challenging unhelpful thoughts it also helpful to recognise the things anxiety can make us do, exploring this area is another way to begin breaking down the vicious cycle of anxiety.

How anxiety peaks:



Anxiety and avoidance: When our anxiety is at its peak we may have the urge to escape the situation (the flight part of our system is activated). If we do escape, we feel immediate relief but what would happen in the long run?

The more we avoid the things that make us feel anxious the harder it becomes to overcome anxiety. We need to gradually face our fears so that our alarm system learns that it doesn't need to go off!

One way of beginning to face our fears can be through the use of goal setting, using the sheet below begin to break down your overall goal into smaller steps.

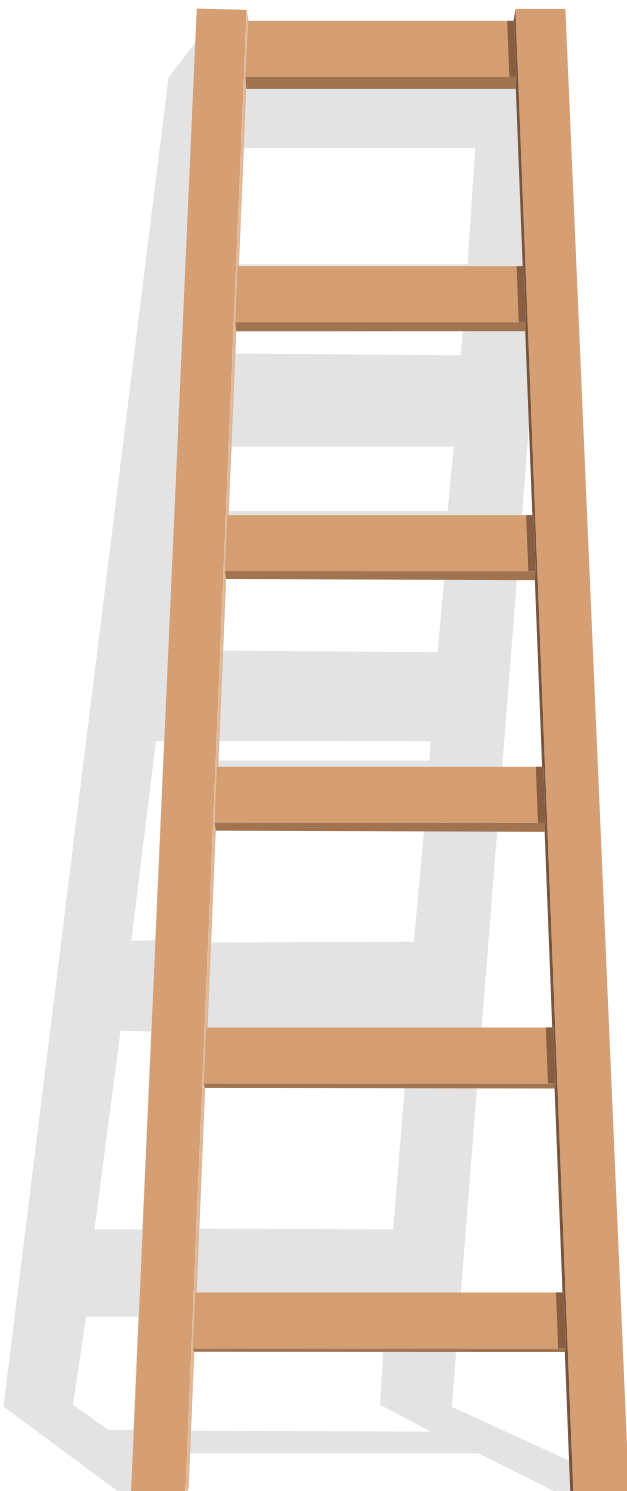


Exercise thirteen: Goal setting

The situation I am avoiding is:

My goal is:

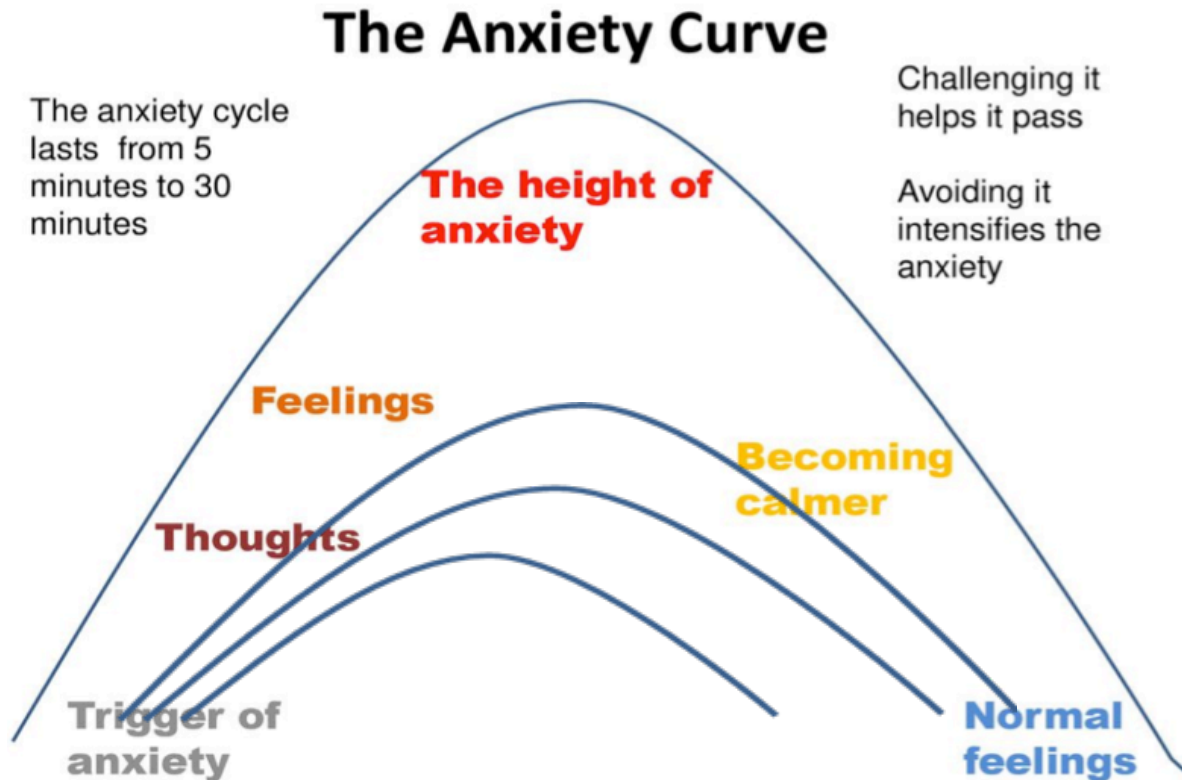
Write down the steps you can take to achieve your goal. When starting each step remember it's important to start slowly with something that gives you a bit of anxiety but not too much. To help you with this, give each step a rating from 0-10, where ten is very high anxiety and 0=no anxiety at all.



Step 10	
Step 9	
Step 8	
Step 7	
Step 6	
Step 5	
Step 4	
Step 3	
Step 2	
Step 1	

So what happens to the anxiety curve?

Through facing our fears and challenging anxiety in repeated small steps the feelings of anxiety begin to reduce each time.



Safety behaviours:

We have looked at how we can face our fears by no longer avoiding the things which feel anxiety provoking however alongside avoidance it is also important that we consider other things which we may use to make us feel more comfortable in anxiety provoking situations. These are often called 'safety behaviours' and can be the things that help anxiety in the short term but long term they can keep the vicious cycle of anxiety going.

Sophie is 16 years old and has been finding it difficult to be in large crowds, she is only going shopping or into busy places when she is with her mum as she begins to feel anxious. Sophie asks her mum to check how many people are in shops before they go in together and likes to keep hold of the car key in case she needs to leave quickly. When in shops Sophie wears her headphones so people do not talk to her.





Exercise fourteen:

Use the space below to write down:

1. The things that Sophie is avoiding
2. The safety behaviours that Sophie has developed to help her feel safe in these situations
3. How you think they might help in the short term?
4. Why you think they might be unhelpful long term?



Take home task: your safety behaviours

My goal this week is:

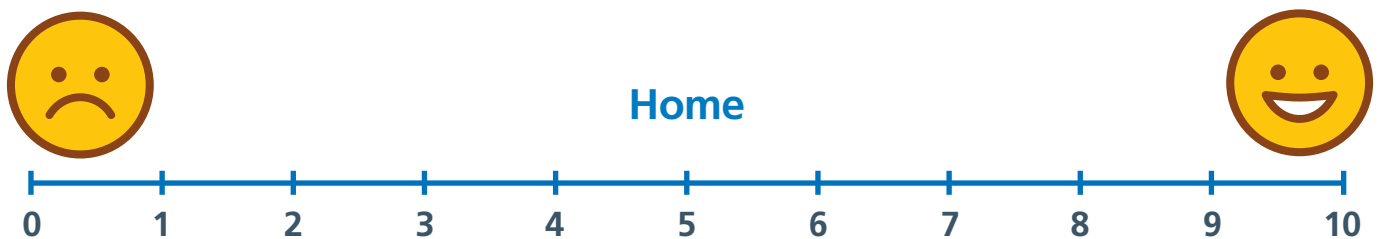
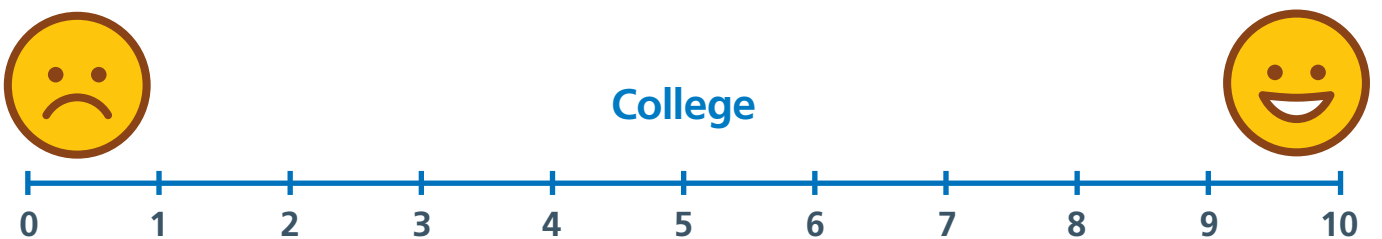
Can you identify any safety behaviours you may use which might impact achieving your goals long term? It can be helpful to revisit your goal ladder and consider what step could include facing an anxiety provoking situation without using your safety behaviours.

My safety behaviours	Short term – how does it help	Long term impact on anxiety	How could I challenge them?

Session Seven: Skills to help with worry

How am I feeling today?

Out of 10 (10 being very happy and 0 being not happy at all) rate your mood and how you are feeling about school/college, friendships and home.



When we experience worries they can often be lots of 'what if...?' thought or things which cannot control. It can be helpful to understand the different types of worries so we can take more control over how we approach them.

Two types of worries we may experience are:

Practical worries: These are worries that affect you now and often can have a practical solution. Example: 'I haven't done the homework yet'

Hypothetical/what-if worries: This type of worry is about things that are in the future and therefore there is often nothing that you can do at the time the worry occurs. Example 'What if I get the answer wrong in class?'



Exercise fifteen: Using the thought bubbles below, note down some of your own worries that you have experienced recently.



My worry is...?



Exercise sixteen: The flow chart below can be a way to figure out if your worry is practical or hypothetical. Using this tool and the space below, note down if the worries you identified were practical or hypothetical.

Can I do something about this worry now?



YES

This is a practical worry, consider how problem solving may be helpful.



NO

This is a hypothetical worry, consider ways to let the worry go or shift your focus. Could you use worry time?

Problem solving

The following steps can be helpful to problem solve practical worries which you may experience, follow the steps through and review how it went. Sometimes worries can feel overwhelming however breaking it down can help it feel more manageable to tackle!



Exercise seventeen: It may be helpful to try this technique for one of the worries you identified above.

1. Identify one problem or worry

2. List all the possible solutions (tip – you can be as creative as you want to be with these)

-
-
-
-
-

3. What are the pros and cons for each solution?

Solution	Pros	Cons

4. Pick on solution that works the best

5. Create a step-by-step plan to works towards this solution, consider:



What?



When?



How?



Who with?



What problems?



Is this realistic?

Worry time

People who worry can find their minds are constantly active; worry time can be a helpful way to take control over hypothetical worries so they don't overflow throughout the day and impact other activities.



Exercise eighteen:

Choose your worry time

1. Set aside a time each day where you will not be distracted or disturbed. This time should ideally be in the evening but not too close to bedtime. Consider setting around 15 minutes aside.

Capture your worries

2. Throughout the day, before worry time, you need a way to capture your worries to put them aside until later. Could you write them down on paper or your phone? This is a way of postponing worries knowing there is some set time to return to them.

Refocus on the present

3. Consider ways to refocus once your worry is recorded for later. What activity did your worry interrupt, can you go back to this? You may find the same worries keep coming back, this is ok, keep writing them down and refocusing throughout the day.

Worry time

4. This is the time that you've set aside for you to worry. It might sound/feel a bit strange at first - but give it a chance! Work through your recorded worries - how did you feel at the time about them and how do you feel now? Has the thing you worried about happened?

Once the set time has passed consider how to turn your mind off from worry time... session 8 will cover helpful tips and techniques to refocus and relax.

Each day I will set worry time at:

During the day I will record my worries by:



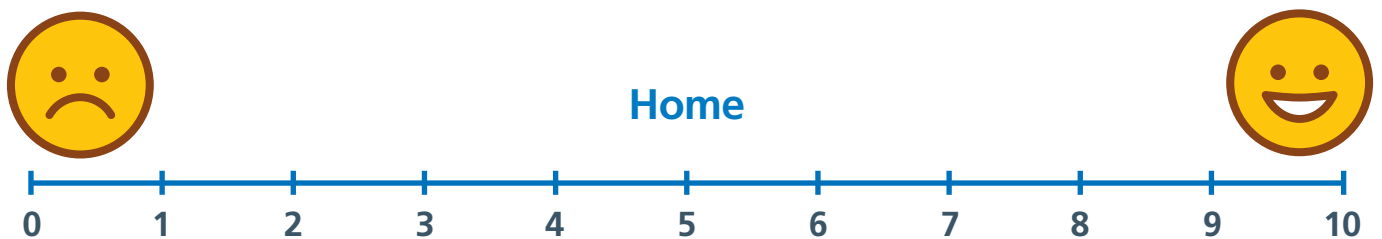
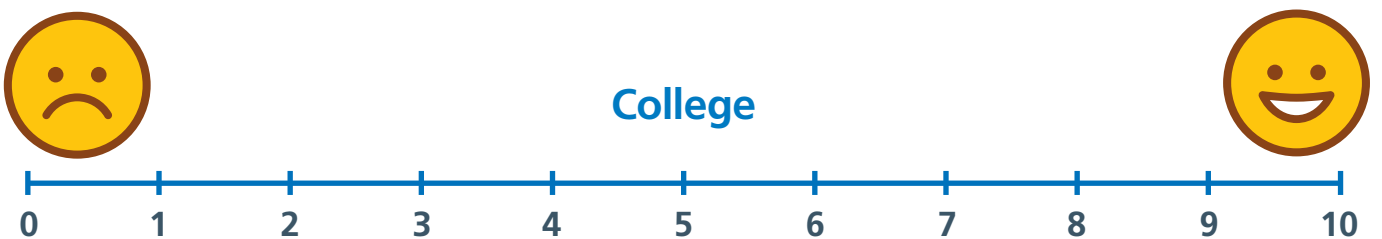
Take home task: Worry diary

What was your worry?	Was it practical or hypothetical?	Did you problem solve – what was the solution?

Session Eight: Helpful tips and techniques

How am I feeling today?

Out of 10 (10 being very happy and 0 being not happy at all) rate your mood and how you are feeling about school/college, friendships and home.



Relaxation and developing helpful coping strategies

Being able to relax and develop helpful strategies are important, but can be tricky.



Exercise nineteen: Do you do anything at the moment that helps you to relax or feel calmer? Note them down here:

New ideas to try

In addition to what you are already doing that helps, you might want to try out some of these relaxation or soothing strategies to help manage your anxiety. Find out what works for you and what you enjoy.

Relaxation exercises

Progressive Muscle Relaxation: Our bodies respond automatically to stressful situations and thoughts by becoming tense. The opposite relationship also works: a good way of relaxing the mind is to deliberately relax the body.

In a progressive muscle relaxation each muscle group is tensed in turn, and the tension is then released. This relaxes the muscles and allows you to notice the contrast between tension and relaxation.

Relaxation should be enjoyable so if any part of the exercise is too difficult skip it for the moment. If you have any injuries you may wish to leave out that part of the exercise. Lie down flat on your back, on a firm bed, a couch, or on the floor. Support your head and neck with a pillow or cushion. Alternatively sit in a comfortable chair with your head well-supported. Close your eyes if you are comfortable doing so.

Instructions: Focus your attention on different parts of your body in sequence. Go through the sequence three times. For the first time tense each body part, hold it for a few moments, then relax. For the second time lightly tense and release each body part. For the final round just pay attention to each muscle group and decide to relax it.

Recommended sequence:

- 1 Right hand and arm**
(clench the fist and tighten the muscles in the arm)
- 2 Left hand and arm**
- 3 Right leg** (tense the leg, lifting the knee slightly)
- 4 Left leg**
- 5 Stomach and chest**
- 6 Back muscles** (pull the shoulders back slightly)
- 7 Neck and throat**
(push the head back slightly into the pillow/surface)
- 8 Face** (scrunch up the muscles in your face)



You might find it easier to listen to the relaxation exercise. Here is a link to a 15 minute guide to progressive muscle relaxation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=912eRrbes2g>

Balloon breathing

This technique engages your diaphragm, which is the most efficient muscle of breathing located at the base of the lungs. When our fight, flight or freeze system is activated we may notice that we are shallow breathing with our chest rather than our diaphragm and stomach. This exercise helps to reset and slow our breathing so we feel calmer. The sequence is described below but whilst doing it some young people find it helpful to imagine a balloon in their stomach that gently inflates as they breathe in and deflates as they breathe out.

Diaphragmatic breathing technique



1. Lie on your back on a flat surface or in bed, with your knees bent and your head supported. You can use a pillow under your knees to support your legs. Place one hand on your upper chest and the other just below your rib cage. This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.



2. Breathe in slowly through your nose so that your stomach moves out against your hand. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.



3. Tighten your stomach muscles, letting them fall inward as you exhale through pursed lips. The hand on your upper chest must remain as still as possible.

Illustrations ref: <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/26573625/diaphragmatic-breathing>

Physical exercise

Another way of releasing tension and adrenaline from our body is by doing exercise. Doing exercise also helps to increase the amount of endorphins (pleasurable hormones) in our body which can help us to feel happier and calmer.



Grounding exercises

When we have flipped our lid, or emotions have become too overwhelming, we need to find a way to bring ourselves back to where we are right now. Grounding exercises help to ground us back into the present moment and an easy way to do them is to engage all of your senses.

5 4 3 2 1 Grounding Exercise



Some young people also find it helpful to carry around a small object that is meaningful to them. When they get overwhelmed they can look at the object, notice its textures, shapes, patterns and details as a way of helping calm emotions that have gotten too much.



Take home task: Self-soothe box

A great way to get creative is to make your own self soothe box.

You could use an old shoe box, or pick up a box that you could decorate or a fancy one from a shop.

Try to fill the box with a few of your favourite things, especially items that can help focus your senses:

- Vision: photo album, DVD, book or magazine, a picture of a beautiful safe place, an inspiring quote, a reminder for funny or inspiring YouTube video, a walk or sit in the park or garden or guided meditation.
- Hearing: soothing or inspiring music, recordings of a friends voice, reminder of phone numbers to ring or an audio book.
- Smell or taste: oils, fruity snack or treat, favourite perfume, a sachet of coffee or ready prepared cake mix.
- Touch: soft woolly socks or blanket, teddy bear, comforter or grounding object, hand or foot lotion, massage oil, warm bubble bath, nail varnish or make-up.



What will you include in your self-soothe box? Write some ideas down here:



Vision



Smell



Hearing



Touch



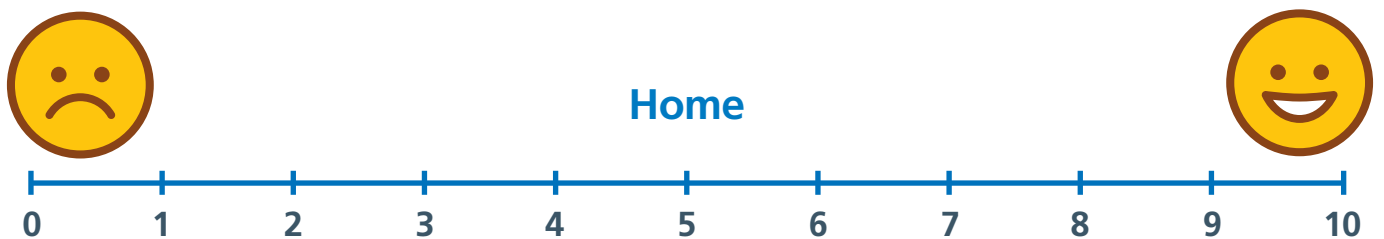
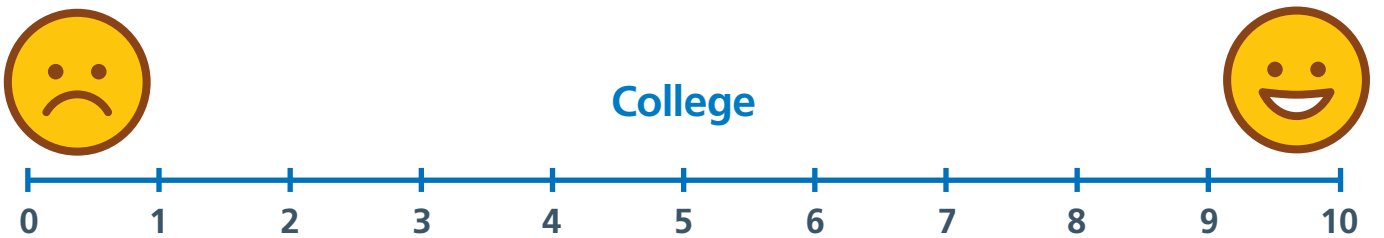
Taste



Session Nine: Bringing it all together

How am I feeling today?

Out of 10 (10 being very happy and 0 being not happy at all) rate your mood and how you are feeling about school/college, friendships and home.



Lets take some time to think about the things you have learnt from this workbook...

Zack is 17 years old. He has been feeling anxious about other people judging him in places such as college and when out with friends. Zack has sometimes avoided seeing friends as he has worried he would do something that might make other people laugh at him or talk about him behind his back. It can take Zack a long time to prepare for going to college on a morning, when he is in college Zack has stopped answering questions in lessons as he feels he will make a mistake or get it wrong. These worries can keep Zack awake at night, he has described himself as an 'over thinker'.



Exercise twenty: Using the scenario above can you think of any advice you might give Zack based on your learning from this workbook?

Your own wellbeing plan



Exercise twenty one: It is really helpful to remember what you want to achieve and all the things/people that will help you. Complete the wellbeing plan below and remember to keep practicing your strategies and reviewing them. Keep the ones that work and change the ones that don't. Keep going you're doing great!

My goals:

Helpful strategies:

People/activities I enjoy:

I can talk to:



Take home task: A letter to yourself

- As a final take home task from this workbook there is some space below to write a kind and compassionate letter to yourself to read when you are feeling worried or anxious.
- Think back to sessions within this workbook as it may be helpful to also include celebrations of the progress you have made and reminders of the strategies which you have found helpful to use.



A large, empty light blue rectangular area intended for writing a letter to oneself.

Apps and websites



My Possible Self: The Mental Health App

Learn how to manage fear, anxiety and stress and tackle unhelpful thinking



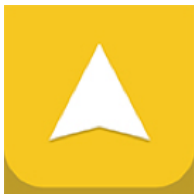
Worry Tree

The WorryTree app aims to help you take control of worry wherever you are. It uses cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) techniques to help you notice and challenge your worries and then make plans to manage them.



Feeling Good – Positive Mindset

Relax your body and mind with a series of audio tracks designed to help you build confidence, energy and a positive mindset.



Stress and Anxiety Companion

Using breathing exercises, relaxing music and games designed to calm the mind, the app helps you change negative thoughts to help you better cope with life's ups and downs.



YoungMinds

Children and young people's charity. Their website offers young people and their parents support. There is also a text and online messenger help line for young people.



Stem4

Advice and information around mental health. For young people and their parents. Stem4 also have apps such as Calm Harm, Clear Fear and Combined Minds.



Kooth

Free, safe and anonymous online support for young people. Speak to counsellors online, write in a daily journal, read articles written by young people.

Notes and questions page

