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 **Managing Health Anxiety**

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**Helpful contacts to keep safe**

**Need to contact Sheffield Talking Therapies?**

You can contact Talking Therapies Admin on **0114 226 4380. Please let us know if you are unable to attend a session or you would like to discuss other treatment options.**

**Need urgent help?**

If your mood is particularly low and you are concerned about your safety, please use the following information:

* Speak with friends and family for support
* Please make an appointment to **speak to your GP** as soon as possible
* **NHS 111 – select option for mental health support 123** (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)
* Samaritans: **116 123**
* Rethink: **0808 8010440**
* A blue silhouette of a head with a heart in the middle

  Description automatically generatedAlways call **999** in an emergency

**Completing the questionnaires**

Before each session we will send you questionnaires by email or text.

These questionnaires include the PHQ-9 which looks at symptoms of depression and the GAD-7 which looks at symptoms of anxiety.

These questionnaires can help measure the severity of your mood and it can show any changes in your mood during your treatment.

For each symptom, have a think about **how often** the symptom has bothered you over the last **two weeks** in total.



|  |
| --- |
|  |

For each questionnaire, you can add up each number scored to provide you with a total score.

**The PHQ-9 is out of 27.   
The GAD-7 is out of 21.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Session 1** | **Session 2** | **Session 3** | **Session 4** | **Session 5** |
| **PHQ-9**  Depression |  |  |  |  |  |
| **GAD-7**  Anxiety |  |  |  |  |  |

Add up your total each week to watch your progress throughout the course.

**What is health anxiety?**

**Session**

**1st**

We can all experience worries about our health from time to time, if we were never concerned about our physical wellbeing that would be strange! It can be helpful to be aware of what is going on in our bodies and notice what is happening.

However, some people can worry excessively about their health and become concerned they may have a serious illness. This can be the case even when medical tests and professionals have said they are ok. This level of worry can start to affect lots of areas of life. This can include some difficult emotions, struggling to do the things that you like to do and can start to feel overwhelming. When this worry about health becomes excessive, this is called ‘health anxiety’.

Health anxiety can lead to various emotions or feelings. These feelings can be very common and can include things such as worry about what the future may hold, anger at a lack of information or anxiety/fear about what could be causing such sensations. It can be helpful for us to label our own emotions so what we can understand these a little better and start to look at ways in which to manage them.

On the next page, try to identify some of your current feelings using the emotions wheel.

**Identifying common emotions**

A circular chart with words

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**What can cause health anxiety?**

Health anxiety can start due to many reasons, but here are some common ones:

* A period of illness for ourselves
* Illness of someone close to us
* Information in the news
* Social media campaigns
* Unexplained physical symptoms
* A particularly stressful time in life

Consider below when your health anxieties started and what may have triggered them. Lots of people have health anxiety that is very understandable due to experiences in their life.

However, not everyone has a specific event that started them off, so don’t be discouraged if you can’t think of anything.

**The five** **areas model**

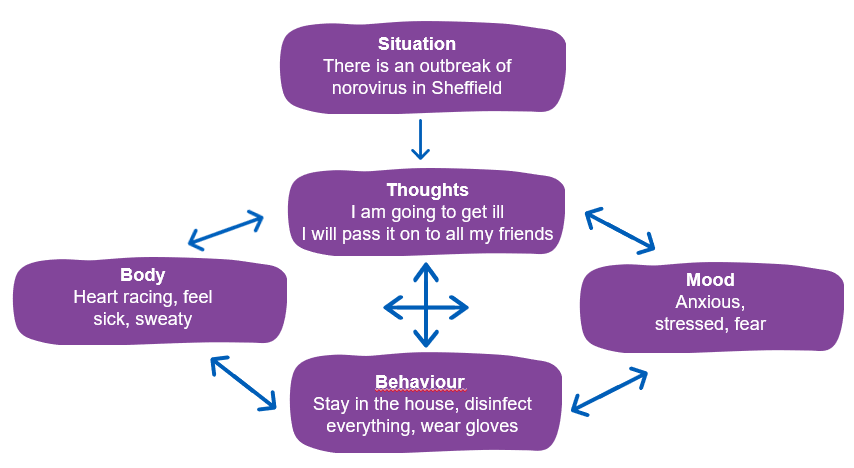
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) treatment focuses on the way our thoughts, feelings and behaviours link with each other.

When feeling anxious, it is common to fall into a vicious cycle. In this vicious cycle, our thought processes and behaviour patterns can be unhelpful. They keep anxiety going. The more we think and behave in unhelpful ways, the longer the anxiety will last.

These vicious cycles can also be influenced by the way we interpret different situations. When we feel anxious, we tend to interpret situations negatively. This can lead to unhelpful feelings and behaviours.

When starting CBT, it is helpful to identify your own unhelpful thought patterns and behaviours. This helps you find your vicious cycle. Once you have identified your vicious cycle, you can learn how to break it and make changes.

Here is an example:



**Completing your five areas**

**Situation**

**Behaviour**

**Mood**

**Body**

**Thoughts**

**Task 2: Identifying stress responses**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Body Sensation** | **Thought** | **Could this be stress?** |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

**Identifying physical symptoms of anxiety**

**The Fight, Flight or Freeze Response**

When we are faced with situations that pose danger to us, our natural response is to want to run away from it or fight it. In order for our bodies to feel prepared in these situations lots of changes happen at once and can make us feel uncomfortable. It is important to know that these changes are happening because they are protecting the body.

The diagram below explains some of the changes that may occur and the reasons why. It is helpful to know the reasons why these changes occur to enable you to feel more in control of them. If you were to interpret any of these normal symptoms of anxiety in a catastrophic way, then this may cause you to feel panicky and result in a panic attack.

A diagram of the body

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**Task 3: Good Deep Breathing**

By changing our breathing to a pattern of good deep breaths we can reduce the fight or flight response and help to relax our muscles. This can change your experience of pain and anxiety.

**Try this:**

* Put one hand on your stomach between your ribs and tummy button.
* Put the other hand on your chest just below your collar bones. Now take a deep breath.

Did you breathe through your nose or through your mouth?

Which hand moved the most?

If your top hand moved more this is not good breathing.

**Good breathing:**

* Uses the full capacity of your lungs. When your lungs are full of air they move to fill your whole rib cage.
* Uses the **diaphragm muscle**. This muscle is shaped like an open umbrella and is between your lungs and stomach. When you are breathing slowly and deeply the muscle flattens downward and gently pushes the stomach out.
* The breathing rate is between 10-14 breaths per minute.
* The breath starts **through the nose** and not the mouth.

**Relaxation can also be a more structured activity. Here are some examples of relaxation techniques:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Progressive muscle relaxation** | Focusing on tensing and then relaxing each muscle group. This highlights the difference between muscle tension and relaxation. Your body will feel heavy and relaxed as a result. | <https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/how-to-do-progressive-muscle-relaxation/>  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GURt2pvdAg> |
| **Visualisation** | Using sight, smell, sound and touch to form mental images of a calming scene. For example you might imagine walking through a forest or along the beach. | <https://www.headspace.com/meditation/visualization> |
| **Belly breathing** | Breathing slowly and deeply from the belly or diaphragm rather than the chest. The oxygen levels in your body are restored to normal. | <https://livingwell.org.au/relaxation-exercises/relaxation-strategy-4-abdominal-breathing/>  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GqfrbGtorBE> |
| **Autogenic relaxation** | Using breathing and body awareness to relax. Calming phrases are repeated such as “I am safe; I am calm” | <https://www.innerhealthstudio.com/autogenic-relaxation.html> |

**Mindful Breathing Exercise:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfDTp2GogaQ>

**Between Session Tasks**

Each session, you will be set some tasks for the next week based on the information covered. It is important to practice each task regularly over the next week.

**Session 1 tasks:**

1. **Complete your own five areas model**
2. **Start to increase awareness of how your physical sensations lead to certain thoughts – could these be related to stress?**
3. **Practice breathing or other relaxation techniques**

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**End of session review**

At the end of each session, it is important to reflect on what you have learned and how you can apply it to your own situation. Use the prompt questions below to think about what you’re going to spend the next week practicing. Consider some solutions to any obstacles that may prevent you making the agreed changes.

**What did I learn in today’s session?**

**How can I apply this to my own situation?**

**What might get in the way of doing this?**

**How can I stop this from happening?**

**What am I going to practice from this session?**

**Session 1 - notes**

**2nd**

**Session**

**Start of session 2 review**

It’s helpful to review the practice you have done over the last week. Don’t be disheartened if you haven’t been able to complete all the tasks. Instead, it is helpful to think about what got in the way and consider how to overcome this next time.

|  |
| --- |
| **How did you get on with the between-session tasks?** |
|  |
| **How do you feel about this?** |
|  |
| **Did you come across any barriers? How did/will you overcome them?** |
|  |

**What we do**

This week we are looking at what we do. Many of these actions are automatic and we may have been doing them for a long time. There are often good reasons why we act in a certain way. However, in the longer term they may contribute to health worries.

The first step in making any change is to become more aware of the way we currently respond.

**Take a few minutes to reflect on what you do more or less of when you feel anxious about your health:**

**Short-term benefits vs long-term consequences**

When we have worries about our health, we can find ourselves doing things that feel helpful at the time but that in the longer term tend to maintain our anxieties. Examples of these include reassurance seeking, checking our body for signs of illness or paying extra attention to physical sensations, avoidance, or checking our symptoms online.

**Short term benefits**

* **Seeking reassurance** – relief when family member or doctor gives you this reassurance.
* **Avoidance** – might give our body a rest while we are recovering. Avoidance of medical attention might prevent us from facing a feared diagnosis.
* **Searching online** – this may give us reassurance in the short term or warn us if our symptoms are a sign of something serious.
* **Body-checking** – gives us more information about our symptoms.

**Long term consequences**

* **Seeking reassurance** – worries return, future disbelief of reassurance
* **Avoidance** – our fears become bigger as not confronted, we don’t engage or participate in life as much, and we tend to lose confidence in ourselves and our ability to cope.
* **Searching online** – increased focus on symptoms, jumping to worse-case scenarios
* **Body-checking** – increased awareness of bodily sensations causing increased worry

**How effective are behaviours?**

Consider some of the ways you have tackled health worries.

How effective were these strategies at the time?

How effective have these strategies been in the long-term?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Ways I have tackled my worry that something is**  **wrong** | **How effective was this strategy at the time?**  **(0-10)** | **How effective was this strategy in the long-term?**  **(0-10)** |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

**Changing behaviour is difficult...**

Remember this will not happen overnight.

* The first step is recognising what we do.
* Next it is helpful to evaluate.
* Then challenging

**Challenge Questions…**

The questions below are useful to ask yourself when you feel tempted to engage in ‘unhelpful’ behaviours. Remember this will take time and don’t be too hard on yourself if you can’t stop these straight away. These behaviours may have been in place for a long time. Change takes time and small steps are valuable.

**Take a step back…**

* What have I been told by professionals before?
* Would I do this if I wasn’t worried?
* What is the most helpful behaviour?
* What is reasonable (based on what I have been told)?

**Task 4: Behaviours diary**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ​ | **Mon**​ | **Tu**​ | **Wed**​ | **Th** | **Fri**​ | **Sat**​ | **Sun**​ |
| **Number of times I asked for reassurance​** | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ |
| **Number of times I checked my body** | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ |
| **Number of times I searched for information​** | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ |
| **Number of times I avoided something** | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ |
| **How anxious I felt (0-100%)​** | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ | ​ |

**Task 5: Lifestyle factors**

Worries about health are likely to be worsened when we feel physically vulnerable. Part of reducing worry or anxiety about health involves considering what is an appropriate level of care to take over our health. In other words, we want to get the right balance between looking after our health, but not letting this get in the way of what we value. Consider some of these tips to help with both our physical and emotional wellbeing.

**Increasing Physical Activity**

Increasing physical activity has many benefits, including:

* Reduces anxiety
* Improves mood
* Protective of long-term physical health
* Reduces muscle tension and experience of pain (release of endorphins)
* Possible social benefits
* Sense of accomplishment; self-esteem

Increasing physical activity does not necessarily have to involve strenuous exercise or joining a gym (although it can do!). Increasing physical activity in any way (such as brisk walking, cycling, swimming, or just cleaning the house) can be helpful.

Where possible, the NHS recommends:

* At least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity such as cycling or brisk walking every week, **and**
* Strength exercises on two or more days a week that work all the major muscles (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders and arms)

This could be achieved by having 30 minutes of moderate physical activity 5 times a week.

**Changes to consider**

**Alcohol**

# Alcohol is a depressant, which means it can interfere with mood. It is common for people to use alcohol as a coping strategy. However, while alcohol may help to induce feelings of relaxation or confidence in the short-term, it can make things worse in the long-term.

# **A screenshot of a screen Description automatically generated**The current guidelines for alcohol use are as follows:

If alcohol is an area you would like to change, it may be helpful to try reducing slowly rather than abruptly stopping. Alternatively, it might be helpful to increase the number of alcohol-free days you have a week, or to replace some alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic alternatives.

**Changes to consider**

**Caffeine**

Caffeine is a stimulant, which means it stimulates our nervous system. This causes many of the same physical symptoms as anxiety:

* Increased heart rate
* Irritability
* Jitteriness
* Disturbed sleep

Indeed, high levels of caffeine can both cause and worsen anxiety. For some people, reducing caffeine use can significantly reduce anxiety. Current guidelines suggest minimising consumption of caffeinated drinks to 2-3 cups a day.

If caffeine is an area that you would like to change, it may be best to reduce this slowly to avoid withdrawal symptoms. Again, replacing some caffeinated drinks with de-caffeinated alternatives can be helpful.

**Changes to consider**

**Diet**

Another way of feeling physically stronger might involve having a balanced diet. In particular, changes in **blood sugar levels** can affect mood and can make you feel weak and dizzy. Changes in blood sugar levels can be avoided by eating regular meals.

Additionally, **dehydration** can mimic symptoms of anxiety and low mood, including reduced energy, poor motivation and lack of concentration. It is therefore important to drink enough water throughout the day.

**Changes to consider**

**Between Session Tasks**

Each session, you will be set some tasks for the next week based on the information covered. It is important to practice each task regularly over the next week.

**Session 2 tasks:**

**4. Complete the behaviours diary. Increasing awareness is the first step. Then use the challenge questions to try to reduce these behaviours.**

**5. Consider making some changes to your lifestyle.**

**A blue silhouette of a head with a heart in the middle

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**End of session review**

At the end of each session, it is important to reflect on what you have learned and how you can apply it to your own situation. Use the prompt questions below to think about what you’re going to spend the next week practicing. Consider some solutions to any obstacles that may prevent you making the agreed changes.

**What did I learn in today’s session?**

**How can I apply this to my own situation?**

**What might get in the way of doing this?**

**How can I stop this from happening?**

**What am I going to practice from this session?**

**Session 2 – notes**

**3rd**

**Session**

**Start of session 3 review**

It’s helpful to review the practice you have done over the last week. Don’t be disheartened if you haven’t been able to complete all the tasks. Instead, it is helpful to think about what got in the way and consider how to overcome this next time.

|  |
| --- |
| **How did you get on with the between-session tasks?** |
|  |
| **How do you feel about this?** |
|  |
| **Did you come across any barriers? How did/will you overcome them?** |
|  |

**What is The Super Scanner?**

Some people can sleep through anything – partners snoring, trains speeding by and thunderstorms. Yet those same people, after they’ve just had a baby, can be woken by the slightest sniffle. It seems we have an inbuilt scanner that keeps us alert to certain signals, even when we’re sleeping. It’s constantly scanning for signs of possible threat, then triggering the body’s alarm system which wakes us up, even from the deepest sleep, to attend to the baby.

Sometimes these inbuilt super-scanners are programmed to look for other signals, and it seems the sensitivity can vary. Someone who worries about being burgled might have a super-scanner which is set to be highly sensitive to noises that are different from those we normally hear at night. A knocking sound will have them instantly awake, alert and anxious. On investigation, they might realise it was a twig tapping against the window, the anxiety subsides – and they can sleep reassured they’re safe.

Our own super-scanners may be very personal to us, to our style of thinking, to our problem, and can vary from time-to-time dependant on what we have going on in our lives.

**If we are worried about our health, then our super-scanner might be constantly on, scanning for body sensations or changes. When we notice these, this may lead to thoughts of becoming seriously unwell.**

**Task 6: The Super Scanner**

Understanding what you own personal super-scanner is doing will help you understand what is keeping your anxiety going. Different people will experience physical sensations in different ways, there is no right or wrong but being aware of how your super-scanner is activated can help you change how you react. Once your super-scanner is triggered, your focus of attention is right there. Your scanner and your thoughts in reaction to the scanner zoom into the foreground of your attention, and everything else fades into the background.

We can learn to notice the super-scanner, and when its activated adjust sensitivity dial. It can be a useful mechanism so we don’t want to turn it off completely, but we can improve our ability to interpret the readings accurately and adjust the way we react.

**How do I notice the super scanner?**

**Notice the scanner**

* + Identify that your scanner is focussing on bodily sensations

**Re-adjust the sensitivity dial**

* + Notice that the scanner may have triggered unhelpful thoughts/worries
  + Change your focus of attention – engage in an activity which involves physical activity and/or requiring your mental attention.

**If-then planning**

It can be helpful to introduce some ‘if-then’ plans for when you notice that your super-scanner is switched on and looking for symptoms, to help turn the sensitivity dial down. This can include things to do to help change your focus of attention when in this moment. Use the space below to consider some ‘if-then’ plans:

**If I notice a physical symptom…**

**Then I will…**

**Impact of thoughts on emotions**

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**My example**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Event** | **Thought** | **Emotion** |
|  |  |  |

**Importance of interpretation**

The way in which we interpret our symptoms can have a big impact on how we feel. Anxiety can lead to more catastrophic ways of thinking, which also influence our emotions, behaviour, and physical symptoms. For example, if we think ‘my breathing is fast, I’m going to die’, we will start to become more anxious and our threat system is activated physically, however if we challenge our thoughts and say to ourselves ‘my breathing is fast because I’ve just been more physically active than usual’, we’re less likely to stay in ‘Fight or Flight’ mode.

**We can sometimes believe thoughts without even questioning them**.

**Remember: Thoughts are not facts!**

Negative thoughts can often be taken as factual and they tend to feel very believable, sometimes there can be *some* evidence to support a negative thought, but often we don’t have the full picture! How we interpret things can affect how we feel and what we do, so it’s important to be able to learn to challenge some of these difficult thoughts.

**Negative Automatic Thoughts**

When we are low or anxious, we are more likely to experience Negative Automatic Thoughts (NATs). NATs are:

**Believable:** we tend to believe our thoughts and take them as facts. A fact is something that is proved to be true, it can’t be interpreted differently by different people. **Remember, thoughts are not necessarily true, accurate or helpful.**

**Automatic:** most thoughts are automatic and arrive in our mind without us choosing them.

**Persistent:** thoughts can repeat in our minds which can make them feel believable.

**Distorted:** thoughts can pull events out of shape and give us a false impression of what is happening.

**Unhelpful Thinking Styles**

We all experience unhelpful thoughts from time to time, and some research has shown we can categorise common errors in our thinking into certain categories (some of which are described on the next page).

It is normal to notice that we think in these ways, and there may be good reasons why we do this. For example, constantly expecting the worst-case scenario (catastrophising) may help us to prepare for a crisis. However, if we get into the habit of using these thinking styles regularly, they can cause us a lot of unnecessary anxiety and activate our body’s threat system.

If we can learn to notice these thinking habits, and recognise that when we experience this, our thoughts may not be factual in nature, we can start to get some distance from our thoughts and recognise them for what they are – just thoughts!

**Unhelpful Thinking Styles**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Description** | **Example** |
| **Overgeneralising** | Seeing negative things as a never-ending pattern of defeat. | *If I have symptoms, it must be that I have a serious underlying condition* |
| **Mind Reading** | Assuming what others are thinking without knowing it. | *My doctor thinks I am faking it* |
| **Mental Filter** | Seeing all situations through a negative lens. | *They said the scan was normal but I think they missed my problem* |
| **Catastrophising** | Imagining the worst case scenario. | *My headache is caused by a brain tumour* |
| **Labelling or**  **mislabeling** | Judging yourself or others based on a behaviour (one time) rather than seeing the whole picture. | *I am weak!*  *(based on being ill once)* |
| **All or nothing thinking / Black or white thinking** | Imagining the worst case scenario. | *If I have any symptoms, then there must be something seriously wrong with me.* |
| **Memories** | Memories of previously distressing episodes can cause us to believe danger is here and now rather than in the past. | *The last time I had this type of pain, I ended up in hospital* |
| **Emotional Reasoning** | Going with how you feel. | *I feel something is wrong so there must be something wrong* |

**Task 7: Cognitive Restructuring**

Cognitive restructuring is an evidence-based technique. It can help change unhelpful thinking by creating more balanced thoughts. When thoughts are more balanced, they are less distressing. ​

Cognitive restructuring is not about creating motivational quotes or thinking positively. It is about thinking in a more realistic way to reduce the connection between anxiety and thoughts.

****

**Step 1: Catching Thoughts**

The first step of challenging unhelpful thoughts is to begin to notice unhelpful thinking​. This can help increase awareness of your thought processes. The more aware you are, the easier it will become to challenge.

Use the task on the next page to keep a thought diary. Notice the emotion linked to the thought and its intensity.

Try and write down thoughts as soon as possible​ so you don’t forget.

**Task: Thought Diary**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Situation** | **Thought (% belief)** | **Emotion**  **(% intensity)** |
|  |  |  |

**Step 2: Identifying unhelpful thinking styles**

Try and identify the **“hot thought”** from the thoughts you have collected. The “hot thought” is the part of the thought that gives you an instant negative reaction e.g. “I’m having a heart attack” or “there is something wrong with me”.

You can use the unhelpful thinking styles on **page 42** to help you identify the unhelpful thinking style.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Situation** | **Thought (% belief)** | **Emotion**  **(% intensity)** | **Unhelpful Thinking Style** |
|  |  |  |  |

**Step 3: Consider the impact on behaviours?**

At this point, it can be helpful to stop and consider, is this thought impacting on what I do? Go back to sessions 1 and 2 and think about the short-term and long-term consequences of what we do. These might be things such as googling symptoms, avoiding certain things like exercising etc. Use the space below to consider whether any of your Negative Automatic Thoughts have an impact on what you do:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Thought (% belief)** | **Impact on behaviour- What did I do or not do?** |
|  |  |

**Step 4: Create more balanced thoughts**

Once you have identified some unhelpful thoughts, you can challenge them.

Remember thoughts aren’t facts. Our aim is to introduce doubt into the original thought. It is not about positive thinking, but rather taking into account the whole picture rather than just one perspective.

Below are some questions you can ask yourself to help with this process:

* Is this fact or opinion?
* What have I been told by professionals?
* What is the most likely thing to happen?
* How many times have I had this thought previously, and how many times did my worst fear actually occur?
* Could these symptoms be something else? Remember the focus of attention (super scanner).
* Would I still believe this thought if I didn’t feel so anxious (emotional reasoning)?
* What would I say to a friend if they were in a similar situation?
* What will happen if I continue to think this way, is it stopping me enjoy life?
* What is a more encouraging or useful way of thinking?
* Is there something I can learn from this situation, to help me next time?

**Step 4: Create more balanced thoughts.**

You can now use the evidence you have gathered to create a **balanced thought** based on **fact.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Original Thought** | **My balanced thought** |
|  |  |

**Reviewing Balanced Thoughts**

How does the new balanced thought compare with the old thought?

The aim of cognitive restructuring is not to bring your belief in the original thought to absolute zero. We are aiming to introduce some doubt into the original thought. It's important not to expect this straight away as you may feel like you've failed and increase the unhelpful thoughts you are experiencing.

The research about Cognitive Restructuring tells us that even a small shift in belief and distress is good enough and you'll hopefully feel a slight improvement as a result.

The more you practice, the more you will feel confident with your thought challenging, the more you can reduce the belief and distress.

**This takes practice, practice, practice!**

**Between Session Tasks**

**Session 3 tasks:**

1. **Identify your super-scanner and learn how to react differently by using the if-then plan**
2. **Use the thought diary and start to challenge thoughts**

**(remember the objective is to introduce doubt into your health anxious thoughts)**

**A blue silhouette of a head with a heart in the middle

Description automatically generated**

**End of session 3 Review**

At the end of each session, reflect on what you've learned. Consider At the end of each session, reflect on what you've learned. Consider how you can apply it to your own situation. Use the prompt questions below to think about what you’re going to spend the next week practicing. Consider some solutions to any barriers that may prevent you making the agreed changes.

* **What did I learn in today’s session?**
* **How can I apply this to my own situation?**
* **What might get in the way of doing this?**
* **How can I stop this from happening?**
* **What am I going to practice from this session?**

**Session 3 – notes**

**4th**

**Session**

**Start of session 4 review**

It’s helpful to review the practice you have done over the last week. Don’t be disheartened if you haven’t been able to complete all the tasks. Instead, it is helpful to think about what got in the way and consider how to overcome this next time.

|  |
| --- |
| **How did you get on with the between-session tasks?** |
|  |
| **How do you feel about this?** |
|  |
| **Did you come across any barriers? How did/will you overcome them?** |
|  |

**What is worry?**

Worry is the thinking part of anxiety.​ It alerts us to things we need to pay attention to and helps us solve future problems.

Worry can be helpful with practical problems, but it can also be an unhelpful habit. When we worry about things that are out of our control, or where the answer is not certain, we can become preoccupied by future threats, which can feel like a constant state of anxiety.​

We are more likely to worry when life feels:

* **uncertain**
* **uncontrollable**
* **unpredictable**

This drives us to try and predict future scenarios to try and get control back. While this can be helpful for short-term and practical issues, our anxiety increases the more we try and predict and control future situations we have no control over.

You may notice symptoms such as:

Thoughts – ‘what if’s’

Physical symptoms – feeling tense or on edge

Emotions – anxiety but also anger, stress and low mood

Behaviours – when we are feeling worried, it can change what we do, but worrying itself is also a behaviour

Think back to your 5 areas, are there any of these that stand out to you?

**Worry management**

**It is not possible to stop worrying**. Much like the fight, flight or freeze response, it is built within us to worry so we can survive. The habit of worrying can be broken if worry is managed better.

Worry management is an **evidence-based technique.** It can make it easier to live in the present moment by letting go of worries that are out of our control. Dealing with worries as they arise prevents them from spiralling and causing prolonged anxiety. Worry management has four steps:

1. **Keeping a worry diary​**
2. **Classifying worries​**
3. **Using the worry tree​**
4. **Using Worry time & problem solving**

**Step 1: Keeping a Worry Diary**

The first step of managing worry is becoming aware of worries.

Writing worries down can help to process them differently in your mind. It can help to take a step back from the worry and gain some perspective or distance. Catching the worry early can sometimes prevent it from spiralling into something catastrophic.

You will find an example of a worry diary on the next page. When completing a diary, try to be as specific as possible by writing the situation or trigger and the specific worrying thought going through your mind. ​

Rating the intensity can also help to determine which worries to tackle first if there are some that cause you to feel more anxious.

**Step 2: Classifying Worries**

Worry can be separated into two different types: ​

**Hypothetical worries** tend to be based in the future and are things we often cannot do anything about immediately, they often start with ‘what if’.

**Practical worries** are usually worries we can take some action against and do something about at the time we experience the worry.

Classifying worries can help determine how to manage it. There are different solutions for different types.

The best way to determine whether a worry is hypothetical or practical is to ask yourself: **Can I do anything about this?** If you can, it is practical. If you cannot, it is hypothetical.

**Task 8: Worry Diary**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Situation** | **Worry** | **Intensity of worry** | **Classify (Practical or Hypothetical)** |
| Example  Walking to the bus stop | What if miss the bus and I am late to work? | 70% | Hypothetical (not in my control) |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

**Step 3: Worry tree**

The Worry Tree is a useful diagram to help you classify worries and decide how to manage them.

The Worry Tree shows us that the best thing to do with **practical worries** is to make an action plan to solve the problem.

The best thing to do with **hypothetical worries** is to practice letting go of what you cannot control.

A tree with text boxes and arrows

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**Step 4: Hypothetical worries: Worry Time**

Worry time is a helpful technique for dealing with hypothetical worries. It helps you to spend less time worrying. If you repeat the following steps, it can help keep your worry under control and to pay attention to what is happening in the present moment. This will give you more chance to notice things that are enjoyable. It takes regular practice to see results. Remember that you are trying to break a habit!

**Step 1:** Notice that you are worrying.

**Step 2:** Record what you are worrying about. Use paper and pen or your phone instead of trying to remember the worry.

**Step 3:** Refocus by paying attention to what you are doing. This might be a productive activity.

**Step 4:** Repeat the above steps as often as you need throughout the day.

**Step 5:** Plan a time for your ‘worry time’ for each day. Ideally this is later in the day but not too close to bedtime. E.g. you might choose 20 minutes after you have eaten in the evening. During worry time, look at your list of worries, allow yourself to think about them and to worry. This may feel uncomfortable – this is normal.

**Step 6:** At the end of worry time, put your list of worries away or throw it in the recycling. Refocus your attention back onto the present moment.

**Task 9: Plan your worry time**

**Use the table below to plan worry time and review how it went**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **When?** |  |
| **For how long?** |  |
| **Where?** |  |
| **Relaxing activity after?** |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **After worry time** | |
| **What went well?** |  |
| **What did not go well?** |  |
| **What will I do next time?** |  |

**Top Tips for worry time**

* If you start to notice yourself spending worry time doing something other than worrying, remind yourself to focus on the worry in this time, no matter how uncomfortable it feels.
* Use the worry diary to make a note of the worries through the day, and then go through this list in worry time, crossing off any worries that no longer seem relevant or worrying.​
* Set a timer to let you know when worry time has ended
* Avoid scheduling worry time around bedtime. It is important to not associate sleep with worrying.
* Do not give up:worry management is a tricky skill to develop and may take a number of attempts. For some people it takes a few weeks to develop this skill.

With repeated practice of postponing worry, our minds will naturally start letting go of hypothetical worries without much effort.

**Practical worries: Problem Solving**

Feeling anxious or low and overwhelmed can mean that we feel unable to cope with practical problems when they come up, especially if feeling physical unwell or tired. This can lead to avoidance or putting things off.

Humans have in-built problem-solving mechanisms, but these do not work as well when we are struggling. Common practical problems can be around finances, relationships, education, employment, or health issues.

Problem Solving is a seven-step method that can be used to find solutions.

**Problem Solving: The Seven Step Method**

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Use the steps below to solve a problem you are struggling to solve at the moment.

**Task 10: Problem Solving**

**Step 1: Identify the problem**

**Step 2: Identify all the possible solutions**

**Step 3: Analyse strengths and weaknesses**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Solution** | **Strengths** | **Weaknesses** |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

**Step 4: Select a solution**

**Step 5: Make a plan – be specific: when, who, where, how?**

**Step 6: Carry out the plan.**

**Step 7: Review how it went. What could you do differently?**

**Task 11: Worry Free Time**

We tend to worry less when our mind is occupied or busy. As well as having a time that is dedicated to worry, it can be helpful to identify tasks or activities that you find absorbing.

You may worry less when you are out of the house, spending time with others, exercising or engaging in a hobby or interest. ​

Identify some activities below that can help to take your mind away from worries:

**Between Session Tasks**

**Session 4 tasks:**

**8. Record your worries using the worry diary and classify these (use worry tree)**

**9. Plan and practice worry time**

**10. Try the problem solving technique for practical worries**

**11. Plan in some worry-free activities over the next week.**

**A blue silhouette of a head with a heart in the middle

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**End of session four review**

At the end of each session, reflect on what you've learned. Consider how you can apply it to your own situation. Use the prompt questions below to think about what you’re going to spend the next week practicing. Consider some solutions to any barriers that may prevent you making the agreed changes.

* **What did I learn in today’s session?**
* **How can I apply this to my own situation?**
* **What might get in the way of doing this?**
* **How can I stop this from happening?**
* **What am I going to practice from this session?**

**Session four – notes**

**Session**

**5th**

**Start of session five review**

It’s helpful to review the practice you have done over the last week. Don’t be disheartened if you haven’t been able to complete all the tasks. Instead, it is helpful to think about what got in the way and consider how to overcome this next time.

|  |
| --- |
| **How did you get on with the between-session tasks?** |
|  |
| **How do you feel about this?** |
|  |
| **Did you come across any barriers? How did/will you overcome them?** |
|  |

**Ending the course**

What techniques have worked well for you?

What techniques didn’t work so well and why?

What techniques do you want to try after the course finishes?

Any Barriers?

**A red stop sign with white text

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**STOP!**Just pause for a moment

**Take a breath!**

[**Notice your breathing as you breathe**](https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/breathe-mindful-breathing/) in and out. In through the nose, out through the mouth.

**Observe**

What thoughts are going through your mind right now?

Where is your [**focus of attention**](https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/now-mindfulness-for-busy-people/)?

What are you reacting to?

What sensations do you notice in your body?

**Pull Back – put in some perspective**

Don’t believe everything you think!

What's the bigger picture?

Take [**the helicopter view**](https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/helicopter/).

What is another way of looking at this situation?

What advice would I give a friend?

What would a trusted friend say to me right now?

Is this thought a[**fact or opinion**](https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/fact-or-opinion/)?

What is a more reasonable explanation?

How important is this?  How important will it be in 6 months time?

[**It will pass**](https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/flexible-thinking/).

**Practice what works - proceed**

What is the best thing to do right now?

What is the most helpful thing for me, for others, for the situation?

What can I do that fits with my [**values**](https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/act-accept-choose-take-action/#Values)?

Where can I focus my attention right now?

Do what will be effective and appropriate.

(source getselfhelp.com)

**Task 12**: Complete your values compass

****

Religion

Arts and culture

Education/ career

Other

Physical wellbeing

Parenting/caring

Friendships

Family/relationships

**Task 12 continued: Values compass reflection**

1. Which of the values are most important to you?

2. Think about how often you are able to prioritise these important values?

3. Does anything need to change?

4. Make a plan to spend more time on the things that are most important, no matter how you feel

**Goal Setting**

Now you have an idea about what’s important to you and what you’d like to change, it can be helpful to set a goal to work towards. This increases motivation to complete the course of treatment and makes it more meaningful.

We can make goals more achievable by using the SMART goal structure. SMART is an acronym for the following:

**A line of icons

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**What do I want to achieve?**

**How will I know I have reached the goal?**

**Can I achieve this goal with the resources I have?**

**Could anyone achieve this goal?**

**When should this goal be completed?**

**Mindfulness**

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way:

* On purpose
* In the present moment
* Non-judgemental

By being mindful we choose and learn to control the focus of our attention. When we worry, we tend to think about the future, trying to anticipate and solve hypothetical problems. Practicing mindfulness will help you to be more grounded in the present moment and to spend less time worrying

A good way to start to practice mindfulness is to start with some routine activities you do (e.g. washing the dishes) and to carry them out mindfully instead.

You can learn how to practice mindfulness by using the Headspace app, reading Mindfulness for Health by Vidyamala Birch and Danny Penman, or using a website like **Freemindfulness.org**. There are a number of courses available that will teach you how to be mindful. Ask your course facilitators or practitioner for details of these.

## Mindful activity

My activity:

During the activity focus on the following:

Touch:

Sight:

Hearing:

Smell:

Taste:

What did I learn from this task?

**Moving forward after the course**

There is no right or wrong way to feel at this point in the course. You may be feeling better and ready to finish treatment. You may not be feeling better and wanting to explore further treatment options. You may be somewhere in between.

To plan for the future beyond this course effectively, you need to think about how things have changed since the first session.

Research tells us that it is common for problems like anxiety and depression to return after feeling better. This is called lapsing and relapsing. While this may seem daunting, it is important to note that this is normal.

It can be helpful to consider what thoughts, feelings or behaviours could be warning signs that you were feeling worse again. When you are more aware of them, they can be stopped quickly and more effectively.

Using the task below, consider noticeable thought patterns, physical feelings behaviours or situations that might trigger anxiety.

**Task 13: My Warning Signs**

|  |
| --- |
| Situations:  Thoughts:  Physical feelings:  Emotions:  Behaviours: |

**Task 14: My Wellbeing Action Plan**

Think about the things you have changed over the past five weeks and make a plan of what you will do in the future if needed.​

While it is recommended to keep up all of the techniques you've learned, it is normal for them to not be needed after a long period of feeling better. Sometimes they just become automatic e.g. thought challenging. Taking the time now to remember what helps can help you restart anything you stop doing should you need to in the future. ​

Consider a time to check back in with the wellbeing plan to make sure it's still being followed or if any changes can be made. The length of time is up to you. ​

Even if you aren’t feeling better, it is helpful to think about what has been helpful and what you'll keep trying as you move forward with treatment – no matter how small.

**What has been working well?**

**What helped last time?**

**What can I do now?**

**What can I continue doing?**

**Next Steps**

The next steps of treatment will depend on how you are currently feeling:

A picture containing text, screenshot, font, number

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Based on the symptoms from your last questionnaire scores, you may be offered a review call. We will discuss alternative options for treatment. This will be offered a few weeks after the course has ended. If you are not offered a review call, you can contact our admin team to request it.

If you feel like you need more support from Sheffield Talking Therapies, please use the box below to consider what some further support might look like. If you don’t feel like you need any more support, consider setting some personal goals to continue with following on from these sessions.

**End of session 5 review**

At the end of each session, reflect on what you've learned. Consider how you can apply it to your own situation. Use the prompt questions below to think about what you’re going to spend the next week practicing. Consider some solutions to any barriers that may prevent you making the agreed changes.

* **What did I learn in today’s session?**
* **How can I apply this to my own situation?**
* **What might get in the way of doing this?**
* **How can I stop this from happening?**
* **What am I going to practice from this session?**

**Session 5 - Notes**