

ANXIETY

A self-help resource to support you on your journey

What's inside?

Complete self-help resource

- ▶ *What is anxiety?*
- ▶ *How can we support anxiety?*
- ▶ *Personalised thought tracker*

YMCA

Recommended for 12 - 18 year olds
Created by Maxie Celliers, Indiana Montaque and Alice
Maynard at YMCA Exeter



WELCOME TO YOUR VERY OWN RESOURCE

In this pack, we will look at what anxiety is, how to support anxiety and how to personalise support to your own lifestyle and needs.

This pack can be used on your own, or with the help of a parent or adult you trust (like a teacher). It's totally up to you and how you prefer to use it.

It might be more helpful to break this into steps rather than reading it all in one go, so we've broken it down for you to make it easier. It's up to you how to use it, but it might be helpful to complete one step per week to give yourself a chance to do the activities.

So, find yourself a comfortable spot, grab a snack and let's get to it...



What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a normal and healthy emotion we all have, just like any other emotion. All emotions have a purpose - and the purpose of anxiety is to keep us safe. We need this to tell us when we're in danger, almost like a smoke alarm that goes off when it thinks there might be a fire.

This stems back from when we were cave-people and would need to hunt for food, we needed a sensitive smoke alarm that would keep us safe from danger! The more sensitive it was, the safer we were and could protect our families.

But we aren't cave-people anymore, are we!

Modern living is very different, and although our brains are wonderful and complex, they don't always know the difference between a bear trying to eat us, or public speaking.

Our smoke alarms can feel pretty intense at times when we aren't necessarily in danger. Just like the smoke alarm in your house that goes off when you're making some toast, ours can go off when we don't need it to.



Step 1: Symptoms of Anxiety

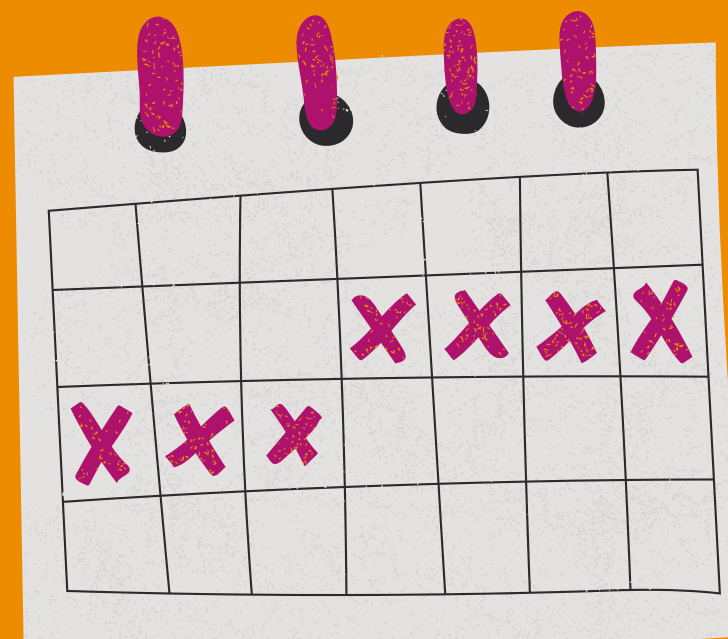
When our smoke alarm goes off, this activates a response called "fight, flight or freeze". This is so we can fight the danger, run away, or hide (freeze). Although this can be helpful if we're running away from a bear, we hopefully aren't doing that! As a result, it can make us feel a bit funny. Let's take a look at what's happening in our bodies at the time

Sweaty

When people feel worried, they might get sweaty. This is the body's way of helping us keep cool, in case we needed to spend time running away from something dangerous

Fear of being judged

People might be avoiding seeing friends or leaving the house. They might be worried about being judged or meeting new people



Shaky

People's arms, legs and hands might shake and this can make them feel a bit wobbly. This is caused by adrenaline running through our bodies to help them respond to danger

Heart beat

People might notice their heart beating faster or feeling like its thumping in their chest.

This is the body pumping lots of blood around to make sure we can respond to danger.



Sleep

People might feel extra tired or drained - this is because anxiety can be draining on our bodies! Or they might struggle to sleep at night because they are worrying



Feeling frozen

People might feel like they can't talk or like they're frozen or stuck. This might be a sign of the "freeze" response

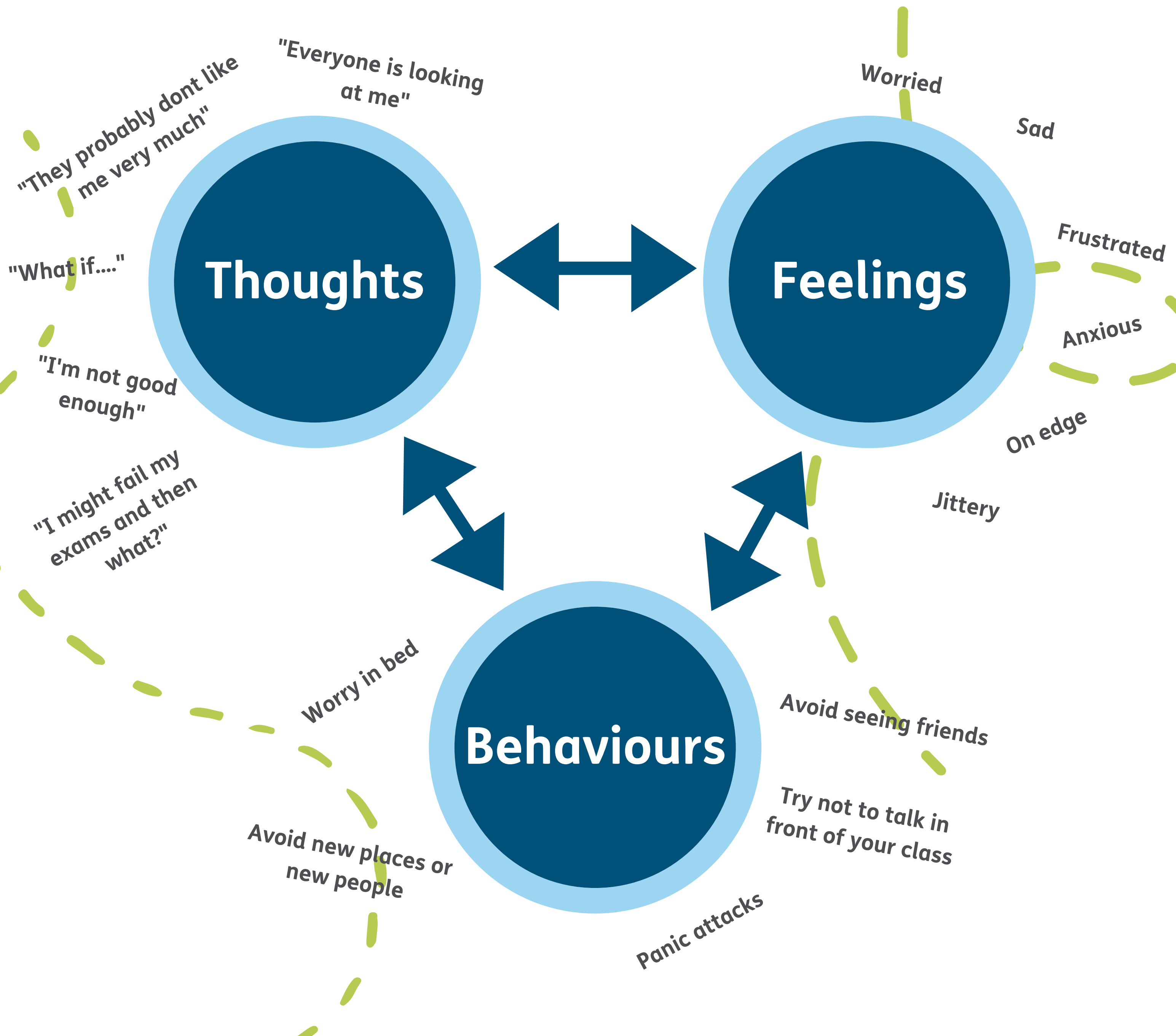
Butterflies or aches

People might get butterflies in their tummy, have a tummy ache, head ache or they might feel sick.

All these feelings might make people feel worse, but they are all a normal response to feeling anxious. Are there any other symptoms you can think of?

Anxiety can impact thoughts, feelings and behaviours

Just like any emotion, anxiety can impact us in different ways. When something like anxiety impacts thoughts, feelings and behaviours, it can become a vicious cycle that can be hard to get out of at times



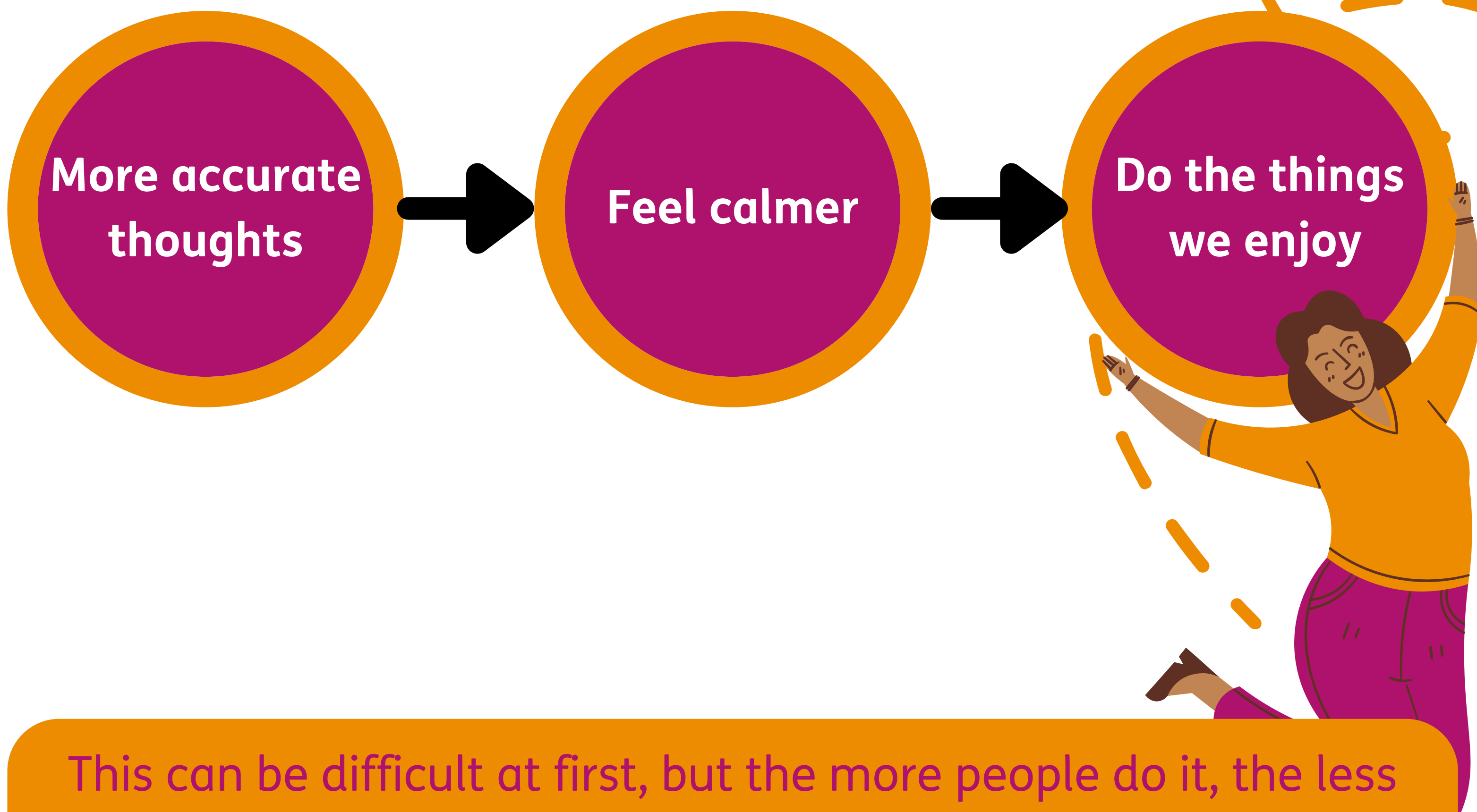
Does any of this feel similar for you? How do you think anxiety impacts your own thoughts, feeling and behaviours? Write yours around the circles too.

More accurate thoughts

So, how can we support anxiety?

As we have learnt, when we feel worried, we tend to believe our worried or anxious thoughts. They might feel so strong and pop into people's heads a lot that it can be hard to ignore them.

We can support this by challenging these thoughts and creating new, more accurate ones.



This can be difficult at first, but the more people do it, the less worried they will feel.

Let's try making this more personal so we can tackle what's going on for you - we can start with some goals on the next page.

Goals

Let's think about three goals that you would like to achieve over the next few weeks. It can be tricky to start thinking of goals, so here's some questions to help you.

How would you know you're starting to feel better? What would you be doing more of?

If we had a magic wand that would make this feeling go away, what would be different for you?

Can we measure this goal?



Step 2: It's helpful to be aware of the "thinking traps" that people can fall into. Have a read over these, are there any you feel you fall into most? Circle the ones that feel familiar to you

Catastrophising

Thinking that the worst possible outcome will happen
"The school bus will crash"



Mind reading

Thinking we know what others are thinking. "They think my hair looks silly today"



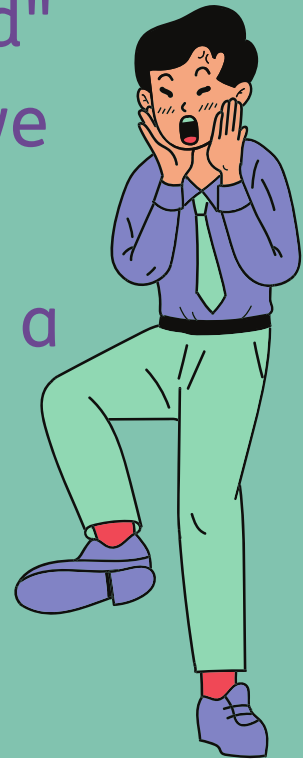
Internal bully

Blaming ourselves for things out of our control, or putting ourselves down.
"I'm such an idiot"



Should's and must's

Thinking we "should" have done this or we "must" do this
"i should have been a better friend"



Feelings

Thinking if we feel worried, it means something bad will happen
"I feel so worried, so I'm not going to do well on this test"

Judgements

Thinking that others are judging us, or judging ourselves negatively
"They think I'm really stupid"



Compare and despair

Seeing only the good in others and comparing ourselves negatively
"She is so good at volleyball, I wish I wasn't so rubbish at all sports"

Predictions

Thinking that we can predict the future
"If i go to that party no one will talk to me"



Mountains and molehills

Exaggerating the things that could go wrong, and minimising the things that could go right



Black and white

Thinking that someone or something can only be good or bad, and nothing in-between



Mental Filter

Only looking for evidence that supports a belief of ours. E.g. someone might think they aren't good at Science and will only look at the negatives in work they do, even if they are doing well.

Did you recognise any of these?

We all fall into these thinking traps at times, we might just not notice it.

It can be helpful to be aware of these so when they come up we know we've fallen into one. It might be helpful to take a picture of the last page so you can remind yourself of them.

Let's have a go at matching some thinking styles to your own thoughts. Have a go at the thought log below for a day or two! See if there are some that come up more often.

Example:

Situation

Getting ready to go to a friends house

Unhelpful thought

No one will talk to me when i get there

Thinking style

Predictions

Activity one - Have a go at doing these yourself - think about some recent thoughts, or log them over the next day or so

Situation

Unhelpful thought

Thinking style

Situation

Unhelpful thought

Thinking style

Situation

Unhelpful thought

Thinking style

Step 3: Great work - we've seen the thinking traps we can fall into, so let's start thinking about how we can change these unhelpful thoughts, and make them more helpful for us.

Which thinking traps did you mainly fall into? Write them here so we can come back to them if needed

.....

So, how do we start untangling 'worry thoughts'? We're going to start looking for evidence for and against the thoughts.

Thought challenging can be tricky, so let's break this down. Think about it like you're 'taking your thought to court', we need to gather all the evidence to make a decision on if the thought is true or false!

Here's an example of combining the evidence for and against a thought to make a new, accurate thought.



Thought: When I go to Zack's, there will be lots of people and no one will talk to me

Evidence For:

Zac has older friends and I don't have much in common with them to talk about

Evidence against:

Last time I went, people did talk to me I know Emily and Luke are there - I can talk to them
Emily is really great at including me in everything so I won't be alone

My new revised thought:

There will be some people I won't know, but I know I've got good friends there who I will have fun with. Maybe I can make some new friends if I feel up to it

Thought challenging can take some practice and can be tricky at first. So, here are some questions to prompt you and help you find "evidence against" your thought.

You might also want to ask someone else to help at first, what 'evidence against' can they think of?

Will this matter in 6 months time? if not, why?

What would I say to a friend who was having this thought?

What evidence would a friend give me against this thought?

If I wasn't feeling this way, would I believe this? if not, why?

Has this happened before? what happened then?

Has this happened to a friend before? what happened then?

What are the chances that this will actually happen?

Step 4: On the next few pages are your thought challenging worksheets. Find some time each day or couple of days to go through a few of the thoughts you've written down and challenge them.

Once you've done this, you can write your "new revised thought".

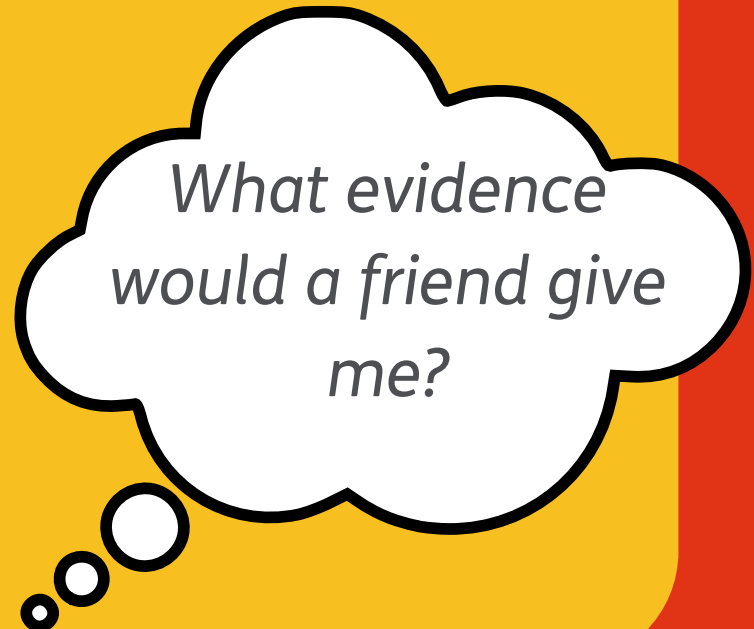
There's also an app called "Thought diary" you can use if that's easier! It will take you through all the same steps and be straight on your phone.

My thought challenging worksheet

My unhelpful thought:

Evidence for the thought:

Evidence against the thought:



What evidence would a friend give me?

My new revised thought:

What emotion did you feel originally? How does this compare to now, with your revised thought?

© 2014 The Mindy Project. All rights reserved.

My thought challenging worksheet

My unhelpful thought:

Evidence for the thought:

Evidence against the thought:

*Will this matter
in 6 months
time?*

My new revised thought:

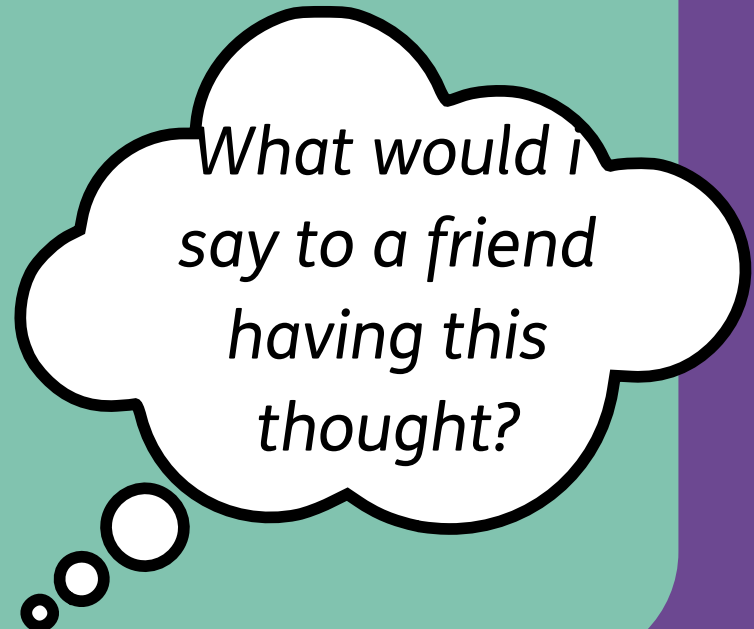
What emotion did you feel originally? How does this compare to now, with your revised thought?

My thought challenging worksheet

My unhelpful thought:

Evidence for the thought:

Evidence against the thought:



What would I say to a friend having this thought?

My new revised thought:

What emotion did you feel originally? How does this compare to now, with your revised thought?

Optional Task: Revisit thought capturing

Capturing thoughts can be hard. We've added another page if you feel you would like extra practice at capturing thoughts. Feel free to use whichever method of writing down your thoughts that works - on an app, on the notes section on your phone, in a journal or on this page.

Situation

Unhelpful thought

Thinking style

Situation

Unhelpful thought

Thinking style

Situation

Unhelpful thought

Thinking style

Situation

Unhelpful thought

Thinking style

Situation

Unhelpful thought

Thinking style

If you've made it this far, a big well done to you!
It's not easy working on anxiety, and you might feel your journey
doesn't end here.

You might want to continue a thought challenging for a few more
weeks, or you might feel you need further support.

We have another resource that's a great fit for once you've
completed this one. It's called "Lifestyle Management". You can
find this on our website and work through it like you did with this
one.

If you feel you need further support, you can email us on
wellbeing@ymcaexeter.org.uk, or you can visit our website if you
want to speak with a member of the team.

Other useful numbers and resources for the future

Childline - 0800 1111

Samaritans - 166 123

Young Minds - Text YM to 85258

www.ymcaexeter.org/cwpwellbeing