

Anxiety Toolbox

Anxiety 101

Student Workbook



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Feedback Form: https://cuboulder.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3L7z1HzZMC1MyMJ

Welcome!

Welcome to **Anxiety Toolbox**, a fast-paced, 2-session seminar intended to help increase your understanding and knowledge about anxiety. The goal is to provide you with some skills to recognize and manage symptoms you may be experiencing. We hope you find it helpful.

The goal of this seminar is to provide you with life-long tools you can use while facing anxiety-triggering situations. Remember, this intervention is not intended to “get rid of” your anxiety. While occasionally unpleasant, some anxiety can actually be a helpful and motivating emotion. Our hope is that these two sessions provide you with a jumping board from which to integrate skills into your daily life in the service of reducing anxiety.

By the end of this course, you will have received a lot of information and at times it may feel overwhelming. Remember that like any skill (e.g., learning to ride a bike), the skills you will learn in **Anxiety Toolbox** take time and practice to master. At times, you may encounter obstacles and/or find it difficult to integrate these skills into your daily life. That’s okay, it’s how change works, and as with all change, it’s important to practice as much as you can, even after encountering setbacks.

Think of your practice of these skills as a form of “mental health hygiene.” At the outset, it may seem tedious and you may question why you need to practice these skills so often. Think of it like dental hygiene—you brush your teeth multiple times a day to prevent the buildup of plaque and ultimately to prevent cavities. Similar to brushing your teeth, daily practice prevents a buildup of anxiety and stress over time. The more you practice and use these skills as part of your daily routine, the less tedious they may seem because they simply become a regular part of daily life.

Should you wish to focus more in depth on any of your anxiety related concerns, you may debrief with a therapist following completion of **Anxiety Toolbox** to discuss options.

If at any time you feel that you need additional support, please let your **Anxiety Toolbox** leader know or contact CAPS at (303)-492- 2277. You may also find additional resources online at www.colorado.edu/counseling

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Anxiety Toolbox?

Anxiety Toolbox is a fast-paced two-session seminar specifically designed to help people who struggle with a variety of anxiety-related concerns (e.g., panic attacks, Generalized Anxiety, test anxiety). The goal of this seminar is to provide education on anxiety and to teach coping skills for managing anxiety symptoms.

Why does Anxiety Toolbox use a 2-session model?

Teaching Anxiety Toolbox over the course of 2 sessions allows you sufficient time to learn the concepts with time to practice between sessions. Keeping it to two 60-minute sessions allows you to find time in your busy schedule to learn these skills.

What if I need more than 2 weeks to learn the model?

You are not alone. The skills taught in Anxiety Toolbox are difficult and take time to build. For this reason, we offer follow up options for anyone who would like additional support. Please see the front desk to schedule a follow up.

What if I don't feel comfortable in groups?

Many people feel a little anxious about participating in a group. Anxiety Toolbox is structured and curriculum-driven, like an academic class. You are not required to speak to the entire group if you do not feel comfortable doing so. The facilitators respect each participant's right to share only what they are comfortable sharing and never require you to share sensitive or potentially embarrassing information.

What if I have an urgent need to see a counselor during Anxiety Toolbox?

Simply let the facilitator or CAPS front desk staff know and they will facilitate you getting the help you need. Walk in hours at CAPS are Mondays through Friday 10am to 3:30pm with limited exceptions. The CAPS phone number is available to you 24/7 at (303) 492-2277.

Why do I have to do homework?

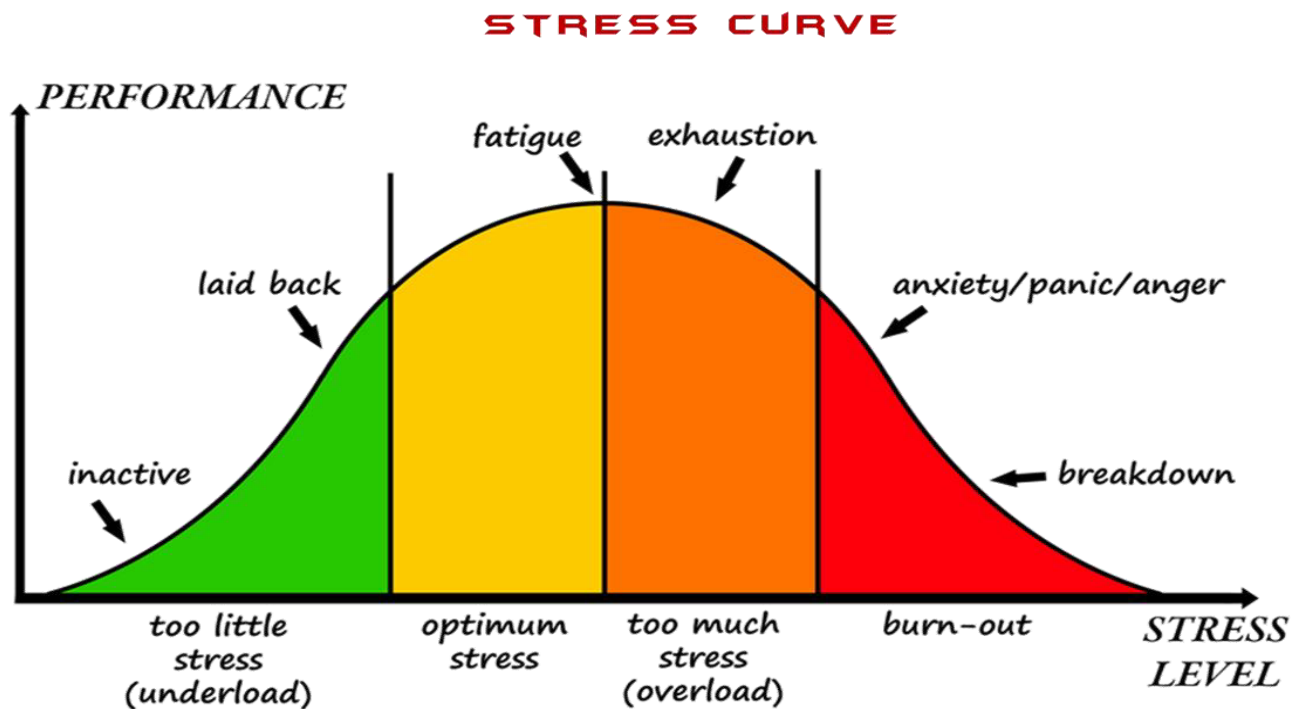
The focus of this workshop is on building skills to cope with anxiety; in order to achieve that goal, regular practice is essential. Any homework offered is simply a suggestion for ongoing practice. The more you practice, the more you may find you get out of this workshop. You will not be required to provide your responses at any time.

IN SESSION WORKSHEETS

Stress versus Anxiety

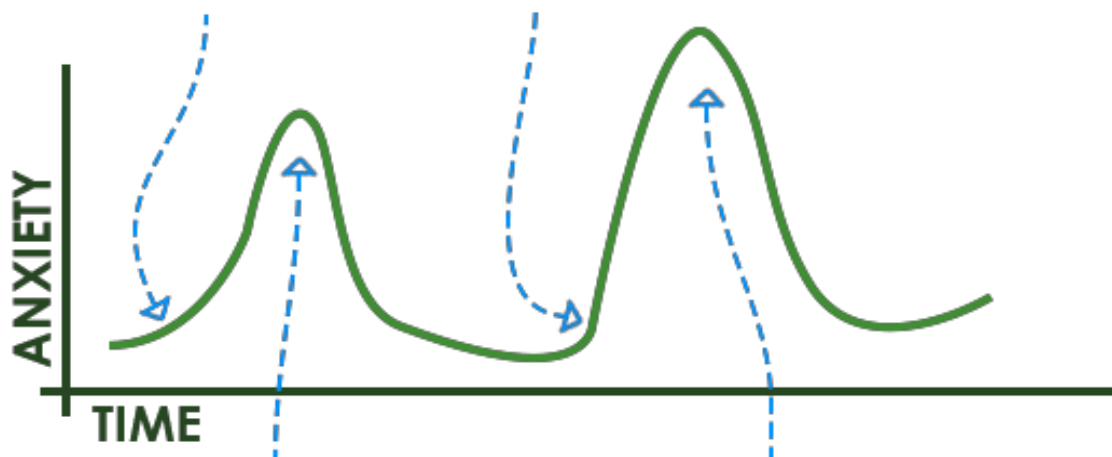
Everyday Anxiety (Stress)	Anxiety Disorder
In response to a known environmental factor	In response to an unknown source or in response to the experience of stress
Symptoms go away when the stressor goes away	Symptoms remain despite no identifiable stressor
Worry about living away from home for the first time, passing a class, a romantic breakup, or other important life events	Constant and unsubstantiated worry that causes significant distress and interferes with your daily life
Embarrassment or self-consciousness in an uncomfortable or awkward social situation; feeling nervous about meeting new people	Avoidance of social situations due to fear of being judged, embarrassed, or humiliated
Feeling nervous or sweating before a big test, class presentation, stage performance, or other significant event	Panic attacks that seem out of the blue and preoccupation with the fear of having another one
Realistic fear of a dangerous object, place, or situation (e.g. fear of poisonous snakes)	Irrational fear or avoidance of an object, place, or situation that poses little or no threat of danger (e.g. fear of elevators)
Making sure that you are healthy and living in a safe environment	Performing uncontrollable repetitive actions, such as excessive cleaning, checking, touching or arranging

Adapted from: <http://www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety>



Anxiety - Avoidance Roller Coaster

(A person is confronted with an anxiety-producing situation which leads to an uncomfortable sense of worry and agitation.)

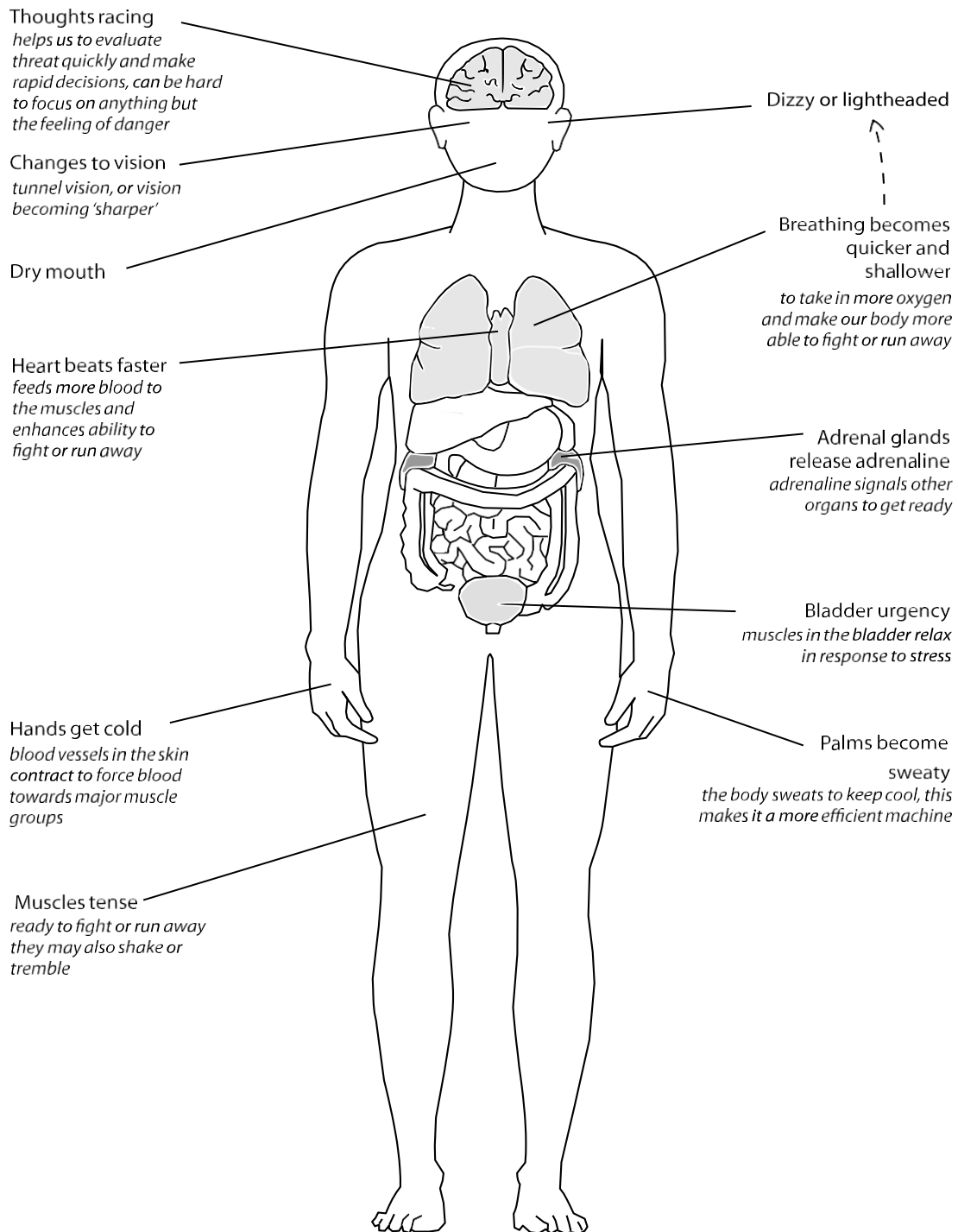


(The anxiety-producing situation is avoided, and the person receives a feeling of relief. However, next time the anxiety will be worse.)

Adapted from- <http://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-guide/cbt-for-anxiety>

Threat System (Fight or Flight)

The 'fight or flight' response gets the body ready to fight or run away. Once a threat is detected your body responds automatically. All of the changes happen for good reasons, but may be experienced as uncomfortable when they happen in 'safe' situations.



APPENDIX

Understanding Anxiety Disorders

While anxiety is a normal and adaptive experience for everyone, anxiety disorders are characterized by significant distress or impairment in social, academic/occupational, or other important areas of functioning (e.g., your general ability to function in life).

Some of the most common anxiety disorders include:

Generalized Anxiety Disorder: Chronic and unrealistic worry that feels difficult to control about everyday things (i.e., things that do not worry most people)

Social Anxiety Disorder: Chronic worry solely related to social situations

Panic Disorder: Characterized by episodes of “panic” that include things like: adrenaline surge, fear of losing control, chest pain, racing heart, shortness of breath, dizziness

Phobias: Specific fears that are excessive in nature and often lead to avoiding that which is feared (e.g., public speaking, heights, tunnels, etc.)

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder: Excessive rumination (thinking) with repetitive behaviors to reduce anxiety

Breathing Exercises

Belly (or Diaphragmatic) Breathing

You can do this exercise in any position, but it is helpful to do this exercise while lying down when first learning belly breathing.

1. Lie comfortably on your back, with a pillow under your head, your knees bent and your back flat. You can stretch your legs out if that's more comfortable.
2. Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your upper chest.
3. Inhale slowly and expand your belly as you breathe so that your lower hand moves with your belly. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.
4. Slowly exhale, focusing on the movement of your belly and lower hand as it returns to its original position.
5. Repeat steps 3 & 4 for several minutes, always focusing on the movement of the belly as you breathe. If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to your breathing.

Breath-Counting Exercise

This exercise focuses on the use of counting with the rhythm of the breath. Start with a short period of time and gradually increase the time. Set a timer so that you do not have to worry about when to stop.

1. Find a comfortable position. Take several deep breaths and settle into yourself. You may either close your eyes or keep them open, depending on your own comfort. If you keep them open, fix them on an object or a spot on the floor about four feet in front of you. Your eyes may be either focused or unfocused.
2. Take deep, comfortable breaths. Notice your inhalation. The pause between inhaling and exhaling, your exhalation, and the pause before starting again.
3. As you inhale, count, "one..." As you exhale, count, "two..." Inhale, "three..." Exhale, "four..." Continue until you reach 10 then start over.
4. If you lose count, simply begin with "one" on your next inhalation.
5. If you notice your mind has wandered, gently notice this, and return your focus back to counting your breath.
6. If you notice any body sensations catching your attention, focus on that sensation until it fades. Then return your attention back to counting your breaths.

Grounding Exercises

When people become overwhelmed with distressing thoughts or feelings, including intense anxiety, activities that keep your mind and body connected (called “grounding”) can be helpful in regaining a sense of stability and mental focus. The following are a number of grounding exercises to choose from to help firmly anchor you in the present moment and provide you with space to choose where to focus your energy. **You may need to try multiple different exercises to find one or two that work best for you.**

1. Remind yourself of who you are now. State your name, age and where you are right now.
2. Take ten slow deep breaths. Focus your attention on each breath on the way in and on the way out. Say the number of the breath to yourself as you exhale.
3. Splash water on your face or place a cool wet cloth on your face.
4. Pay purposeful attention as you hold a cold (non-alcoholic) beverage in your hands. Feel the coldness, and the wetness on the outside. Note the taste as you drink. You can also do this exercise with a warm beverage.
5. Find a “grounding object” to hold, look at, listen to, and/or smell. This could be a soft object such as a pillow or stuffed animal, a smooth stone you found on the beach, a picture of a beautiful scene or loved one, and/or any other object that represents safety or comfort.
6. Listen to music. Pay close attention and listen for something new or different.
7. If you wake up suddenly during the night and feel disoriented or distressed, remind yourself who you are and where you are. Look around the room and notice familiar objects and name them. Feel the bed you are lying on, the softness of the sheets or blankets, the warmth or coldness of the air, and notice any sounds you hear. Remind yourself that you are safe.

8. Feel the clothes on your body, whether your arms and legs are covered or not, and the sensation of your clothes as you move in them.
9. While sitting, feel the chair under you and the weight of your body and legs pressing down on it.
10. If you are lying down, feel the contact between your head, your body and your legs, as they touch the surface you are lying on. Starting from your head, notice how each part feels, all the way down to your feet, on the soft or hard surface.
11. Stop, look, and listen. Notice and name what you can see and hear nearby and in the distance.
12. Look around you, notice what is front of you and to each side, name first large objects and then smaller ones.
13. Get up, walk around, take your time to notice each step as you take one then another.
14. If you can, step outside, notice the temperature, the sounds around you, the ground under your feet, the smell in the air, etc.
15. "54321" Grounding Exercise:
 - Name 5 things you can see in the room with you.
 - Name 4 things you can feel (tactile; e.g. "chair on my back" or "feet on floor")
 - Name 3 things you can hear right now
 - Name 2 things you can smell right now
 - Name 1 good thing about yourself
16. Write and/or say grounding statements
 - This situation won't last forever
 - This too shall pass.
 - I can ride this out and not let it get me down.
 - My anxiety/fear/sadness won't kill me; it just doesn't feel good right now.
 - These are just my feelings and eventually they'll go away.

Adapted from: <http://www.livingwell.org.au/well-being/grounding-exercises/>

Sleep Hygiene

What is Sleep Hygiene? 'Sleep hygiene' is the term used to describe good sleep habits. Considerable research has gone into developing a set of guidelines and tips which are designed to enhance good sleeping, and there is much evidence to suggest that these strategies can provide long-term solutions to sleep difficulties.

1. **Get regular.** Go to bed and get up at more or less the same time every day, even on weekends and days off!



2. **Get up & try again.** Go to sleep only when tired. If you haven't been able to fall asleep after 30 minutes, get up and do something calming (not stimulating) until you feel sleepy, then return to bed and try again.

3. **Avoid caffeine & nicotine.** Avoid consuming any caffeine (coffee, tea, soda, chocolate) or nicotine (cigarettes) for at least 4-6 hours before going to bed. These act as stimulants and interfere with falling asleep



4. **Avoid alcohol.** Avoid alcohol for at least 4-6 hours before bed because it interrupts the quality of sleep.

5. **Bed is for sleeping.** Do not use your bed for anything other than sleeping and sex, so that your body comes to associate bed with sleep.

6. **Electronics Curfew.** Don't use back-lit electronics 60 minutes prior to bed, as the



artificial light prevents hormones and neurons that promote sleep.

7. **The right space.** Make your bed and bedroom quiet and comfortable for sleeping. An eye mask and earplugs may help block out light and noise.

8. **No naps.** Avoid taking naps during the day. If you can't make it through the day without a nap, make sure it is for less than an hour and before 3pm.

9. **Sleep rituals.** Develop rituals to remind your body that it is time to sleep, like relaxing stretches or breathing exercises 15 minutes before bed.



10. **No clock-watching.** Checking the clock during the night can wake you up and reinforces negative thoughts such as "Oh no, look how late it is, I'll never get to sleep."

11. **Keep daytime routine the same.** Even if you have a bad night sleep it is important that you try to keep your daytime activities the same as you had planned. That is, don't avoid activities because you feel tired. This can reinforce the insomnia.

Adapted from <http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au>

progressive muscle relaxation

One of the body's reactions to fear and anxiety is muscle tension. This can result in feeling "tense", or can lead to muscle aches and pains, as well as leaving some people feeling exhausted. Think about how you respond to anxiety. Do you "tense up" when you're feeling anxious? Muscle relaxation can be particularly helpful in cases where anxiety is especially associated to muscle tension. This information sheet will guide you through a common form of relaxation designed to reduce muscle tension.

Muscle tension

Muscle tension is commonly associated with stress, anxiety and fear as part of a process that helps our bodies prepare for potentially dangerous situations. Even though some of those situations may not actually be dangerous, our bodies respond in the same way. Sometimes we don't even notice how our muscles become tense, but perhaps you clench your teeth slightly so your jaw feels tight, or maybe your shoulders become. Muscle tension can also be associated with backaches and tension headaches.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

One method of reducing muscle tension that people have found helpful is through a technique called Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR). In progressive muscle relaxation exercises, you tense up particular muscles and then relax them, and then you practice this technique consistently.

preparing for relaxation

When you are beginning to practice progressive muscle relaxation exercises keep in mind the following points.

- **Physical injuries.** If you have any injuries, or a history of physical problems that may cause muscle pain, always consult your doctor before you start.
- **Select your surroundings.** Minimize the distraction to your five senses. Such as turning off the TV and radio, and using soft lighting.
- **Make yourself comfortable.** Use a chair that comfortably seats your body, including your head. Wear loose clothing, and take off your shoes.
- **Internal mechanics.** Avoid practicing after big, heavy meals, and do not practice after consuming any intoxicants, such as alcohol.

general procedure

- 1 Once you've set aside the time and place for relaxation, slow down your breathing and give yourself permission to relax.
- 2 When you are ready to begin, tense the muscle group described. Make sure you can feel the tension, but not so much that you feel a great deal of pain. Keep the muscle tensed for approximately 5 seconds.
- 3 Relax the muscles and keep it relaxed for

approximately 10 seconds. It may be helpful to say something like "Relax" as you relax the muscle.

- 4 When you have finished the relaxation procedure, remain seated for a few moments allowing yourself to become alert.

Relaxation sequence

1. **Right hand and forearm.** Make a fist with your right hand.
2. **Right upper arm.** Bring your right forearm up to your shoulder to "make a muscle".
3. **Left hand and forearm.**
4. **Left upper arm.**
5. **Forehead.** Raise your eyebrows as high as they will go, as though you were surprised by something.
6. **Eyes and cheeks.** Squeeze your eyes tight shut.
7. **Mouth and jaw.** Open your mouth as wide as you can, as you might when you're yawning.
8. **Neck. !!!** Be careful as you tense these muscles. Face forward and then pull your head back slowly, as though you are looking up to the ceiling.
9. **Shoulders.** Tense the muscles in your shoulders as you bring your shoulders up towards your ears.
10. **Shoulder blades/Back.** Push your shoulder blades back, trying to almost touch them together, so that your chest is pushed forward.
11. **Chest and stomach.** Breathe in deeply, filling up your lungs and chest with air.
12. **Hips and buttocks.** Squeeze your buttock muscles
13. **Right upper leg.** Tighten your right thigh.
14. **Right lower leg. !!!** Do this slowly and carefully to avoid cramps. Pull your toes towards you to stretch the calf muscle.
15. **Right foot.** Curl your toes downwards.
16. **Left upper leg.** Repeat as for right upper leg.
17. **Left lower leg.** Repeat as for right lower leg.
18. **Left foot.** Repeat as for right foot.

Adapted from <http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au>

behavioural experiments negative predictions

Negative Predictions

Many people who suffer from anxiety, depression or low self-esteem tend to make negative predictions about how certain situations will turn out. You may tend to:

- Overestimate the likelihood that bad things will happen or that something will go wrong
- Exaggerate how bad things will be
- Underestimate your ability to deal with things if they don't go well
- Ignore other factors in the situation which suggest that things will not be as bad as you are predicting

When you jump to such negative conclusions about the future, you will tend to engage in unhelpful behaviours. You may tend to:

- Avoid** the situation totally
- Try the situation out but **escape** when things seem too difficult
- Be overly cautious and engage in **safety behaviours** (see worksheet Biology+Psychology of Panic)

The problem with these strategies is that they prevent you from actually testing out your predictions. This makes it very hard for you to ever have a different experience from what you expected, so you continue to expect the worst.



For example, let us imagine you have been invited to a BBQ and your negative prediction is: "I will have a terrible time, no-one will speak to me, I will feel like a total fool."

Your usual response may be to either avoid the BBQ altogether, or to attend but to leave as soon as you feel uncomfortable, or to stand in the corner and speak only to one person you already know. This may help you reduce your discomfort in the short term, but it also contributes to the continuation of your negative predictions, and this means continuation of anxieties.

Testing Our Predictions

What could have been an alternative way to handle the BBQ situation described above?

A different approach could be to go to the BBQ, try your best to have a nice time and speak to others, and use the resulting experience as evidence to test your original negative prediction. **Think of yourself as a scientist, putting your thoughts under the microscope to examine the evidence for and against your thoughts**, instead of assuming that of your negative predictions are true. Behavioural experiments are a good way for testing these predictions. Next we will go through the steps, using the BBQ situation as an example.



Planning your Behavioural Experiment

1. Be clear about the purpose of the experiment - the point is to test out your negative predictions and help you to develop more realistic and/or balanced predictions.

2. What is the thought or belief that you are trying to test? Rate how strongly you believe this prediction (0-100)

I will have a terrible time at the BBQ. Even if I try to talk to people, no-one will talk to me. (90)

3. What is an alternative prediction or belief? Rate how strongly you believe this alternative (0-100)

I will find at least one person to talk to and will have an ok time. (10)

4. Design the actual experiment - what will you do to test your prediction, when will you do it, how long will it take, and with whom? Try to be as specific as possible. There are no boundaries to how creative you can be, and it is ok to ask for help.

I will go to the BBQ at 8pm, alone, and will stay for at least one hour. I will try to make conversation with at least three people, one that I did not know already. I will only drink one glass of wine.

5. Make sure you set your experiment at an appropriate level. It is best to start simply and increase the challenge step-by-step.

Identify likely problems and how to deal with them.

There might not be anyone I know at the BBQ. But I will at least know the host and I can ask to be introduced to some other people.



Evaluating your Behavioural Experiment

1. Carry out the experiment as planned. Remember to take notice of your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

2. Write down what happened, what did you observe?

Consider the evidence *for* and *against* your original prediction. What did this say about your negative prediction

I felt quite nervous at first and wanted to leave. I used breathing to calm myself. The host was friendly and seemed happy to talk to me, and I also spoke to Kelly, who I hadn't seen in some time. Kelly introduced me to her partner Jim and we had a good chat about travel. At one point I worried I had said something stupid, but Jim didn't seem to notice so my worry passed.

3. What have you learned?

I am capable of making conversation and enjoying myself in a casual social situation.

4. Rate how strongly you now believe in your original prediction and the alternative (0-100)

I will have a terrible time at the BBQ. Even if I try to talk to people, no-one will talk to me. (10)
I will find at least one person to talk to and will have an ok time. (80)

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Centre for
Clinical
Interventions
• Psychotherapy • Research • Training

CAPS Workshops

Please note workshop offerings are subject to change each semester. Please call CAPS at (303) 492-2277 for the most up to date information on CAPS' current offerings.

Anxiety Toolbox:

This workshop is a two-part series designed to help you understand anxiety symptoms and build skills to manage these symptoms. The sessions include modules dedicated to understanding anxiety, learning deep breathing and grounding skills, introducing a method for slowing down and disentangling anxious thoughts, and developing alternative responses to anxiety.

Feel Better Fast:

This workshop is a three-part series designed to help you make a change in your life by learning mindfulness techniques, as well as ways to cope with distressing emotions and thoughts. Some of the skills you will learn include how to make balanced decisions, to self-soothe, to take a step back from your thoughts and to live by your values. With guidance and support, this workshop might be all you need to get back on track and feeling better in no time.

COVID Workshop Series

The COVID workshop series is composed of 4 independent workshops designed to help you cope with ways in which COVID-19 has changed our lives. This is a great option if you're short on time, wanting some quick coping skills, and/or are noticing distress related to COVID. They include the following:

Mindfully Thriving: Learn how to stay present during times of unease. Now more than ever we can all benefit from learning mindfulness skills to stay grounded and present during the pandemic. This workshop teaches mindfulness skills and guides you through 3 different mindfulness exercises you can easily practice at home.

Anxiety Toolbox for COVID: acknowledges the ways in which COVID-19 can increase anxiety. Learn skills and tools to help you manage challenging or triggering thoughts, feelings and behaviors using examples from the current pandemic.

Coping with COVID: normalizes the different responses people have been experiencing related to COVID-19. Learn skills for managing overwhelming emotions and reducing emotional vulnerability during this stressful time.

How to Survive Quarantine with Other People: Because of COVID, more of us are spending more hours than usual at home with family members, partners, or roommates. Learn to address conflict, develop listening skills, and develop healthy boundaries to manage tension and conflict that many have experienced due to that challenges of increased time with others.

Feel Good Fridays:

This drop-in workshop is an opportunity to be led through a powerful guided meditation to undo stress, soothe the nervous system and feel better. Students, staff and faculty are welcome to attend. Participants are encouraged to bring materials for personal comfort that will aid meditation (e.g., yoga mat, a small pillow or cushion, etc.). Please arrive on time so the meditation is not disturbed. There will be no late admittance.

Identity and Sexuality Exploration

Do you have questions about sexuality, gender or relationships? Do you need help navigating gender-affirming healthcare? This workshop provides an inclusive and affirming space to develop knowledge and skills for your personal journey. An informal consultation with a queer-friendly nurse practitioner and clinical psychologist can provide insight for sex and sexuality questions, initiating sexual health exams and testing, gender-affirming treatment options and relationship health. All identities and questions are welcome!

Apps for your Smartphone, Tablet, or Computer

ACT Coach
Breathe2relax
CBTi-Coach
Calm
Stop, Breathe, & Think
Happify: for Stress and Worry

Headspace (has a student discount)
Mindfulness Coach
Mindshift
Sanvello
T2 Mood Tracker

Online Resources

Cal Poly SLO Counseling Services - Guided Meditations

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI44jVzqiSNuYrPNPWHc6BTqrwBXtlhrS>

Centre for Clinical Interventions

<https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Anxiety>

<https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Worry-and-Rumination>

Mayo Clinic Stress Reduction Website

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/mindfulness-exercises/MY02124>

Meditation Oasis www.meditationoasis.com

Mindful www.mindful.org

Mindfulness Research Guide <http://www.mindfulexperience.org/>

UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center- Guided Meditations

<http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22>

Books for Further Reading

An End to Panic by Zuercher-White (1998)

The Anxiety and Worry Workbook by Clark & Beck (2012)

Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life by Hayes & Smith (2005)

The Mindful Way Workbook by Teasdale, Williams, Segal, & Kabat-Zinn (2014)

The Mindfulness Workbook: A Teach Yourself Guide by Langley (2013)

The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook by Davis, Robbins, Eshelman & McKay (2008)

Things Might Go Terribly Horribly Wrong by Wilson and DuFrene (2010)

When Panic Attacks by Burns (2006)