

TUTOR TIME ACTIVITIES

Your Well-being

A Self Help Guide



Learn more about:

Challenging unhelpful thoughts and emotions

Relaxation

Problem solving

Looking after yourself

Communication

Timekeeping and organisation

Challenging unhelpful thoughts

The way we think about things has an impact on our mood, anxiety and stress levels. Many of these thoughts occur outside of our control and can be negative or unhelpful. It is therefore important to remember that they are just thoughts, without any real basis and are not necessarily facts. Even though we may believe a lot of our unhelpful thoughts when we are low, anxious or stressed, it is good to remember that they should be questioned as they are often based on wrong assumptions.

The following section will help you begin to recognise if you are thinking about things in an unhelpful or unrealistic way and discuss how you can start to make changes to this. By doing so, you can learn to see things in a more realistic light which can help to improve your mood and reduce your stress and anxiety levels. You might have unhelpful thoughts about all kinds of things. Here are some examples:

Yourself:

- I'm boring
- I'm ugly
- I'm a failure

Not Pretty Enough



Not Good Enough

Others:

- No-one likes me
- People are out to get me
- Everyone is better than me

Not Smart Enough

The world:

- Life is unfair
- The world is a horrible place

The future:

- Things will never get better
- What's the point of continuing
- I'm destined to fail

It is clear to see how this kind of thinking might bring your mood and confidence levels down. Do you ever think in any ways outlined above? Fill in your examples below:

You might find it difficult to identify an unhelpful thought. Try thinking about a time when you felt particularly low, worried or stressed. Consider what was running through your mind at the time.

Patterns of unhelpful thinking

First you need to be able to recognise an unhelpful thought. Then you can challenge it. Being aware of the common patterns that unhelpful thoughts follow can help you to recognise when you have them. Here are some of the common patterns that our unhelpful thoughts follow:

Predicting the future

Catastrophising

What if?

When people are worried about something it is common for them to spend a lot of time ruminating. You can end up thinking about the future and predicting what might go wrong. This is instead of just letting things be. You might blow things out of proportion, or come to expect a catastrophe. For example:

- What if I go to a party and no-one talks to me?
- What if I don't make friends when I start my new job?
- What if I can't cope and have a panic attack?

Jumping to conclusions

Taking things personally

Mind reading

When people are feeling emotionally vulnerable, it is likely that they take things to heart and become more sensitive to what people say. They can often make assumptions about why someone said something, being overly quick to draw conclusions and thinking that they are the focus of what has been said. For example:

- You think that a friend has ignored you, but in fact they have other things on their mind.
- They must be laughing at me.

Focusing on the negative

Ignoring the positive

Filtering

Often people can ignore the positive aspects of life or their situation. Instead you may focus on negative elements. This style of thinking stops us feeling good about ourselves. It can lower your confidence. For example:

- Despite having many friends, we focus on the one person that doesn't seem to like us.
- I was only able to cope on that occasion because

Black & white thinking
 All or nothing
 Perfectionism
 “Should” thinking

Sometimes people only see things as black or white, with no grey area or in-between. Having this polarised view can lead some people into setting themselves impossibly high standards, being overly critical and struggling to recognise any achievement due to their perfectionism.

- That was a complete waste of time
- They must hate me
- I should always get full marks

Over-generalising
 Labelling

Based on one isolated incident you might assume that other events will follow a similar pattern in the future. You might find it hard to see a negative event as a one-off. This can also mean that you label yourself, often unkindly, which can lower your mood and confidence, perhaps even leading to feelings of hopelessness. For example:

- Failing my driving test means I'll fail at everything
- The neighbour's dog snarled at me, all dogs are vicious!
- I'm useless

Do any of the unhelpful thoughts follow some of these patterns? Jot down any examples you can think of into the box below:

Unhelpful Thought	Category
eg <i>"I'm such a loser"</i>	<i>Labelling</i>

We can learn techniques to challenge these unhelpful thoughts. This can help to improve your mood and reduce your anxiety and stress levels. The next part of this booklet will discuss how we can go about challenging our unhelpful thoughts. You may come up with a more balanced thought that is accurate and based on evidence.

How to challenge unhelpful thoughts

Once you have recognised an unhelpful thought, the next stage is to challenge it. To do this, you can ask yourself a series of questions. See example below:

Situation: My friend hasn't called me after saying they would



How you feel: Worried, upset, low

Unhelpful thought: They must dislike me; perhaps they don't want to be my friend after all!

Challenges to an unhelpful thought

Now you can challenge your unhelpful thoughts by asking these questions.

Is there any evidence that contradicts this thought?

- Perhaps they haven't got away yet or are busy?
- Maybe they just forgot

Can you identify any of the patterns of unhelpful thinking described earlier?

- I'm catastrophizing
- Mind-reading

What would you say to a friend who had this thought in a similar situation?

- I'd say – they're probably just busy, stop stressing; they'll no doubt call soon

What are the costs and benefits of thinking in this way?

- Costs: I am likely to be on edge a lot and suspicious of my friend
- Benefits: I can't think of any

How will you feel about this in 6 months time?

- I'll probably look back and laugh about how silly I was being

Is there another way of looking at this situation?

- They're probably just busy and will call soon

Once you have asked yourself these questions, you should read through your answers. Try to come up with a more balanced or rational view. For example:

I'm sure there'll be a good explanation as I don't have any evidence that suggests that they're fed up with me.

Try to apply these questions to the unhelpful thoughts that you notice. It can help to improve your mood and reduce your anxiety and stress levels. You can use this technique to test if your thoughts are realistic and balanced.

HELPFUL



UNHELPFUL



THOUGHTS are **NOT** FACTS PRACTICE

mindful
mindful.org

When you put some space between you and your reaction, it changes your relationship to your thoughts—you can watch them come and go instead of treating them as facts.

If you're stuck on a negative thought, ask yourself:

1

Is it true?

Often the answer is, "Well, yes." This is the brain initially reacting—the autopilot you live with and believe is you.

2

Is it **absolutely true?**

Is this thought 100% accurate? Can you see the thought in a different way?

3

How does **this thought make me feel?**

Notice any storylines you're holding onto, and name your feelings: *sad, angry, jealous, hurt*.

4

What would **things be like if I didn't hold this belief?**

Imagine possible benefits to your relationships, energy levels, and motivation.

<https://www.mindful.org/>

Identifying Unhelpful Thoughts

Whenever your mood changes, try to write down what you were doing, how you felt and what you were thinking at the time.

You might find that patterns begin to emerge.

Situation	Feelings	Thoughts

Reducing avoidance

People often get into the habit of avoiding situations that cause them difficulty. This coping strategy can unfortunately make the problem worse. This is because the longer we avoid something, the more intimidating it becomes. By avoiding situations, we also stop ourselves from proving that we can cope in them. As a result, our anxiety towards the situation continues and our confidence remains low. Take the example below:

Someone who tends to worry about being judged negatively by others.



- *May avoid going out socially, or speaking when in large groups.*
- *May avoid all performance situations, such as giving a speech or presenting their work.*



By avoiding all of these related situations, they never have a chance to practice in them or prove that they could cope well.

It is easy to see how using avoidance as a strategy to cope can soon begin to have a negative impact on people's lives as they start to avoid more and more situations. If instead we confront difficult situations then it is possible to build up our confidence. This will help your anxiety to reduce significantly.

Physical feelings are experienced when your body reacts to stress, fear or anxiety. These symptoms are often referred to as the 'fight or flight' response. This reaction quickly and helpfully prepares the body for action. It prepares us to either protect against or escape danger.

- Making our heart beat faster - to supply more blood to our muscles.
- Producing more sweat - to cool us down.
- Tensing our muscles - getting them ready for action.
- Taking deeper and quicker breaths - to supply oxygen to our muscles.
- Shutting down body functions that aren't needed at the time e.g. digestion.
- Racing thoughts - quickly narrowing the available options to make a quick response.

In the past such a reaction would have offered us some protection. Preparing us to react quickly in case of predators, and aiding survival as we hunted and gathered food. These days we do not depend so much upon running or fighting as we negotiate difficult circumstances. The symptoms described above are therefore less helpful. They may even end up being quite confusing. Threats like money problems, difficulties at work, challenging friends, unhelpful staff or rude drivers do not require such an extreme physical reaction. These symptoms are not dangerous in themselves. In many ways it is a useful response, but at the wrong time. We need not fear the fight or flight reaction. It is our body's healthy protection system. Understanding this can help you to manage the physical symptoms. You

need not worry about them or feel that you need to respond or react. You can allow them to pass, as they will do quite quickly.

Things to consider:

List the things that you avoid

Come up with a list of the situations that you often try to escape from or avoid.

Hierarchy items	Predicted anxiety
Speaking to a group of friends	
Giving a presentation to a small group of people	
Making eye contact with a stranger	
Asking a shop assistant for a refund	
Asking a stranger for directions	
Making a request or asking for help	
Having a one to one conversation with a colleague, teacher etc..	

Don't fear the symptoms of anxiety. Anxiety is a natural and healthy reaction that is not dangerous.

Ranking these situations

Rank your list of situations in order of difficulty. From the least anxiety provoking to the most anxiety provoking on a scale of 0-100. 0 = no anxiety and 100 = extreme anxiety.

Hierarchy items	Predicted anxiety
Speaking to a group of friends	75
Giving a presentation to a small group of people	90
Making eye contact with a stranger	95
Asking a shop assistant for a refund	50
Asking a stranger for directions	60
Making a request or asking for help	70
Having a one to one conversation with a colleague, teacher etc	50
	75

Once you have done this, try to organise your items from least anxiety provoking to most anxiety provoking.

Try not to escape situations you fear half-way through. Stay, and your anxiety will eventually decrease.

Confronting the lowest ranked situation

Try to confront the lowest ranked item on your list. This will be the item that causes you least anxiety. You will likely find that although your anxiety might initially rise, it will drop if you remain in the situation for long enough. Try to stay with the situation until your anxiety has reduced by at least half.

- Your anxiety will reduce each time you confront a feared situation. Try to confront your fears as often as possible.
- You may also find it helpful

Repeating this task

Repeat the task as often as possible (every day if you can). Try not to leave too long between times when you confront this item. This is because the more you confront something, the more your fear will reduce. You should notice your anxiety getting less and less each time you do so. You may find eventually that it will cause you little or no anxiety at all.

- You may also find it helpful to challenge any unhelpful thoughts as you face a fear.
- Look out for other situations that you avoid due to anxiety. Try to gradually reduce your avoidance more and more.
- You may confront an item on your list which doesn't go as well as you had hoped. Try not to give up. Persevere, and it should eventually get easier.
- If an item on your list seems too hard, see if you can put in an extra step or two before it. This will allow your confidence to rise further before you face it.



Moving on to the next lowest item

When you feel comfortable with an item, try to move on to the next item on your list. Working through your list you will begin to feel anxious in fewer and fewer situations. You should find that your confidence grows as you move on from each item. You should find that tasks ranked as more difficult seem more manageable as you progress.



Things to remember:

- Don't fear the symptoms of anxiety. Anxiety is a natural and healthy reaction that is not dangerous.
- Try not to escape situations you fear half-way through. Stay, and your anxiety will eventually decrease.
- Your anxiety will reduce each time you confront a feared situation. Try to confront your fears as often as possible.
- You may also find it helpful to challenge any unhelpful thoughts as you face a fear.
- Look out for other situations that you avoid due to anxiety. Try to gradually reduce your avoidance more and more.
- You may confront an item on your list which doesn't go as well as you had hoped. Try not to give up. Persevere, and it should eventually get easier.
- If an item on your list seems too hard, see if you can put in an extra step or two before it. This will allow your confidence to rise further before you face it.

FACT or OPINION



FACT

Evidence to support its truth
Undisputable
Driven by rational thought
Head

OPINION

Based upon a belief or personal view
Arguable
Driven by and reinforced by emotion
Heart

At stressful times, we tend to be driven by our emotions and opinions, which create a vicious cycle by fuelling each other. Our emotions strengthen our opinions, which in turn, intensify our emotions.



This leads to impulsive acts and unhelpful longer term consequences, which help to maintain the overall problem.

Realising that many thoughts are opinion rather than fact makes it less likely that we'll be distressed by them, and more able to make wise and calm decisions about the best action to take.

It is helpful to ask ourselves whether our thoughts are FACT or OPINION.

- If OPINION, then we can look at the facts – what we do **know** about the situation.
- If FACT, then we can make choices about the best thing to do.

FACT or OPINION?

Relaxation

It is important to make time to relax and do activities that are enjoyable. This can help to by calming the body and mind. It can also help you to sleep. Without taking the time to unwind, it is easy to feel overwhelmed and stressed.

Relaxation can involve doing something that you enjoy, or just being by yourself. Good examples might be reading a book or having a bath. Exercise is also particularly effective at helping us to relax. What you do does not really matter. Try to choose something that you will look forward to and that gives you a break. Doing an activity that you enjoy will also give you less time to spend worrying. Here is a list of activities that might help you to relax.



Suggestions:

- Do some exercise (e.g. swim, cycle)
- Read a book
- Watch your favourite TV show
- Go to the cinema
- Do something creative (e.g. draw, paint)
- Visit a friend or family member
- Have a bath

Try to add some of your own ideas into the box below. You will know what works best for you.

Try to find time to relax every day. This might seem difficult, but it is worth making time for. It can help you to feel a lot better. There are audio relaxation guides available that you might find a helpful support.

There are also some exercises described in the next few pages. They are specifically designed to help you to relax. However, you should stop the exercise if at any time you begin to experience discomfort or pain.

Looking After Yourself

Taking steps towards a healthy lifestyle can have a real impact on our mood, anxiety and stress levels. On the other hand, unhealthy habits can put your health, or the health of others, at risk. It can be a real challenge to overcome some habits or behaviours. Focusing on the benefits of positive change may boost your motivation.



Alcohol

Alcohol can impact your ability to cope and control behaviours. This can be unhelpful if you are trying to overcome problems with anger or anxiety. It can also interfere with your mood, and the quality of your sleep. You might think that consuming alcohol would help you sleep. In fact, as your body processes alcohol overnight it can wake you up. Some people use the numbing effect of alcohol to avoid thinking about or facing problems. Unfortunately, this approach can be damaging and make things worse. Drinking a lot and often can lead to a pattern of addictive substance misuse.



Drugs

Many drugs have a sedative or stimulant effect on the body which can have an impact on your sleep and mood. Some people use recreational drugs as a distraction, to avoid thinking about or facing problems. Using such substances can be damaging and make things worse. Developing a habit of regular or increasing use can lead to a pattern of addictive substance misuse.



Smoking

The content of cigarette smoke and nicotine replacements act as a stimulant. This can have an impact on your sleep and your mood. Some people say that smoking helps them to cope with stress. Smoking is known to have a negative impact on long-term physical health.



Caffeine

Caffeine can trigger a reaction that is similar to the symptoms of anxiety. It can also reduce the quality of sleep. It is best not to have anything caffeinated within four hours of bedtime. Coffee, tea, hot chocolate, energy drinks, and some fizzy drinks contain caffeine.

By cutting down or stopping your consumption of potentially harmful substances, you are taking steps towards a healthier lifestyle.



Relationships / Social Network

Good relationships and support from friends and family can really help us cope better. It can also mean that we overcome problems more quickly and for longer. It can be really helpful to talk through difficulties with friends. You could discuss ways of coping, and some of them might have been through something similar.



Healthy Eating

What you eat and drink can have a significant impact on your mood, sleep and physical health. Consider making changes towards having a balanced, nutritious diet. Try to eat regular meals and stay hydrated. Avoid unhealthy food that contains a lot of fat or sugar. Also, consider what you eat and drink close to bedtime. Caffeine, alcohol or a large meal can interfere with your sleep.



Exercise

Keeping fit and active can improve your physical health, mood and ability to cope with problems. Try to get at least some gentle exercise each week. You could try going for a walk, doing the garden or housework, playing sport or joining an exercise class. While exercise can also help us sleep, try not to be too active close to bedtime as this can keep you awake.



Routine

Having a consistent routine can help give structure to your life. Patterns can be set as we react the same way or do the same thing in certain situations. Our body can begin to expect and follow such routines. For example, taking time to relax and unwind before bed, and getting up at the same time.

Scratched Record

This can be useful with strangers when you have a specific task. For example, when taking something back to a shop. It consists simply of repeating your point several times no matter how the other person tries to divert you. Imagine this situation:

Taking a pair of trousers back to the shop.



Customer:

"I'd like to return these trousers because they've got a mark on them."

Sales Assistant:

"Hmm...Well, it's only a small mark. It will probably wash off."

Customer:

"I'd still like them changed please."

Sales Assistant:

"We don't have any more of that size in stock."

Customer:

"I would like a replacement pair please."

Sales Assistant:

"OK. We'll re-order them. They should be in by the end of the week."

Taking Criticism

It can be difficult to listen to criticisms. It is a chance to learn about yourself as others see you. Helpful criticism can be very useful. This is very different to negative insults. Try simply listening to what is being said. Check that you understand their comments by repeating them back in your own words. You might not immediately agree with what has been said. It is important to stand your ground, but not become defensive.

Imagine this situation:

Person B is trying on a shirt and asks Person A for their opinion.



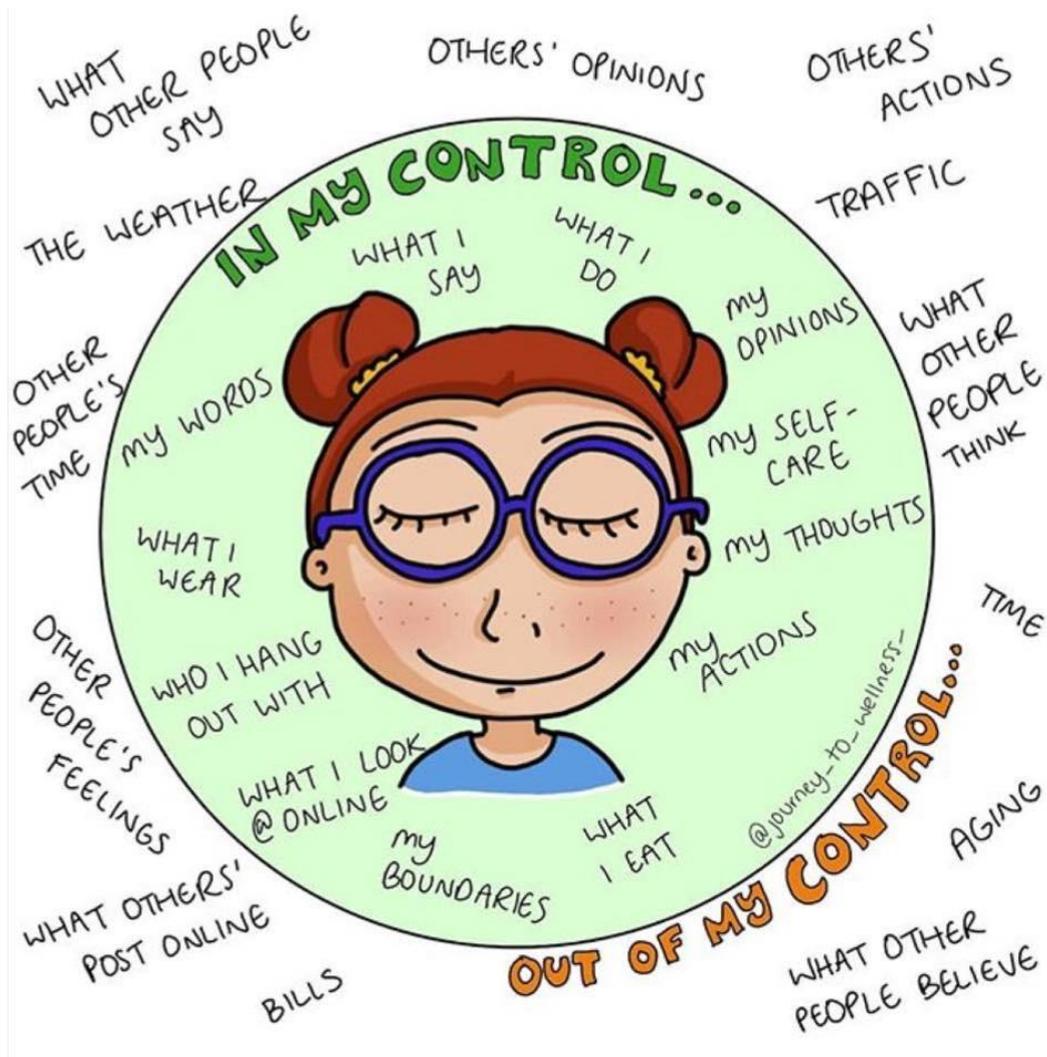
Person A:

"You don't suit that shirt at all!"

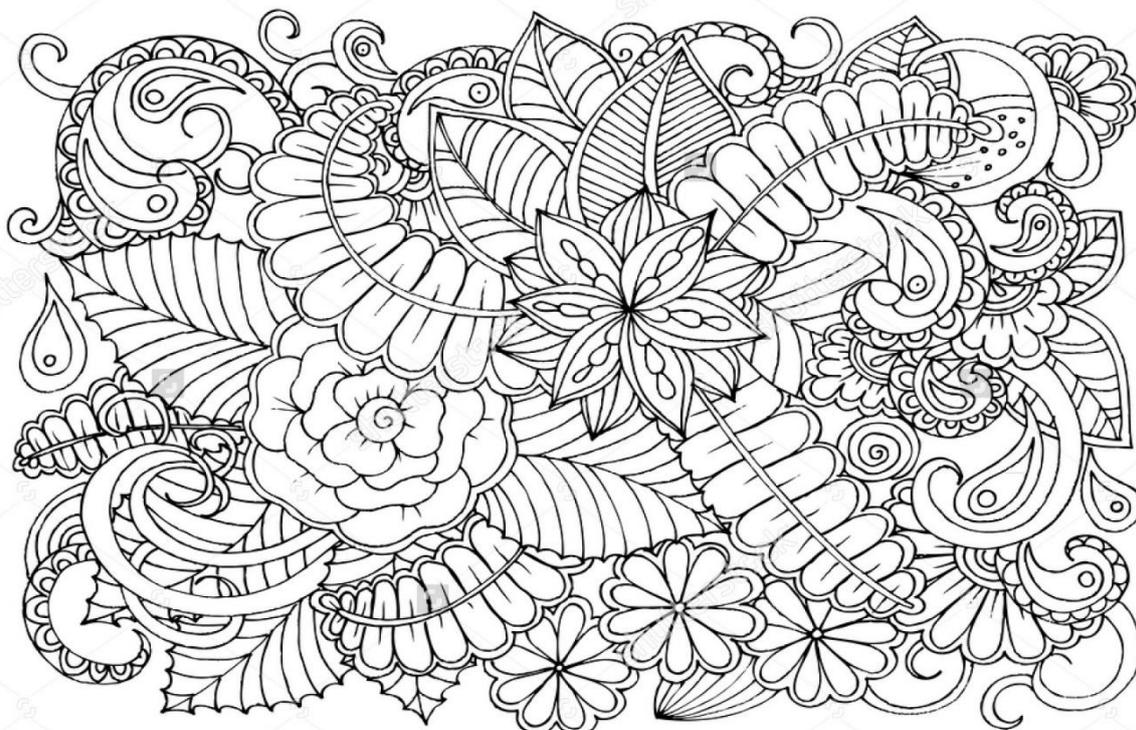
Person B:

"OK...there's something you don't like about it."

In My Control or Out of My Control?



Once you have filled in your diary, all you have to do is try to follow your plan each day. Don't worry if unexpected things come up and you cannot stick to it exactly. In fact, it is very unlikely that things will go exactly as you planned. It is also fine to be flexible and replace some activities with new ones. Leave out some tasks altogether if you don't have time for them. Try to be relaxed if this happens.



HOW ABOUT SOME MINDFULNESS COLOURING?



Activity Diary

Try to plan activities to fill your week. This can help you to make good use of your time.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Breakfast							
Morning							
Morning							
Lunch							
Afternoon							
Afternoon							
Dinner							
Evening							
Bedtime							

Thought Diary

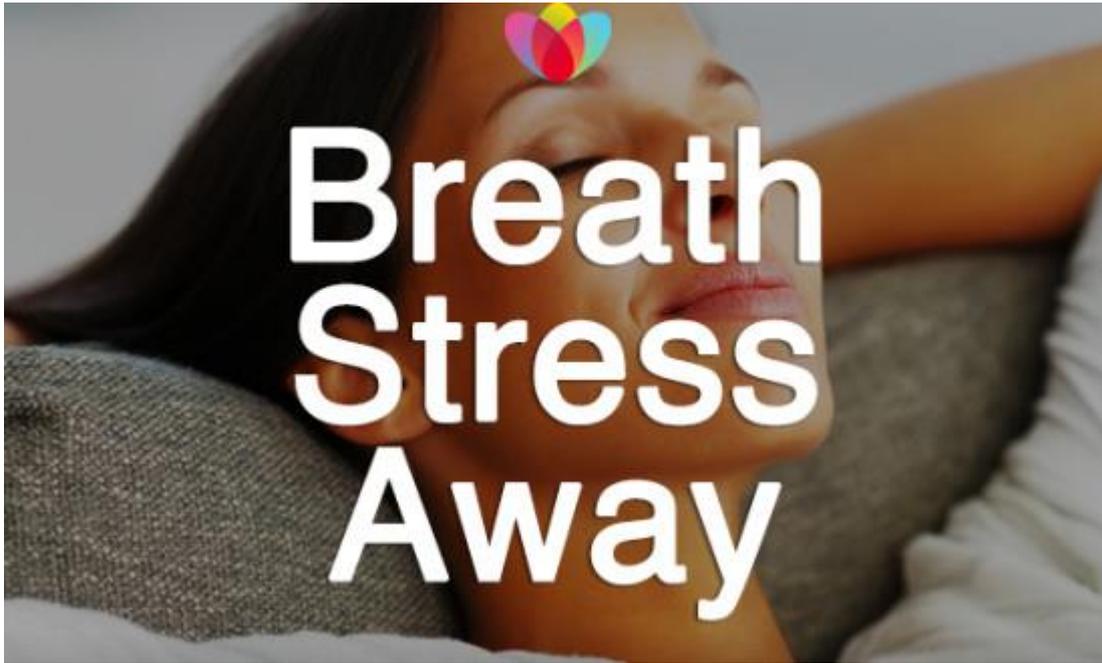
Whenever your mood changes, try to write down what you were doing, how you felt and what you were thinking at the time. You might find that patterns begin to emerge. Then taking a particular unhelpful thought, see if you can test it. Ask questions to test whether your belief has any real basis.

Situation	Emotion(s) How it makes you feel	Unhelpful thought(s)	Challenges to unhelpful thought(s) Use the questions listed below to help	Balanced thought(s) Can you think of a more balanced thought that would be more accurate
			<p>Is there any evidence that contradicts this thought?</p> <p>Can you identify any of the patterns of unhelpful thoughts described above?</p> <p>What would you say to a friend who had this thought in a similar situation?</p> <p>How will you feel about this in 6 months time?</p> <p>What are the costs and benefits of thinking this way? Benefits: Costs: Is there another way of looking at this situation?</p>	

COPING TOOLS: What Helps Me

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Read A Book or Magazine  | <input type="checkbox"/> Ride a Bike or Skateboard  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hug or Climb a Tree  | <input type="checkbox"/> Create Origami  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Journal or Write a Letter  | <input type="checkbox"/> Cook or Bake  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use Kind & Compassionate Self-Talk  | <input type="checkbox"/> Ask for Help  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Make a Collage or Scrapbook  | <input type="checkbox"/> Talk to Someone You Trust  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rest, Nap or Take a Break  | <input type="checkbox"/> Weave, Knit or Crochet  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Go on a Hike, Walk or Run  | <input type="checkbox"/> Build Something  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take Good Care of the Earth  | <input type="checkbox"/> Get a Hug  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drink Water  | <input type="checkbox"/> Visualize a Peaceful Place  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Play a Board Game  | <input type="checkbox"/> Stretch  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do Something Kind  | <input type="checkbox"/> Make Art  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Make and Play with Slime  | <input type="checkbox"/> Use Positive Affirmations  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Discover Treasures in Nature  | <input type="checkbox"/> Take Slow, Mindful Breaths  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take a Shower or Bath  | <input type="checkbox"/> Clean, Declutter or Organize  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exercise  | <input type="checkbox"/> Use Aromatherapy  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drink a Warm Cup of Tea  | <input type="checkbox"/> Cry  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Forgive, Let Go, Move On  | <input type="checkbox"/> Try or Learn Something New  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Practice Yoga  | <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to Music  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Garden or Do Yardwork  | <input type="checkbox"/> Use a Stress Ball or Other Fidget  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jump on a Trampoline  | <input type="checkbox"/> Get Plenty of Sleep  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cuddle or Play with Your Pet  | <input type="checkbox"/> Kick, Bounce or Throw a Ball  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Practice Gratitude  | <input type="checkbox"/> Take or Look at Photographs  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do a Puzzle  | <input type="checkbox"/> Eat Healthy  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blow Bubbles  | <input type="checkbox"/> Play Outside  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Smile and Laugh  | <input type="checkbox"/> Sing and/or Dance  |

Breathe Stress Away



Do you suffer from tension or anxiety? Do you sometimes have trouble 'switching off' and going to sleep at night?

Would you like to learn a simple yet effective technique to help you take back control and relax very deeply whenever you choose?

Learn to relax whenever you choose

Breathing is something we do all of the time but many of us get it wrong without realising.

Anxiety causes tension in the body and can make our breathing rate too fast and too shallow. This is our 'fight or flight' mechanism, which is useful if we are under threat and need to react immediately.

However, most of the time, we are not under any threat, but if our breathing has become shallow and fast by habit, then that in itself can cause tension in the body and mind.

Yes, constant **shallow breathing** or 'chronic hyperventilation' as it is sometimes known, actually *creates* anxiety and can even cause physical symptoms like palpitations or

dizziness. It can cause headaches and muscle weakness too, because the gases in our bloodstream are not correctly balanced.

This is something we have instinctively known for a long time. There is an ancient piece of wisdom which says '*control the breath, control the life.*'

For thousands of years, people have practised yoga and have observed that calming the breath, calms body and mind also.

Now neuroscience helps us understand why.

Breathing is linked to the **autonomic nervous system**. When we breathe in we engage the **sympathetic nervous system**. This is linked to our **fight or flight response** so we tense when we breathe in but when we breathe out, we engage the parasympathetic nervous system. This is rest and digest.

It is far easier for us as human beings to breathe out than breathe in, so when we breathe in, we tense and when we breathe out we relax.

If you slow your breathing down and allow for the out breath to be longer than the in breath you cannot help but begin to relax and you tap into the body's innate relaxation response.

So, it's a good idea to take time out each day to simply stop for ten minutes and quietly focus on your breathing, allowing it to settle and slow right down.

And it's good to know that you can train yourself to breathe stress away, and when you do that, everything in your body works better. Your immune system and digestion function better, you sleep more peacefully and you'll probably even live longer and until someone finds a way for charging us for the air that we breathe...it's free!

Resource: The fusion model, Frances Masters.