

Practical strategies for managing symptoms of stress and anxiety

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Agenda

Facts about stress and anxiety

What is stress and anxiety?

Symptoms

Practical Strategies for managing worry

Resources



Facts:

- it is estimated that 1 in every 5 experience significantly anxious mood at some time in their life.
- Anxiety can affect any kind of person at any stage of their life, whether they are an introvert or an extrovert, socially active or shy, youthful or elderly, male or female, wealthy or poor. Whatever your distinction, you can become anxious.
- There are different kinds of anxiety we can experience: General, panic, social, phobias etc.



What is stress and anxiety?

- Some stress and anxiety is normal and adaptive; It's part of what makes us human
- Stress and anxiety can be problematic when the levels of stress and anxiety don't match the level of danger at hand
- The fight or flight response - In our "caveman days" we used the fight/flight system to escape danger.
- Today we don't experience the same types of threats but our bodies respond the same way to perceived threats



Symptoms:

Physical symptoms

- **Increased heart rate** -An increase in the rate and depth of breathing- prepare our body to run
- **A redistribution of blood** from areas that aren't as vital to those that are (such as muscles). Pale skin, feeling cold, numbness and tingling in fingers and toes
- **Widening of the pupils of the eyes** to allow us to see dangers better. Leads to blurred vision, spots, or a sense that lights are too bright
- **Decreased activity of the digestive system**- More resources to muscle groups. Leads to feelings of nausea, dry mouth, constipation, and other stomach issues
- **Muscle tension**- prepares our body for fight or flight.



Symptoms:

Behavioural system: Fight/flight or aggression/desire to escape a situation

- Foot tapping, pacing, or snapping at people

Cognitive system: Shifting attention to the possible threat.

- Difficulty concentrating



The connection between our thoughts, behaviour, and mood:

“Suppose you are at a party, and a friend introduces you to Alex. As you talk, Alex never looks at you; in fact, throughout your brief conversation, he looks over your shoulder across the room.”

Thought #1: Alex is rude. He is insulting me by ignoring me.

Feeling: Irritated, sad, nervous or caring?



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Thought #2: Alex doesn't find me interesting. I bore everybody.

Mood: (Irritated, sad, nervous, or caring?)



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“Suppose you are at a party, and a friend introduces you to Alex. As you talk, Alex never looks at you; in fact, throughout your brief conversation, he looks over your shoulder across the room.”

Thought #3: Alex seems shy. He’s probably too uncomfortable to look at me.

Mood: (Irritated, sad, nervous, or caring?)

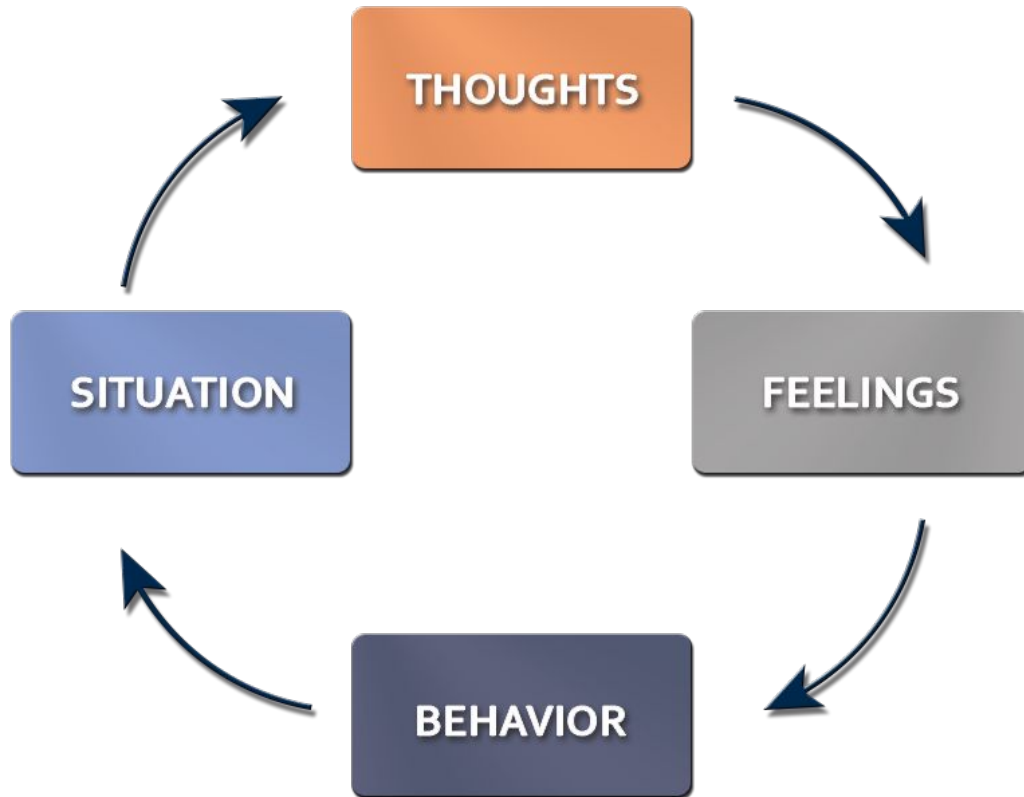


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Challenging your thoughts:

“Is my thought based on facts or feelings?”

- *Just because we feel or think something it doesn't mean it's true.*

“How would my best friend see this situation?”

- *what might they say to you if they came to you with the same problem you are having*

“How likely is it that my fear will come true?” “What's most likely to happen?”

- *Worrying about something that may or may not happen*

“If my fear comes true, will it still matter in a week? A month? A year?”

- *keeping things in perspective*



Cognitive Distortions / Unhelpful thinking styles

- all -or-nothing thinking
- Overgeneralization
- Catastrophizing
- Personalization
- Mind reading
- Mental filtering
- Discounting the positive
- “Should” statements
- Emotional reasoning
- Labeling

**All or nothing
thinking**



Sometimes called 'black
and white thinking'

If I'm not perfect I have failed

Either I do it right or not at all

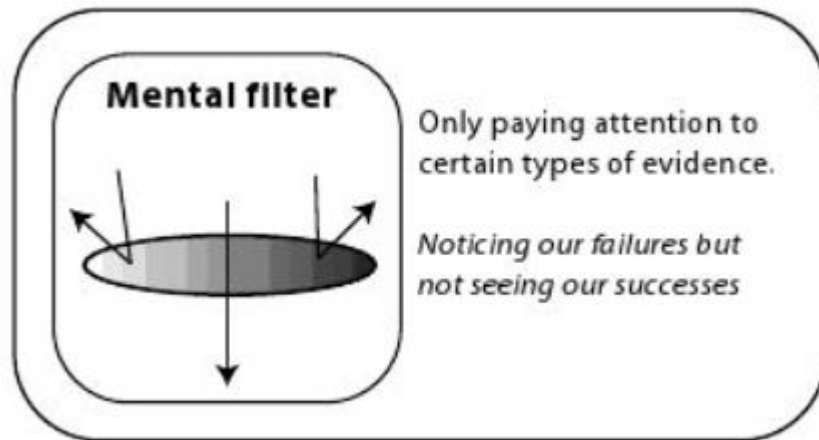


**Over-
generalising**

*"everything
is **always**
rubbish"*

*"**nothing** good
ever happens"*

Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw





**Disqualifying
the positive**



Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another

That doesn't count



Jumping to conclusions



$$2 + 2 = 5$$

There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:

- **Mind reading**
(imagining we know what others are thinking)
- **Fortune telling**
(predicting the future)



**Magnification
(catastrophising)
& minimisation**



Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophising), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important



**Emotional
reasoning**



Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true.

I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot



should

must

Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed

If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration



Labelling



Assigning labels to ourselves or other people

I'm a loser

I'm completely useless

They're such an idiot

Personalisation

***"this is
my fault"***

Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault. Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault.



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Breathing techniques

INHALE

#DeStressMonday DeStressMonday.org

**DE STRESS
MONDAY**



Another simple practice:

If you are reading this:

Release your shoulders from your ears

Unclench your jaw

Remove your tongue from the roof of your mouth.

Relax



Other helpful strategies

- Exercise
- Diet
- “The 5 minute rule”



Resources

- Primary care provider (medication or referrals to therapy)
- Youtube (for breathing and mindfulness techniques)
- iCBT through Mindbeacon or Morneau Shepell (Funded by the Government of Ontario)
- Bounceback and BigWhiteWall



Thank you!

References:

Mind over Mood - Greenberger and Padesky, 2nd addition

<https://www.psychologytools.com/resource/unhelpful-thinking-styles/>

<https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/~media/CCI/Mental-Health-Professionals/Anxiety/Anxiety---Information-Sheets/Anxiety-Information-Sheet---01---What-is-Anxiety.pdf>

<https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/fight-or-flight.pdf>



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