Patrick O'Hare Therapy

# Therapy handouts and worksheets

## The complete library

392 handouts across 22 topics. 399 pages.


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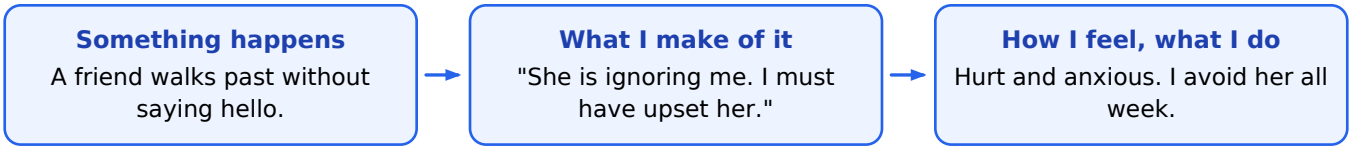
# What is CBT?

A short guide to cognitive behavioural therapy and how we will use it.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a practical, structured kind of talking therapy. It looks at how the way you think about things, and the way you respond to them, affect how you feel. It is one of the most researched therapies and is recommended for many common difficulties, including anxiety, low mood, panic, OCD and trauma.

## The basic idea

How we feel often depends less on the situation itself than on what we make of it and what we do next. Two people can get the same text message and feel completely different, depending on how they read it.




A different reading ("She looked miles away, she probably did not see me") leads to a different feeling and a different response. CBT helps you notice these readings, check them out, and try new responses.

## What CBT involves

- **Working together.** You know your own life, and I know how these difficulties tend to work, so we work it out between us.
- **A focus on now.** We may look at where things came from, but most of the work is on what keeps the problem going today.
- **Clear goals.** We agree what you want to be different and keep checking how it is going.
- **Trying things out.** Change happens between sessions as much as in them. We will agree small things to practise or test.
- **Learning skills.** The aim is that you learn to do this for yourself and need me less over time.

## What it asks of you

1. You do not need to have things worked out before you come.
2. Say what is going through your mind as openly as you can, even if it seems silly or embarrassing.
3. Try the between-session practice and tell me honestly how it went. If something did not work, that is useful to know.

> **Note**
> CBT is not positive thinking, and nobody will tell you that your feelings are wrong. The aim is to see things accurately, including yourself.

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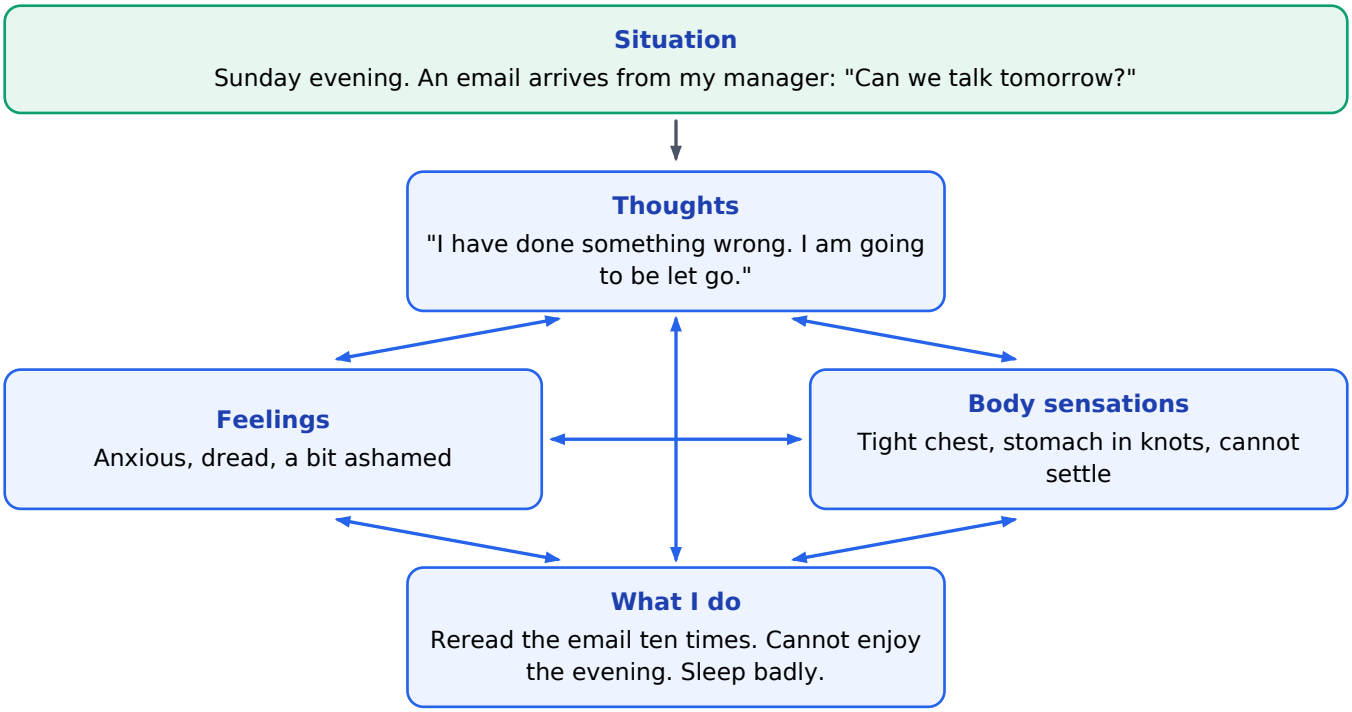
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# The five areas: how it all links up

Thoughts, feelings, body and behaviour all affect each other.

When something difficult happens, we react in four connected ways: what goes through our mind, what we feel, what happens in our body, and what we do. Each one affects the others, so a small change in one area can shift the whole pattern.

## An example




## What the example shows

- The thought ("I am going to be let go") is a guess, but the body reacts as if it were a fact.
- The tight chest and churning stomach seem to confirm that something is wrong, which makes the thought more convincing.
- Rereading the email and lying awake keep attention locked on the threat, so the anxiety stays high.

**Why this matters**

Because the areas are linked, a change in any one of them affects the others. Testing a thought, calming the body or doing something different can each ease the whole pattern.

*The five areas model was developed by Chris Williams. It builds on the "hot cross bun" model of Christine Padesky and Kathleen Mooney.*

**My notes and questions**

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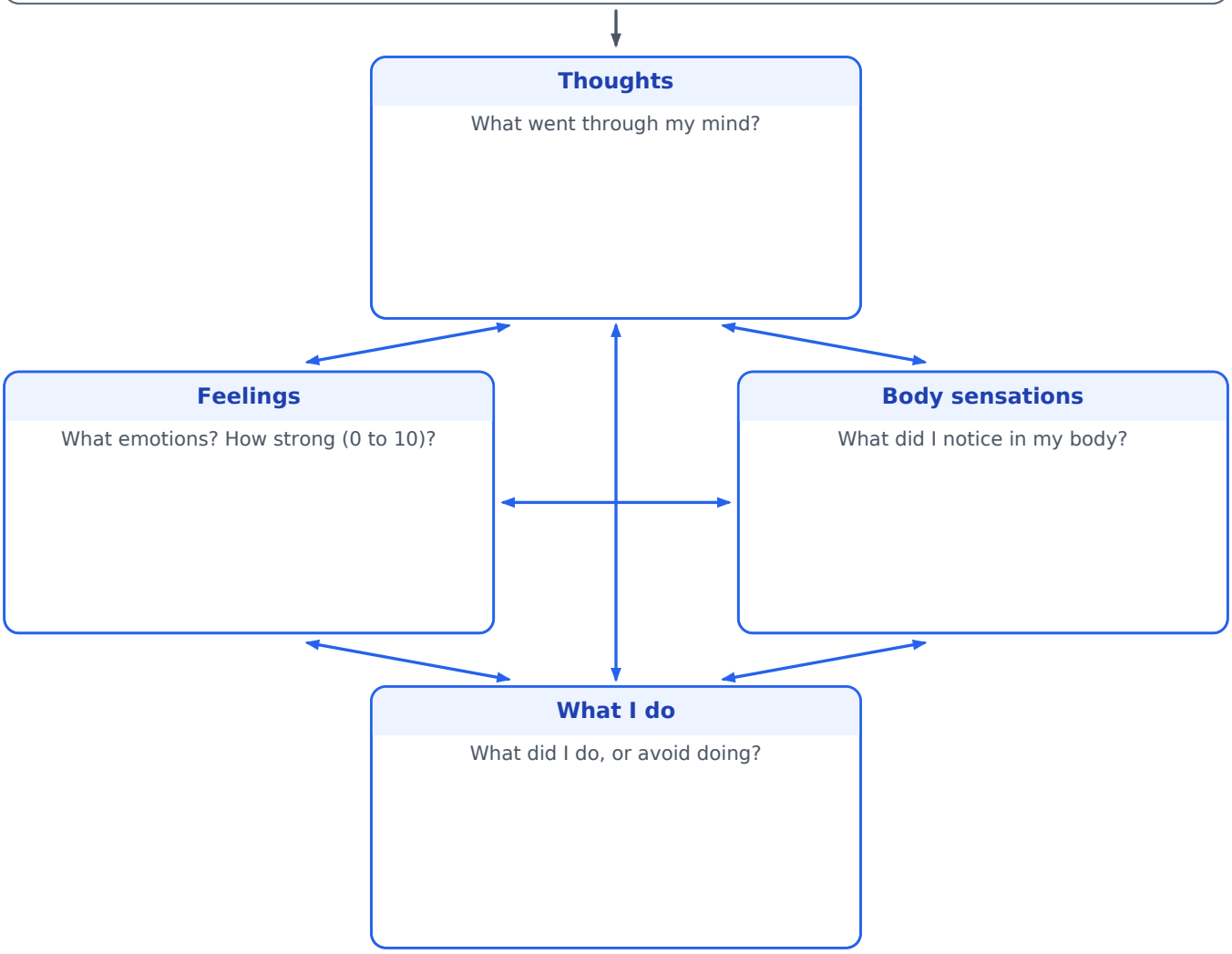
# My five areas map

Pick one recent moment when your mood changed, and map what happened.

Name _____ Date _____

**Situation**

Where was I? Who was there? What happened?




**What do I notice when I look at this map? Which area might be easiest to change?**

**If a friend were in this exact situation, what would I say to them?**

*Based on the five areas model developed by Chris Williams.*

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# Unhelpful thinking styles

Common habits of mind that make things look worse than they are.

Everyone's mind takes shortcuts, especially under stress. These habits are normal. Once you can spot one, you can decide whether to go along with it.

### All-or-nothing thinking

Seeing things as total success or total failure, with nothing in between. "I missed one session at the gym, so the whole week is ruined."

### Catastrophising

Jumping to the worst possible outcome and treating it as likely. "This headache is probably something serious."

### Mind reading

Assuming you know what others think, usually something bad about you. "They went quiet. They think I am boring."

### Fortune telling

Predicting that things will go badly before they have happened. "There is no point applying. I will not get it."

### Mental filter

Noticing the one thing that went wrong and filtering out everything that went well.

### Discounting the positive

Explaining away good things. "They only said that to be nice."

### Emotional reasoning

Taking a feeling as proof. "I feel like a fraud, so I must be one."

### "Should" and "must"

Holding yourself or others to rigid rules. "I should be able to cope with this on my own."

### Labelling

Summing up a whole person in one harsh word. "I am useless." "He is a waste of space."

### Taking it personally

Blaming yourself for things that were not all down to you. "The meeting went flat. It was my fault."

**Try this**

Over the next week, see if you can catch one of these each day. You do not need to argue with it. Just name it: "That is mind reading again."

**My notes and questions**

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# Thought record (simple)

Use this when you notice a sudden shift in how you feel.

Name _____ Date _____

Catch the moment as close to when it happens as you can. One line is enough. Rate how strong the feeling was from 0 (not at all) to 10 (the strongest it could be).

| When and where | What I felt (0 to 10) | What went through my mind |
|---|---|---|
| *Tuesday, on the bus to work* | *Anxious 7* | *"I am going to mess up the presentation and everyone will see."* |
| | | |
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# Thought record (step by step)

Work through one upsetting thought from start to finish.

Name _____ Date _____

### 1. The situation. Where was I, what was happening?

### 2. Feelings

Name each one and rate it 0 to 10

### 3. The hot thought

The thought that carries the most feeling. How much do I believe it (0 to 100%)?

### 4. Evidence that supports the thought

Facts only, not feelings or guesses

### 5. Evidence that does not fit the thought

What would I tell a friend? What have I missed?

### 6. A more balanced way of seeing it. Take both columns into account.

### 7. How much do I believe the balanced view? (0 to 100%)

### 8. My feelings now (0 to 10)

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# Putting a thought on trial

Weigh the evidence for and against one harsh thought, the way a court would.

Name _____ Date _____

**The thought on trial (write it as one clear sentence)**

**How strongly do I believe it right now?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Completely

### The case for

Solid evidence that the thought is true. Would it stand up in court?

### The case against

Evidence that it is not true, or not the whole truth

## Questions for the jury

- Am I confusing a feeling with a fact?
- What would someone who cares about me say about this evidence?
- Have there been times when this thought turned out not to be true?

**The verdict. A fair summing up, based on all the evidence.**

**How strongly do I believe the original thought now?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Completely

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# Questions to test a thought

Keep this beside you when you fill in a thought record.

Pick two or three questions that fit the thought in front of you. The aim is to see the situation accurately. It is not to talk yourself into feeling fine.

## Check the evidence

- What are the facts here, and what am I adding?
- What is the evidence for this thought? What is the evidence against it?
- Has this worry come up before? What actually happened?

## Look from another angle

- If my closest friend had this thought, what would I say to them?
- How might I see this in a week, a month, a year?
- Is there another explanation I have not considered?

## Check the thinking style

- Am I thinking in all-or-nothing terms?
- Am I predicting the future or reading minds?
- Am I holding myself to a standard I would never apply to anyone else?

## Check the cost

- What does believing this thought do to me? How do I feel and act when I buy into it?
- Does thinking this way help me deal with the situation?

## Move to action

- If the thought is partly true, what can I do about that part?
- What is the worst that could realistically happen? Could I cope? Who or what would help?
- What is one small step I can take now?

**A last question**

What would be a fairer way of putting this?

**My notes and questions**

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# Behavioural experiment planner

Plan a real-life test of a prediction, and record what happened.

Name _____ Date _____

## Before

**The belief or prediction I am testing. What exactly do I think will happen?**

**How strongly do I believe it?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Completely

**The experiment. What will I do, where and when?**

**What might get in the way, and how will I handle it? (Include any safety behaviours I will drop.)**

## After

**What actually happened? Stick to what I saw and heard.**

**How does that compare with my prediction?**

**What have I learned? What does this say about the original belief?**

**How strongly do I believe the original prediction now?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Completely

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# Core beliefs: the deeper layer

Where the automatic thoughts come from.

Automatic thoughts are the thoughts that pop up in the moment. Underneath them sit broader beliefs about ourselves, other people and the world. We usually picked these up early in life, when they made sense of what was happening around us.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Early experiences** | What happened around me growing up. How I was treated, what was expected, what was praised or criticised. |
| ↓ | |
| **Core beliefs** | Deep, absolute conclusions. "I am not good enough." "People leave." "The world is dangerous." |
| ↓ | |
| **Rules for living** | Rules that protect me from the core belief. "If I never make mistakes, nobody can criticise me." |
| ↓ | |
| **Triggers** | Situations where the rule is broken or under threat. A mistake at work. A friend cancels. |
| ↓ | |
| **Automatic thoughts** | "I have messed everything up." "She does not want to know me." |

## Things to know about core beliefs

- They feel like facts, but they are conclusions you drew when you were younger and had less to go on.
- They work like a filter. Evidence that fits gets noticed. Evidence that does not fit gets ignored or explained away.
- They can change, slowly, as you collect the evidence the filter has been leaving out.

**Common themes**

Core beliefs tend to cluster around being unlovable ("I am not wanted"), being helpless ("I cannot cope"), or being worthless ("I am bad"). Most people have a positive set too, which low mood can hide.

**My notes and questions**

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# Catching automatic thoughts

How to notice the thoughts that go with a change in mood.

Automatic thoughts are the quick, running commentary your mind produces all day. Most of the time you do not notice them. You only notice the feeling they leave behind.

## What they are like

- **Fast.** They arrive in a flash, often as a few words or a picture.
- **Believable.** They feel true, even when they are only opinions.
- **Biased.** When you are anxious, they lean towards danger. When you are low, they lean towards loss and failure.
- **Habitual.** The same themes come round again and again.

## How to catch one

1. **Use your feelings as a signal.** A sudden drop in mood, a spike of anxiety or a flash of anger means a thought has just gone by.
2. **Ask the question.** "What was going through my mind just then?"
3. **Look for pictures as well as words.** Sometimes the thought is an image of something going wrong.
4. **Write it down as it came.** Not tidied up. "I am going to make a fool of myself" is more useful than "I felt nervous about the meeting."
5. **Turn questions into statements.** "What if I fail?" usually hides "I am going to fail."

## If you cannot find the thought

- What did this situation mean to me? What does it say about me?
- What was I afraid might happen?
- What would be the worst thing about it?

> **Note**
> At this stage you are only catching the thought, not changing it. Once it is written down we can work on it.

**My notes and questions**

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# Spot the thinking style

Practise naming the habit before you try it on your own thoughts.

Name _____ Date _____

Read each thought. Which unhelpful thinking style is at work? There may be more than one. Then write a fairer way of putting it.

| The thought | Thinking style | A fairer way of putting it |
|---|---|---|
| **1. "I stumbled over one answer. The whole interview was a disaster."** | | |
| **2. "He has not texted back. He has gone off me."** | | |
| **3. "I feel so guilty, I must have done something wrong."** | | |
| **4. "I should never need to ask for help."** | | |
| **5. "They said the meal was lovely, but they were only being polite."** | | |
| **6. "If I go to the party, nobody will talk to me."** | | |
| **7. "I forgot her birthday. I am a terrible friend."** | | |

## Now my thoughts from this week

| My thought | Thinking style | A fairer way of putting it |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

*One way of reading them: 1 all-or-nothing thinking, 2 mind reading, 3 emotional reasoning, 4 "should" and "must", 5 discounting the positive, 6 fortune telling, 7 labelling. Several fit more than one.*

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# Thought, feeling or fact?

A sorting exercise: is each statement a fact, a thought or a feeling?

Name _____ Date _____

A **fact** is something a camera could record. A **thought** is what your mind says about it: an opinion, a guess or a prediction. A **feeling** is an emotion, usually one word: sad, scared, angry, ashamed.

Mark each statement with an X in the right column.

| Statement | Fact | Thought | Feeling |
|---|---|---|---|
| **I was ten minutes late for the meeting.** | | | |
| **Everyone thinks I am unreliable.** | | | |
| **Anxious.** | | | |
| **My manager did not say good morning.** | | | |
| **She is annoyed with me.** | | | |
| **I am going to lose my job.** | | | |
| **Ashamed.** | | | |
| **I have not been out with friends in three weeks.** | | | |
| **Nobody wants me around.** | | | |
| **Lonely.** | | | |

**Notice**

"I feel like a failure" is a thought, even though it starts with "I feel". If you can swap "I feel" for "I think", it is a thought.

## A situation from my week

| The facts | What I thought | What I felt |
|---|---|---|
| What a camera would have recorded | Opinions, guesses, predictions | One word for each feeling |

**What changes when I separate the three?**

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# The downward arrow

Follow a thought down to the belief underneath it.

Name _____ Date _____

Start with an upsetting thought. Instead of arguing with it, ask what it would mean if it were true. Keep asking until you reach a statement about yourself, other people or the world that feels heavy and familiar. Take your time. If it becomes too much, stop and bring it to our next session.

The situation, and my first thought

↓

If that were true, what would it mean?

↓

And if that were true, what would be so bad about it?

↓

What would that say about me, other people or the world?

**The belief I arrived at**

**How true does it feel right now?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Completely

**Seeing it written down: where might this belief have come from? Is it the whole truth?**

*The downward arrow technique was described by David Burns.*

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# Rules for living

The "if... then" rules and the "shoulds" you live by.

Name _____ Date _____

Rules for living usually began as a sensible way to cope. Trouble starts when they are rigid, extreme or impossible to keep. Some common ones:

- "If I do everything perfectly, nobody can criticise me."
- "I must never let anyone down."
- "If I show how I feel, people will think I am weak."
- "If I keep everyone happy, they will not leave."

**One rule I live by (If I... then... / I must... / I should always...)**

**How this rule has helped me**

**What this rule costs me**

**Where did I learn it? Does it still fit my life now?**

**A fairer, more flexible version. For example: "I like to do things well, and mistakes are part of being human."**

**One small way I could try out the new rule this week**

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# Evidence log for a new belief

A daily record of evidence that supports a new, fairer belief.

Name _____ Date _____

| The old belief | The new, fairer belief I am building |
|---|---|
| | |

Each day, write down anything that fits the new belief, however small. The old belief will tell you it does not count. Write it down anyway.

| Date | What happened | What this says about the new belief |
|---|---|---|
| *Mon 3rd* | *A colleague asked my opinion on her report.* | *People do value what I think.* |
| | | |
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| | | |

**How much do I believe the new belief at the end of the week?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Completely

*The positive data log was described by Christine Padesky (1994).*

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# Problem solving in six steps

For real, practical problems that need a decision or an action.

Name _____ Date _____

**1. What exactly is the problem? Be specific, and take one problem at a time.**

**2. Every option I can think of. Do not judge them yet. Include the daft ones.**

| 3. Options worth a closer look | Points for | Points against |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**4. The option, or mix of options, I will try**

| 5. My plan | First small step |
|---|---|
| What will I do, and when? | Something I can do in the next day or two |

**6. Review. How did it go? What would I keep, and what would I change?**

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# Pros and cons of changing

The good and the not so good of changing, and of staying as you are.

Name _____ Date _____

**The change I am thinking about**

| | Staying as I am | Making the change |
|---|---|---|
| **Good things** | **What I get from things as they are** | **What I might gain** |
| **Not so good things** | **What it costs me** | **What I might lose, or what would be hard** |

**Looking at all four boxes, what stands out?**

**How important is this change to me?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Not at all — Extremely

**How confident am I that I could do it?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Not at all — Very

*The decisional balance comes from the work of Irving Janis and Leon Mann.*

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# Worst case, best case, most likely

For a worry about the future: write out the worst case, the best case and the most likely one.

Name _____ Date _____

**What am I worried about?**

**Worst case**

What is the very worst that could happen?

**Best case**

What is the best that could happen?

**Most likely**

Realistically, what will probably happen?

**How likely is the worst case, really?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Will not happen — Certain

**If the worst did happen, how would I cope? Who and what would help me?**

**What can I do now to make a good outcome more likely?**

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# Responsibility pie

For guilt and self-blame: share out responsibility among everything that played a part.

Name _____ Date _____

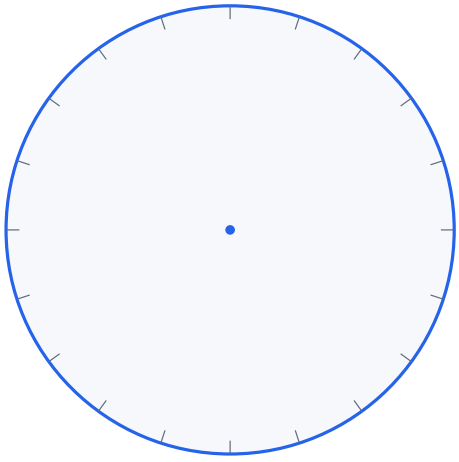
1. Write down what happened.
2. List everyone and everything that played a part. Leave yourself until last.
3. Give each one a share of the pie, as a percentage, and draw the slices.
4. Whatever is left over is your share.

**What happened?**

**Before I start: how responsible do I feel?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Totally



| Who or what played a part? (Put myself last) | % share |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

**What do I notice? How does my share compare with how responsible I felt at the start?**

*Responsibility pies are described by Dennis Greenberger and Christine Padesky in Mind Over Mood.*

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# Safety behaviours

The precautions people take when anxious, and why they keep anxiety going.

A safety behaviour is anything you do to stop a feared outcome from happening, or to get through a situation you are afraid of. In real danger they make sense. In a false alarm they cause a problem: you never find out that you would have been fine anyway.

## Examples

**Panic**
Sitting near the exit. Carrying water or tablets "just in case". Holding on to something. Only going out with someone.

**Social anxiety**
Rehearsing what to say. Avoiding eye contact. Staying quiet. Gripping a glass so no one sees a shake.

**Health anxiety**
Checking your body. Looking up symptoms. Asking others if you look all right.

**Worry**
Over-planning. Making endless lists. Checking that people got home safely. Putting off decisions.

## Why they backfire

1. **They stop you learning.** If nothing bad happens, the safety behaviour gets the credit: "I only coped because I sat by the door."
2. **They keep your attention on danger.** Monitoring yourself makes you notice more that seems wrong.
3. **They can cause the very thing you fear.** Gripping a glass tightly makes a hand shake more. Rehearsing every sentence makes conversation stilted.
4. **They grow.** What starts as one precaution becomes a list of rules.

## Letting them go

- Make a list of yours. Some are obvious, some are subtle, and some happen only in your head.
- Pick one and treat dropping it as an experiment. What do you predict will happen? What actually happens?
- Expect anxiety to rise at first. That is normal. It does not mean the experiment has failed.

**How to tell**
Ask yourself, "If I were not anxious, would I still be doing this?" If the answer is no, it is probably a safety behaviour.

**My notes and questions**

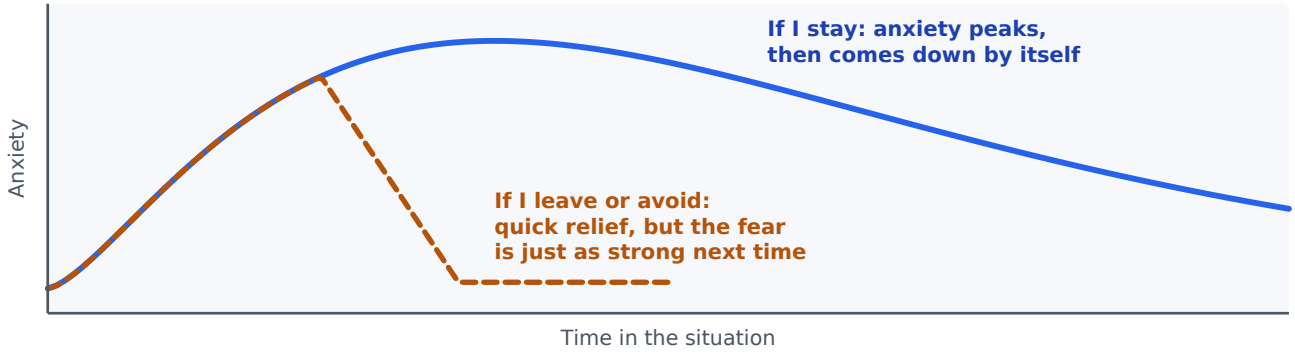
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# Avoidance: why it keeps anxiety going

How avoiding something brings relief now and more anxiety later.

Getting away from something frightening is a natural thing to do, and the relief is immediate. That is why avoidance is easy to fall into. Over time it makes anxiety worse.




## What avoidance teaches your brain

- "That was dangerous, and I only just got away." The alarm is confirmed.
- "I cannot cope with that." Confidence shrinks a little each time.
- "Avoiding works." So next time the urge to avoid is stronger, and it spreads to more situations.

## What staying teaches your brain

- Anxiety rises, peaks and comes down by itself, even if you do nothing to make it stop.
- The thing you feared usually does not happen, or you cope with it better than you expected.
- Each time you stay, the next time is a little easier.

## Avoidance is not always obvious

- [ ] Putting things off, or making excuses
- [ ] Only doing something with a "safe" person
- [ ] Keeping busy so there is no time to think
- [ ] Drinking or scrolling to take the edge off
- [ ] Leaving early, or arriving late
- [ ] Going, but not really taking part

**Where to start**

Start with something that feels manageable but not easy, and stay with it long enough for the anxiety to begin to drop. The biggest fears can wait until later.

**My notes and questions**

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# How my difficulties fit together

A map of where the problem came from and what keeps it going.

Name _____ Date _____

**Early experiences**

What happened that shaped how I see things?

↓

**Core beliefs**

About myself, other people and the world

↓

**Rules I live by**

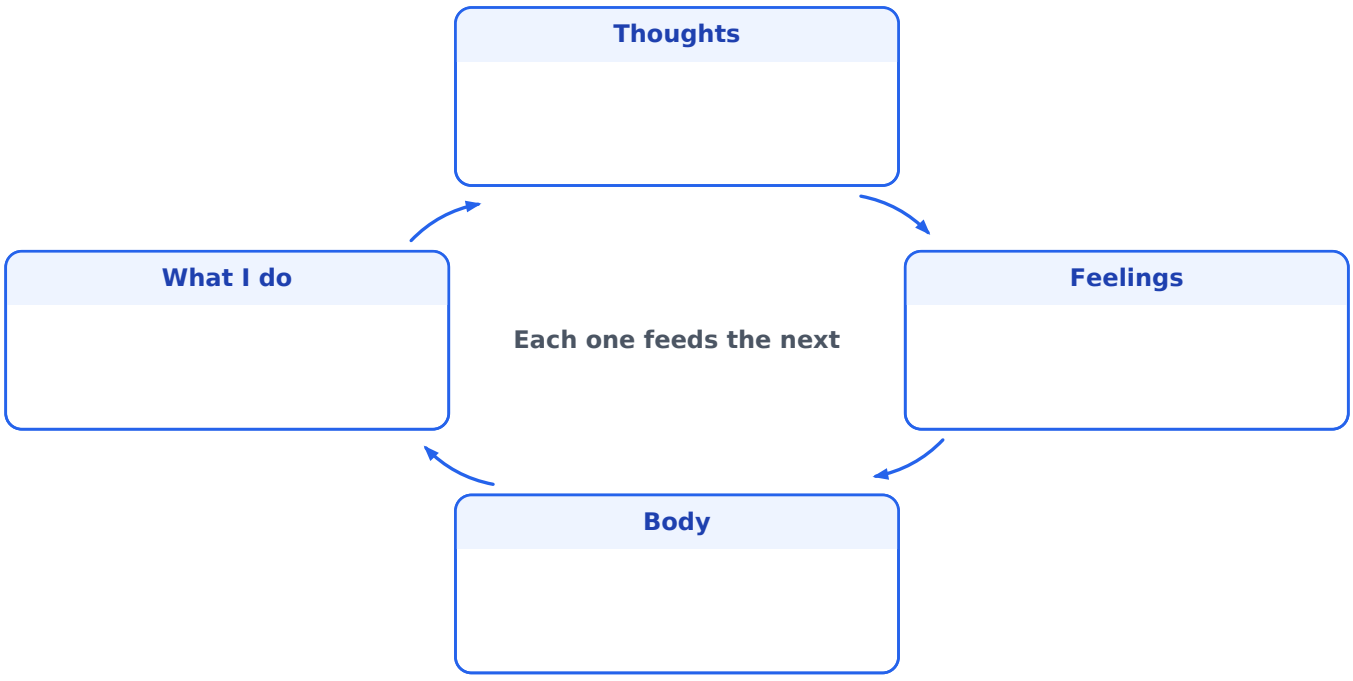
If... then... I must... I should...

↓

**Triggers**

What sets the problem off now?

## When it is triggered, this is the cycle




## What this map suggests we work on first

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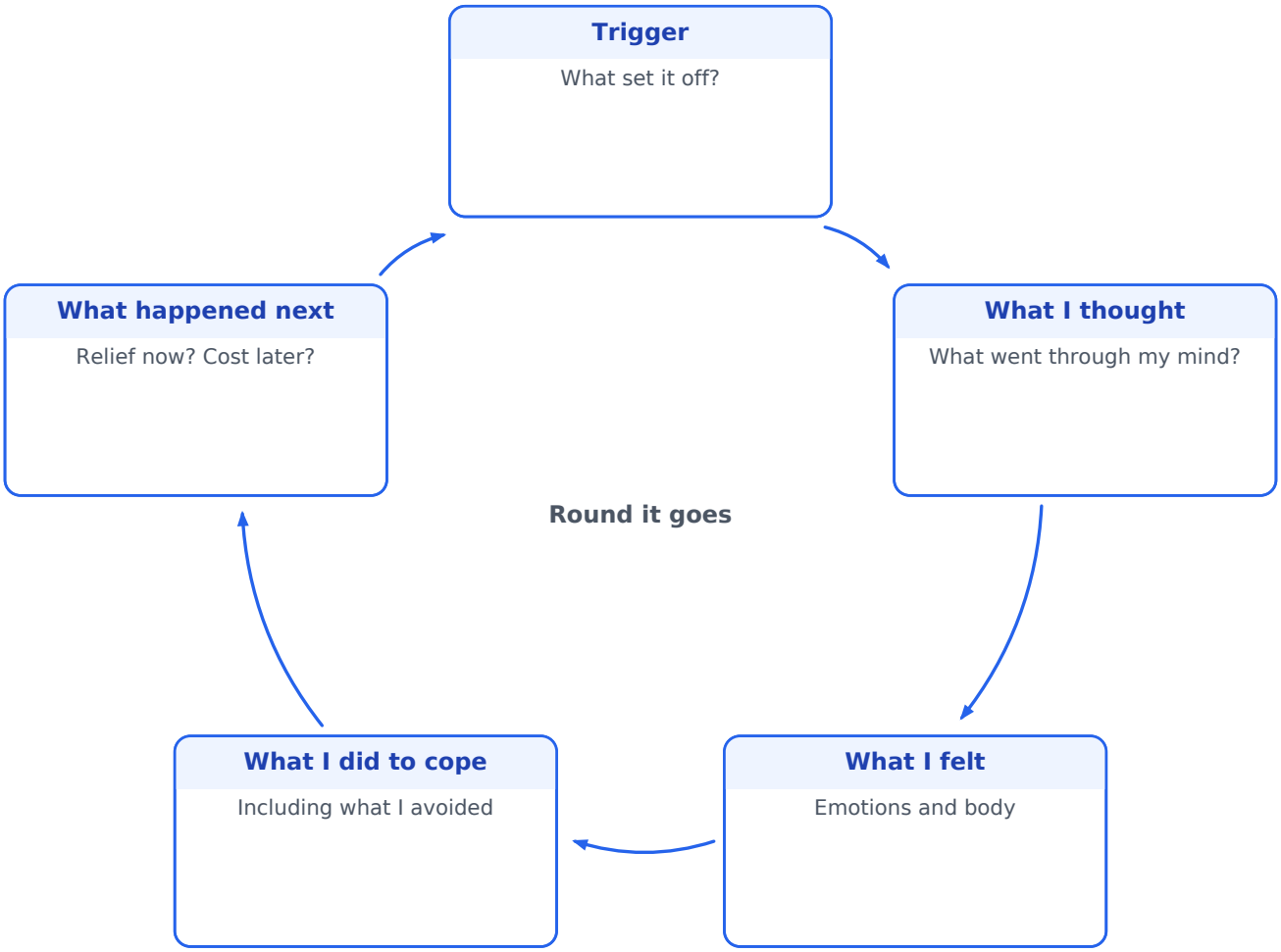
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# What keeps it going?

Map the cycle that keeps one problem going.

Name _____ Date _____

Think of a recent, typical example of the problem. Fill in each box, starting with the trigger.




**Where in this cycle could I do something different?**

**What would I try instead, and what do I predict would happen?**

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# Coping cards

Short reminders to read in situations you find hard, written in advance.

When feelings run high it is hard to think straight, so a coping card is written in advance. Use one card for each situation you find hard. Keep the words short, believable and in your own voice.

> **An example**
> **When I notice** my chest tighten before a meeting, **I will remind myself** that this is adrenaline and it settles once I start. **Then I will** breathe out slowly and walk in.

*Cut along the dashed lines. Keep the cards where you will see them, or take a photo of each one.*

**When I notice...**
My warning sign or trigger

**I will remind myself...**
A fair, balanced thought

**Then I will...**
One or two helpful actions, or someone to contact

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**When I notice...**
My warning sign or trigger

**I will remind myself...**
A fair, balanced thought

**Then I will...**
One or two helpful actions, or someone to contact

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One or two helpful actions, or someone to contact

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My warning sign or trigger

**I will remind myself...**
A fair, balanced thought

**Then I will...**
One or two helpful actions, or someone to contact

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*Coping cards are a cognitive therapy tool described by Judith Beck.*

*In an emergency call 112 or 999. Samaritans: freephone 116 123.*

# Shades of grey: rating a belief

Rate yourself and other people on a scale, to test an all-or-nothing belief.

Name _____ Date _____

**The belief about myself (for example: "I am a failure")**

**Where do I put myself to begin with?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Completely

**What would 0% look like?**

Describe someone at the very bottom of this scale. What would they do, every day?

**What would 100% look like?**

Describe someone at the very top.

Now place some real people on the same scale: people you know, and people in public life.

| Person | Where they fall (0 to 100%) | Why |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**Having done this, where do I put myself now?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Completely

**What do I notice?**

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# Costs and benefits of a belief

What a belief or rule does for you, and what it costs.

Name _____ Date _____

## The belief or rule I am looking at

### Advantages of holding it

How does it help or protect me?

### Disadvantages of holding it

What does it cost me, and the people around me?

## An alternative I could try instead

### Advantages of the alternative

### Disadvantages of the alternative

## On balance, which do I want to live by?

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# Mood diary

A week of noticing how you feel and what is going on at the time.

Name _____ Date _____

Three times a day, note your mood out of 10 (0 is the worst you could feel, 10 is the best) and a few words about what you were doing or thinking.

| Day | Morning | Afternoon | Evening |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | | |
| **Tue** | | | |
| **Wed** | | | |
| **Thu** | | | |
| **Fri** | | | |
| **Sat** | | | |
| **Sun** | | | |

**What patterns do I notice? Better times, worse times, people, places, activities?**

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# Asking others: a survey experiment

Test a belief about what other people think by asking them.

Name _____ Date _____

**The belief I want to test. For example: "Anyone who saw me blush would think I was weak."**

**The question or questions I will ask**

**Who will I ask? Aim for five or more people. Your therapist can also ask people for you, without naming you.**

**What do I predict they will say?**

| Person | What they said |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

**What did I learn? How does it fit with what I predicted?**

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# ABC: trigger, belief, consequence

Record an event, what you told yourself about it and what followed.

Name _____ Date _____

When something upsets us, it feels as if the event caused the feeling directly. Usually there is a step in between: what we told ourselves about it. The same event with a different belief leads to a different feeling.

**A: Activating event**
What happened. Just the facts.

→

**B: Beliefs**
What I told myself about it.

→

**C: Consequences**
What I felt, and what I did.

| A: What happened | B: What I told myself | C: What I felt (0 to 10) and what I did |
|---|---|---|
| *My manager said "We need to talk on Friday."* | *"I am in trouble. I am going to lose my job."* | *Dread 8. Could not concentrate. Snapped at home.* |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

## Then add D and E

**D: Dispute. Is the belief true? Is it helpful? What would I say to a friend who thought this?**

**E: Effect. A fairer belief to try**

**If I held the fairer belief, what would I feel and do?**

*The ABC model was developed by Albert Ellis, the founder of rational emotive behaviour therapy.*

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# What is anxiety?

What anxiety is, how it shows up and when it becomes a problem.

Anxiety is the body and mind getting ready to deal with a threat. It is normal and everybody has it. It sharpens attention before an exam and makes you jump back from a speeding car.

It becomes a problem when the alarm goes off too often, too loudly, or about things that are not really dangerous, and when it starts to get in the way of your life.

## The three parts of anxiety

**Thoughts**
"What if something goes wrong?" The mind scans for danger and jumps to worst cases.

**Body**
Racing heart, tight chest, churning stomach, tense muscles, shaky, hot, dizzy.

**Behaviour**
Avoiding, escaping, checking, seeking reassurance, over-preparing.

## Things worth knowing

- **Anxiety is not dangerous.** It is uncomfortable, sometimes very, but the sensations are your body doing its job. They cannot harm you and they always pass.
- **It works like an over-sensitive smoke alarm.** An alarm that goes off when you make toast is annoying, but it is not broken. The aim is to make it less sensitive.
- **Avoidance keeps it going.** The more you stay away from what you fear, the more dangerous it seems.
- **It is very common.** Around one person in four has a significant problem with anxiety at some point.

## When to get support

- [ ] It is there most days and hard to switch off
- [ ] It stops you doing things you want or need to do
- [ ] You are relying on alcohol, avoidance or constant reassurance to get by
- [ ] It is affecting your sleep, work or relationships

**Treatment**
Anxiety responds well to therapy. The alarm does not disappear, but you learn what sets it off, how to stop making it worse, and how to carry on with what matters when it goes off.

**My notes and questions**

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# Fight, flight and freeze

What your body is doing when the alarm goes off, and why.

When your brain senses danger, it prepares your body to fight, to run or to freeze. This happens in a fraction of a second, before the thinking part of your brain has had a look. It is the same response whether the threat is a dog off its lead or a presentation on Monday.

Every sensation has a job. None of them is harmful.

| What you notice | What your body is doing | Why |
|---|---|---|
| **Racing or pounding heart** | Pumping blood faster to the big muscles | More fuel for running or fighting |
| **Fast, shallow breathing** | Taking in extra oxygen | Ready for a burst of effort |
| **Dizzy or light-headed** | A side effect of breathing faster than you need to | Harmless, and it settles as breathing slows |
| **Tight or shaky muscles** | Muscles tensed and ready to move | Faster reactions |
| **Sweating** | Cooling the body down | Stops you overheating |
| **Churning stomach, dry mouth** | Digestion switched off for now | Energy goes where it is needed |
| **Tunnel vision, racing thoughts** | Attention narrows on to the threat | Nothing else matters in an emergency |
| **Cold or tingling hands and feet** | Blood moves from skin to muscles | Protects against blood loss |
| **Frozen, blank or numb** | The freeze response | Staying still and unnoticed can be safest |

## After the alarm

Once the threat has passed, a second system (the "rest and digest" system) brings everything back down. This always happens. The body cannot stay at full alarm for long.

Afterwards you may feel shaky, washed out or tearful for a while. That is the adrenaline clearing. It does not mean something is wrong.

> **Try this**
> Next time you notice a sensation, name what it is for: "That is my heart getting blood to my legs." Many people find this makes the sensation less frightening.

**My notes and questions**

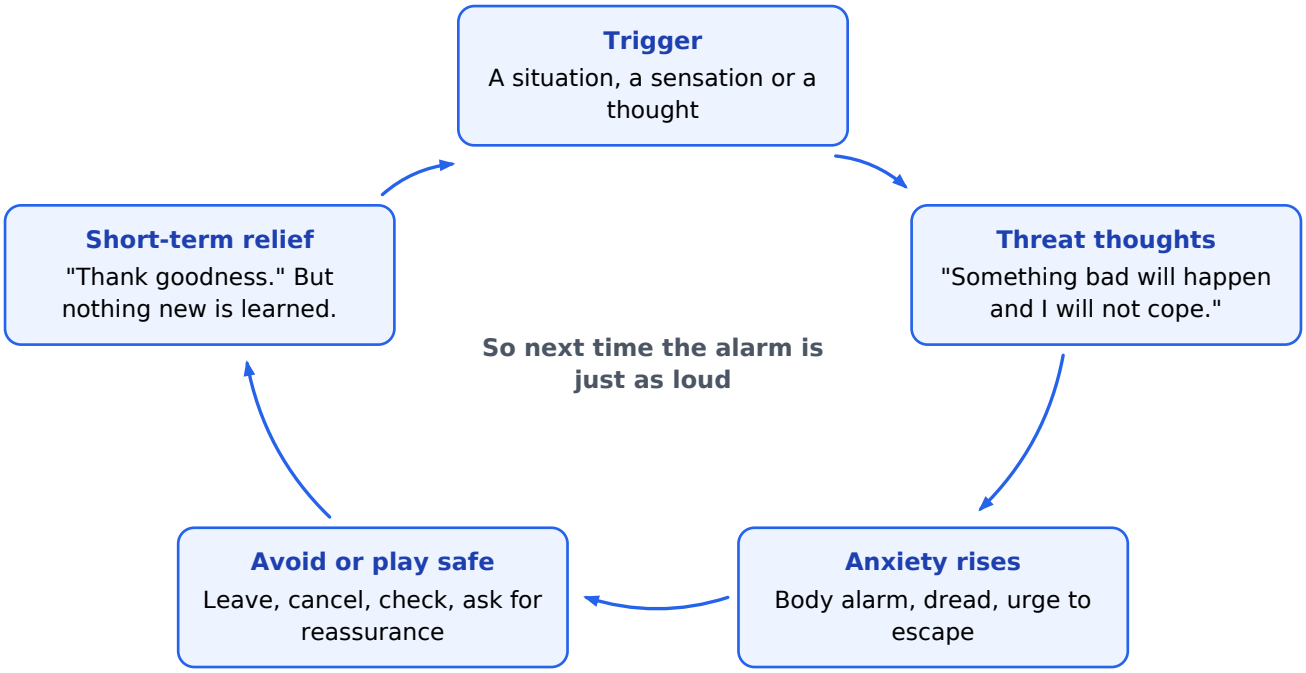
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# The anxiety cycle

How anxiety keeps itself going.

Anxiety is kept going by a loop. Each step makes sense on its own, but together they keep the anxiety going.




## What keeps the loop turning

- **Relief rewards avoiding.** The drop in anxiety when you avoid tells your brain that avoiding was the right thing to do.
- **The prediction is never tested.** You do not get the chance to find out that the feared thing would not have happened, or that you would have managed.
- **Attention sticks to danger.** When you are on the lookout for threat, you find it.

## Where the loop can be broken

1. **Thoughts.** Check the prediction. How likely is it really? How would I cope?
2. **Body.** Slow the breathing and let the wave pass without fighting it.
3. **Behaviour.** Stay, or go in, a little at a time. This usually makes the biggest difference.

> **Keep in mind**
> Breaking the cycle means feeling more anxious for a short while, in order to feel much less anxious in the long run.

**My notes and questions**

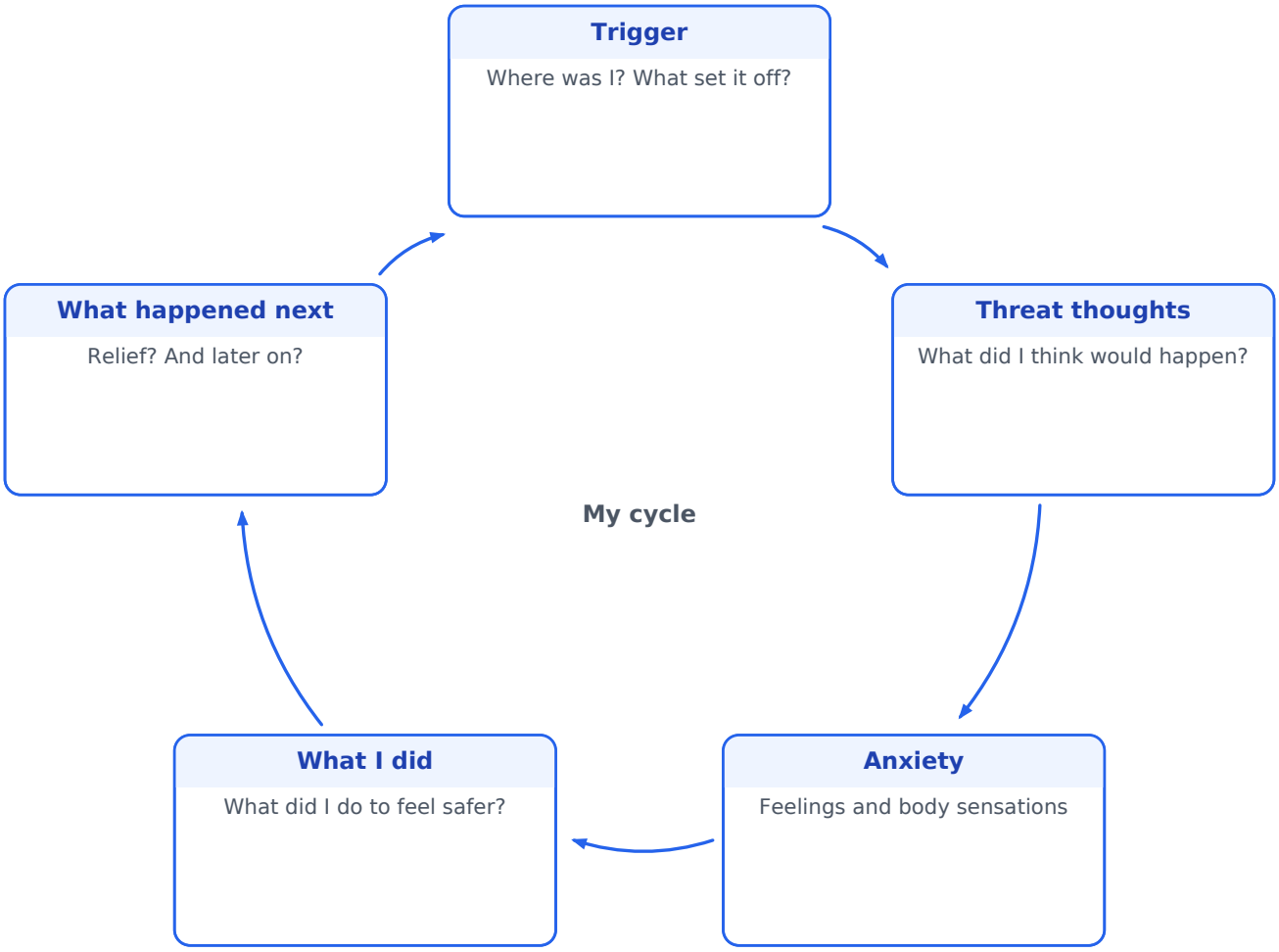
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# My anxiety cycle

Map one recent time when anxiety took over.

Name _____ Date _____




**What did avoiding or playing safe stop me from finding out?**

**If I had stayed, or done it differently, what might have happened?**

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# The anxiety scales

Why anxiety is high when danger looks big and coping looks small.

How anxious you feel depends on two judgements your mind makes very quickly: how bad and how likely is the danger, and how well could I cope?

**Anxiety goes up when I...**

- overestimate how likely the bad thing is
- overestimate how awful it would be
- underestimate my own ability to cope
- forget about the help and support I have

**Anxiety comes down when I...**

- weigh up the real odds
- picture getting through it, not just the worst moment
- remember what I have coped with before
- count the people and resources I can call on

When we are anxious we tend to overestimate the danger and underestimate our ability to cope. The aim is to weigh both sides accurately, without pretending there is no danger.

## Questions for the danger side

- How many times have I predicted this, and how many times has it happened?
- If I had to bet money on it, what odds would I give?
- If it did happen, how bad would it be in a week, or in a year?

## Questions for the coping side

- What have I got through before that I did not think I could?
- What would I actually do, step by step, if it happened?
- Who could I turn to?

## A worry of mine, re-weighed

**The worry**

**The danger side**

What are the honest odds? How bad would it really be, a week on?

**The coping side**

What would I do? Who and what could I call on?

**Looking at both sides, how anxious do I feel now?**

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# Understanding worry

Why some minds worry more, and what keeps worry going.

Worry is a chain of "what if" thoughts about things that might go wrong. A little worry is useful: it helps us plan. Too much worry is exhausting. It jumps from topic to topic, is hard to stop, and rarely ends in a solution.

## Signs that worry has become a problem

- [ ] I worry about lots of different things
- [ ] Once I start, it is hard to stop
- [ ] I feel tense, restless or on edge
- [ ] My sleep is affected
- [ ] I find it hard to concentrate
- [ ] I am tired and irritable

## Why worry keeps going

**It feels useful**
"If I worry, I will be prepared." "Worrying shows I care." These beliefs make it hard to put worry down.

**Uncertainty feels unbearable**
Worry is an attempt to get certainty about the future. There is never enough, so the worrying carries on.

**It becomes a worry itself**
"I am going to make myself ill with all this worry." Worry about worry adds a second layer.

**Avoiding and checking**
Putting off decisions, over-preparing and seeking reassurance all give short relief and keep the habit strong.

## What helps

- Sorting worries into those you can act on and those you cannot.
- Giving worry a set time and place, instead of all day.
- Practising small doses of uncertainty on purpose.
- Bringing attention back to what is in front of you.

**Note**
Worrying is something you do, even though it feels automatic. That means you can learn to do less of it.

**My notes and questions**

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# Two kinds of worry

Sort your worries into practical problems and "what ifs".

Name _____ Date _____

**Practical worries**
About a real problem that exists now, and that you can do something about. "The car tax is due and I have not paid it." These need a plan.

**Hypothetical worries**
About things that have not happened and may never happen, or that are out of your hands. "What if I get ill next year?" These cannot be solved by thinking harder.

List what is on your mind. For each one, mark whether it is practical or hypothetical. If it is practical, what is the next step?

| My worry | Practical or hypothetical? | If practical, my next step |
|---|---|---|
| *What if the landlord puts the rent up?* | *Hypothetical for now* | *None. Come back to it if a letter arrives.* |
| | | |
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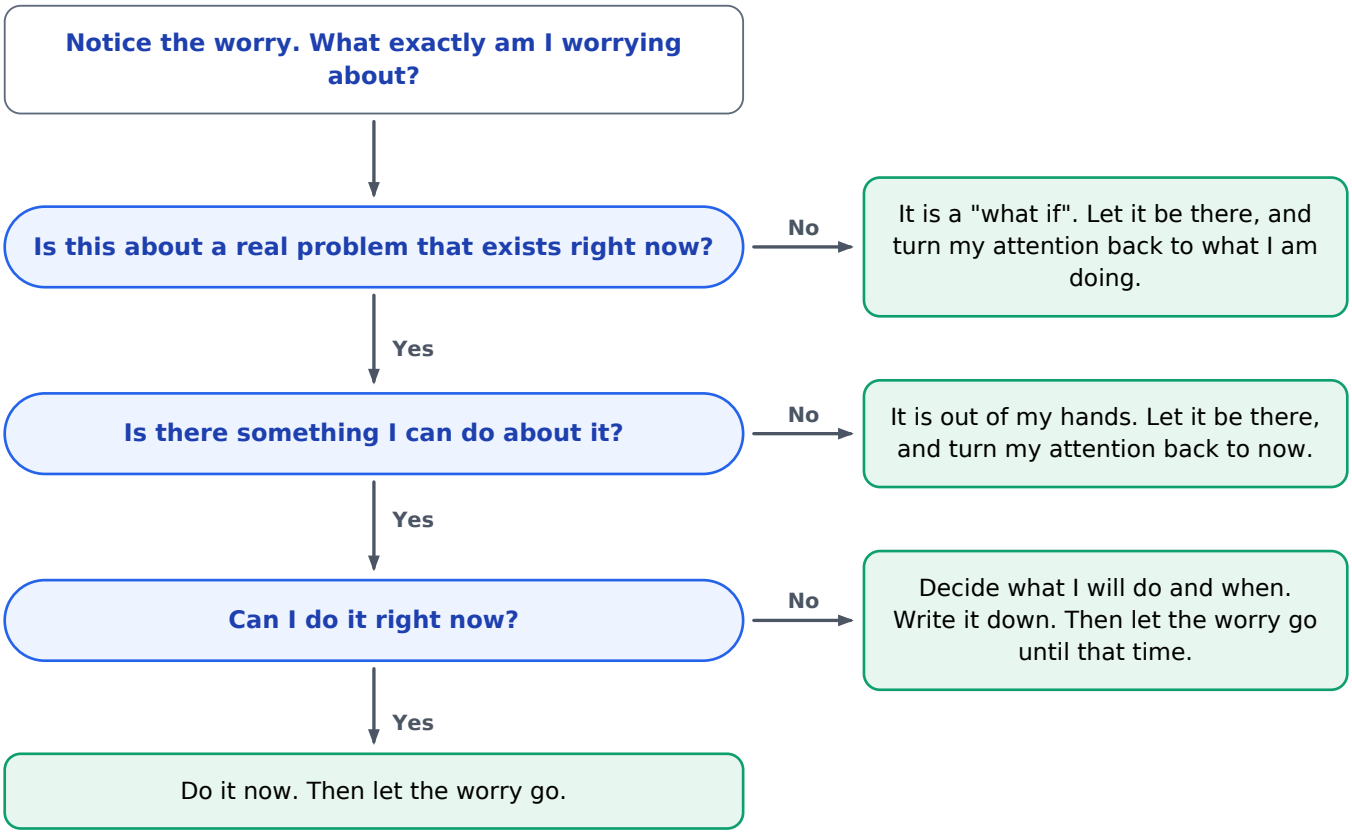
**For the hypothetical ones**
Notice it, name it ("that is a what-if"), and bring your attention back to what you are doing. It will come back. Do the same again.

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# The worry decision tree

Three questions to ask when a worry shows up.




## How to let a worry go

Letting a worry go does not mean forcing it out of your head, which makes it come back stronger. It means deciding not to follow it, and moving your attention to something else: the task in front of you, the room around you, your feet on the floor.

The worry will probably return, often within minutes. That is normal. Each time you notice it and come back, the habit of worrying gets a little weaker.

*Based on the worry decision tree described by Gillian Butler and Tony Hope in Manage Your Mind.*

**My notes and questions**

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# Worry diary

A week of tracking what you worry about, and what actually happens.

Name _____ Date _____

Fill in the first three columns when you catch yourself worrying. Come back later to fill in the last one.

| Date | What I was worried about | How anxious (0 to 10) | What actually happened |
|---|---|---|---|
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**At the end of the week: how many of my worries came true? When they did, how did I cope?**

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# Worry time

Postpone worrying to one set time each day.

Worrying on and off all day keeps your mind on high alert. Setting aside one short period to worry on purpose teaches your mind that worry can wait, and that you are in charge of when it happens.

## How to do it

1. **Pick a time and place.** Fifteen to twenty minutes, at the same time each day. Not in bed, and not in the hour before sleep.
2. **During the day, catch and postpone.** When a worry arrives, jot down a word or two and tell yourself, "Not now. I will think about that at half six."
3. **Come back to the present.** Turn your attention to what you were doing. The worry will tug at you. Postpone it again.
4. **Keep the appointment.** At worry time, take out your list. Worry about anything on it that still matters.
5. **Sort as you go.** If a worry is a real problem, write a next step. If it is a "what if", let it be.
6. **Stop when the time is up.** Close the notebook and do something absorbing.

## What people usually find

- Many worries no longer seem important by the time worry time comes round.
- Worrying on purpose is surprisingly hard to keep up for twenty minutes.
- The urge to worry "right now" gets weaker with practice.

| My worry time | What I will do straight afterwards |
| --- | --- |
| When and where? | Something that holds my attention |

**If it feels impossible**

Postponing gets easier with repetition. Aim to put off a worry for ten minutes at first, then build up.

*Worry time is based on the stimulus control approach to worry developed by Thomas Borkovec.*

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# Postponed worries

A list for the worries you have put off until worry time.

Name _____ Date _____

| Time | The worry, in a few words | Still matters at worry time? | What I did with it |
|---|---|---|---|
| *10.40* | *Did I offend Sarah yesterday?* | *No* | *Let it go* |
| | | | |
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**What have I noticed this week about postponing worry?**

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# Beliefs about worry

What I believe about worrying: that it helps, and that it harms.

Name _____ Date _____

Most people who worry a lot hold two sets of beliefs at once: that worry is useful, and that worry is harmful. Tick any that ring true.

**Worry is useful**

"Worrying helps me be prepared." "If I worry, bad things are less likely." "Worrying shows I am a caring person." "It helps me solve problems."

**Worry is harmful**

"I cannot control my worrying." "Worry could make me ill." "If I keep worrying, I will lose my mind."

**One belief of mine about worry being useful**

**Evidence that it is true**

**Evidence that it is not**

Has worry ever changed an outcome? Do people who worry less care less?

**One belief of mine about worry being harmful or out of control**

**Evidence that it is true**

**Evidence that it is not**

Have I ever stopped worrying when something else needed my attention?

**An experiment I could try. For example: worry on purpose on Monday, postpone all worry on Tuesday, and compare the two days.**

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# Tolerating uncertainty

Why needing to be sure drives worry, and how to get used to not knowing.

Nobody likes not knowing. For some people, though, uncertainty feels almost like an allergy: even a small amount sets off a big reaction. Worry, checking and reassurance are all ways of trying to feel sure.

The trouble is that life cannot be made certain. However much you check or plan, another "what if" appears. What helps is building up your tolerance for not knowing.

## Ways people try to get certainty

- [ ] Asking others for reassurance
- [ ] Checking and rechecking
- [ ] Making lists for everything
- [ ] Researching for hours before deciding
- [ ] Putting off decisions
- [ ] Doing everything myself, not delegating
- [ ] Avoiding anything new or unplanned
- [ ] Phoning or texting to check people are safe

## What it costs

All of these work for a few minutes. Then doubt creeps back, and the behaviour has to be repeated. Over time your world gets smaller, decisions get harder, and your confidence in your own judgement drops.

## Building tolerance

1. Choose one small certainty-seeking habit.
2. Drop it, on purpose, as an experiment. Send the email after one read. Order something new. Let someone else choose.
3. Notice what you predict will happen, and what does happen.
4. Notice that the discomfort rises, peaks and fades without you doing anything.
5. Repeat, and gradually take on bigger ones.

> **A phrase that helps**
> "Maybe, maybe not. I can live with not knowing."

*Draws on the work of Michel Dugas and colleagues on intolerance of uncertainty.*

**My notes and questions**

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# Uncertainty experiments

Drop one certainty-seeking habit at a time and record what happens.

Name _____ Date _____

Pick habits you use to feel certain, and try doing without them. Start small.

| What I did differently | What I feared would happen | What actually happened | If it went wrong, how did I cope? |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Sent a work email after reading it once* | *It would have a mistake and I would look careless* | *Nobody said anything* | *Not needed* |
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**What am I learning about uncertainty, and about myself?**

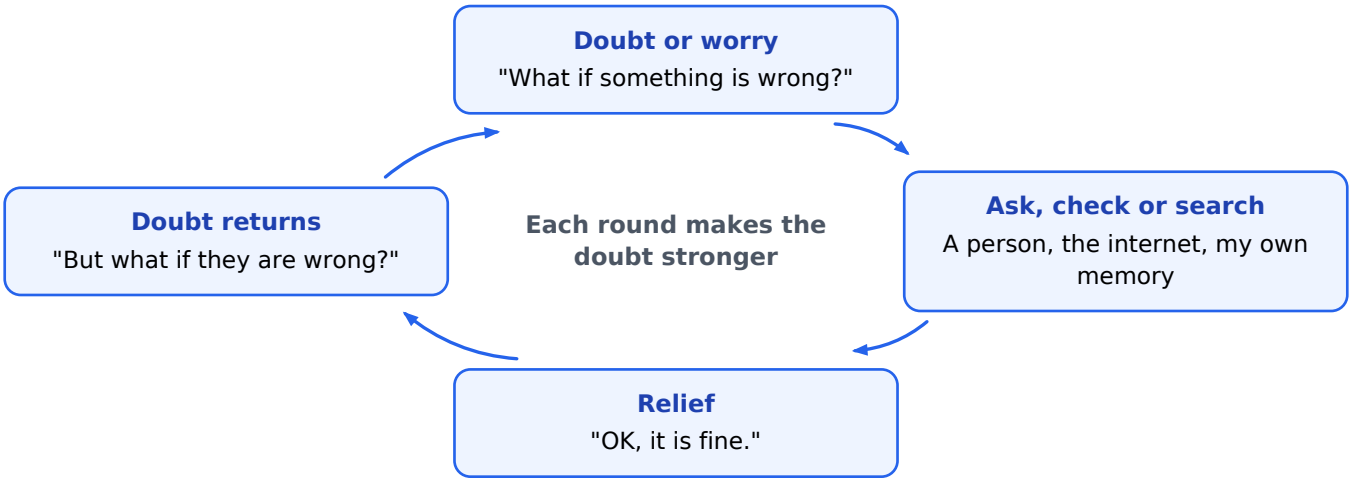
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# Reassurance seeking

Why asking for reassurance keeps anxiety going, and what to do instead.

Asking for reassurance is natural, and now and then it is fine. It becomes a problem when you need it again and again about the same thing, and the relief only lasts a few minutes.




## Less obvious kinds of reassurance

- Asking the same question in different ways
- Telling someone your worry and watching their face
- Searching symptoms or stories online
- Going over a conversation in your head to check you did not say something wrong
- Asking for a second and third opinion

## What to do instead

1. **Name it.** "This is the urge for reassurance."
2. **Delay.** Wait fifteen minutes before asking or checking. The urge usually drops.
3. **Answer with uncertainty.** "Maybe it is fine, maybe not. I do not need to know right now."
4. **Do something else** that needs your attention.

## For the people around you

> *"I care about you, and I can see you are anxious. We agreed that answering that question does not help in the long run. What could you do instead of asking?"*

**Expect this**

Cutting back on reassurance makes anxiety go up before it comes down. The rise is temporary.

**My notes and questions**

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# Calm breathing

Slow breathing with a longer out-breath, to calm the body.

When we are anxious we breathe fast and high in the chest. Slowing the breath down, and making the out-breath longer than the in-breath, switches on the body's calming system. It will not make anxiety vanish, but it takes the edge off and gives you something steady to do.

## How to do it

1. Sit or lie comfortably. Drop your shoulders. Put one hand on your belly.
2. Breathe in gently through your nose for a count of 4. Let your belly rise under your hand.
3. Pause for a moment.
4. Breathe out slowly through your mouth for a count of 6, as if you were blowing on hot soup.
5. Carry on for three to five minutes. If your mind wanders, bring it back to the counting.

## Tips

- **Slow, not deep.** Big gulps of air can make you dizzy. Keep the breath slow and low in the belly.
- **Practise when calm.** Twice a day for a few minutes. It is easier to use under stress once you have practised it when calm.
- **Find your own count.** If 4 and 6 feels strained, try 3 and 5. The out-breath being longer is what matters.
- **Use a cue.** Link it to something you already do: the kettle boiling, sitting into the car, getting into bed.

| Day | Morning practice | Evening practice | What I noticed |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | | |
| **Tue** | | | |
| **Wed** | | | |
| **Thu** | | | |
| **Fri** | | | |
| **Sat** | | | |
| **Sun** | | | |

**A caution**

If you have panic attacks, use breathing as a way to steady yourself, not as a way to escape the feelings. The sensations of panic are safe, with or without breathing exercises.

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# Progressive muscle relaxation

Tensing and releasing each muscle group in turn, to learn what relaxed feels like.

Anxiety and stress leave muscles tight, often without us noticing. In this exercise you tense each muscle group on purpose, then let go, so you learn what release feels like and can find it again when you need it.

Allow about fifteen minutes. Sit or lie somewhere quiet. For each area, tense for about 5 seconds, then release for about 15 seconds and notice the difference. Tense firmly, not painfully. Skip any area that is injured or sore.

| Area | How to tense it |
|---|---|
| Hands and forearms | Make tight fists. |
| Upper arms | Bend your elbows and tense your biceps. |
| Shoulders | Lift them up towards your ears. |
| Forehead and eyes | Raise your eyebrows high, then screw your eyes shut. |
| Jaw | Press your teeth together and pull the corners of your mouth back. |
| Neck | Gently press your head back against the chair or pillow. |
| Chest and back | Take a breath in and pull your shoulder blades together. |
| Stomach | Pull your belly in tight. |
| Thighs | Press your knees together or push your heels into the floor. |
| Lower legs | Point your toes up towards your face. |
| Feet | Curl your toes under. |

## To finish

Scan through your body from head to toe. If any tightness is left, let it go. Breathe slowly for a minute or two. Get up slowly.

**Tension before**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

None … Extreme

**Tension after**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

None … Extreme

*With practice, most people can relax by scanning and releasing, without needing to tense first.*

*Progressive muscle relaxation was developed by Edmund Jacobson.*

**Notes**

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# Grounding with your five senses

The 5-4-3-2-1 exercise, for bringing your attention back to the present.

When anxiety or a memory pulls you out of the present, your senses can bring you back. Go slowly. Say each thing out loud or in your head, and really look, listen and feel.

| | |
|---|---|
| **5 things I can see** | Look around. Notice colours, shapes, light and shadow. Pick out small details. |
| **4 things I can feel** | Your feet in your shoes. The chair under you. The air on your skin. An object in your hand. |
| **3 things I can hear** | Near and far. Traffic, a clock, your own breathing. |
| **2 things I can smell** | Coffee, soap, fresh air. If nothing is there, name two smells you like. |
| **1 thing I can taste** | A sip of water, a mint, or just the taste in your mouth. |

Finish with one slow breath out, and remind yourself where you are: "It is Tuesday afternoon. I am in my kitchen. I am safe right now."

## Make it yours

**Things I can keep nearby to help me ground (something to hold, smell, taste or look at)**

**A sentence that reminds me where and when I am**

**When I tried this, what did I notice?**

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# A menu of grounding techniques

Different things work for different people. Try several and keep what helps.

Grounding means anchoring your attention in the here and now. Use it when you feel overwhelmed, spaced out, panicky or caught in a memory. Tick the ones you want to try.

## Using your body

- [ ] Press your feet into the floor and notice the pressure
- [ ] Hold something cold, or run cold water over your wrists
- [ ] Stretch, stamp your feet, or push against a wall
- [ ] Clench your fists, then let them go
- [ ] Walk, counting your steps
- [ ] Hold a warm mug in both hands

## Using your mind

- [ ] Describe the room in detail, out loud
- [ ] Say the date, the time and where you are
- [ ] Count backwards from 100 in sevens
- [ ] Name an animal for each letter of the alphabet
- [ ] List everything you can see that is blue
- [ ] Read something out loud, slowly

## Soothing yourself

- [ ] Say something kind to yourself, as you would to a friend
- [ ] Picture a place where you feel calm and safe
- [ ] Listen to a favourite song
- [ ] Wrap up in a blanket
- [ ] Smell something you love
- [ ] Think of people who care about you

**Tips**

Practise when you are only a little stressed, so the skills are ready when you need them. Keep your eyes open. Rate your distress from 0 to 10 before and after, to learn which ones work for you.

**My top three**

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# A calm place in your mind

A guided exercise for imagining a calm place in detail.

Your body responds to what you imagine. Picture biting into a lemon and your mouth waters. In the same way, picturing a calm place in detail can settle your body down.

## Steps

1. Sit comfortably and take a few slow breaths.
2. Bring to mind a place where you feel calm and at ease. It can be real or made up: a beach, a hillside, a room, a garden. Somewhere with no difficult memories attached.
3. Look around it. What can you see? Colours, light, the time of day?
4. What can you hear? What can you smell? What is the air like on your skin?
5. Notice where you feel the calm in your body. Let it spread.
6. Give the place a name or a cue word.
7. Stay for a few minutes. When you are ready, bring your attention back to the room.

If the image changes or something unwelcome appears, you can alter it, as you would edit a film. It is your place. If no place feels safe, try imagining a calm activity or a kind presence instead.

**What I can see**

**What I can hear**

**What I can smell and feel**

**Where I feel calm in my body**

**My cue word or name for this place**

**When could I use this? What did I notice when I practised?**

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# My anxiety coping plan

Decide now what you will do when anxiety rises, so you are not working it out in the moment.

Name _____ Date _____

## Situations that tend to set my anxiety off

## Early signs in my body

## Early signs in my thinking and behaviour

## When I notice these signs, the first things I will do

## What I will say to myself

## Things that seem to help but keep it going

- [ ] Avoiding
- [ ] Checking
- [ ] Alcohol
- [ ] Leaving early
- [ ] Reassurance
- [ ] Over-preparing

## What I will do instead

## People I can talk to

## What I want to remember when it passes

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# Shifting your attention outwards

Practice in moving your attention from yourself to what is around you.

When you are anxious, attention turns inwards: to your heartbeat, your thoughts, how you are coming across. The more you watch yourself, the worse you feel and the less you take in of what is really happening around you.

Attention is like a torch. You can learn to point it where you choose.

## Practice 1: sounds (5 minutes, at home)

1. Sit quietly. Pick one sound and give it your full attention for a minute.
2. Switch to another sound, perhaps further away. Stay with it for a minute.
3. Move between three or four sounds, one at a time.
4. Finally, open your attention wide and take in all the sounds at once.

## Practice 2: everyday tasks

Choose something ordinary: washing up, a shower, a walk. Put your attention fully on the task. What can you see, hear, feel and smell? Each time your attention slides back to yourself or your worries, notice it and return to the task.

## Practice 3: with people

In a conversation, focus on the other person. What exactly are they saying? What colour are their eyes? What is their mood? When you catch yourself checking how you are doing, turn the torch back to them.

| When | What I practised | Where my attention went | How well could I bring it back? (0 to 10) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
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*Your mind will wander back to you many times. That is expected. Noticing and returning is the exercise.*

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# Facing fears: how exposure works

Why facing a fear in planned steps reduces it, and how to do it well.

Avoiding something frightening teaches your brain that it really is dangerous. Exposure is the opposite: you approach what you fear, deliberately and gradually, and stay long enough to find out what actually happens.

## What happens when you stay




Anxiety cannot stay at its peak. If you stay put and do not use safety behaviours, it levels off and begins to fall by itself. Even when it stays high for a while, you learn something just as valuable: that you can feel anxious and still cope.

## What happens when you repeat it




Each practice starts a little lower and settles a little faster. Your brain is updating its prediction: "This is uncomfortable, not dangerous."

## The rules of good exposure

1. **Graded.** Build a ladder from easier to harder. Start with something challenging but doable.
2. **Long enough.** Stay until you have learned what you came to learn: the feared thing did not happen, or you coped with it.
3. **Repeated.** Once is not enough. Practise each step several times, ideally daily.
4. **No safety behaviours.** No distraction, no escape plan, no reassurance. They stop the learning.
5. **Your choice.** You decide what to do and when. Nobody will spring anything on you.

> **The aim**
> Not to feel no anxiety. The aim is to learn that anxiety is safe and passes, and that the thing you fear is less likely or less terrible than it seems.

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# My exposure ladder

Break a fear down into steps, from easiest to hardest.

Name _____ Date _____

**The fear I am working on**

**My goal. What do I want to be able to do?**

Brainstorm situations related to this fear. Rate how anxious each would make you, from 0 (none) to 100 (the most you can imagine). Then place them on the ladder with the hardest at the top. Vary things like distance, time, and whether you are alone to create in-between steps.

| Step | Situation | Anxiety (0 to 100) |
|---|---|---|
| **10 (hardest)** | | |
| **9** | | |
| **8** | | |
| **7** | | |
| **6** | | |
| **5** | | |
| **4** | | |
| **3** | | |
| **2** | | |
| **1 (easiest)** | | |

*Start with a step rated around 30 to 50. Repeat it until it feels noticeably easier, then move up.*

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# Exposure practice record

A record of each exposure practice, with anxiety ratings.

Name _____ Date _____

**The step I am practising**

**What I predict will happen**

| Date | How long | Anxiety before | Anxiety at peak | Anxiety at end | What I learned |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |
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**Looking down the columns, what do I notice? Did my prediction come true?**

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# Dropping a safety behaviour

Find out what happens when you let go of one precaution.

Name _____ Date _____

**The safety behaviour I am going to drop (what I usually do to feel safe)**

**The situation where I will try it**

**What I fear will happen if I do not do it**

**How strongly do I believe that?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Completely

**What I will do instead (for example: look up and keep my hands relaxed)**

**What actually happened**

**How strongly do I believe my fear now?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Completely

**What does this tell me about how much I need the safety behaviour?**

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# What am I avoiding?

List what you have been avoiding, and how much each thing matters to you.

Name _____ Date _____

Avoidance builds up slowly, so it is easy to miss how much you have stopped doing. List what you are staying away from, how anxious it would make you, and how much it matters to you to get it back.

| What I avoid | Anxiety if I did it (0 to 100) | How much I want it back (0 to 10) |
|---|---|---|
| **Places and situations** | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| **Activities** | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| **People, or kinds of contact** | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| **Body sensations, thoughts or memories** | | |
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**What has avoiding cost me?**

**The one I would most like to tackle first**

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# Anxiety: what helps and what keeps it going

A one-page summary of what makes anxiety worse and what brings it down.

### Keeps anxiety going

- Avoiding the things I fear
- Leaving as soon as I feel anxious
- Asking for reassurance again and again
- Checking, over-planning and over-preparing
- Watching my body for signs of trouble
- Trying to push thoughts away
- Using alcohol to take the edge off
- Believing every "what if"

### Helps over time

- Facing fears in small, repeated steps
- Staying until the anxiety settles
- Letting uncertainty be there
- Doing things once, well enough
- Turning my attention outwards
- Letting thoughts come and go
- Looking after sleep, food and movement
- Asking "what is most likely?"

## Everyday foundations

- **Caffeine.** It mimics anxiety in the body. If you are jittery, try cutting back gradually and see what changes.
- **Sleep.** Tiredness makes anxiety worse. Keep a regular wind-down and wake-up time.
- **Movement.** Regular exercise burns off stress hormones and is one of the best-supported ways to reduce anxiety.
- **Alcohol.** It calms for an hour or two, then makes anxiety worse the next day.
- **Company.** Time with people you are comfortable with helps you feel calmer.

**In short**

Doing the opposite of what anxiety tells you, a little at a time, reduces it.

| A habit I want to drop | What I will do instead | When I will start |
|---|---|---|
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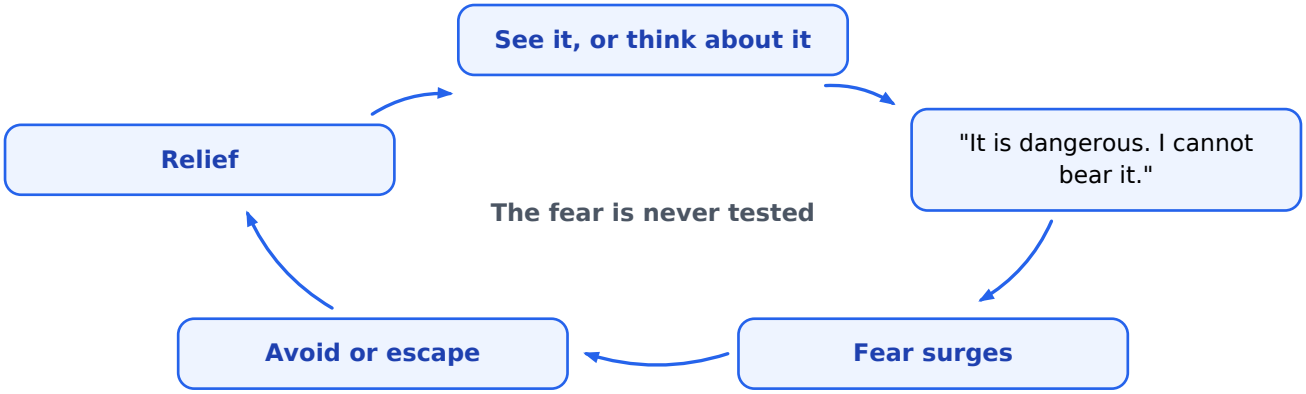
# Understanding phobias

A strong fear of one particular thing, out of proportion to the danger.

A phobia is an intense fear of a specific object or situation: heights, flying, dogs, spiders, needles, vomiting, lifts, the dentist. You may know the fear is bigger than the real risk and still feel unable to face it.

## How a phobia develops

Sometimes there was a frightening experience. Sometimes the fear was picked up from someone else, or there is no clear starting point at all. How it began matters less than what keeps it going.




## How phobias are treated

Phobias respond very well to graded exposure. You build a ladder of steps, from looking at a picture to the real thing, and work up it at a pace you choose. Many people improve a lot within a few sessions.

Along the way you test what you believe would happen. "The dog will bite me." "The lift will get stuck and I will run out of air." "I will lose control." These predictions almost never come true, and the fear reduces as you find that out.

**Blood, injury and needle fears are different**

Most fears raise blood pressure. With blood and needles, it can rise and then drop sharply, which is why some people faint. A technique called applied tension (tensing the big muscles of the arms, legs and body for 10 to 15 seconds, then releasing, and repeating) keeps blood pressure up. Ask me to teach you this before starting exposure, and check with your GP if you have a heart condition.

**What does my phobia stop me doing, and what would I do if it were gone?**

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# Coping statements for anxiety

Short, accurate things to say to yourself when anxiety is high.

These are accurate reminders for the moments when anxiety makes it hard to think. They are not about pretending everything is fine. Circle the ones that fit, and change the wording to sound like you.

| | |
|---|---|
| This is anxiety. I know what this is. | It is uncomfortable, and it is not dangerous. |
| This feeling will peak and pass. It always has. | I do not have to like it. I only have to let it be here. |
| My body is doing what it is built to do. | I have got through this before. |
| A thought is not a fact. | I can feel anxious and still do this. |
| I do not need to be certain. | One thing at a time. What is the next small step? |

| When I notice... | I will say to myself... |
|---|---|
| *My heart racing on the bus* | *This is adrenaline. It peaks and passes. I can stay where I am.* |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

*Cut along the dashed lines. Keep a card in your wallet or phone case.*

**For anxious moments**

The statement I most need

Patrick O'Hare Therapy

**For anxious moments**

The statement I most need

Patrick O'Hare Therapy

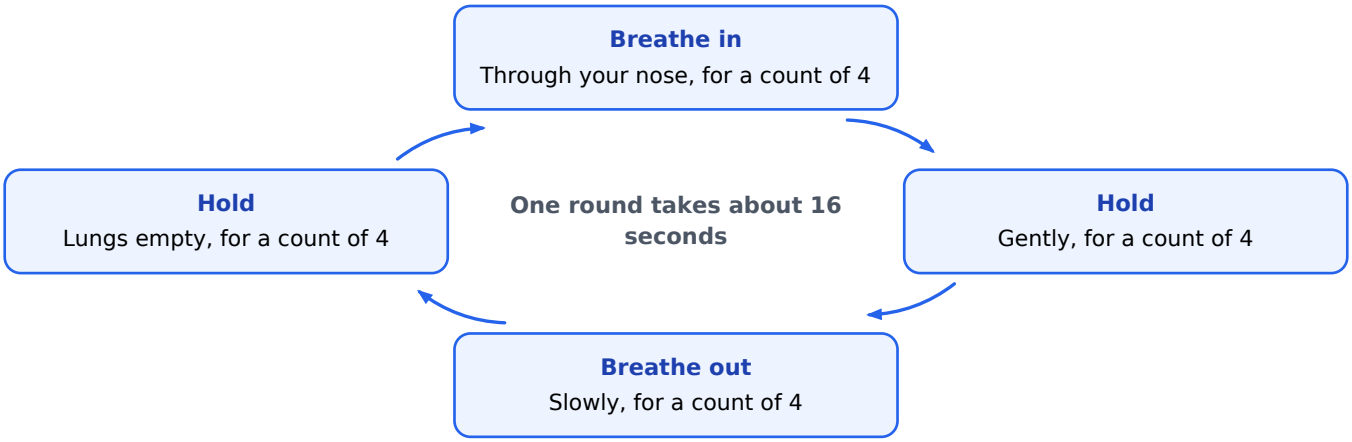
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# Box breathing

Four equal sides: in, hold, out, hold.

Box breathing slows your breath into four equal parts. Counting gives your mind one simple job, and the slower rhythm tells your body that it can stand down. Most people feel a difference within a minute or two.




## How to do it

1. Sit with your feet on the floor, or stand. Let your shoulders drop.
2. Breathe in through your nose for a slow count of 4. Let your belly move, not your chest.
3. Hold for 4, with your throat and jaw loose.
4. Breathe out for 4. Then hold for 4 with your lungs empty.
5. Go round four to six times. Then let your breathing go back to normal.

## Tips

- **Picture the box.** Trace a square with a finger: up, across, down, across.
- **Shrink the box if you need to.** Count to 3, or shorten the holds.
- **Practise when calm,** twice a day, so that it is there when you need it.

| Day | When I practised | Rounds | How I felt after |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | | |
| **Tue** | | | |
| **Wed** | | | |
| **Thu** | | | |
| **Fri** | | | |
| **Sat** | | | |
| **Sun** | | | |

**Go gently**

Holding your breath does not suit everyone. If you feel dizzy or panicky, stop and breathe normally. If you are pregnant or have a heart or lung condition, leave out the holds, or check with your GP first.

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# Your brain's alarm system

Why you cannot "just think straight" when you feel under threat.

Three parts of the brain do most of the work when we feel under threat. Knowing how they talk to each other explains a lot about anxiety, anger and trauma reactions.

**The alarm**
The amygdala. Fast and crude. It scans for danger all the time, and would rather be wrong a hundred times than miss one real threat.

**The thinking brain**
The prefrontal cortex. Slower and smarter. It weighs things up, makes plans, and can tell the alarm to stand down.

**The memory keeper**
The hippocampus. It files memories with a time and a place, so the brain knows "that was then, this is now".

## What happens when the alarm goes off

| | |
|---|---|
| **Something happens** | A noise, a look, a thought, a body sensation |
| ↓ | |
| **The alarm fires** | In a fraction of a second, before you have had time to think |
| ↓ | |
| **The body gets ready** | Heart, breathing and muscles prepare to fight, run or freeze |
| ↓ | |
| **The thinking brain catches up** | "Is this really dangerous?" If not, it settles the alarm. |

When the alarm is very loud, the thinking brain goes quiet. That is why, in a panic or a rage, you cannot reason your way out, find the right words, or remember what you planned to do. Nothing is wrong with you. The system is working as designed, at the wrong moment.

## A smoke alarm, not a fire

A smoke alarm cannot tell burnt toast from a house fire. It only knows "smoke". After a long stretch of stress, or after trauma, the brain's alarm can be set too sensitive and go off at toast. The feeling of danger is real. The danger often is not.

## The alarm can be retrained

- **Settle the body first.** A slow breath out and grounding quieten the alarm enough for the thinking brain to come back.
- **Then think.** Once you are steadier, questions like "What is most likely?" start to work.
- **Teach it through experience.** The alarm learns from what happens, not from being told. Facing a feared situation and finding that you are safe is what resets it.
- **Look after the basics.** Poor sleep, too much caffeine and alcohol all make the alarm jumpier.

*This is a simplified picture. The brain works as a network, and each of these areas does many other jobs as well.*

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# What is a panic attack?

What a panic attack is, why it feels so serious, and why it is not dangerous.

A panic attack is the body's alarm system going off at full volume when there is no real danger. It comes on fast, usually peaks within about ten minutes, and then fades. Many people have one at some point in their lives.

## What it can feel like

- [ ] Pounding or racing heart
- [ ] Short of breath, or a choking feeling
- [ ] Chest tightness or pain
- [ ] Dizzy, unsteady or faint
- [ ] Shaking or trembling
- [ ] Sweating, hot or cold flushes
- [ ] Tingling or numbness
- [ ] Feeling sick, or a churning stomach
- [ ] Feeling unreal or detached
- [ ] Fear of dying, collapsing or losing control

## Why it feels so serious

The sensations are strong and they come out of the blue, so the mind looks for an explanation. The usual conclusions are "I am having a heart attack", "I am going to faint", or "I am going mad". Those thoughts are terrifying, so the alarm rings louder, and the sensations get stronger.

In fact these are the ordinary sensations of adrenaline, the same ones you would feel after sprinting for a bus.

## When panic becomes a problem

After a first attack, many people start to fear the next one. They watch their body for warning signs, avoid places where an attack happened, and carry "just in case" items. This fear of panic is what turns one frightening episode into an ongoing problem.

**What we know**

A panic attack is very unlikely to make you faint, because blood pressure goes up in panic and fainting needs it to drop. It cannot make you go mad, and it does not damage a healthy heart. It always passes.

**Check first**

If you have not already, see your GP to rule out a physical cause for your symptoms. Once that is done, the work is learning that these sensations are safe.

**My notes and questions**

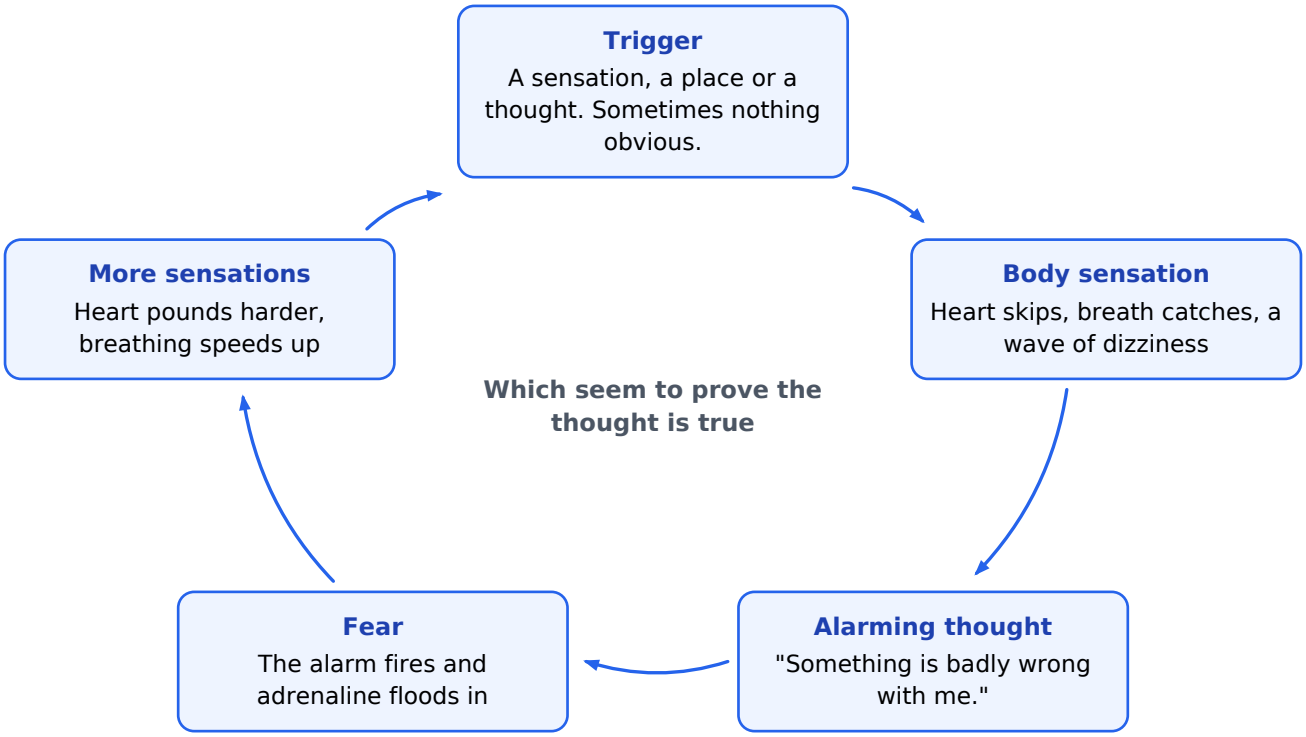
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# The panic cycle

How a harmless body sensation turns into a full panic attack.

Panic attacks are driven by a loop between body and mind. It can build in seconds.




## The step that matters most

The loop depends on how the sensation is read. If a racing heart means "I ran up the stairs", nothing happens. If it means "heart attack", the alarm fires. The sensation is the same in both cases. Only the meaning is different.

## What keeps it going between attacks

- **Body watching.** Scanning for sensations means you find more of them.
- **Avoidance.** Staying away from places or activities linked to panic.
- **Safety behaviours.** Sitting down, holding on, sipping water, escaping. Each one seems to have saved you, so the belief in danger survives.

## What breaks it

1. Learning what the sensations really are.
2. Testing the alarming thought. Did the feared disaster ever happen?
3. Bringing the sensations on deliberately and discovering they are safe.
4. Going back, step by step, to the places and activities you have been avoiding.

*Based on the cognitive model of panic developed by David M. Clark.*

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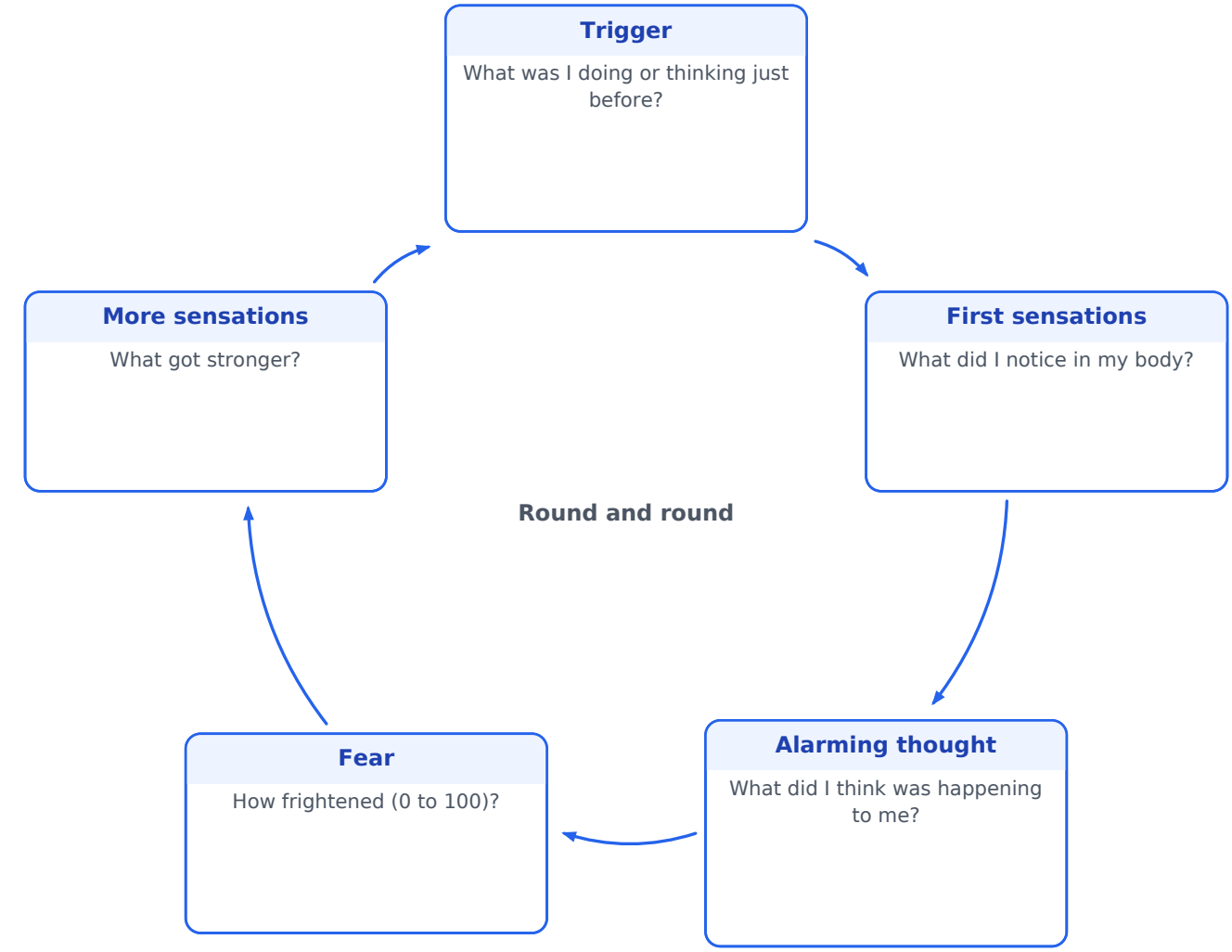
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# My panic cycle

Map your most recent or most typical panic attack.

Name _____ Date _____

**When and where did it happen?**




**What did I do to try to stop it or keep safe?**

**What actually happened in the end? Did the thing I feared happen?**

**What does that tell me?**

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# Panic sensations: what is really happening

Each sensation has an ordinary explanation.

| Sensation | What panic says | What is really going on |
|---|---|---|
| **Pounding heart, palpitations** | "I am having a heart attack." | Adrenaline makes the heart beat faster and harder to supply the muscles. A healthy heart can do this for hours. |
| **Chest tightness or pain** | "My heart is failing." | Chest muscles tense up, and fast breathing makes them work hard. Muscle pain, not heart pain. |
| **Breathlessness, tight throat** | "I cannot breathe. I will suffocate." | You are over-breathing, taking in more air than you need. The feeling of not getting enough is the opposite of the truth. |
| **Dizzy, light-headed** | "I am going to faint." | Over-breathing briefly lowers carbon dioxide. Blood pressure is up, so fainting is very unlikely. |
| **Tingling, numb fingers or lips** | "I am having a stroke." | Another harmless effect of over-breathing. It fades as breathing settles. |
| **Feeling unreal or detached** | "I am losing my mind." | A common effect of high arousal and over-breathing. It is unpleasant, and it passes. |
| **Shaky, wobbly legs** | "I am going to collapse." | Muscles primed with adrenaline tremble. They are stronger than usual, not weaker. |
| **Hot, sweaty, flushed** | "Everyone can see. Something is wrong." | The body is cooling itself. Others notice far less than you think. |
| **Urge to run** | "I must get out or something terrible will happen." | The flight response. The urge is strong, and nothing happens if you stay. |

| The sensation that frightens me most | What I used to think it meant | What I understand now |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
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**A note**

This sheet is for people whose doctor has ruled out a physical cause. New or different chest pain, or symptoms that are not typical for you, should always be checked.

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# Panic: myths and facts

The fears that keep panic going, and what the evidence says.

| The fear | The facts |
|---|---|
| **"I will faint."** | Fainting happens when blood pressure drops suddenly. In panic, blood pressure and heart rate go up. The exception is blood and needle phobia, which works differently. |
| **"I am having a heart attack."** | Panic sensations peak within minutes and ease with rest. A heart attack does not come and go with anxiety. If your heart has been checked, these are adrenaline sensations. |
| **"I will stop breathing."** | Breathing is automatic. Your body will not let you stop. The breathless feeling comes from breathing too much, not too little. |
| **"I will lose control."** | People in panic do not run amok, crash the car or do something shocking. The alarm makes you more alert and more careful, not less. |
| **"I am going mad."** | Panic is not a sign of serious mental illness and does not lead to it. Feeling unreal is a normal effect of high arousal. |
| **"It will never stop."** | The body cannot keep producing adrenaline at that rate. Every panic attack ends, usually within ten to twenty minutes. |
| **"Everyone can see."** | Panic feels enormous from the inside. From the outside, most people notice little or nothing. |
| **"I must have a weak or damaged body."** | Panic is a strong, healthy alarm system firing at the wrong time. |

**The myth I have believed most strongly**

**How much do I believe it now?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Completely

**What evidence from my own experience goes against it? (How many panic attacks have I had, and how many times did the feared thing happen?)**

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# Panic diary

A record of each panic attack, to show up patterns.

Name _____ Date _____

| Date and place | Main sensations | What I thought was happening | What I did | What actually happened |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
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**Looking across the week: what do my panic attacks have in common? What do my feared outcomes have in common?**

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# Practising panic sensations

Bringing on the feelings on purpose, to learn that they are safe.

If you fear the sensations of panic, the most direct treatment is to produce them deliberately, in a planned way, and find out that nothing bad follows. The exercises below create sensations similar to panic. They are safe for healthy people.

**Before you start**

Check with your GP first if you are pregnant or have a heart condition, asthma or another lung condition, epilepsy, low blood pressure, a history of fainting, or neck, back or balance problems. We will choose exercises that suit you.

| Exercise | For how long | Sensations it tends to produce |
|---|---|---|
| Breathe fast and deep through your mouth | 1 minute | Dizziness, tingling, unreality |
| Breathe through a narrow straw, nose pinched | 1 minute | Breathlessness, air hunger |
| Hold your breath | 30 seconds | Breathlessness, chest tightness |
| Run on the spot, or up and down stairs | 1 minute | Pounding heart, breathlessness, heat |
| Spin in an office chair | 1 minute | Dizziness, nausea |
| Shake your head from side to side | 30 seconds | Dizziness, blurred vision |
| Head between your knees, then sit up quickly | 30 seconds | Light-headedness, head rush |
| Tense every muscle in your body | 1 minute | Trembling, tension, heaviness |
| Stare at a spot on the wall, or at your own reflection | 2 minutes | Unreality, feeling detached |

## How to practise

1. Try each one and rate how similar it is to your panic, and how anxious it makes you.
2. Pick the ones that come closest. Start with a moderate one.
3. Do the exercise fully. Do not stop early, hold on, or distract yourself.
4. Stay with the sensations afterwards until they fade. Notice what happens, and what does not.
5. Repeat three or four times in a row, every day, until the fear drops.

**The aim**

To stop being afraid of the sensations. They do not have to go away.

**Notes**

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# Sensation practice record

A record of each practice and how anxious it made you.

Name _____ Date _____

**What I fear these sensations mean**

| Date | Exercise | Sensations (0 to 10) | Anxiety (0 to 10) | Like my panic? (0 to 10) | What happened |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |
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**What am I learning about these sensations?**

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# My panic safety behaviours

Tick the precautions you use, then plan to drop them one at a time.

Name _____ Date _____

Tick everything you do, or have done, to prevent a panic attack or keep yourself safe during one.

## During anxiety or panic

- ☐ Sit down or lie down
- ☐ Hold on to something or someone
- ☐ Take deep breaths or open a window
- ☐ Sip water
- ☐ Leave the situation
- ☐ Distract myself (phone, counting, music)
- ☐ Check my pulse
- ☐ Take a tablet "just in case"
- ☐ Tense up to stay in control
- ☐ Phone someone

## To prevent it happening

- ☐ Only go out with a trusted person
- ☐ Stay near exits or sit at the end of the row
- ☐ Carry water, tablets or a phone at all times
- ☐ Avoid exercise, caffeine, heat or anything that changes how my body feels
- ☐ Avoid queues, crowds, public transport or driving
- ☐ Avoid being far from home, or being alone
- ☐ Plan escape routes in advance

| Safety behaviour | What I fear would happen without it | How hard to drop (0 to 10) |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
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| | | |

**The first one I will experiment with dropping, and when**

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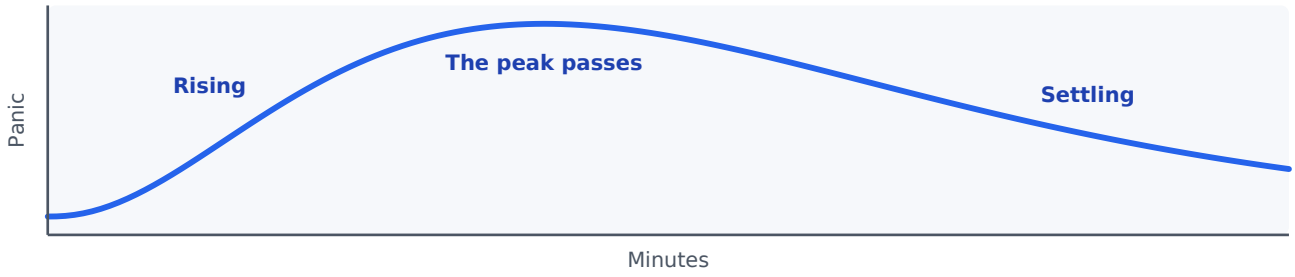
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# Riding out a panic attack

Six steps for letting a panic attack pass without fighting it.

The instinct in panic is to fight it or get away. Both tell your brain the danger is real. It works better to let the attack happen and pass.

1. **Name it.** "This is a panic attack. I know what this is. It is adrenaline."
2. **Stay where you are** if you safely can. If you are driving, pull over when it is safe and wait.
3. **Stop fighting it.** Loosen your shoulders and hands and let the sensations come. They are unpleasant but not harmful.
4. **Breathe out slowly.** Do not gulp air. Let your breathing find its own pace.
5. **Watch it rise and fall.** It builds, peaks and comes down, like a wave. Notice the moment it starts to ease.
6. **Carry on.** When it eases, go back to what you were doing. This is what teaches your brain it was a false alarm.




## Each time I ride one out

| Date | Roughly how long to the peak | What I did | What I found out |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

*Cut along the dashed lines. Keep a card in your wallet or phone case.*

**This is panic. It is adrenaline. It is not dangerous and it will pass. Stay. Loosen. Breathe out. Let the wave rise and fall. Then carry on.**

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**What I want to remember when panic comes**

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# Understanding agoraphobia

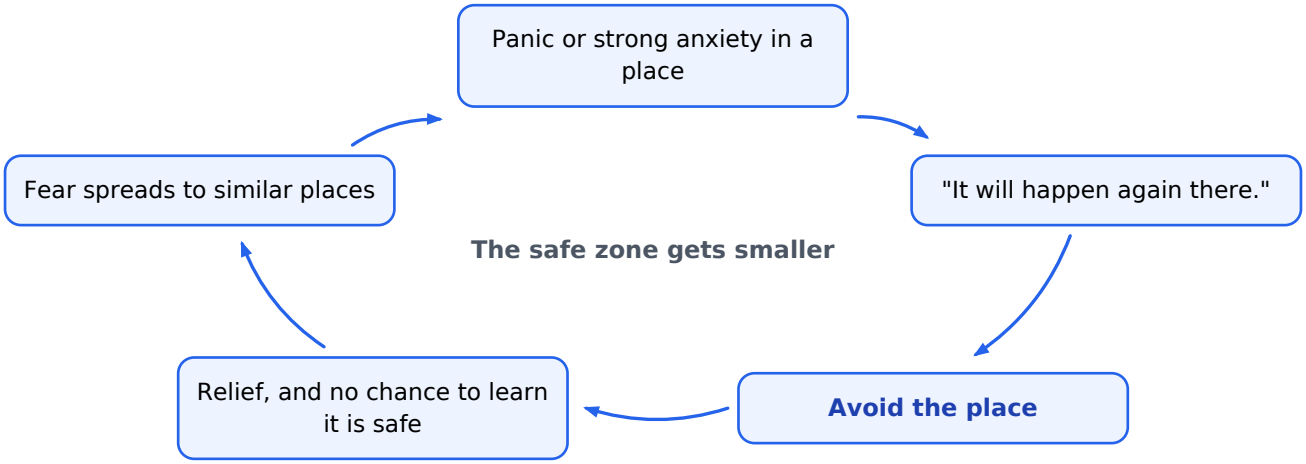
Fear and avoidance of places that would be hard to leave if you panicked.

Agoraphobia is not simply a fear of open spaces. It is a fear of being somewhere that would be hard to leave, or where help might not come, if you panicked or felt unwell. To stay safe, people start to avoid.

## Commonly avoided

- [ ] Public transport
- [ ] Shops, supermarkets, queues
- [ ] Crowds, cinemas, restaurants
- [ ] Driving, motorways, bridges, tunnels
- [ ] Open spaces, car parks
- [ ] Being far from home
- [ ] Being at home alone
- [ ] Lifts and other enclosed spaces

## How it grows




Some people can still do things with a trusted companion, with a "lucky" object, or at quiet times. These are safety behaviours. They help in the short term and keep the fear in place.

## How it is treated

Agoraphobia is treated by going back, step by step, into the places you have been avoiding and staying long enough to learn what really happens. We build a ladder together. You set the pace.

Part of this work can happen outside the therapy room. If it would help, and once we have a good foundation, we can do some sessions out in the places that are hard for you.

**The aim**
To be able to go where you want, whether or not you feel anxious. Feeling no anxiety is not the target.

**My notes and questions**

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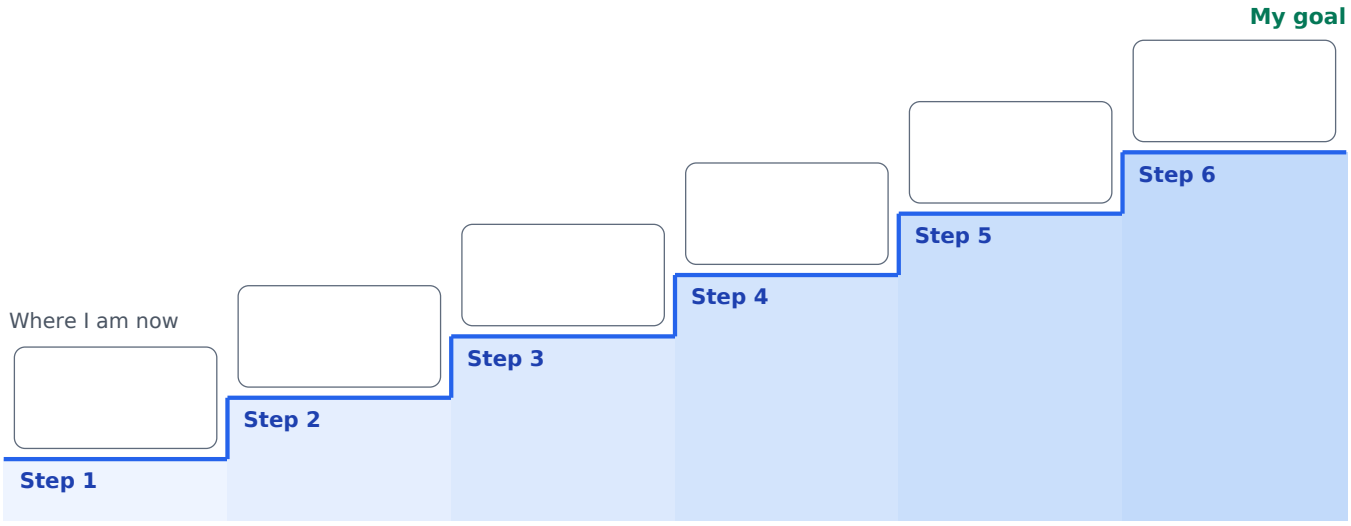
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# Going out again: my step plan

A ladder of steps back into the places you have been avoiding, with a weekly record.

Name _____ Date _____

**Where I want to be able to go, or what I want to be able to do**




Make each step a bit harder than the last. You can change one thing at a time: how far, how long, how busy, and whether someone is with you.

| Date | Step | What I predicted | Anxiety at peak (0 to 100) | What happened |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
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| | | | | |
| | | | | |

*Practise each step several times before moving up. Stay until you have found out what you needed to know.*

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# Out-and-about session plan

Planning a therapy session in the real world.

Name _____ Date _____

## Before we go

### What I want to get from this session

### Where we will go and what we will do, in order

### What I predict will happen

**What I would like my therapist to do**

Where to be, and when to step back

**What I will try not to do**

Safety behaviours I am going to drop

### How we will stop or pause if I need to

## Afterwards

### What actually happened

**Highest anxiety**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

None Extreme

**Anxiety at the end**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

None Extreme

### What I learned, and what I will practise by myself before next time

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# Testing a panic prediction

Plan a test of what you fear will happen in a panic attack.

Name _____ Date _____

**What I believe will happen if I panic and do not protect myself**

**How strongly do I believe it?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Completely

**If I am right, what exactly would we see? How would we know it had happened?**

**The experiment. What will I do to test it, and which safety behaviours will I drop?**

**What happened**

**If the catastrophe did not happen, why not? (Be honest: was it luck, a safety behaviour, or because it was never going to?)**

**How strongly do I believe the prediction now?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Completely

**What is the next experiment?**

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# After a panic attack: what did I learn?

Fill this in soon after an attack: what you feared and what happened.

Name _____ Date _____

**When and where**

**What I noticed first**

**What I was afraid would happen**

**What I did**

**What actually happened**

**How well did I cope, looking back?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Not at all — Very well

**What I did that helped**

**What I would like to do differently next time**

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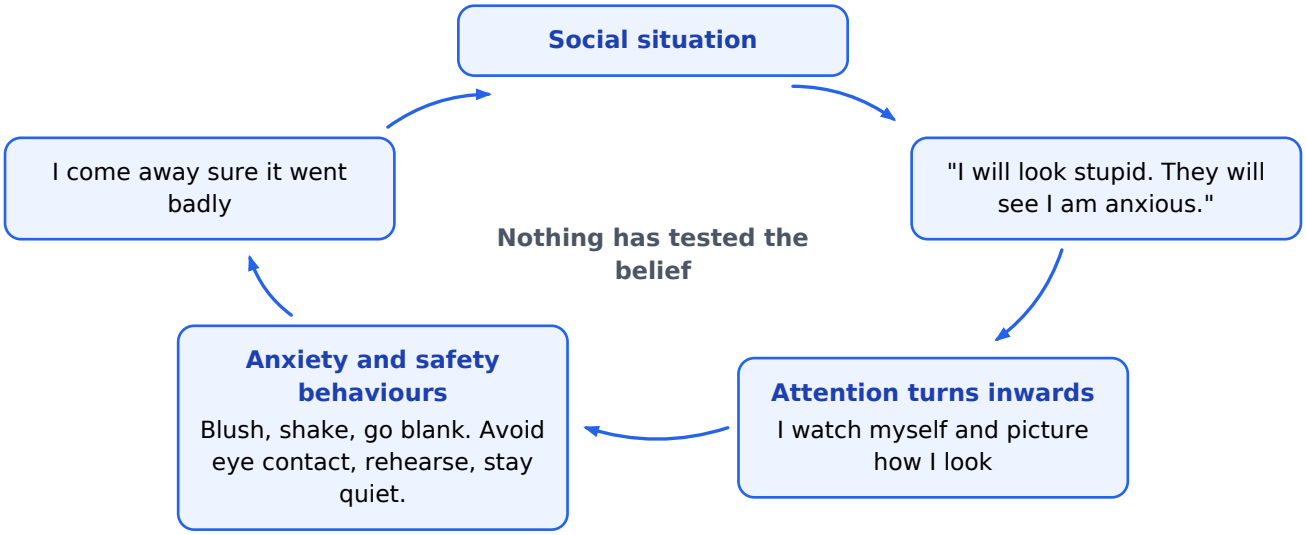
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# Understanding social anxiety

A fear of being judged by other people, and what keeps it going.

Social anxiety is an intense fear of doing or saying something that will lead to embarrassment, rejection or being thought badly of. It can show up in conversations, meetings, eating in front of others, phone calls, or simply walking into a room.

## What happens in a social situation




## Three things that keep it going

**Self-focus**
Attention goes on to yourself. You miss the smiles and nods that show it is going fine, and take your feelings as proof of how you look.

**Safety behaviours**
Things you do to avoid disaster. They can make you seem distant or tense, and stop you learning that you would have been fine without them.

**Before and after**
Dreading the event for days, then replaying it afterwards and picking out every flaw.

## What people with social anxiety usually discover

- Anxiety is far less visible than it feels. A blush that feels obvious is barely noticed.
- Other people are mostly thinking about themselves.
- Small slips (losing your thread, a pause, a shaky hand) are common and quickly forgotten.
- People are warmer and less critical than the anxious mind predicts.

**How therapy helps**
We find out what you fear will happen, then test it: dropping safety behaviours, turning attention outwards, and comparing what you believe you look like with what is actually there.

*Draws on the cognitive model of social anxiety developed by David M. Clark and Adrian Wells.*

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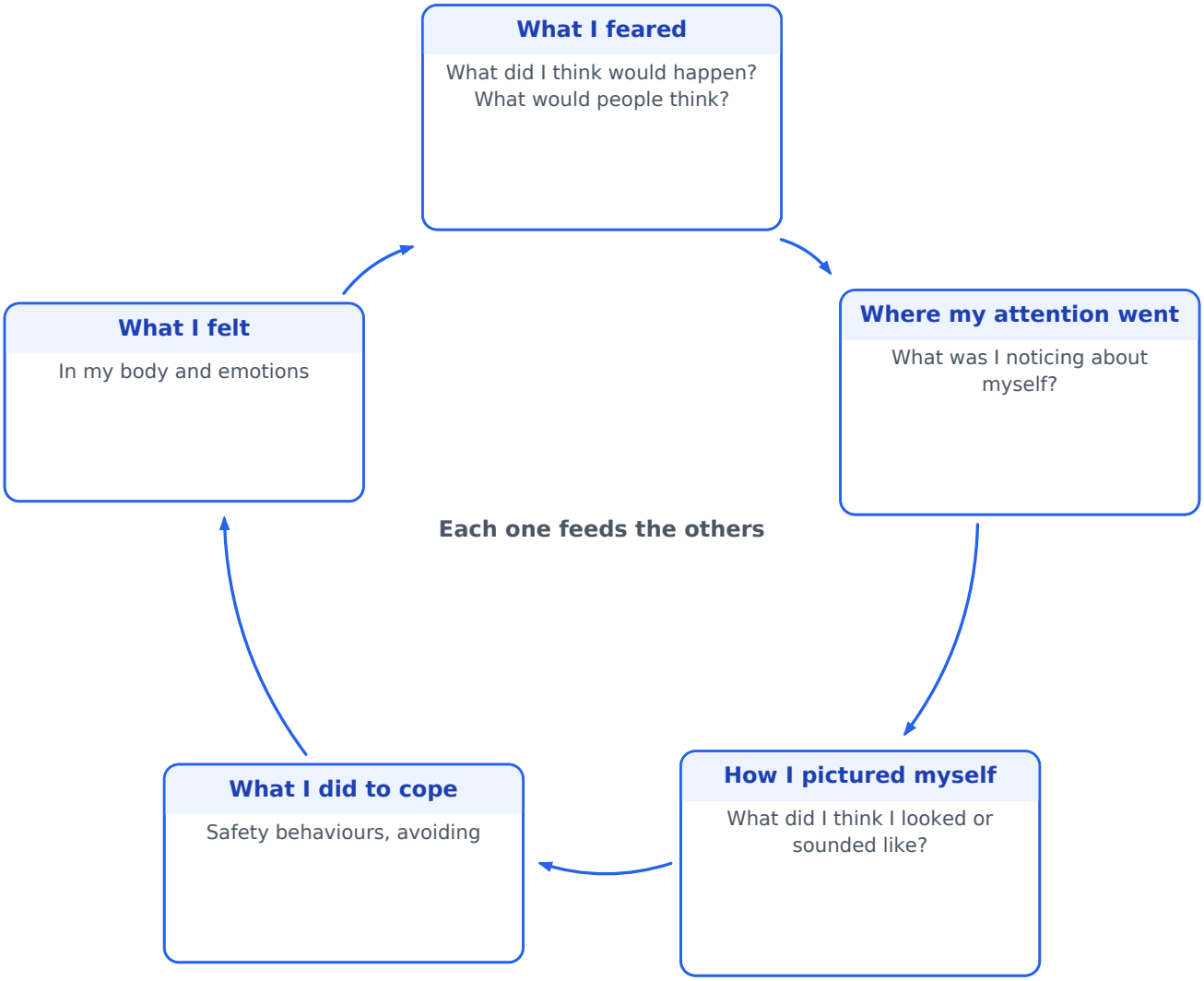
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# My social anxiety map

Map a recent situation where you felt anxious around people.

Name _____ Date _____

**The situation**




**What did I notice about the other people? (If the answer is "not much", that is useful to know.)**

**What did I tell myself afterwards? Was it a fair account?**

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# Safety behaviours in social situations

The small things you do to get through, and what they cost.

Name _____ Date _____

Tick what you do. Most people are surprised by how many there are.

## To avoid attention

- [ ] Stay quiet or say very little
- [ ] Stand at the edge of the group
- [ ] Avoid eye contact
- [ ] Keep my head down or look at my phone
- [ ] Let others do the talking
- [ ] Leave early or arrive late

## To control how I come across

- [ ] Rehearse sentences before I say them
- [ ] Check afterwards that I said it right
- [ ] Speak quickly to get it over with
- [ ] Plan topics and questions in advance
- [ ] Agree with everyone
- [ ] Try to be funny or interesting all the time

## To hide signs of anxiety

- [ ] Wear make-up or clothes to hide blushing or sweat
- [ ] Grip a glass or keep hands in pockets
- [ ] Keep my arms close to my body
- [ ] Hold on to something
- [ ] Use alcohol to loosen up
- [ ] Sit down or lean on something

| My main safety behaviours | What I fear would happen without it | How it might backfire |
|---|---|---|
| *Rehearsing what to say* | *I would dry up and look stupid* | *I miss what is being said and seem distracted* |
| | | |
| | | |
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| | | |

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# Before, during and after

One social situation, looked at in three parts.

Name _____ Date _____

## The situation

## Before

### What I predicted would happen

### What I did to prepare or avoid

**Anxiety beforehand**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

None — Extreme

## During

### Where my attention was

On myself, on the task, on other people?

### Safety behaviours I used

**Anxiety at its highest**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

None — Extreme

## After

### What my mind said afterwards

The replay

### What actually happened, as a bystander would describe it

## What I would like to try differently next time

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# After the event: stopping the replay

Why going over it again and again makes it look worse than it was.

After a social situation, the anxious mind runs a post-mortem. It replays the event, searches for mistakes, and usually finds some. By the end, an ordinary conversation has become a disaster in memory.

## Why the replay cannot be trusted

- It is based on how you felt, not on what happened. Feeling awkward gets remembered as looking awkward.
- It picks out the worst moments. The parts that went fine are left out.
- You were watching yourself at the time, so you have very little information about how others reacted.
- Each replay adds detail that was never there.

## Stepping out of it

1. **Notice the replay has started.** "I am doing a post-mortem."
2. **Ask what it is for.** Is it helping me solve anything, or just making me feel worse?
3. **Do one fair review, in writing, then stop.** Use the boxes below.
4. **Move your attention.** Do something that takes concentration. When the replay returns, label it and come back.

| Facts | What went fine, or even well |
| --- | --- |
| What a camera would have recorded | |

**If a friend described this evening to me, what would I say to them?**

**What I will take from it. One line, then leave it.**

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# The spotlight effect

People notice and remember far less about us than we think.

When we feel self-conscious, it seems as if a spotlight is following us around. Every stumble, blush or awkward pause feels lit up for all to see.

Psychologists have tested this. In one well-known set of studies, students were asked to walk into a room wearing an embarrassing T-shirt. They guessed that about half the people there would notice it. In fact only around a quarter did.

## Why we get it wrong

- **We assume our feelings show.** We know every detail of how we feel, and assume other people can see it.
- **Nerves are hard to see.** Nerves that feel obvious from the inside are mostly invisible from the outside.
- **Other people are thinking about themselves.** Most people in the room are busy wondering how they are coming across.
- **People forget.** Even when something is noticed, it is rarely remembered for long.

## Check it against your own experience

**Think of the last gathering you were at. What can you remember about what other people wore, said wrong, or did awkwardly?**

**When someone else blushes or loses their words, what do you think of them?**

**An experiment**

This week, deliberately do one small thing you fear would draw attention. Wear something slightly different, ask a question in a meeting, or pause mid-sentence. Count how many people react.

**What I found**

*The T-shirt studies were carried out by Thomas Gilovich and colleagues (2000).*

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# Conversations: starting, keeping going, ending

Practical tips for starting, keeping up and ending a conversation.

You do not need to be witty or fascinating. Good conversation is mostly about showing interest and sharing a little of yourself.

## Starting

- Comment on what you have in common right now: the event, the weather, the queue, the food.
- Ask an easy, open question. "How do you know Aoife?" "What has your week been like?"
- A simple "Hi, I am..." works more often than you expect.

## Keeping it going

- **Listen to the answer.** Pick up on something they said and ask about it.
- **Use open questions.** Ones that start with what, how or tell me about get more than yes or no.
- **Share something too.** Offer something about yourself as well as asking questions.
- **Allow pauses.** A pause of a few seconds is normal. You do not have to fill it.
- **It is not all on you.** The other person is responsible for half the conversation.

## Ending

- "It was good to chat. I am going to get a drink."
- "I had better let you go. See you next time."
- Leaving a conversation is ordinary. People do not read much into it.

## Things that get in the way

**Less helpful**

- Rehearsing your next line while they speak
- Monitoring how you sound
- Asking question after question
- Waiting for the perfect thing to say

**More helpful**

- Listening to their words
- Looking at their face
- Sharing a small detail about yourself
- Saying the ordinary thing

**One conversation I will try this week. Who with, and how will I start?**

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# Social experiments

Ideas for testing your fears, from small to bold.

Name _____ Date _____

The aim of a social experiment is to find out what really happens, not to perform well. Choose things that test your own particular fear.

## Ideas

- [ ] Say hello to a neighbour
- [ ] Ask a shop assistant a question
- [ ] Make a phone call instead of texting
- [ ] Give an opinion in a group
- [ ] Ask a question in a meeting
- [ ] Eat or drink in front of others
- [ ] Start a chat with someone I do not know
- [ ] Disagree politely with someone
- [ ] Leave a pause without filling it
- [ ] Say "I do not know"
- [ ] Let my hand shake without hiding it
- [ ] Stumble over a word on purpose

| The experiment | What I predict | What happened | What I learned |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
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*Do each one without your usual safety behaviours, and keep your attention on the other person and the surroundings.*

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# My rules about social situations

The hidden standards you hold yourself to with other people.

Name _____ Date _____

Many people with social anxiety hold very high standards for how they must come across. Tick any that feel familiar.

- [ ] I must always have something interesting to say
- [ ] I must never look anxious
- [ ] If I blush, people will think I am weak
- [ ] If there is a silence, it is my fault
- [ ] If someone disagrees with me, they dislike me
- [ ] If I make a mistake, people will remember it
- [ ] I must be liked by everyone
- [ ] If people really knew me, they would not like me

**My strongest rule**

**Do I expect this of other people?**

What do I think when someone else is quiet, blushes or stumbles?

**Where did I learn this rule?**

**A fairer version I could live by**

**One way to test the new version this week**

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# How I think I look, and how I look

Compare the picture in your head with the evidence.

Name _____ Date _____

In social anxiety, the picture you have of yourself is built from feelings, not from what others see. This experiment checks the picture. Record yourself (a short talk to camera, or a conversation with my help in session), then follow the steps.

## Before watching

**How do I think I came across? Describe what I expect to see.**

| What I expect to see | How strong (0 to 10) |
|---|---|
| *Shaking hands* | *8* |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

## Watching

Watch as if it were a stranger. Look at the whole person, not just the feared signs. Then rate what is actually visible.

| What I expected | What I actually saw (0 to 10) |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

**What else did I notice about this person?**

**What does this tell me about the picture I carry in my head?**

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# Nerves before a big moment

Interviews, presentations, exams and other times when it counts.

Nerves before something important are your body getting ready to perform. The pounding heart and the butterflies are the same adrenaline that sharpens your focus and gives you energy. The aim is to do the thing well while nervous. You do not need to feel calm first.

## Three useful facts

- **You look calmer than you feel.** Nobody can see your heart rate. Most signs of nerves that feel huge from the inside are barely visible from the outside.
- **The audience is on your side.** Interviewers want to find a good candidate. Listeners want the talk to go well. Nobody is hoping you fail.
- **Nerves peak early.** The first two minutes are the hardest. After that, they nearly always ease.

## In the run-up

### Preparation that helps

- Practising out loud, not only in your head
- Knowing your opening lines well
- Preparing answers to the questions you dread most
- Checking the practical things: time, place, technology
- Keeping sleep, food and movement steady

### Preparation that backfires

- Learning every word by heart
- Rehearsing late into the night
- Planning for every possible disaster
- Asking for reassurance again and again
- Cancelling or calling in sick

## On the day

1. Arrive early enough not to rush.
2. Before you start: feet on the floor, and one slow breath out, longer than the breath in.
3. Put your attention on the task and the people, not on yourself. What are they asking? What do they need to hear?
4. If your mind goes blank, pause. Take a sip of water. Look at your notes. Say "Let me come back to that." A pause feels far longer to you than to anyone else.
5. Slow down. Nerves speed everyone up.

## Afterwards

- Skip the post-mortem. Going over every moment makes the next time harder.
- Write down three things that went well enough, and one thing you would do differently.
- Give yourself credit for turning up.

**Note**

You do not have to get rid of the nerves. You can be nervous and still do it well.

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# My plan for a big moment

For an interview, a presentation, an exam or any event that matters.

Name _____ Date _____

**The event, and when it is**

**What I am afraid will happen**

**How likely does that feel right now?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Certain

**What a calm, fair friend would say about that**

## Getting ready

**What I will practise, and when**

Out loud, with a timer or with a friend

**My opening**

The first thing I will say or do

**If my mind goes blank or I stumble, I will...**

**The night before**

- [ ] Early night
- [ ] Things packed
- [ ] Alarm set

**Just before**

- [ ] Arrive early
- [ ] Breathe out
- [ ] Look outwards

## Afterwards

**What actually happened, and how did that compare with what I feared?**

**What went well enough**

**What I would do differently next time**

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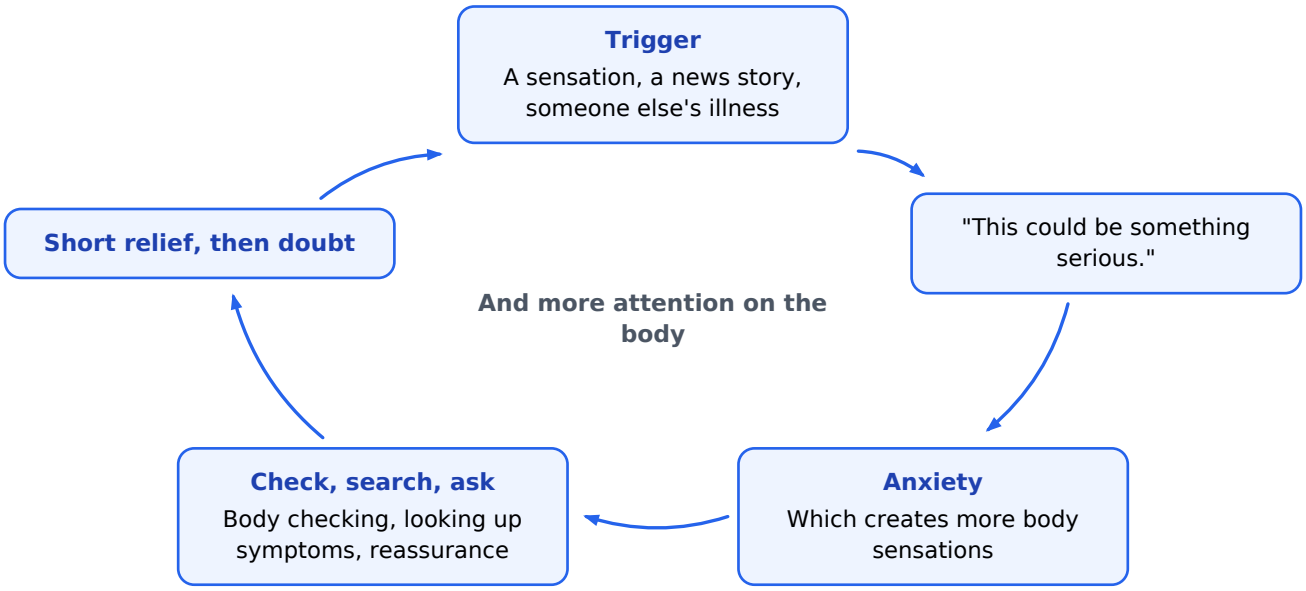
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# Understanding health anxiety

When worry about illness becomes the problem.

Everyone worries about their health sometimes. Health anxiety is when the worry is persistent, out of proportion to the medical findings, and takes over a lot of your time and peace of mind. The distress is completely real, whatever the cause of the symptoms.

## How it works




## Things worth knowing

- **Bodies are noisy.** Twinges, lumps, aches, flutters and odd sensations are part of normal life. Most have no medical meaning.
- **Attention amplifies.** Focus on any body part for a minute and you will find sensations there.
- **Anxiety has symptoms.** A racing heart, dizziness, tingling, stomach upset, tight chest and headaches are all caused by anxiety itself.
- **Checking causes symptoms.** Prodding a lump makes it sore. Repeated swallowing makes a throat feel tight.
- **Reassurance wears off.** A clear test brings relief for a while, then "what if they missed something?" arrives.

## What treatment involves

1. Testing a different explanation: that the problem is worry about health, not health.
2. Cutting back on checking, searching and reassurance, step by step.
3. Learning to let body sensations and uncertainty be there without acting on them.
4. Getting back to the life that health worry has pushed aside.

**This is not about ignoring your health**

Sensible medical care continues. We can agree a clear plan with your GP for when a symptom should be checked, so you do not have to decide in an anxious moment.

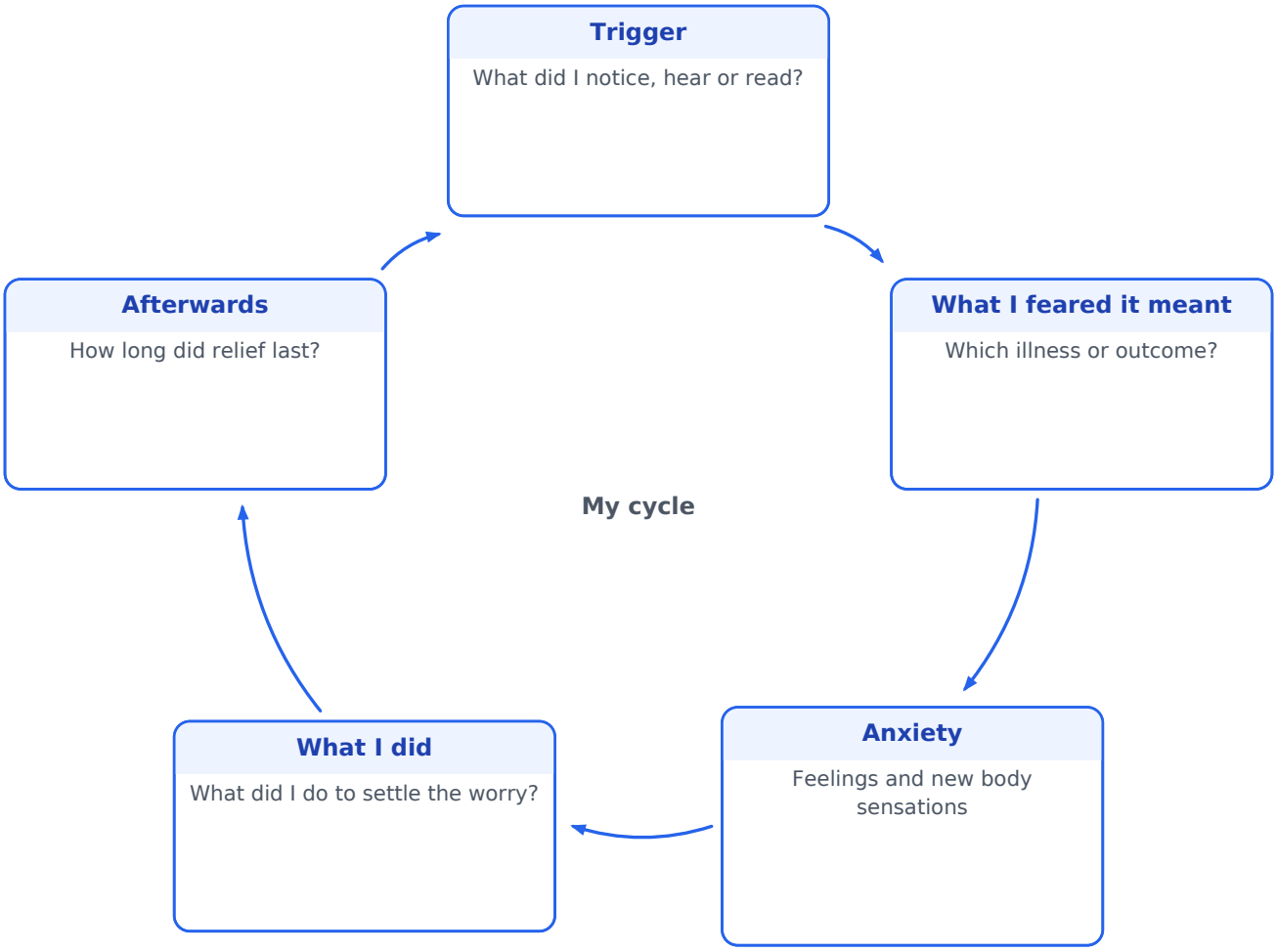
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# My health anxiety cycle

Map a recent episode of health worry.

Name _____ Date _____




**How did checking, searching or asking affect my worry over the following hours and days?**

**What is another possible explanation for what I noticed?**

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# Checking and reassurance log

A daily count of checking, searching and asking for reassurance.

Name _____ Date _____

Each day, count roughly how many times you did each one. Rate your average health anxiety for the day from 0 to 10.

| Day | Checked my body | Looked up symptoms | Asked for reassurance | Health anxiety (0 to 10) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | | | |
| **Tue** | | | | |
| **Wed** | | | | |
| **Thu** | | | | |
| **Fri** | | | | |
| **Sat** | | | | |
| **Sun** | | | | |

**What do I notice? On the days I checked more, was I more anxious or less?**

**My target for next week (for example: check once in the morning only, no searching after 8pm)**

**What I will do when the urge comes**

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# The body focus experiment

A five-minute test of what attention does to sensation.

People with health worries often say, "But I really do feel it." They do. The question is whether paying attention changes what you feel. Try this.

1. Sit still. Close your eyes if you like.
2. Put all your attention on your left hand for two minutes. Search it for any sensation at all: warmth, pulsing, tingling, itching, heaviness.
3. Now open your eyes and count every blue object you can see for two minutes.
4. What happened to the sensations in your hand while you were counting?

| What I noticed in my hand while I focused on it | What I noticed in my hand while I counted blue things |
| --- | --- |
| | |

## What this shows

Your hand did not change. What changed was where your attention was. Any part of the body will produce sensations if you search it, and those sensations fade into the background when attention moves on.

**Which parts of my body do I scan or monitor most?**

**What might that be doing to what I feel there?**

**Try this**

Next time you catch yourself scanning, name it ("I am scanning again") and move your attention to something outside your body.

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# Symptom searching: a cutting-back plan

A plan for cutting back on looking up symptoms online.

Name _____ Date _____

Searching online is designed to give answers, but for an anxious mind it does the opposite. Lists of possible causes always include something serious, frightening stories stick, and each search leads to another.

## My searching at the moment

**When and where I tend to search**

**What I am hoping to feel afterwards**

**How I actually feel afterwards**

**What it has cost me (time, sleep, peace of mind)**

## My plan

- [ ] Delay every urge to search by 20 minutes, then decide
- [ ] No searching in bed or after a set time in the evening
- [ ] No forums or personal stories
- [ ] One trusted source only (hse.ie), once, for no more than five minutes
- [ ] Tell someone my plan so they can back me up
- [ ] Remove health apps and bookmarks from my phone

**Other rules**

**When the urge comes, I will say to myself**

**And I will do this instead**

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# Other explanations for a symptom

List every possible cause of a symptom, and give each one a fair share.

Name _____ Date _____

**The symptom or sensation**

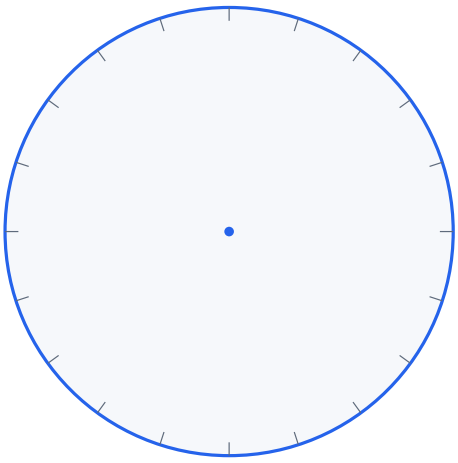
**What I fear it means**

**How likely does that feel right now?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Certain

List every other possible cause you can think of: tension, tiredness, too much coffee, a pulled muscle, anxiety itself, something you ate, checking the area, a virus, hormones. Then give each one a share of the pie. Put the feared illness in last.



| Possible causes (feared illness last) | % share |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

**How likely does the feared illness seem now?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Certain

**What do I notice?**

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# Living with uncertainty about health

Why being sure about your health is not possible, and how to live with that.

Health anxiety makes a demand that cannot be met: "I need to be completely sure nothing is wrong." No doctor, scan or blood test can promise that. Everyone lives with some uncertainty about their health. Most of the time, most people do not think about it.

## The problem

Trying to get certainty takes more and more time, and leaves less room for everything else. People can spend so much energy trying not to become ill that they stop living as if they were well.

## A different approach

You do not have to believe you are healthy. You only have to be willing not to know for sure, and to put your attention back on your life.

| When my mind says... | I can answer... |
|---|---|
| "What if it is something serious?" | "Maybe. I cannot know for certain, and neither can anyone. I have a plan with my GP." |
| "I need to check, just once." | "Checking gives me five minutes of relief and then more doubt. I will let the urge pass." |
| "What if the doctor missed something?" | "That is possible for everyone. I am choosing not to chase certainty today." |
| "I cannot relax until I know." | "I can do things that matter while not knowing." |

## What worry has pushed out

**Things I have stopped doing or enjoying because of health worry**

**If I trusted my body a little more, what would I do this week?**

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# When to see the GP: an agreed plan

Agree in advance when a symptom should be checked, and when to wait.

Name _____ Date _____

Health anxiety can pull in two directions: going to the doctor again and again, or avoiding doctors altogether out of fear. A clear plan, ideally agreed with your GP, takes the decision out of the anxious moment.

> **Always**
> In an emergency, call 112 or 999. This plan is a guide for everyday worries and does not replace medical advice.

**Routine care I will keep up (check-ups, screening, ongoing prescriptions)**

**A new symptom is worth a GP visit when... (for example: it lasts longer than a period we agree, or it is on a list my GP gives me)**

**Before booking, I will... (for example: wait the agreed time, note the symptom once a day without checking in between)**

**What I will ask the GP, and what I will not ask again once it is answered**

**After an appointment, I will not...**

- [ ] Seek a second opinion on the same thing
- [ ] Search online
- [ ] Ask others to confirm

**Who has agreed this plan with me, and the date**

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# Theory A and Theory B

Compare two explanations of the problem: that it is danger, or that it is worry about danger.

Name _____ Date _____

Theory A says the problem is the danger itself. Theory B says the problem is the worry about the danger. Both cannot be acted on at once, because each asks you to do the opposite.

### Theory A: the problem is...

The danger I fear, in one sentence

### Theory B: the problem is...

The worry about that danger, in one sentence

### Evidence that fits Theory A

### Evidence that fits Theory B

### If A is true, what do I need to do?

### If B is true, what do I need to do?

**Which theory have I been living by? What would it look like to act as if Theory B were true for the next two weeks?**

*Theory A and Theory B comes from the work of Paul Salkovskis and colleagues on OCD and health anxiety.*

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# What is OCD?

Unwanted thoughts that feel urgent, and the things you do to make them stop.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) has two parts.

**Obsessions**
Unwanted thoughts, images, urges or doubts that keep coming back and cause distress. They feel important and dangerous, even when you know they do not make sense.

**Compulsions**
Things you do, out loud or in your head, to get rid of the distress or to stop something bad happening. They bring short relief, and then the doubt returns.

## Common themes

| Theme | Obsessions | Compulsions |
|---|---|---|
| **Contamination** | Fear of germs, illness, dirt or of spreading something | Washing, cleaning, avoiding touching things |
| **Harm and responsibility** | "Did I leave the cooker on?" "Did I hit someone with the car?" | Checking, retracing steps, asking others |
| **Unwanted thoughts** | Violent, sexual or blasphemous thoughts that horrify you | Reviewing, praying, neutralising, avoiding triggers |
| **Order and "just right"** | A feeling that things are uneven, incomplete or wrong | Arranging, repeating, redoing until it feels right |
| **Doubt about relationships or identity** | "Do I really love them?" "What if I am not who I think I am?" | Testing feelings, comparing, seeking reassurance |

## Things worth knowing

- **OCD is common.** It affects about one or two people in every hundred.
- **The thoughts are not the problem.** Nearly everyone has strange, unwanted thoughts. In OCD they get treated as dangerous.
- **It targets what you care about.** A gentle person gets thoughts about harm. A devoted parent gets thoughts about their child. The distress shows how far the thoughts are from who you are.
- **Compulsions keep it going.** They are the part we can change.

**It can be treated**
The treatment with the strongest evidence is exposure and response prevention (ERP): facing the thoughts and situations a step at a time, and learning to leave the compulsion undone.

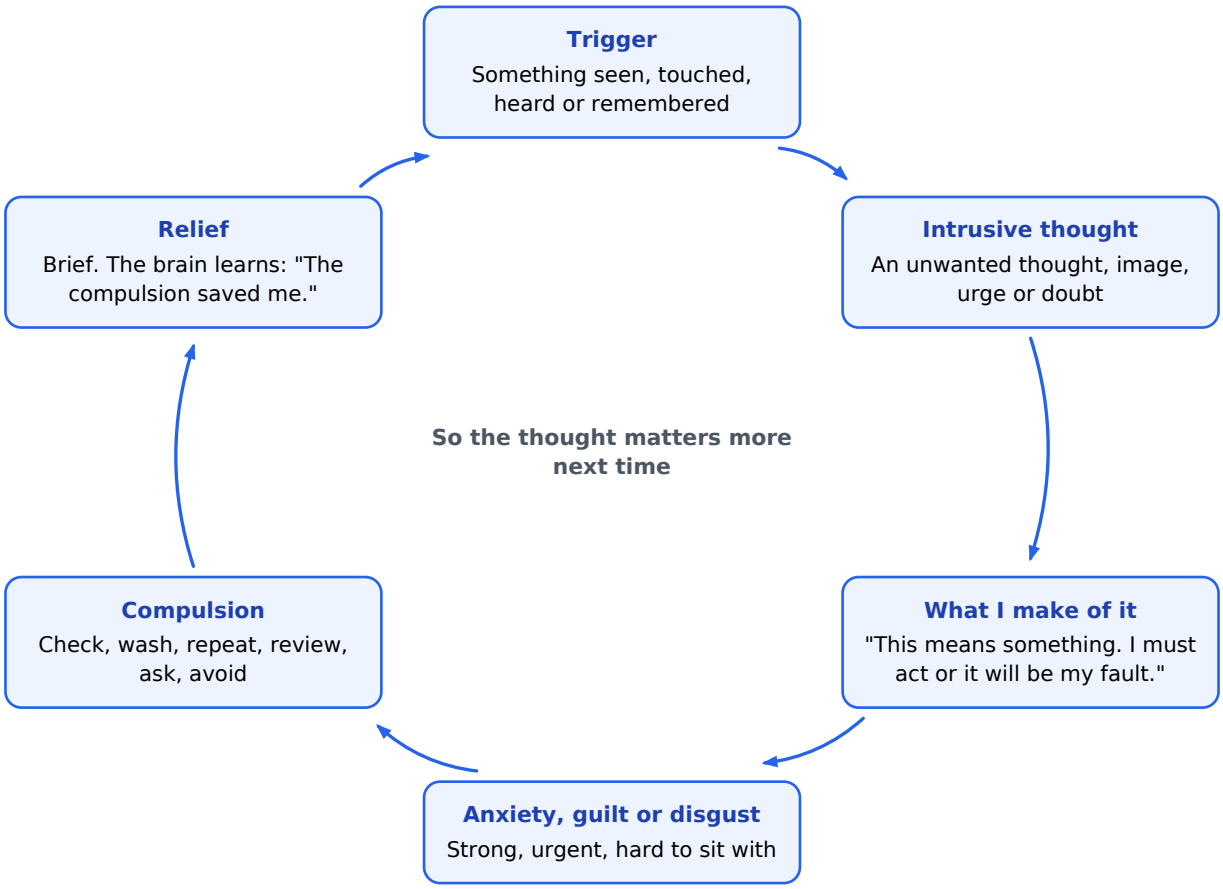
**My notes and questions**

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# The OCD cycle

Why doing the compulsion makes the next obsession stronger.




## The step that drives the cycle

The intrusive thought is not the problem. Everyone has them. The trouble starts with what you make of it: that it is a warning, that having it makes you responsible, that you have to be certain. Once a thought is treated as dangerous, anxiety follows and a compulsion feels essential.

## Why the relief is a problem

Each time a compulsion brings relief, three things are learned. None is true, but there is never a chance to find that out.

1. The thought really was dangerous.
2. The compulsion is the only reason nothing bad happened.
3. You could not have coped with the feeling otherwise.

## Breaking it

- **Change the meaning.** "This is an OCD thought. It does not mean anything."
- **Leave out the compulsion.** Feel the anxiety rise, peak and fall without it.
- **Stop avoiding.** Go back to the things OCD has ruled out.

> **Note**
> The thought does not have to go away. What changes is that you stop acting on it.

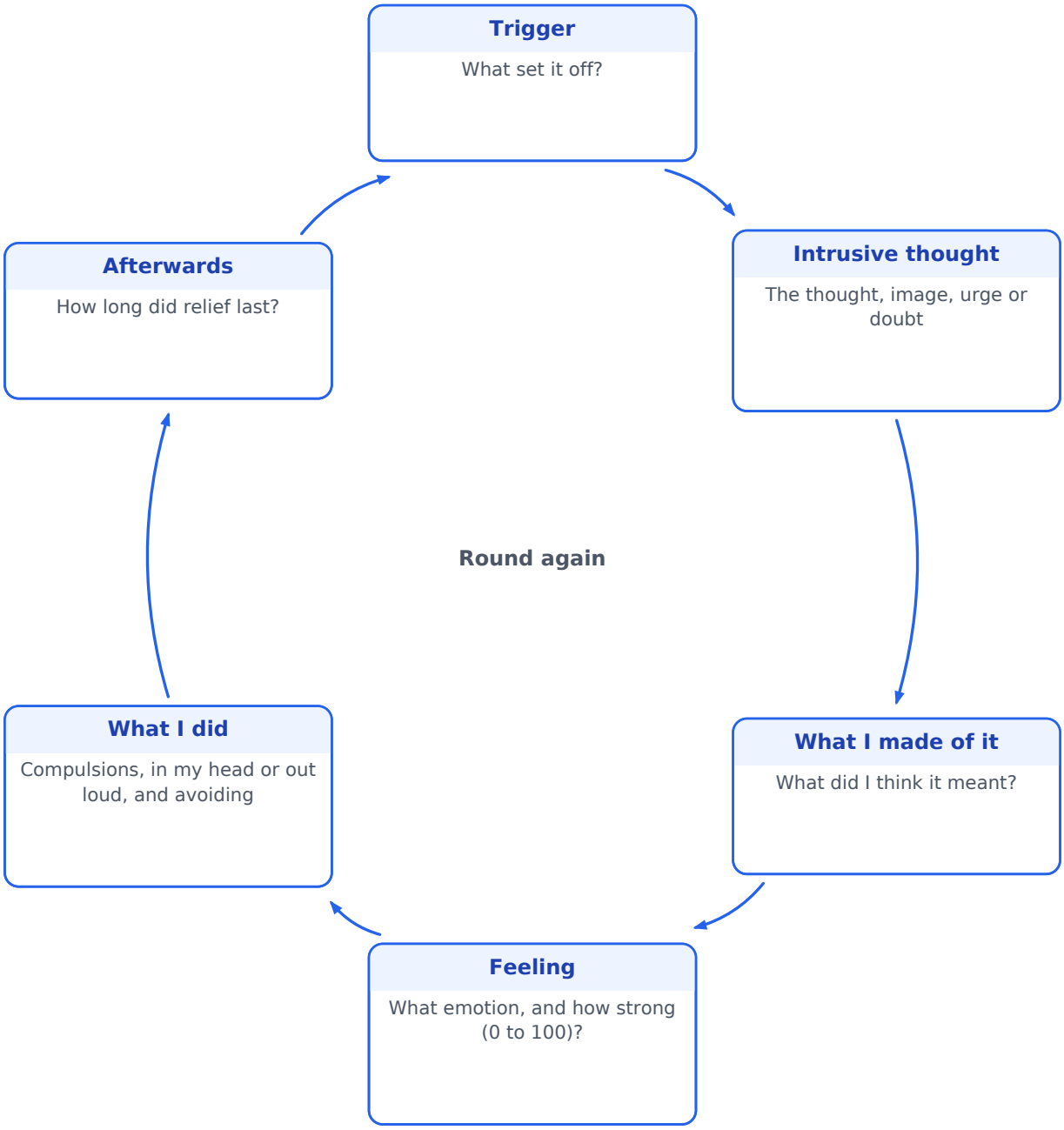
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# My OCD cycle

Map one recent example from start to finish.

Name _____ Date _____




**What does this cycle cost me, in time and in what I miss out on?**

**If the thought meant nothing, what would I do differently next time?**

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# Intrusive thoughts: everyone has them

Strange, unwanted thoughts are normal, and almost everyone has them.

Many people have stood on a train platform and had a sudden thought of jumping, or held a baby and pictured dropping it, or had a shocking thought in a quiet church. Thoughts like these are normal.

## What the research shows

When people with no mental health problem are asked, around nine in ten report unwanted, intrusive thoughts. The content is the same as in OCD: harming someone, doing something shocking, contamination, doubts, sexual and blasphemous thoughts.

What differs in OCD is what happens next.

**Someone without OCD**

- "That was a weird thought."
- Shrugs and moves on
- The thought fades
- It rarely comes back

**Someone with OCD**

- "Why would I think that? What does it say about me?"
- Tries to push it away, check or cancel it out
- The thought gets stronger
- It returns again and again

## Why pushing a thought away does not work

Try this for one minute: do not think about a white bear. Most people find the bear pops up at once, and keeps popping up. The harder you try not to think something, the more your mind checks whether you are thinking it.

## What a thought is not

- **A thought is not a wish.** The thoughts that upset you most are the ones furthest from what you want.
- **A thought is not an action.** Thinking something does not make it more likely to happen.
- **A thought is not a fact about you.** Minds produce all sorts of content. You are not responsible for what turns up, only for what you do.

**Try this**

When an intrusive thought arrives, label it ("There is an intrusive thought") and carry on with what you were doing. Do not argue, check or push. Let it sit in the background, like a radio in another room.

*The survey research began with Stanley Rachman and Padmal de Silva (1978). The white bear experiment was carried out by Daniel Wegner (1987).*

**My notes and questions**

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# How OCD twists thinking

The beliefs about thoughts that keep OCD going.

OCD is kept going by a handful of beliefs about thoughts themselves. Tick the ones you recognise.

**Inflated responsibility**
"If there is any chance I could prevent harm, I must. If I do not, it is as bad as causing it."

**Thoughts are as bad as actions**
"Having this thought is as bad as doing it." Or: "Thinking it makes it more likely to happen."

**Overimportance of thoughts**
"If I am thinking it, it must mean something."

**Need to control thoughts**
"I should be able to control what comes into my mind. If I cannot, something is wrong with me."

**Overestimating danger**
"If it could happen, it probably will, and it will be terrible."

**Need for certainty**
"I have to be completely sure. Any doubt is unbearable."

**Perfectionism**
"There is a right way, and it must feel exactly right before I can stop."

**Feelings as proof**
"I feel anxious, so there must be danger. I feel guilty, so I must have done something."

## A fairer view

- Responsibility is shared. You are one factor among many, and failing to prevent every possible harm is not the same as causing it.
- Thoughts are mental events. They do not change the world and they do not reveal hidden wishes.
- Nobody controls what pops into their head.
- Certainty is not available to anyone, about anything. People without OCD live with exactly the same doubts. They just do not notice them.

**The belief that has the tightest grip on me**

**What would I say to someone else who believed this?**

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# My compulsions and avoidance

List everything OCD has you do or avoid, and how hard each would be to resist.

Name _____ Date _____

Compulsions are not always visible. Include the ones that happen in your head, the ways you get others to help, and the things you steer clear of.

| What I do | How often | How hard to resist (0 to 10) |
|---|---|---|
| **Things I do (washing, checking, repeating, arranging)** | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| **Things I do in my head (reviewing, counting, praying, replacing thoughts)** | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| **Reassurance (asking, confessing, searching online)** | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| **Things, places and people I avoid** | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**How much time does all of this take in a day?**

**The one I would be most willing to try going without first**

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# Exposure and response prevention explained

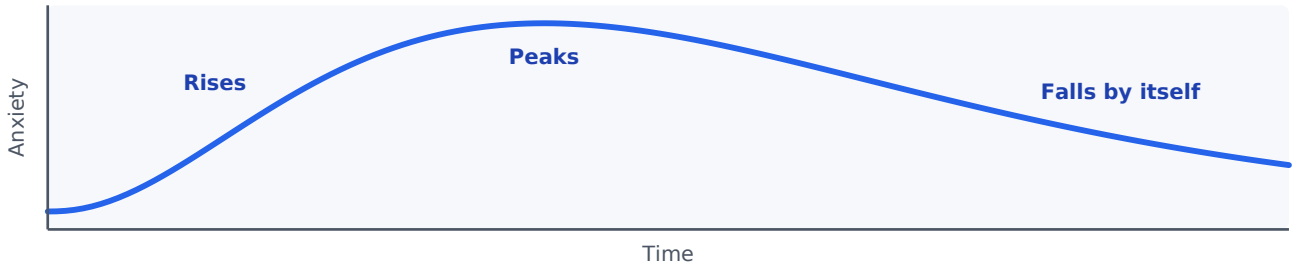
How exposure and response prevention works, and how to do it.

ERP has two halves, and both matter.

**Exposure**
Deliberately facing the thoughts, objects and situations that set off your obsessions, starting with easier ones.

**Response prevention**
Not doing the compulsion afterwards. No washing, checking, reviewing, asking or cancelling out. You stay with the feeling and let it pass.

## What happens




At first the anxiety climbs, and every instinct says to do the compulsion. If you wait, it peaks and begins to fall by itself. You learn two things: the feared outcome does not happen, and you can bear the feeling.

## The rules

1. **Plan it.** We build a ladder together. You choose each step.
2. **Do it fully.** Really touch it, really think it, really leave it unchecked.
3. **No compulsions, including mental ones.** No "it will be fine" either. That is reassurance.
4. **Stay with it** until the urge has clearly dropped, or until you have learned what you came to learn.
5. **Repeat** daily until it becomes boring. Then move up.

## Common pitfalls

- Doing the exposure, then a small or delayed compulsion "just to be safe".
- Swapping a visible compulsion for a mental one.
- Getting someone else to check or reassure.
- Distracting yourself so you are not really there.

**What to expect**
ERP is hard, and it is meant to be. Anxiety during a practice means you are doing it right. People are often surprised by how quickly the first steps become easy.

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# My ERP ladder

Exposure steps, from manageable to hardest.

Name _____ Date _____

For each step, write what you will face and what you will not do afterwards. Rate how distressing it would be if you did it without any compulsion: 0 (none) to 100 (the worst imaginable).

| Step | What I will face | What I will not do afterwards | Distress (0 to 100) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **8 (hardest)** | | | |
| **7** | | | |
| **6** | | | |
| **5** | | | |
| **4** | | | |
| **3** | | | |
| **2** | | | |
| **1 (easiest)** | | | |

*Begin with a step rated around 30 to 50. Practise it every day until the distress has roughly halved, then move up.*

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# Response prevention plan

Decide in advance what you will do when the urge comes.

Name _____ Date _____

| When I feel the urge to... | Instead I will... | I will know it is working when... |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

## Getting through the urge

- [ ] Label it: "This is an OCD urge, not a real emergency"
- [ ] Rate it from 0 to 10 and watch the number change
- [ ] Delay: "I will wait 15 minutes and decide then"
- [ ] Carry on with what I was doing, with the feeling still there
- [ ] Remind myself why I am doing this

**What I will say to myself**

**If I slip and do the compulsion, I will... (for example: "undo" it by touching the thing again, and start again without criticising myself)**

**People who know my plan, and what I have asked them to do**

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# ERP practice record

A record of each practice, with distress ratings.

Name _____ Date _____

**The step I am practising**

**The compulsion I am leaving out**

| Date | Distress at start | Distress at peak | Distress at end | Minutes | Any compulsion? | What I learned |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | |
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**What is changing as I repeat this?**

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# Delaying a compulsion

Practise putting a compulsion off, and record how the urge changes.

Name _____ Date _____

If leaving a compulsion out altogether feels too much, start by putting it off. Set a timer. Rate the urge at the start and at the end. When the time is up, decide whether to delay again.

| Date | The urge | Delay (minutes) | Urge at start (0 to 10) | Urge at end (0 to 10) | Did I do it? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |
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**What happens to the urge when I wait?**

**My next target: how long will I delay this week?**

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# Mental compulsions

Compulsions that happen in your head, and how to spot them.

Some people with OCD do very little that others could see. Their compulsions happen in the mind. Because these feel like "just thinking", they are easy to miss, and they keep OCD going as surely as hand washing.

## Common mental compulsions

- [ ] Going over events to check nothing bad happened
- [ ] Arguing with the thought or trying to prove it wrong
- [ ] Reassuring myself ("I would never do that")
- [ ] Replacing a bad thought with a good one
- [ ] Praying or repeating phrases to cancel a thought
- [ ] Counting, or thinking in a set pattern
- [ ] Checking how I feel ("Did I feel anything then?")
- [ ] Analysing why I had the thought
- [ ] Mentally rehearsing or planning to be sure
- [ ] Scanning my memory for evidence

## Obsession or compulsion?

| Obsession | Mental compulsion |
|---|---|
| **Arrives uninvited** | Something I do on purpose |
| **Raises anxiety** | Aims to lower anxiety, or get certainty |
| **I cannot choose whether it comes** | I can choose whether to continue |

## What to do

1. **Catch it.** "I am reviewing again."
2. **Stop mid-ritual.** You do not need to finish, reach an answer or feel sure.
3. **Leave the question open.** "I do not know, and I am not going to work it out."
4. **Go back to what is in front of you.** The thought can come along.

> **The aim**
> To stop arguing with OCD, not to win the argument.

**My notes and questions**

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# Where does OCD come from?

What is known about the causes of OCD.

There is no single cause of OCD. It seems to come from a mix of things, none of which you chose.

**Biology**
OCD runs in some families, and brain circuits involved in spotting errors and danger appear to be over-active. The "something is wrong" signal fires when nothing is wrong, and is slow to switch off.

**Temperament**
People who are careful, conscientious and caring, and who take responsibility seriously, seem more prone to it.

**Learning**
Messages picked up along the way: that thoughts matter as much as deeds, that mistakes are unforgivable, that you must keep others safe.

**Life events**
OCD often starts or flares at times of stress or new responsibility: exams, a first job, a new relationship, becoming a parent.

## Why your particular thoughts?

OCD goes after whatever matters most to you. The content changes from person to person and can shift over time, but the pattern is the same: a thought that offends your values, taken as a sign of danger.

That is why the thoughts feel so awful. If you did not care, they would not bother you.

## What this means

- Having OCD says nothing bad about you. If anything, it reflects how much you care.
- You did not cause it, and you could not have prevented it.
- How it started matters less than what keeps it going now. That part, the compulsions and avoidance, is what treatment changes.

**In short**
OCD is a false alarm. You do not need to work out why it is going off. Treatment is about learning not to respond to it.

**My notes and questions**

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# Reassurance and OCD: a guide for family and friends

How to support someone with OCD without giving reassurance.

When someone you love is distressed, you want to help. With OCD, the help that comes naturally, answering their questions, checking for them, going along with their rules, gives relief for a moment and makes the OCD stronger. This is not your fault. It is how OCD works.

## Ways families get drawn in

- [ ] Answering the same question again and again
- [ ] Checking things for them
- [ ] Washing, cleaning or doing things "their way"
- [ ] Avoiding places, words or topics
- [ ] Waiting while rituals are finished
- [ ] Taking over their responsibilities

## What helps instead

- **Agree a plan together, in a calm moment.** Not in the middle of an episode. Their therapist can help with this.
- **Be warm and firm.** You are refusing the OCD, not the person.
- **Reduce gradually.** One thing at a time, by agreement.
- **Notice effort.** Praise the trying, not only the success.

## Things you could say

> *"That sounds like an OCD question. I love you, and I am not going to answer it."*
>
> *"I can see how hard this is. I am going to sit here with you while it passes."*
>
> *"We agreed I would not check that. What would help you get through the next ten minutes?"*
>
> *"I believe you can handle this feeling."*

## Things that do not help

- Arguing with the logic of the obsession. OCD always has another "but what if".
- Getting angry or telling them to just stop.
- Giving in "just this once" on a bad day. That makes bad days more likely.

**Look after yourself too**

Living alongside OCD is tiring. Your own support matters.

**My notes and questions**

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# Living with "maybe"

Answering OCD's doubts with "maybe" in place of reassurance.

OCD asks questions that cannot be answered with certainty, then demands that you answer them. Every reassuring reply invites another "but what if". The way out is to stop trying to answer, and to agree that you do not know.

## Three kinds of reply

| Reply | Example | What happens |
|---|---|---|
| **Reassuring** | "No, of course I locked it." | Relief for a moment, then "but are you sure?" |
| **Arguing** | "I checked twice, so it must be locked because..." | A long debate that OCD always wins |
| **Agreeing with uncertainty** | "Maybe I did, maybe I did not. I am not going to check." | Anxiety rises, then fades. OCD has nothing to push against. |

## Phrases to practise

- "Maybe, maybe not."
- "I cannot know for sure, and I am going to get on with my day."
- "That is possible. I will take the risk."
- "Thanks, mind. Noted."

Say them plainly. No sarcasm, no hidden reassurance, no checking to see if you feel better. Then turn back to what you were doing.

## Try it

**The doubt OCD brings me most often**

**My "maybe" statement for it**

**When I practised this, what happened to the urge?**

*This is hard at first. It gets easier quickly with repetition.*

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# OCD and the things you care about

What OCD takes time from, and what you want to get back to.

Name _____ Date _____

OCD takes time, energy and attention away from the things that matter to you. Being clear about what you want back gives you a reason to get through the hard moments.

| What my OCD is about | What that says about what I care about |
| --- | --- |
| The themes of my obsessions | What matters to me underneath each theme |

**What OCD has cost me**

☐ Time ☐ Relationships ☐ Work or study ☐ Enjoyment ☐ Freedom ☐ Confidence

**If OCD took up a tenth of the space it does now, what would I do with my days?**

| Something I want back | A first step towards it |
| --- | --- |
| | |
| | |
| | |

**A sentence to remind myself why this is worth it**

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# Common reactions to trauma

The reactions people commonly have after a frightening or overwhelming event.

After something frightening, shocking or overwhelming, most people have strong reactions. They are a normal response to what happened. They do not mean you are weak or going mad.

### Memories that push in

Images, sounds or smells that come back uninvited. Nightmares. Feeling as if it is happening again.

### Being on guard

Jumpy, easily startled, scanning for danger, unable to relax, poor sleep, short temper.

### Avoiding

Staying away from places, people or conversations linked to what happened. Keeping busy so you do not have to think.

### Numbness and distance

Feeling flat, cut off from others, unreal, or as if you are watching life from outside.

### Strong feelings

Fear, anger, sadness, guilt or shame, sometimes all in one day.

### Changes in the body

Tension, headaches, stomach upset, exhaustion, a racing heart.

### Changes in thinking

Poor concentration and memory. Blaming yourself. Seeing the world as dangerous or people as untrustworthy.

### Changes in what you do

Withdrawing, drinking more, working all hours, losing interest in things.

## What usually happens

For most people these reactions ease over the first few weeks, especially with support, rest and a return to routine. Expect good days and bad days along the way.

## What helps in the early weeks

- Stay connected with people you trust, even if you do not want to talk about it.
- Keep to ordinary routines: meals, sleep, movement.
- Let yourself feel what you feel, in small doses.
- Go easy on alcohol. It gets in the way of the mind's natural processing.

### When to look for more help

If the reactions are still strong after about a month, are getting worse, or are stopping you from living your life, talk to your GP or a therapist. Effective treatments exist.

**My notes and questions**

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# What is PTSD?

What post-traumatic stress disorder is, why it lasts and how it is treated.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can develop after an event involving serious threat to you or someone else: an accident, an assault, abuse, a sudden death, a traumatic birth or medical event, war, disaster. It is diagnosed when certain reactions last longer than a month and get in the way of life.

## The four groups of symptoms

**Re-experiencing**
Flashbacks, nightmares and intrusive memories that feel as if the event is happening now, with the same fear and body reactions.

**Avoidance**
Staying away from reminders, and trying not to think or talk about it.

**Changes in mood and beliefs**
Guilt, shame, numbness, feeling cut off. "It was my fault." "Nowhere is safe." "I am damaged."

**Being on high alert**
Easily startled, always watchful, irritable, poor sleep and concentration.

## Why it lasts

- **The memory is unprocessed.** It is stored in fragments of sight, sound and sensation, without a clear "this is over" tag, so reminders set it off as if it were now.
- **Avoidance stops processing.** Pushing the memory away prevents the mind from filing it as past.
- **The meaning sticks.** Beliefs such as "I should have done something" keep the sense of threat or shame alive.

## Treatment

The treatments with the best evidence are trauma-focused: trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy and EMDR (eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing). Both help you revisit the memory safely so it can be stored as something that happened in the past, and both look at what the event has come to mean to you.

This work is done at your pace. We start by building ways to stay steady, and you stay in charge throughout.

**Outlook**
PTSD can be treated. Most people who complete a trauma-focused therapy improve substantially, including people whose trauma happened many years ago.

**My notes and questions**

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# Why trauma memories are different

Why trauma memories come back uninvited and feel as if they are happening now.

Ordinary memories are like files in a cabinet. They have a label, a date and a beginning, middle and end. You can take one out when you choose, and put it back.

During overwhelming danger, the brain is busy surviving. It does not file. The experience is stored as raw pieces: images, sounds, smells, body sensations and feelings. There is no date stamp to say "this is over".

**An ordinary memory**

- Has a time and place
- Feels like the past
- Comes when I call it
- Has words and a story
- Fades with time

**A trauma memory**

- Has no clear time stamp
- Feels as if it is happening now
- Comes uninvited, set off by reminders
- Is mostly sensations and images
- Stays vivid

## Triggers

Because the pieces are stored by sensation, anything similar can set them off: a colour, a tone of voice, a smell, a time of year, a feeling in your body. The alarm part of the brain matches the pattern and reacts before the thinking part can say, "That was then."

This is why reactions can seem to come from nowhere.

## How this changes

Avoiding the memory keeps it unfiled. In trauma-focused therapy, we go through it carefully, in a safe setting, so the brain can do what it could not do at the time:

1. Put the pieces in order.
2. Add what you know now: that it ended, that you survived, what was and was not in your control.
3. Stamp it with a time and place, so it can be stored as past.

The memory does not disappear. You will still be able to recall it, but it stops coming back as if it were happening now.

**In the meantime**

Grounding skills help when a trigger hits. They bring your attention back to where you are, which tells your body that the danger is over.

*Draws on the cognitive model of PTSD developed by Anke Ehlers and David M. Clark.*

**My notes and questions**

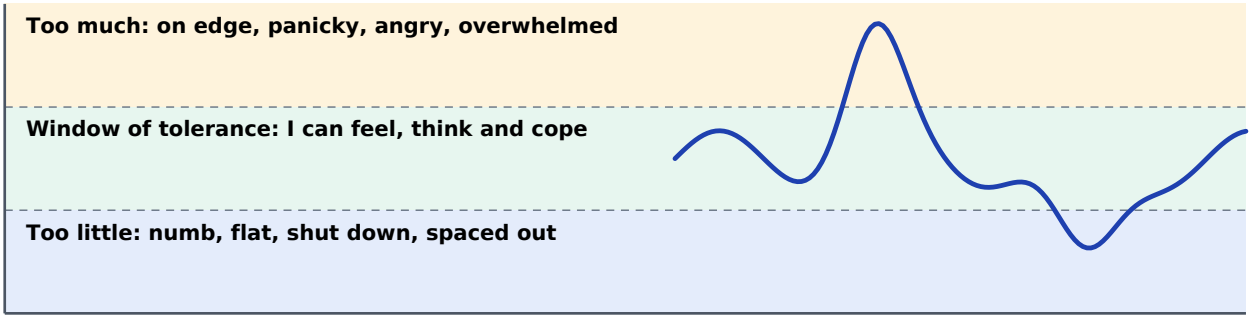
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# The window of tolerance

What the window of tolerance is, and what happens above and below it.

Everyone has a zone of arousal in which they function well. Inside it you can think clearly, feel your feelings without being swamped, and respond to what is in front of you. This is called the window of tolerance.




Stress pushes us towards the edges. Past the top edge the body goes into fight or flight. Past the bottom edge it shuts down. Both are automatic survival responses that you do not choose.

| | Above the window | Below the window |
|---|---|---|
| **Feels like** | Panicky, enraged, overwhelmed, racing | Numb, empty, foggy, far away |
| **Body** | Heart pounding, tense, shaky, hot | Heavy, slow, cold, hard to move |
| **Mind** | Racing thoughts, cannot think straight | Blank, cannot find words |
| **Helps** | Slow out-breath, cold water, grounding, movement to burn it off | Gentle movement, strong tastes or smells, naming what you see, contact with someone |

## What affects the window

- Trauma, stress, tiredness, hunger and illness all make the window narrower.
- Everyone's window is a different size, and it changes from day to day.
- The window can be widened: through rest and routine, safe relationships, and practising skills that bring you back from the edges.

**In therapy**

We aim to work inside your window. If you notice yourself heading out of it, say so, and we will pause until you are back.

*The window of tolerance was described by Daniel Siegel (1999).*

**My notes and questions**

# My window of tolerance

Your own signs of being above or below your window, and what brings you back.

Name _____ Date _____

**Above my window**

How I know I am there (body, thoughts, behaviour)

**Inside my window**

What I am like when I am steady

**Below my window**

How I know I am there (body, thoughts, behaviour)

### What brings me down from above

Slowing, cooling, grounding

### What brings me up from below

Movement, sensation, contact

### What makes my window smaller

☐ Tiredness ☐ Alcohol ☐ Conflict ☐ Certain dates ☐ Pain ☐ Hunger

### What makes my window bigger

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# Triggers: then and now

For one trigger, compare what is the same as then with what is different now.

Name _____ Date _____

When something sets off a trauma memory, your brain has spotted a similarity and sounded the alarm. This exercise trains it to notice the differences as well.

**What happened just now? What set me off (a sight, sound, smell, feeling, place, date)?**

**What did it remind me of?**

| THEN | NOW |
| --- | --- |
| What was happening at the time of the trauma? Where was I, how old, who was there, what could I do? | Where am I today? How old am I? Who is here? What can I do now that I could not do then? |

**Everything that is different between then and now**

**What I can say to myself the next time this trigger comes up**

**How I felt before and after doing this**

*Tip: look around and name five things that prove it is now, not then. Today's date. Your phone. Your own hands.*

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# Trigger log

A weekly record of what set you off, how you reacted and what helped.

Name _____ Date _____

| Date and time | What was happening | What I think set it off | How I reacted (0 to 10) | What I did | How long to settle |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |
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**Patterns I notice (times, places, people, states such as tired or stressed)**

**What helped me come back most quickly**

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# Coping with flashbacks

What to do during a flashback and afterwards.

A flashback is a memory so vivid it feels as if the trauma is happening again. It is frightening, and it is a memory. It cannot hurt you, and it will pass.

## During a flashback

1. **Tell yourself what it is.** "This is a flashback. It is a memory. It is not happening now."
2. **Open your eyes and look around.** Name five things you can see. Say the date and where you are.
3. **Feel your feet on the floor.** Press them down. Feel the chair holding you.
4. **Breathe out slowly.** Longer out than in.
5. **Use your senses.** Hold something cold or textured. Smell something strong. Sip water.
6. **Remind yourself it is over.** "That was then. I survived. I am safe now."

## Afterwards

- Give yourself time. You may feel shaky or tired.
- Do something comforting and ordinary: a warm drink, a blanket, a walk.
- If you can, tell someone you trust.
- Note what set it off, when you are ready. Triggers get easier to handle once you know them.

## A sentence to finish

"Right now I am feeling (frightened) and my body is (shaking), because I am remembering (what happened). At the same time, I am looking around and I can see (the kitchen, my dog). It is (today's date). So I know that (it) is not happening now."

**My grounding kit: things to keep nearby that bring me back (something to hold, smell, taste or look at)**

*Cut along the dashed lines. Keep a card in your wallet or phone case.*

**This is a flashback. It is a memory. It is not happening now. Look around. Feet on the floor. Breathe out. It is over. I am safe.**

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**What helps me most to come back**

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*The sentence to finish is adapted from the flashback halting protocol described by Babette Rothschild.*

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# Rewriting a recurring nightmare

How to rewrite a recurring nightmare while awake and rehearse the new version.

Name _____ Date _____

Nightmares are common after trauma. They are the mind trying, and failing, to process what happened. A repeated nightmare is also partly a habit, and habits can be changed.

## Imagery rehearsal

1. Choose a nightmare. Start with one that is upsetting but not the worst.
2. Write it down briefly, as it usually goes.
3. Change it in any way you like: the ending, the setting, who is there, what you can do. It does not need to be realistic.
4. Write out the new version in detail.
5. Rehearse the new version in your mind for 10 to 15 minutes each day, while awake and relaxed. Do not rehearse the old one.

**The nightmare, briefly**

**My new version. What happens now?**

**When and where I will rehearse it each day**

## If you wake from a nightmare

- Turn on a light. Say where you are and what the date is.
- Feel the bed under you. Touch something familiar.
- Get up for a few minutes if you need to. Have a sip of water.
- Remind yourself: "It was a dream. I am awake. I am safe."

*Imagery rehearsal was developed by Barry Krakow and colleagues. Many people notice fewer or milder nightmares within a few weeks.*

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# What the trauma taught me to believe

How trauma may have changed what you believe about yourself, other people and the world.

Name _____ Date _____

After trauma, beliefs often swing to an extreme. Sometimes an old belief is shattered. Sometimes a harsh one seems to be confirmed. Tick any that sound like you.

- ☐ Nowhere is really safe
- ☐ I cannot trust anyone
- ☐ I cannot trust my own judgement
- ☐ I should have seen it coming
- ☐ It was my fault
- ☐ I should have fought back or done more
- ☐ I am damaged for good
- ☐ I must stay in control at all times
- ☐ If I let people close, I will be hurt
- ☐ My reactions mean I am weak

**The belief that affects me most**

**How strongly do I believe it?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Completely

**What makes it seem true**

**What does not fit, or what I would say to someone else in my position**

**What did I know at the time, and what do I only know now, looking back?**

**A fairer way of putting it**

**How strongly do I believe the original version now?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Completely

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# Guilt and shame after trauma

Why guilt and shame are common after trauma, and questions that ease self-blame.

Many people come away from trauma blaming themselves. It can seem easier to believe "I could have stopped it" than to accept that something terrible happened and was out of your control.

**Guilt says**
"I did something wrong." It is about actions: what I did or did not do.

**Shame says**
"There is something wrong with me." It is about who I am, and it makes people hide.

## Why self-blame is so common

- **Hindsight.** You now know how it ended. At the time you did not. It is unfair to judge your choices then by what you only learned later.
- **The body takes over.** Under threat, people freeze, go along or go numb. This is an automatic survival response, not consent and not cowardice. It is often what kept them alive.
- **There was no time.** Decisions made in a second or two are replayed for years, as if there had been time to weigh them up.
- **What other people said.** Being blamed, disbelieved or told to move on can leave you ashamed of something that was not your fault.
- **The illusion of control.** If it was my fault, then I can prevent it next time. Self-blame can feel safer than helplessness.

## Questions that help

- What did I actually know at that moment?
- What options did I really have, and how long did I have to choose?
- Who was responsible for what happened?
- If this had happened to someone I love, would I blame them?
- What would I have needed, then, to be able to do something different?

**Responsibility**
Responsibility lies with the person who chose to cause harm, or with circumstances that nobody controlled. Surviving is not something to be ashamed of.

**What I would say to a friend who told me this story**

# Looking after yourself after trauma

Sleep, food, routine, people and pacing in the weeks and months after trauma.

Recovering from trauma takes energy. Looking after the ordinary things gives your mind and body the best conditions to heal.

## Body

- **Sleep.** Keep regular bed and wake times, even if sleep is poor. Rest still counts.
- **Food.** Eat regularly. A body low on fuel feels more anxious.
- **Movement.** Walking, stretching, swimming. Gentle, regular movement helps discharge stress.
- **Go easy on alcohol, caffeine and other substances.** They give short relief and make sleep, mood and anxiety worse.

## Routine

- Keep some structure to the day: get up, get dressed, eat at mealtimes.
- Do small, manageable tasks. Finishing something restores a sense of control.
- Build in things that are pleasant or calming, even if you do not feel like it.

## People

- Spend time with those who feel safe. You do not have to talk about what happened.
- Let people know what helps: company, practical help, or space.
- It is fine to say, "I do not want to talk about it today."

## Pace

- Lower your expectations for a while. Concentration and energy will come back.
- Put off big decisions if you can.
- Limit news and social media about the event.
- Expect ups and downs. A hard day is not a step backwards.

> **A small daily check**
> Have I eaten? Have I moved? Have I spoken to someone? Have I done one thing that was just for me?

**What I am already doing that helps**

**One thing I will add this week**

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# Reclaiming your life

List what has dropped out of your life since the trauma and plan small steps to bring it back.

Name _____ Date _____

After trauma, life often gets smaller. People stop doing things they used to enjoy or that gave life meaning. Sometimes because of fear, sometimes because nothing feels worth it. Taking these back, bit by bit, is a central part of recovery.

| Something I have stopped or cut back | Why it mattered to me | A first small step |
|---|---|---|
| *Meeting friends for five-a-side* | *Fun, fitness, feeling part of things* | *Text Dave and go to watch one game* |
| | | |
| | | |
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| | | |

**The one I will start with, and when**

**What might get in the way, and what I will do about it**

**After I did it: how did it go, and how did I feel afterwards?**

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# Understanding dissociation

What dissociation is, why it happens and how to come back to the present.

Dissociation is a disconnection from your thoughts, feelings, body or surroundings. Everyone does it mildly: daydreaming, or driving a familiar road and not remembering the journey. During overwhelming stress it is a way of getting away mentally when you cannot get away physically.

## What it can be like

- [ ] Feeling spaced out, foggy or far away
- [ ] Feeling unreal, or as if in a dream
- [ ] The world looking flat, distant or strange
- [ ] Watching myself from outside
- [ ] Feeling numb, emotionally or physically
- [ ] Losing track of time, or gaps in memory
- [ ] Not recognising where I am for a moment
- [ ] Going blank mid-conversation

## Why it keeps happening

If dissociation protected you once, your brain may reach for it at any sign of stress, including strong feelings, conflict or reminders of the past. It becomes automatic. It is not something you are doing wrong.

## Coming back

1. **Notice the early signs.** Fog, tunnel vision, sounds fading, a floaty feeling.
2. **Move.** Stand up, stretch, stamp your feet, walk.
3. **Wake up your senses.** Cold water on your hands or face. A strong mint. A textured object.
4. **Orient.** Say your name, your age, the date and where you are. Name what you can see.
5. **Connect.** Make eye contact or talk to someone, if someone safe is there.

## Reducing it over time

- Learn your triggers and your early warning signs.
- Look after sleep, food and stress levels. Dissociation is more likely when you are run down.
- Practise grounding when you are calm, so it is there when you need it.

> **In sessions**
> If you notice yourself drifting, tell me or give a signal. We will pause and help you come back.

**My notes and questions**

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# The container

An imagery exercise for setting upsetting thoughts aside until a time you choose.

Some thoughts and memories need attention, but not at three in the morning or in the middle of work. This exercise gives you a way to set them aside and come back to them at a time you choose, such as in a therapy session.

## Steps

1. Imagine a container strong enough to hold anything. A safe, a vault, a chest with a lock, a shipping container. Make it yours.
2. Picture it in detail. What is it made of? How big? What colour? How does it close?
3. Decide where it is kept: buried, at the bottom of the sea, in my office, wherever feels right.
4. Bring to mind what is troubling you. You do not need to look at it closely.
5. Imagine it going into the container. It might flow in like smoke, or you might place it in as a file or a film reel.
6. Close and lock it. Notice the sound it makes.
7. Remind yourself: "It is stored safely. I can come back to it when I choose."
8. Take a slow breath and turn your attention to the room.

**My container**

What does it look like? How does it lock?

**Where I keep it**

**What I am putting in it for now**

**How I felt before and afterwards**

*The container is not for locking things away for good. It is for choosing the right time and place to open them.*

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# Trauma and the body

How trauma shows up in the body, and physical ways to help it settle.

Trauma affects the body as well as the mind. When the danger has passed but your body stays on alert, the strain shows up physically.

## How it can show

- Muscles that stay tense: jaw, neck, shoulders, back
- Headaches, stomach and bowel problems
- A racing heart, or feeling short of breath
- Being easily startled
- Exhaustion that sleep does not fix
- Feeling numb or cut off from parts of the body
- Pain with no clear medical cause

These are real, physical effects of a nervous system that has been on guard for too long. They are not imagined. It is still important to have new or persistent symptoms checked by your GP.

## Helping the body settle

**Breath**
A slow, long out-breath tells the body the emergency is over.

**Movement**
Walking, stretching, swimming, yoga. Rhythm and repetition are calming.

**Temperature**
A warm shower or a cool cloth can shift your state quickly.

**Touch and pressure**
A weighted blanket, a firm self-hug, hands pressed together.

**Releasing tension**
Tense and release muscle groups one at a time.

**Rest**
Real rest, not scrolling. Lying down with your eyes closed counts.

## If your body does not feel safe

Go slowly. Start with neutral areas: hands, feet, the feeling of the chair. Short and often is better than long and overwhelming.

**Where I carry tension, pain or numbness**

**What helps my body settle**

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# Avoidance after trauma

How avoiding reminders keeps trauma symptoms going, with a list of what you avoid.

Name _____ Date _____

After trauma, it is natural to steer clear of anything that brings it back. In the short term this protects you. In the long term it teaches your brain that the reminders themselves are dangerous, and it shrinks your life.

### Avoiding outside things

- Places, routes, people
- Activities, objects, clothes
- News, films, conversations
- Dates and times

### Avoiding inside things

- Memories and images
- Feelings
- Body sensations
- Thinking or talking about what happened

| What I avoid | What I fear would happen | What avoiding it costs me |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
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| | | |
| | | |

### Things I do to keep the memory away

☐ Keeping busy ☐ Drinking ☐ Never being alone ☐ Never being still ☐ Staying online

### One reminder I would like to be able to face again, and why it matters

*Facing reminders is done gradually and with support. This list is a starting point for planning, not a to-do list for tomorrow.*

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# Supporting someone after trauma

For partners, family and friends.

When someone close to you has been through trauma, you may feel helpless, shut out or unsure what to say. You do not need the perfect words. Being steady and present matters most.

## What you might see

- Mood swings, irritability, anger over small things
- Withdrawal and wanting to be alone
- Jumpiness, poor sleep, nightmares
- Avoiding places, people or activities
- Seeming distant, numb or "not themselves"

None of this means they do not care about you. It means their nervous system is overloaded.

### What helps

- Listening without trying to fix
- Believing them
- Asking what they need
- Keeping ordinary routines going
- Being patient with slow progress
- Respecting "not today"

### What does not help

- Pressing for details
- "You should be over it by now"
- "At least..." or "It could have been worse"
- Telling them what they should have done
- Taking the anger personally
- Walking on eggshells for ever

## Things you could say

> *"I am here. You do not have to talk, and you can if you want to."*
>
> *"It makes sense that you feel this way after what happened."*
>
> *"What would help right now?"*

## When to encourage more help

If the reactions last more than a month, are getting worse, or involve heavy drinking or talk of not wanting to be here, encourage them to see their GP or a therapist. Offer to help with the first step. If you think they are in immediate danger, call 112 or 999. Samaritans are on freephone 116 123, day or night.

**Mind yourself**

Supporting someone through trauma is demanding. Keep up your own sleep, friendships and interests. You will be more help, for longer, if you are rested.

**My notes and questions**

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# What keeps me steady

Your warning signs, and the grounding, people and places that help you stay steady.

Name _____ Date _____

## Signs that I am becoming overwhelmed or starting to shut down

## Grounding that works for me

Senses, movement, orienting

## Soothing that works for me

Comfort, warmth, kindness

## People I can be with or contact

## Places where I feel calm

## Things to avoid when I am struggling (they seem to help and do not)

## Words I want to hear from myself

## What I will do after a difficult session or a hard day

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# When trauma happened over and over

Understanding the effects of prolonged or early trauma.

Some trauma is a single event. Some goes on for months or years, often in childhood or in a relationship that was hard to leave. When trauma is repeated and there is no escape, its effects can reach further.

## As well as the usual trauma reactions, you may notice

**Strong, fast-changing feelings**
Emotions that go from nought to a hundred, or a shut-down numbness. Difficulty calming down once upset.

**A harsh view of yourself**
Deep shame, feeling worthless, different or damaged. A sense that it was your fault.

**Difficulty with closeness**
Finding it hard to trust or feel safe with people. Expecting to be hurt or left. Keeping distance, or holding on tight.

## Why

A child, or anyone trapped, has to adapt to survive. Staying on guard, shutting off feelings, blaming yourself, pleasing others, keeping people at arm's length: each of these was a sensible solution to an impossible situation. The trouble is that they carry on long after the situation has changed.

These are ways of coping that you learned. They do not mean there is something wrong with you.

## How therapy usually goes

| | |
|---|---|
| **Feeling safer and steadier** | Understanding your reactions. Building skills for strong feelings and for staying in the present. A reliable relationship with your therapist. |
| ↓ | |
| **Working with what happened** | When you are ready, making sense of memories so they lose their grip. |
| ↓ | |
| **Living more fully** | Relationships, work, identity, and the things that matter to you now. |

The phases overlap, and there is no fixed timetable. The work goes best at a pace that keeps you inside your window of tolerance.

> **Note**
> What happened to you was not your fault. The ways you learned to cope are how you got through it.

**My notes and questions**

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# What is depression?

What depression is, how it shows up, what keeps it going and what helps.

Everyone feels low sometimes. Depression is when low mood, or a loss of interest in things, lasts for weeks and gets into every part of life. It is one of the most common health problems there is, and it is treatable.

**Feelings**
Sad, empty, flat or numb. Irritable. Guilty. Hopeless. Little pleasure in things you used to enjoy.

**Body**
Tired all the time. Sleeping too little or too much. Appetite changes. Slowed down or restless. Aches.

**Thinking**
Harsh about yourself. Gloomy about the future. Poor concentration and memory. Hard to decide anything.

**Behaviour**
Doing less. Withdrawing from people. Letting things slide. Staying in bed. Drinking more.

## Why it happens

There is rarely one cause. It is usually a mix: difficult events and losses, long-term stress, isolation, physical illness, family history, and patterns of thinking and coping learned early on. Depression is not a sign of weakness or laziness, and you cannot just snap out of it.

## How it keeps going

Depression drains energy and motivation, so you do less. Doing less means fewer good moments and more time to dwell. Mood drops further. This cycle is where therapy starts.

## What helps

- **Talking therapies.** CBT and other therapies have good evidence.
- **Getting active again**, in small planned steps, before you feel like it.
- **Antidepressant medication**, for some people. Your GP can advise.
- **The basics:** regular sleep, food, movement, daylight and contact with people.

**Talk to someone today**
if you are having thoughts of harming yourself or that life is not worth living. Tell your GP, your therapist or someone you trust.

**If you need help right now (Ireland)**

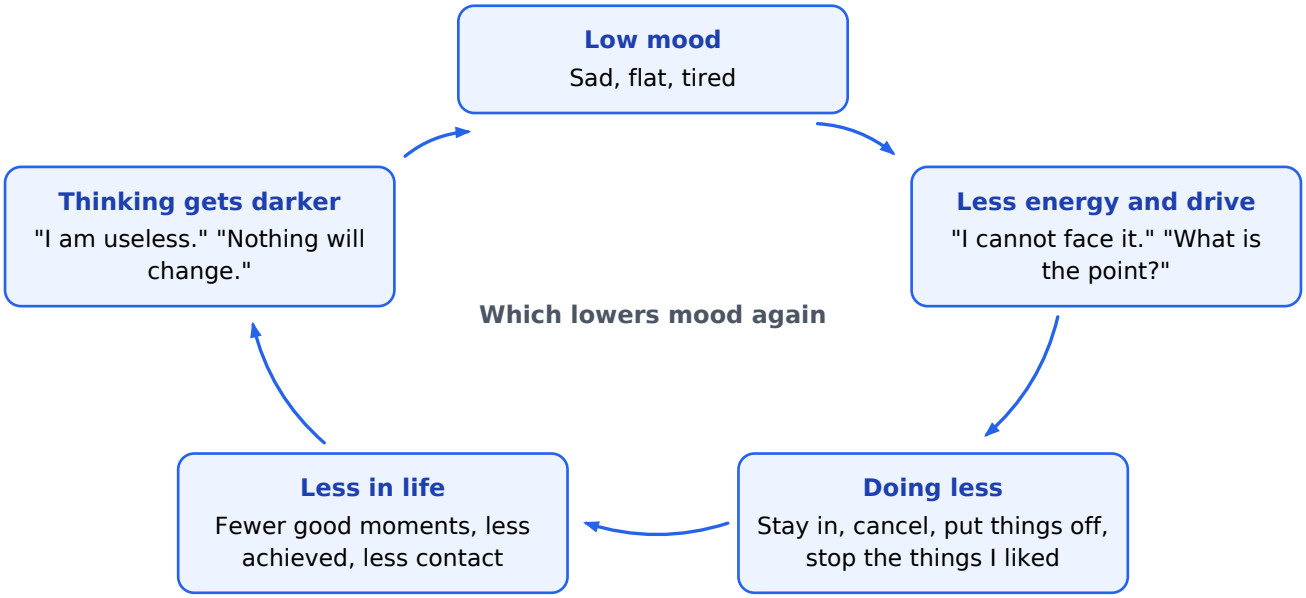
| | |
|---|---|
| **In an emergency** | Call **112** or **999**, or go to your nearest emergency department. |
| **Samaritans** | Freephone **116 123**, any time, day or night. Email jo@samaritans.ie |
| **Text About It** | Free text **HELLO** to **50808**, any time, for an anonymous text conversation. |
| **Pieta** | Freephone **1800 247 247**, any time, or text **HELP** to **51444**. For thoughts of suicide or self-harm. |
| **Your GP** | Contact your GP or the out-of-hours GP service in your area. |

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# The low mood cycle

How low mood and doing less feed each other, and where to break the cycle.




## Each step makes sense

When you feel exhausted and flat, resting and pulling back seem like the obvious thing to do. With a physical illness they would help. With depression they backfire: the less you do, the less there is to lift your mood, and the more time there is for dark thoughts.

## Where to break the cycle

You cannot simply decide to feel better, and arguing with your thoughts is hard when your mood is on the floor. Behaviour is different. You can do something small without feeling like it.

1. **Start with what you do.** Add back small activities, on a plan, whatever your mood says.
2. **Mood follows.** Not straight away and not every time, but reliably over a few weeks.
3. **Thinking lifts with it.** After a day with something in it, the bleak thoughts are less convincing.

> **The reverse cycle**
> A little more activity brings a little more achievement, pleasure or contact. That gives a little more energy, which makes the next step easier.

**My notes and questions**

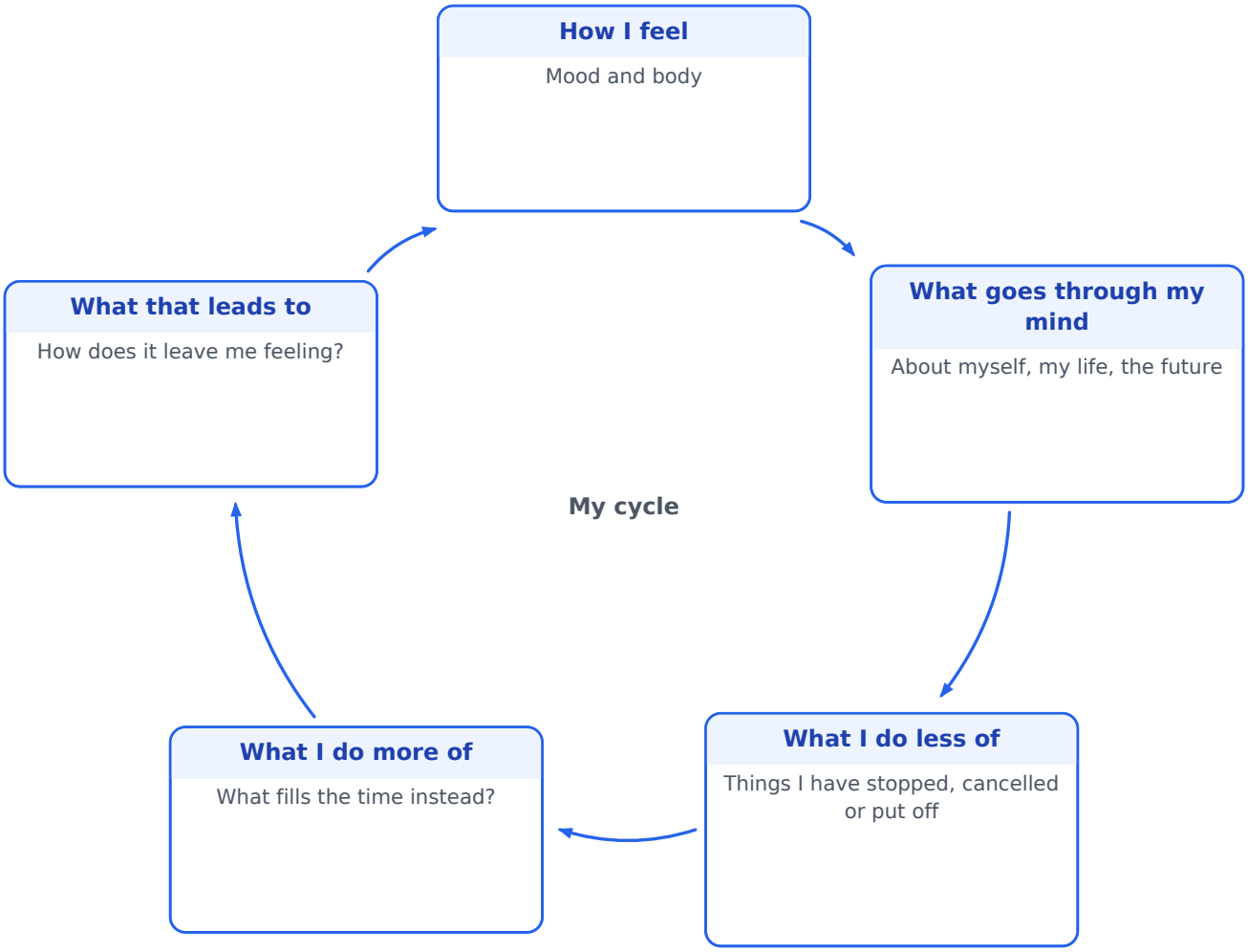
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# My low mood cycle

Fill in your own version of the cycle.

Name _____ Date _____




## Things I used to do that I have let go

## The smallest thing I could add back this week

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# How low mood changes your thinking

How depression affects memory, attention and the way you see yourself and the future.

When mood drops, thinking changes with it. This is a known effect of depression and says nothing about your character. Knowing how it works helps you take dark thoughts a little less at face value.

## What the thoughts are about

**Myself**
"I am useless, a burden, a failure." Strengths vanish from view and every flaw is magnified.

**My life and other people**
"Nothing goes right. Nobody cares." Problems look huge and help looks far away.

**The future**
"It will always be like this." Hope feels naive.

## What depression does to the mind

- **Memory is biased.** It becomes easier to recall bad times and failures than good times and successes. This is a measurable effect of low mood. It is not an accurate record of your life.
- **Attention narrows.** You notice what fits the mood and miss what does not.
- **Thinking slows.** Concentrating, remembering and deciding all get harder, which then gets read as "I am stupid".
- **Thoughts feel like facts.** The feeling of certainty comes from the mood, not from the evidence.

## What this means

You do not have to believe everything you think when you are low. A useful question is: "Is this me talking, or the depression?"

| Depression says | A fairer version might be |
|---|---|
| **"I never get anything right."** | "I am finding things hard at the moment. I have got plenty right before." |
| **"Nobody would miss me."** | "I feel cut off. That is the low mood. People have shown they care." |
| **"It will never get better."** | "It feels endless now. Low moods lift, and this one will too." |

**A thought of mine that might be the depression talking, and a fairer version**

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# Action before motivation

Why acting first works better than waiting until you feel like it.

We usually assume it goes like this: feel motivated, then act. When you are low, motivation does not arrive. If you wait for it, you do less and less.

**Usual order**
Feel like it, then do it

→

**In depression**
The feeling does not come

→

**What works**
Do it first. The feeling follows.

## Working from the outside in

- **Follow the plan, not the mood.** Decide in advance what you will do and when. Then do it because it is 11 o'clock, not because you feel up to it.
- **Start smaller than seems worth it.** Five minutes of a walk. One dish washed. One text sent.
- **Expect little at first.** Things may feel flat or pointless. Do them anyway. Pleasure and energy come back with repetition, usually later than you would like.
- **Count the effort.** When you are low, getting dressed can be a real achievement. Judge by how hard it was, not by what you used to manage.

## Three kinds of activity to include

**Achievement**
Things that give a sense of having done something: a chore, a form, a task at work.

**Closeness**
Things that connect you with others: a text, a coffee, a chat over the wall.

**Enjoyment**
Things that used to give pleasure, or might: music, a bath, a walk, a match on TV.

## What to expect

Some days it will help and some days it will not. Look at the trend over two or three weeks, not at any single day.

> **Tell yourself**
> "I do not have to feel like it. I only have to start."

**My notes and questions**

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# Activity diary

A week of what you actually do, in two-hour blocks.

Name _____ Date _____

In each box, write a few words about what you were doing and rate your mood from 0 (very low) to 10 (very good). Fill it in as you go, or at lunchtime and bedtime.

| Time | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **6 to 8am** | | | | | | | |
| **8 to 10am** | | | | | | | |
| **10am to 12** | | | | | | | |
| **12 to 2pm** | | | | | | | |
| **2 to 4pm** | | | | | | | |
| **4 to 6pm** | | | | | | | |
| **6 to 8pm** | | | | | | | |
| **8 to 10pm** | | | | | | | |
| **10pm to 12** | | | | | | | |

*At the end of the week, look for patterns. When was mood a little higher? What were you doing, and who were you with?*

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# Daily activity and mood diary

One day in detail: what you did and what it gave you.

Name _____ Date _____

For each activity, rate from 0 to 10 your mood at the time, and how much it gave you a sense of achievement (A), closeness to others (C) and enjoyment (E).

| Time | What I did | Mood | A | C | E |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
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**What gave me the most today? Was there anything that surprised me?**

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# Activity ideas

A list of activities to choose from when you cannot think of any.

Tick anything you could imagine doing, even if you do not feel like it now. Aim to have some from each group in your week.

## Achievement

- [ ] Make the bed
- [ ] Clear one surface
- [ ] Deal with one piece of post
- [ ] Do a wash
- [ ] Cook something simple
- [ ] Pay a bill or make a call I have put off
- [ ] Fix or tidy one small thing
- [ ] Do 15 minutes on a task at work

## Closeness

- [ ] Text someone to say hello
- [ ] Ring a friend or relative
- [ ] Have a cup of tea with someone
- [ ] Say yes to an invitation
- [ ] Chat to a neighbour or shop assistant
- [ ] Do something kind for someone
- [ ] Play with the kids or the dog
- [ ] Go along to a group, club or class

## Enjoyment

- [ ] Listen to music I love
- [ ] Watch a film or a match
- [ ] Read a few pages
- [ ] Have a long shower or bath
- [ ] Sit in the sun or by a window
- [ ] Cook or order a favourite meal
- [ ] Do something creative
- [ ] Potter in the garden

## Body and outdoors

- [ ] Walk round the block
- [ ] Stretch for five minutes
- [ ] Go to the sea, a park or the hills
- [ ] Swim, cycle or kick a ball
- [ ] Do some gentle exercise at home
- [ ] Get outside before noon

**Other ideas**

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# Planning my week

Plan the week ahead so you have something to follow whatever your mood.

Name _____ Date _____

Plan one or two things for each part of the day. Keep them small and specific (what, where, with whom). Include something for achievement, something for closeness and something for enjoyment most days. Tick each one when it is done.

| Day | Morning | Afternoon | Evening |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | | |
| **Tue** | | | |
| **Wed** | | | |
| **Thu** | | | |
| **Fri** | | | |
| **Sat** | | | |
| **Sun** | | | |

**What might get in the way this week, and what will I do about it?**

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# Predicting pleasure

Predict how satisfying an activity will be, then record how it really was.

Name _____ Date _____

When you are low, your mind predicts that nothing will be enjoyable or worthwhile. These predictions are usually too gloomy. Before each planned activity, predict how satisfying it will be from 0 to 10. Afterwards, write down how it really was.

| Activity | Who with | Predicted (0 to 10) | Actual (0 to 10) | What I noticed |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Walk to the pier* | *Alone* | *2* | *5* | *Better once I got moving. Nice light.* |
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**How did my predictions compare with what happened?**

**What does this tell me about trusting "there is no point"?**

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# The five-minute start

A way to get started on a task you keep putting off.

When something feels too big, commit to less. Agree to do it for five minutes. You are not agreeing to finish it.

1. **Pick one task.** Just one.
2. **Decide the very first physical action.** Not "sort the kitchen". "Put the cups in the sink."
3. **Set a timer for five minutes.**
4. **Start.** Do only that task until the timer goes.
5. **Then choose.** Stop, with no guilt. Or carry on for another five.

## Why it works

- Starting is the hardest part. Once you are moving, continuing takes far less effort.
- Five minutes is too small for your mind to argue with.
- Stopping after five minutes still counts. You did what you said you would.

| Task | First action | Did I start? | Did I carry on? | How I felt afterwards |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
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*On the worst days, make it two minutes.*

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# Breaking a task into steps

Split a job you are avoiding into small steps and tick them off.

Name _____ Date _____

**The task that feels too big**

**What "done" would look like. Be realistic: good enough, not perfect.**

List every step, however small. If a step still feels too much, break it down again.

| Step | What exactly I will do | How long | When | Done |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | | |
| 2 | | | | |
| 3 | | | | |
| 4 | | | | |
| 5 | | | | |
| 6 | | | | |
| 7 | | | | |
| 8 | | | | |

**What might stop me, and what would help**

**How I will mark finishing it**

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# Understanding rumination

What rumination is, how to tell it from problem solving, and ways to stop.

Rumination is going round the same thoughts again and again: why did this happen, what is wrong with me, why can I not just get on with things. It feels as if you are working something out. In fact you finish each round feeling worse and no further on.

**Rumination**

- Asks "why?"
- Abstract and general
- Goes round in circles
- Focuses on what is wrong with me
- Leaves me lower and stuck

**Useful thinking**

- Asks "how?" and "what next?"
- Specific and concrete
- Moves towards a decision
- Focuses on what I can do
- Leaves me with a next step

## Why we do it

It seems as if understanding the problem should fix it. It can feel irresponsible not to think about it. And when mood is low, the mind keeps going back to dark topics.

## The two-minute test

After a couple of minutes of thinking something over, ask:

1. Have I made any progress towards solving a problem?
2. Do I understand something now that I did not before?
3. Do I feel any less self-critical or low?

If it is no to all three, you are ruminating.

## Ways out

- **Name it.** "I am ruminating."
- **Change "why" to "how".** From "Why am I like this?" to "How can I make the next hour a bit better?"
- **Get specific.** What exactly happened? What is the first small thing I could do?
- **Move.** Change rooms, go outside, do something with your hands.
- **Absorb yourself.** Pick something that needs your attention: a task, a conversation, a puzzle.
- **Notice your danger times.** In bed, in the shower, on the commute. Plan something for them.

> **Note**
> You cannot stop the thoughts arriving. You can choose not to keep going over them.

**My notes and questions**

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# Stepping out of rumination

A log of when you ruminate, what set it off and what you did instead.

Name _____ Date _____

| When and where | What set it off | What I was going over | Was it getting me anywhere? | What I did instead | Mood after (0 to 10) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

**When and where am I most likely to ruminate?**

**What worked best for stepping out of it?**

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# Three good things

Each evening, write down three things that went well and why.

Name _____ Date _____

Low mood trains the mind to scan for what went wrong. This exercise trains it the other way. Each evening, write three things that went well today, or that you are glad of, and why they happened. They can be small: a good cup of coffee, a kind word, getting something done.

| Day | Three things that went well | Why did they happen? |
|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | |
| **Tue** | | |
| **Wed** | | |
| **Thu** | | |
| **Fri** | | |
| **Sat** | | |
| **Sun** | | |

*It can feel forced at first. Keep going for the full week before you judge it.*

*From research by Martin Seligman and colleagues (2005).*

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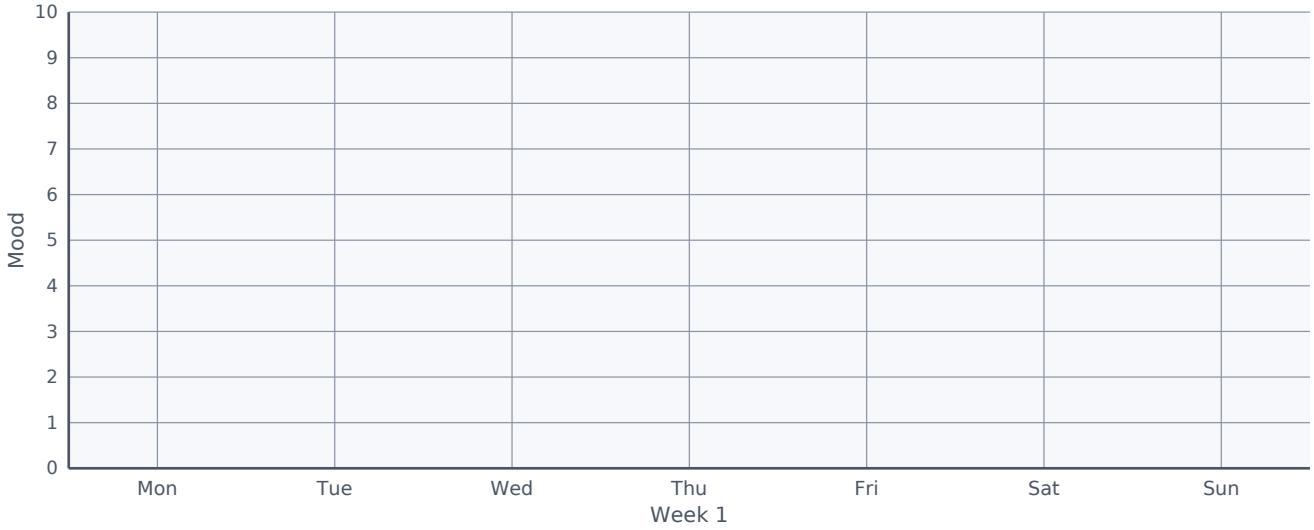
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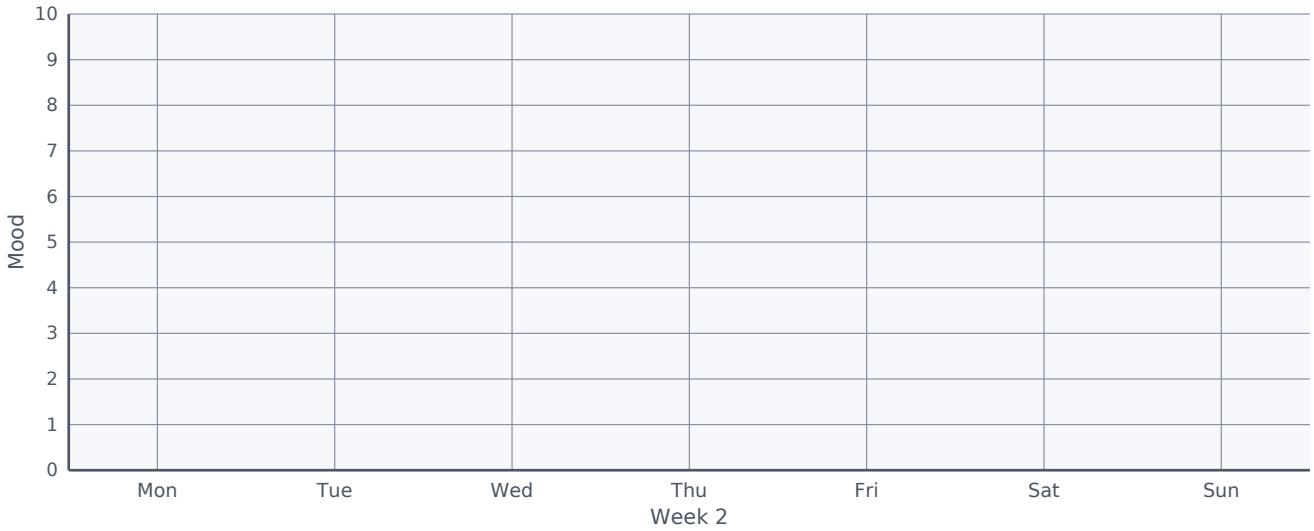
# Mood chart

Rate your mood each day for two weeks.

Name _____ Date _____

Each evening, mark a dot for your average mood that day (0 is the lowest, 10 is the best) and join the dots. Add a word or two below about anything that affected it.




**Notes: sleep, activity, events, medication changes**

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# Daily anchors

Fixed times for getting up, meals, movement, contact and winding down.

Name _____ Date _____

When mood is low or life has lost its shape, days blur together. A handful of fixed points gives your body clock and your mood something steady to work with. Keep them the same every day, weekends included.

| Anchor | My time | What exactly I will do |
|---|---|---|
| **Get up** | | |
| **Get dressed and eat something** | | |
| **Get outside or to a window for daylight** | | |
| **Move my body** | | |
| **Midday meal** | | |
| **Contact with someone** | | |
| **Evening meal** | | |
| **Wind down for bed** | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**Which anchor matters most for me?**

**What will help me keep it on a bad day?**

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# Movement and mood

How physical activity helps mood, and a plan for building it in.

Name _____ Date _____

Regular physical activity is one of the best-supported ways to improve low mood and anxiety. It also helps sleep, energy and concentration. You do not need to become a runner. The biggest gain comes from going from nothing to something.

## What counts

- Walking briskly, cycling, swimming, dancing, gardening, taking the stairs
- Anything that gets you slightly warm and slightly out of breath
- Ten minutes counts. So does five on a bad day.

## Making it stick

1. **Choose something you do not hate.** Enjoyment predicts whether you will keep it up.
2. **Fix the when and where.** "After breakfast, round the park."
3. **Start below what you think you can do.** Build up slowly.
4. **Link it to people or places.** A walking partner, a class, a route you like.
5. **Track it.** A tick on the calendar is enough.

| Day | What I will do | When | Done |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | | |
| **Tue** | | | |
| **Wed** | | | |
| **Thu** | | | |
| **Fri** | | | |
| **Sat** | | | |
| **Sun** | | | |

**Mood before a walk or session**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Low Good

**Mood afterwards**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Low Good

**Check with your GP**

before starting anything strenuous if you have a health condition or have not exercised in a long time.

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# Staying well: my early warning plan

Your early signs of a dip in mood, and what to do when you notice them.

Name _____ Date _____

**Green: when I am well**

What I am doing, how I sleep, who I see. What keeps me here.

**Amber: early warning signs**

The first changes I or others notice in my mood, thinking, sleep and behaviour.

**Red: I am struggling**

Signs that things have slipped a long way.

**When I notice amber signs, I will...**

- [ ] Back to my routine
- [ ] Plan each day
- [ ] See or ring someone
- [ ] Use my tools

**When I notice red signs, I will...**

- [ ] Tell someone I trust
- [ ] Contact my GP
- [ ] Contact my therapist

**Situations that might set off a dip**

**People I have asked to tell me if they notice changes, and how to reach them**

**What I want to remember about how I got better last time**

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# Supporting someone with depression

For partners, family and friends.

Watching someone you care about struggle with depression is hard. You cannot fix it for them, but your support does help.

## What it is like for them

Everything takes enormous effort. Things they used to enjoy feel flat. Their mind tells them they are a burden. They may pull away or snap, not because they do not care, but because they have nothing left.

### What helps

- Listening without rushing to solutions
- Small, specific invitations ("Walk to the shop with me?")
- Doing things alongside them
- Noticing effort, however small
- Patience with slow progress
- Gently encouraging professional help

### What does not help

- "Cheer up" or "Snap out of it"
- "Other people have it worse"
- Taking over everything
- Taking withdrawal personally
- Nagging or criticising
- Waiting for them to ask for help

## Things you could say

> *"I am not going anywhere."*
>
> *"You do not have to talk. I will just sit with you."*
>
> *"What is one small thing that would make today a bit easier?"*

## If you are worried about their safety

Ask directly: "Have you been having thoughts of ending your life?" Asking does not put the idea in their head. It shows you can bear to hear the answer. If they say yes, stay with them and help them contact their GP, an out-of-hours service or one of the lines below.

### If you need help right now (Ireland)

| | |
|---|---|
| **In an emergency** | Call **112** or **999**, or go to your nearest emergency department. |
| **Samaritans** | Freephone **116 123**, any time, day or night. Email jo@samaritans.ie |
| **Text About It** | Free text **HELLO** to **50808**, any time, for an anonymous text conversation. |
| **Pieta** | Freephone **1800 247 247**, any time, or text **HELP** to **51444**. For thoughts of suicide or self-harm. |
| **Your GP** | Contact your GP or the out-of-hours GP service in your area. |

### Look after yourself

Keep your own life going: sleep, friends, interests. You will be more help, for longer.

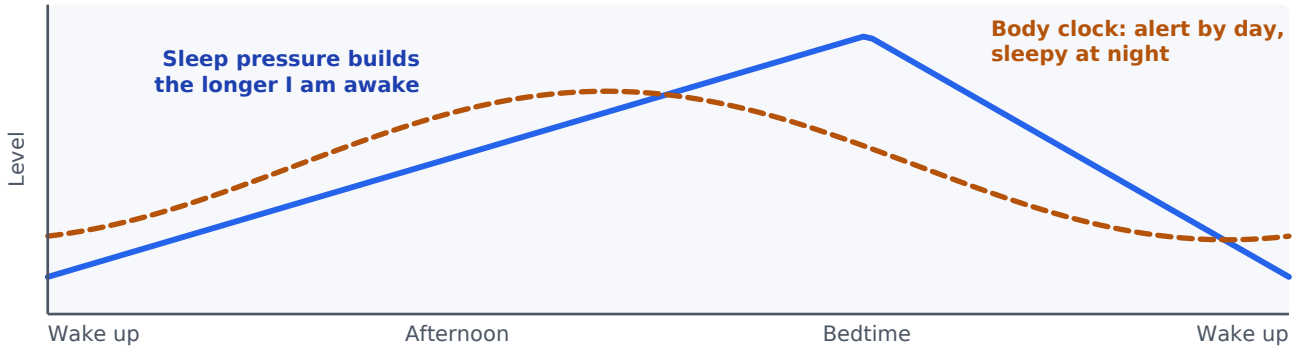
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# How sleep works

How sleep pressure and the body clock control when you sleep.

You cannot make yourself sleep. Sleep happens when two systems in the body line up.




**Sleep pressure**
Builds from the moment you wake. The longer you are up and the more active you are, the stronger it gets. Sleep empties it again. Naps, lie-ins and early nights all reduce it.

**The body clock**
A roughly 24-hour rhythm that makes you alert by day and sleepy at night. It is set mainly by light, especially morning daylight, and by regular times for getting up.

You fall asleep easily when sleep pressure is high and the body clock says "night". Trouble starts when the two get out of step.

## Useful facts

- **Sleep comes in cycles** of about 90 minutes, moving through lighter sleep, deep sleep and dreaming sleep.
- **Waking in the night is normal.** Most people wake briefly several times and do not remember it.
- **Need varies.** Most adults need somewhere between seven and nine hours. Some need less. How you function in the day is a better guide than the number.
- **You can cope with a bad night.** The body makes up for lost sleep mainly by sleeping more deeply the next night. It does not need the same hours back.
- **You cannot force it.** Trying hard to sleep wakes you up. Sleep comes more easily when you stop trying.

## The three things that matter most

1. Get up at the same time every day.
2. Get daylight in the morning.
3. Stay out of bed until you are sleepy.

**Note**
Your body already knows how to sleep. Most of the work is removing the things that get in its way.

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# The insomnia cycle

How a few bad nights turn into a lasting problem.

Most insomnia starts for a good reason: stress, illness, a new baby, a change of routine. It carries on because of what we do, quite understandably, to cope with it.




## What keeps it going

- **Too much time in bed.** More hours in bed spreads sleep thinner and makes it lighter and more broken.
- **Irregular hours.** Lie-ins and naps weaken sleep pressure and confuse the body clock.
- **Bed linked with being awake.** After enough bad nights, getting into bed is enough to make you alert.
- **Effort.** Trying hard to sleep keeps you awake.
- **Daytime worry.** Watching for tiredness and blaming everything on sleep keeps the pressure on.

## What breaks it

1. A fixed getting-up time, seven days a week.
2. Going to bed only when sleepy.
3. Getting out of bed when you cannot sleep.
4. A shorter, more regular time in bed.
5. A wind-down routine and a plan for a busy mind.
6. Easing off the struggle.

**Treatment**

This approach is called CBT for insomnia. It is the recommended first treatment for long-term sleep problems and works for most people within a few weeks.

**My notes and questions**

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# Sleep diary

One week of sleep, recorded each morning.

Name _____ Date _____

Fill in each column within an hour of getting up. Estimates are fine. Do not clock-watch in the night to get them exact.

| | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Time I got into bed** | | | | | | | |
| **Time I tried to go to sleep** | | | | | | | |
| **Minutes to fall asleep** | | | | | | | |
| **Number of times I woke** | | | | | | | |
| **Minutes awake in the night** | | | | | | | |
| **Time of final waking** | | | | | | | |
| **Time I got out of bed** | | | | | | | |
| **Hours of sleep (estimate)** | | | | | | | |
| **Sleep quality (0 to 10)** | | | | | | | |
| **Naps (minutes)** | | | | | | | |
| **Caffeine after 2pm** | | | | | | | |
| **Alcohol (drinks)** | | | | | | | |

*Bring this to your next session. We will use it to work out your sleep pattern and plan changes.*

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# Working out my sleep efficiency

How much of your time in bed is spent asleep?

Name _____ Date _____

Sleep efficiency is the share of your time in bed that you spend asleep. Good sleepers are asleep for around 85% to 90% of the time they are in bed. Use last week's sleep diary.

| Night | A. Hours in bed | B. Hours asleep |
|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | |
| **Tue** | | |
| **Wed** | | |
| **Thu** | | |
| **Fri** | | |
| **Sat** | | |
| **Sun** | | |
| **Total** | | |
| **Average (total divided by 7)** | | |

| Average hours in bed (A) | Average hours asleep (B) | Efficiency: B divided by A, times 100 |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

## What the number means

| | |
|---|---|
| **85% or more** | Your time in bed is a good fit for your sleep. If you are still tired, you may be able to extend it a little. |
| **80% to 84%** | Reasonable. Keep your times steady and see how it settles. |
| **Under 80%** | You are spending a lot of time awake in bed. Shortening your time in bed is likely to help. |

**What I notice from these numbers**

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# Sleep habits checklist

The everyday things that help sleep or get in its way.

Name _____ Date _____

Tick what you already do. Circle one or two to work on. Good habits alone rarely cure insomnia, but they give the other strategies a fair chance.

## During the day

- [ ] I get up at the same time every day
- [ ] I get outside in daylight in the morning
- [ ] I move my body most days
- [ ] I avoid naps, or keep them under 20 minutes before 3pm
- [ ] I stop caffeine by early afternoon

## In the evening

- [ ] I finish eating two to three hours before bed
- [ ] I keep alcohol low and not close to bedtime
- [ ] I avoid nicotine near bedtime
- [ ] I wind down for the last hour
- [ ] I dim the lights and put screens away
- [ ] I deal with tomorrow's worries earlier in the evening

## In the bedroom

- [ ] My room is dark, quiet and cool
- [ ] My bed is comfortable
- [ ] I use my bed only for sleep and sex
- [ ] My phone charges outside the room, or out of reach
- [ ] The clock is turned away from me

## At night

- [ ] I go to bed only when sleepy
- [ ] If I am awake for a long time, I get up
- [ ] I do not check the time in the night

**The one or two changes I will make this week**

**What might make that hard, and how I will handle it**

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# Bed is for sleep

Six rules that rebuild the link between bed and sleep.

After many nights of lying awake, your brain links bed with being alert and frustrated. These rules break that link and rebuild the connection between bed and sleep. They are simple, and they work, though the first week or two can be tiring.

## The rules

1. **Go to bed only when you are sleepy.** Not just tired: eyes heavy, head nodding. If that is later than usual, so be it.
2. **Use the bed only for sleep and sex.** No phone, TV, work, eating or worrying in bed.
3. **If you are awake for what feels like 15 to 20 minutes, get up.** Go to another room. Do something quiet and dull in low light. Do not look at the clock.
4. **Go back to bed only when sleepy again.** Repeat as often as you need to.
5. **Get up at the same time every morning**, however the night went. Weekends too.
6. **Do not nap.**

## Make it easier

- Set up a "night spot" in advance: a chair, a blanket, a lamp, a book that is not too gripping.
- In winter, leave a dressing gown ready so getting up is less grim.
- Tell anyone you live with what you are doing and why.

## What to expect

- You may get less sleep for the first few nights. That builds sleep pressure, which is what makes the method work.
- Getting up feels like the wrong thing to do. It is the most important rule.
- Most people notice they are falling asleep faster within one to three weeks.

> **Take care**
> You may be sleepier than usual at first. Be careful with driving and anything that needs full alertness.

**My getting-up time, every day**

**Where I will go and what I will do if I am awake**

*These instructions are known as stimulus control, developed by Richard Bootzin.*

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# My sleep window

Spending less time in bed, for a while, to get deeper and more solid sleep.

Name _____ Date _____

If you are in bed for eight hours and asleep for five and a half, your sleep is spread thin. Matching your time in bed to the sleep you are actually getting squeezes it into one solid block. Once it is solid, you lengthen it again.

**Read this first**

This method makes you sleepier in the short term. Talk to your GP or therapist before using it if you have bipolar disorder, epilepsy, a history of seizures or psychosis, or untreated sleep apnoea. The same goes if you drive for work, operate machinery or do other safety-critical work. Do not drive when sleepy.

## Setting my sleep window

1. From my sleep diary, my average sleep per night is about:
2. My sleep window is that amount of time, and never less than five and a half hours.
3. My fixed getting-up time, every day:
4. Counting back, my earliest bedtime is:

| Average sleep per night | Getting-up time | Earliest bedtime |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

## The rules

- Do not go to bed before my earliest bedtime, even if I am sleepy.
- Get up at my fixed time, whatever the night was like.
- No naps, and keep the sleep diary going.

## Adjusting each week

| | |
|---|---|
| **Efficiency 85% or more** | Add 15 minutes to my window by going to bed 15 minutes earlier. |
| **Efficiency 80% to 84%** | Keep the window the same for another week. |
| **Efficiency under 80%** | Shorten the window by 15 minutes, but not below five and a half hours. |

| Week | Bedtime | Getting-up time | Sleep efficiency | Change for next week |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | | |
| 2 | | | | |
| 3 | | | | |
| 4 | | | | |

*This method is known as sleep restriction therapy, developed by Arthur Spielman.*

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# My wind-down routine

Plan the last hour before bed.

Name _____ Date _____

You cannot go from full speed to asleep. A wind-down routine tells your body that the day is finished. Aim for the last 45 to 60 minutes before bed, in the same order each night.

## Ideas

- [ ] Dim the lights
- [ ] Put the phone away
- [ ] Lay out things for tomorrow
- [ ] Write tomorrow's list
- [ ] Wash, or have a warm shower
- [ ] Read something light
- [ ] Listen to calm music or a podcast
- [ ] Gentle stretches
- [ ] Slow breathing
- [ ] A warm, caffeine-free drink

| Time | What I will do |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

**What I will stop doing in the last hour**

**What would get in the way, and what I will do about it**

| Night | Did my wind-down | Sleepy at bedtime? (0 to 10) |
|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | |
| **Tue** | | |
| **Wed** | | |
| **Thu** | | |
| **Fri** | | |
| **Sat** | | |
| **Sun** | | |

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# A busy mind at night

Write down tomorrow's worries and tasks earlier in the evening.

Worries and unfinished tasks tend to come to mind at bedtime, when it is quiet. If you go through them earlier in the evening, fewer turn up in bed.

## How to do it

1. Early in the evening, at least two hours before bed, sit down with this sheet for ten to fifteen minutes.
2. In the left column, write whatever is on your mind: tasks, problems, worries.
3. In the right column, write the next small step you could take, and when. If there is nothing you can do, write "nothing to do tonight".
4. Fold the page and leave it somewhere outside the bedroom.
5. If the thoughts come back in bed, remind yourself: "I have dealt with that as far as I can today. It is written down."

| What is on my mind | Next step, and when |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

## If thoughts still come in bed

- Keep a notepad by the bed. Write one line and let it go.
- Say a neutral word such as "the" slowly in your head, over and over. It blocks other thoughts without waking you up.
- Picture something calm in detail: a walk you know well, step by step.

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# Unhelpful thoughts about sleep

What you believe about sleep can keep you awake.

Name _____ Date _____

Worrying about sleep raises the alarm level in your body, which is the opposite of what sleep needs. Many of the things we tell ourselves about sleep are not accurate.

| The thought | A more accurate view |
|---|---|
| **"I need eight hours or I cannot function."** | Need varies. Most people cope better than they expect after a short night, and the body compensates with deeper sleep. |
| **"If I do not sleep tonight, tomorrow is ruined."** | Tomorrow may be harder. It will not be ruined. I have managed on poor sleep before. |
| **"I have lost the ability to sleep."** | Sleep is automatic. It can be disrupted and it cannot be lost. |
| **"I should stay in bed and try harder."** | Trying keeps me awake. Getting up until I am sleepy works better. |
| **"Lying there resting is nearly as good."** | Long stretches awake in bed teach my brain that bed is for being awake. |
| **"Poor sleep is wrecking my health."** | Worry about sleep is a bigger problem for me right now than the sleep itself, and it can be treated. |

**The thought about sleep that bothers me most**

**How much do I believe it?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Completely

**Evidence for it**

**Evidence against it**

Including days I coped better than I expected

**A more accurate and calmer version**

**How might I act differently at night, and during the day, if I believed that?**

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# Awake in the night: what to do

Steps to follow when you wake in the night, with cards to keep by the bed.

Waking in the night is normal. The aim is to stay calm and let sleep come back. Trying to make yourself sleep does not work.

1. **Do not look at the clock.** Knowing the time only starts the sums.
2. **Stay easy.** Tell yourself: "Waking is normal. Rest is fine. Sleep will come when it comes."
3. **Give it a little while.** Breathe slowly. Let your body be heavy.
4. **If you are wide awake or getting wound up, get up.** Go to your night spot. Low light, something quiet and dull.
5. **No phone, no email, no news.**
6. **Go back to bed when you feel sleepy.** Repeat if you need to.
7. **Get up at your usual time,** whatever happened.

## Notes to self

- One bad night does not undo my progress.
- The more I chase sleep, the faster it runs.
- I have got through tired days before.

## My plan

**My night spot**

Where I will go if I am wide awake

**What I will do there, quiet and dull**

- [ ] A paper book
- [ ] A puzzle
- [ ] Soft music
- [ ] Herbal tea

**What I will leave ready there before bed**

*Cut along the dashed lines. Keep a card in your wallet or phone case.*

**Awake at night**

No clock. No phone. Stay easy. If wide awake, get up and do something dull in low light. Back to bed when sleepy. Up at the usual time.

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**What I want to tell myself at 3am**

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# Caffeine, alcohol, nicotine and sleep

How caffeine, alcohol and nicotine affect sleep, and what to change.

**Caffeine**
Blocks the chemical that builds sleep pressure. Half of it can still be in your system five or six hours later, longer for some people.

**Alcohol**
Helps you nod off, then breaks up the second half of the night. Sleep is lighter, with more waking and early rising.

**Nicotine**
A stimulant. It makes it harder to fall asleep and causes lighter sleep. Withdrawal overnight can wake you.

## Caffeine

- It is in coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks, chocolate and some painkillers.
- Try a cut-off in the early afternoon, and notice the effect over a week or two.
- If you drink a lot, cut down gradually to avoid headaches.
- Extra coffee after a bad night feels essential, and sets up the next bad night.

## Alcohol

- A nightcap is one of the most common causes of 3am waking.
- If you drink, have it earlier in the evening and keep it modest.
- If you have been drinking heavily every day, do not stop suddenly. Talk to your GP first, because withdrawal can be dangerous.

## Nicotine

- Avoid smoking or vaping in the hour or two before bed and during the night.
- If you are thinking of stopping, your GP or pharmacist can help, and sleep usually improves after the first few weeks.

| Over the next week | What I do now | What I will try |
|---|---|---|
| **Caffeine** | | |
| **Alcohol** | | |
| **Nicotine** | | |

**What I notice after a week**

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# Sleep: myths and facts

Some common beliefs that make sleep harder.

| Myth | Fact |
|---|---|
| **Everyone needs eight hours.** | Need differs between people and changes across life. Seven to nine hours suits most adults. Some do well on less. |
| **Good sleepers sleep straight through.** | Everyone wakes several times a night. Good sleepers just drop off again without noticing. |
| **You can catch up at the weekend.** | Lie-ins confuse the body clock and make Sunday night harder. A steady getting-up time works better. |
| **If you cannot sleep, stay in bed and rest.** | Long periods awake in bed strengthen the link between bed and wakefulness. |
| **A drink helps you sleep.** | Alcohol helps you fall asleep, then causes lighter, broken sleep later in the night. |
| **Older people need less sleep.** | The need stays much the same. Sleep becomes lighter and more broken with age, and often shifts earlier. |
| **Lost sleep must be paid back hour for hour.** | The body recovers mostly by sleeping more deeply, not by sleeping as long again. |
| **Watching TV in bed helps me unwind.** | For good sleepers it may be harmless. With insomnia, it keeps the brain linking bed with being awake. |
| **Insomnia means something is seriously wrong.** | It is very common and usually kept going by habits and worry, which can be changed. |

**A belief about sleep I have held that might not be true**

**What I might do differently now**

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# Sleep and shift work

How to sleep better when you work nights or changing shifts.

Your body clock expects you to be awake in daylight and asleep in the dark. Shift work asks it to do the opposite, so sleep after a night shift is usually shorter and lighter. You cannot remove that completely. You can make it a good deal easier.

| When | What tends to help |
|---|---|
| **Before the first night** | Sleep in that morning if you can. Take a nap in the afternoon or early evening, up to about 90 minutes. |
| **Early in the shift** | Bright light. Caffeine, if you use it. Eat your main meal before you start. |
| **Later in the shift** | Stop caffeine about six hours before you plan to sleep. Light snacks, not a heavy meal. A short nap on your break, if your workplace allows it. |
| **Going home** | If you are sleepy, do not drive. Get a lift, take public transport, or nap first. Sunglasses help on a bright morning. |
| **Sleeping in the day** | Go to bed as soon as you can. Dark, cool and quiet: blackout blinds or an eye mask, earplugs, phone on silent. Tell the people you live with when you will be asleep. |
| **After the last night** | Take a short sleep in the morning, an hour or two. Then get up, get outside, and go to bed at a normal time that night. |

## Things that help whatever the shift

- **A routine for each shift pattern.** The same wind-down before sleep, whatever time sleep is.
- **Protect your sleep.** Treat it like an appointment. Deliveries and phone calls can wait.
- **Go easy on alcohol.** It may knock you out, but it breaks up the sleep that follows.
- **Keep moving and keep seeing people.** Shift work squeezes out exercise and company first. Plan them in on your days off.
- **Bed is still for sleep.** If you are wide awake after 20 minutes or so, get up, do something quiet in low light, and go back when you are sleepy.

**When to get help**

Talk to your GP or occupational health if you often nod off at work or at the wheel, if your sleep stays poor on days off, or if your mood is dropping. Some people's bodies never adjust to nights, and that is not a failing.

**What gets in the way of my sleep around shifts**

**The two changes I will try first**

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# What is stress?

What stress is, what it does and when it becomes a problem.

Stress is what happens when the demands on you feel bigger than what you have to meet them with. Some pressure is helpful. It gets you up for an interview or through a deadline. The trouble comes when pressure is too high for too long, with no chance to recover.




## What stress does

**Body**
Tense muscles, headaches, poor sleep, tiredness, stomach trouble, more colds and bugs.

**Feelings**
Irritable, anxious, overwhelmed, flat, tearful, quick to snap.

**Thinking**
Racing mind, forgetfulness, poor concentration, worry, seeing only problems.

**Behaviour**
Rushing, skipping breaks and meals, drinking or eating more, withdrawing, dropping the things that help.

## Demands and resources

Stress is a balance between demands (work, money, caring, health, conflict, change) and resources (time, sleep, support, skills, money, a sense of control). You can reduce stress from either side: lower the load, or build up what you have to carry it.

## Three questions

1. What can I change or remove?
2. What can I not change, but could handle differently?
3. What do I need more of to cope: rest, help, information, time to myself?

**Note**
Stress does the damage when there is no recovery from it. Short, regular breaks from pressure matter as much as reducing the pressure.

*The pressure and performance curve is based on the Yerkes-Dodson law (1908).*

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# The stress bucket

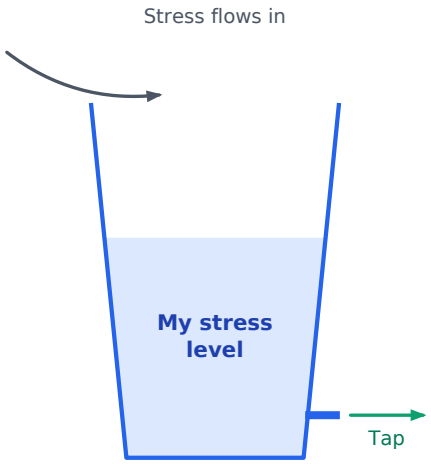
A picture of what adds to your stress and what lets it out.

Name _____ Date _____

Imagine your stress collecting in a bucket. Pressures pour in at the top. Helpful coping opens a tap at the bottom and lets some out. If more comes in than goes out, the bucket overflows: you snap, get ill, cannot sleep or feel you cannot cope. Tick what fits and add anything else.

### What is filling my bucket

- [ ] Work
- [ ] Money
- [ ] Family
- [ ] Health
- [ ] Worries
- [ ] Change
- [ ] Poor sleep




### What lets stress out

- [ ] Rest
- [ ] Sleep
- [ ] Movement
- [ ] Talking
- [ ] Outdoors
- [ ] Enjoyment

### Signs my bucket is getting full

In my body, mood and behaviour

### Taps that feel like relief but add to the load

- [ ] Drinking
- [ ] Overworking
- [ ] Avoiding
- [ ] Scrolling
- [ ] Comfort eating
- [ ] Snapping

### What could I do to reduce what is flowing in?

### Which tap will I open more this week, and when?

*The stress bucket was described by Alison Brabban and Douglas Turkington (2002).*

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# My stress warning signs

Tick your signs of building stress and pick out the earliest ones.

Name _____ Date _____

Tick the signs you get when stress is building. Then pick out the earliest ones. Those are the ones to watch for.

## Body

- [ ] Tight shoulders, neck or jaw
- [ ] Headaches
- [ ] Trouble sleeping
- [ ] Tired all the time
- [ ] Upset stomach
- [ ] Racing heart
- [ ] Getting ill more often
- [ ] Appetite changes

## Feelings

- [ ] Irritable or snappy
- [ ] Anxious or on edge
- [ ] Overwhelmed
- [ ] Flat or low
- [ ] Tearful
- [ ] Guilty when resting

## Thinking

- [ ] Mind racing
- [ ] Forgetful
- [ ] Cannot concentrate
- [ ] Cannot switch off
- [ ] Everything feels urgent
- [ ] Expecting the worst

## Behaviour

- [ ] Skipping breaks or meals
- [ ] Working longer hours
- [ ] More alcohol, caffeine or food
- [ ] Avoiding people
- [ ] Putting things off
- [ ] Dropping exercise or hobbies

**My earliest warning signs (the first two or three I notice)**

**What other people notice in me first**

**When I spot these signs, the first thing I will do**

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# Change it, accept it or let it go

Sort what is weighing on you into what you can change, what to accept and what to drop.

Name _____ Date _____

A lot of stress comes from fighting things we cannot change and neglecting the things we can. List what is weighing on you, then decide which group each one belongs to.

**Change it**
I have some control. There is something I can do, ask for or stop doing.

**Accept it**
I cannot change it, at least for now. I can change how I respond and look after myself around it.

**Let it go**
It is not my responsibility, it matters less than it feels, or worrying will make no difference.

| What is stressing me | Change, accept or let go? | What I will do |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
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| | | |

**The one thing that would make the biggest difference if I acted on it**

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# Urgent and important

When everything feels like a priority, sort it into four boxes.

Name _____ Date _____

Urgent tasks demand attention. Important ones can be put off until they become a crisis. Write each task on your mind into one of the boxes.

| | Urgent | Not urgent |
|---|---|---|
| **Important** | **Do it now**<br>Deadlines, real emergencies | **Plan it**<br>Health, relationships, planning, rest. Put it in the diary. |
| **Not important** | **Limit it**<br>Interruptions, other people's priorities. Can I shorten, delay or hand it on? | **Drop it**<br>Time fillers and things nobody will miss |

**Which box do I spend most of my time in?**

**One "plan it" item I will protect time for this week, and when**

*The idea of sorting by urgency and importance is often credited to Dwight D. Eisenhower.*

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# Understanding burnout

The signs of burnout, what leads to it and how to recover.

Burnout builds slowly, from long-term stress that has not been managed, usually at work or in a caring role. It is not a weakness. It tends to happen to conscientious people who keep going long after they should have stopped.

## The three signs

**Exhaustion**
Drained, physically and emotionally. Rest does not seem to refill the tank.

**Distance**
Feeling detached, cynical or numb about work or the people you look after. Going through the motions.

**Feeling ineffective**
Tasks take longer. Mistakes creep in. A sense that nothing you do makes a difference.

## What leads to it

- [ ] Too much to do, for too long
- [ ] Little control over how I work
- [ ] Effort that goes unnoticed
- [ ] Conflict or lack of support
- [ ] Unfairness
- [ ] Work that clashes with my values
- [ ] No real time off
- [ ] Caring for others with little care for me

## Is it burnout or depression?

They overlap, and one can lead to the other. Burnout is usually tied to one area of life and eases with distance from it. Depression affects all of it. If low mood, hopelessness or loss of interest have spread across your whole life, talk to your GP.

## Recovering

1. **Take it seriously.** Burnout does not fix itself by pushing through.
2. **Rest properly.** Time off that is really off. Sleep, daylight, movement, food.
3. **Reduce the load.** What can be dropped, delayed, delegated or renegotiated?
4. **Put boundaries around work:** hours, email, breaks.
5. **Reconnect** with people and with things that have nothing to do with being useful.
6. **Look at the causes.** Without some change in the conditions, burnout comes back.

**Recovery takes time**
Usually months. Trying to rush it tends to set you back.

**What needs to change for me, and who do I need to talk to about it?**

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# Energy audit

List what drains your energy and what gives it back.

Name _____ Date _____

Think through a typical week: the tasks, the people, the places, the habits. Some leave you with less energy than you started with. Some give energy back.

| Drains | Chargers |
| --- | --- |
| What leaves me depleted? | What leaves me with more in the tank? |

**This week, how full is my battery overall?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Empty Full

**One drain I could reduce, limit or stop**

**One charger I will add or do more often, and when**

**What gets in the way of recharging, and what would help?**

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# Micro-breaks

Two-minute breaks to take several times a day.

You do not need a holiday to recover from stress. Short breaks, taken often, stop pressure from building. Two minutes every hour or so does more than one long break at the end of an exhausting day.

**Breathe**
Six slow breaths, with the out-breath longer than the in-breath.

**Move**
Stand, stretch, roll your shoulders. Walk to the window or up the stairs.

**Look far**
Rest your eyes on something in the distance for a minute. The sky, a tree, the end of the street.

**Step outside**
Daylight and fresh air for two minutes, even in the rain.

**Drink water**
Slowly, away from your screen.

**Unclench**
Drop your shoulders. Loosen your jaw. Open your hands.

**Do one thing slowly**
Make a cup of tea and do nothing else while you drink it.

**Connect**
A short chat with someone about anything that is not work.

## Making them happen

- Attach a break to something that already happens: after a call, before opening email, when the kettle boils.
- Set a quiet reminder for the first week.
- Take a proper lunch break, away from your desk, most days.
- Do not use breaks to check your phone. That is more input, not rest.

| When in my day | The break I will take |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

**After a week of this, what do I notice by the evening?**

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# Boundaries between work and the rest of life

Deciding where work stops.

Name _____ Date _____

When work can reach you anywhere, at any time, it tends to fill all the available space. Boundaries are decisions you make in advance about where it ends.

**Where work spills over now**

- [ ] Long hours
- [ ] Calls at home
- [ ] Skipped breaks
- [ ] Evening emails
- [ ] Weekends
- [ ] Thinking about it

**What that costs me and the people around me**

## My boundaries

| Area | My rule | What makes it easier |
|---|---|---|
| **Start and finish times** | | |
| **Breaks and lunch** | | |
| **Email and messages out of hours** | | |
| **Days off and holidays** | | |
| **Taking on extra work** | | |

## An end-of-day routine

- [ ] Write tomorrow's top three tasks
- [ ] Close everything down
- [ ] Say a phrase that marks the end: "That is it for today"
- [ ] Change clothes, walk, or do something that signals the switch

**A conversation I need to have, and who with**

**Words I could use. For example: "I can do that by Thursday. If it is needed sooner, which of these should I put down?"**

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# My self-care plan

What you will do to look after your body, your mind and your relationships.

Name _____ Date _____

Self-care is the ordinary upkeep that keeps you well: sleep, food, movement, rest, people and things that matter to you. It is the first thing to go when life gets busy, and that is when you need it most.

### Body

Sleep, food, movement, medical care

### Mind

Rest, breaks, things I enjoy, time offline

### People

Who I spend time with, asking for help

### Meaning

What matters to me, what I look forward to

### Every day I will...

### Every week I will...

## Signs that I am neglecting myself

## What gets in the way, and how I will handle it

## A reminder to myself about why this matters

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# The two-minute reset

A quick way to bring your stress level down a notch, anywhere.

Use this between tasks, before a meeting, or whenever you notice you are wound up.

1. **Stop.** Put down what you are doing. Sit back or stand up.
2. **Feet.** Feel both feet flat on the floor.
3. **Shoulders.** Lift them up to your ears, hold for three seconds, and let them drop.
4. **Jaw and hands.** Unclench your teeth. Open your hands.
5. **Breathe.** In gently through the nose for 4. Out slowly for 6. Five times.
6. **Look.** Find three things in the room you had not noticed.
7. **Ask.** "What is the one thing that needs me next?"
8. **Go.** Do that one thing.

## When to use it

- [ ] Before I open my email
- [ ] After a difficult call or conversation
- [ ] Before I walk in the door at home
- [ ] When I notice my shoulders are up
- [ ] Before a meeting or presentation
- [ ] When I am about to snap

## Try it for a week

| When I used it | Stress before (0 to 10) | Stress after (0 to 10) | What I noticed |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
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**The cue I will use to remind myself (for example: each time the kettle boils)**

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# Stress diary

A week of noticing what winds you up and what helps.

Name _____ Date _____

| Date and time | What happened | Stress (0 to 10) | How I reacted (body, thoughts, behaviour) | What I did to cope | Did it help? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |
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**What are my main triggers?**

**What helps most? What makes it worse?**

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# The three-minute breathing space

A short pause to step out of autopilot, any time of day.

This is a short practice in three steps, about a minute each. Think of the shape of an hourglass: wide, narrow, wide.

| | |
|---|---|
| **1. Check in** | Ask: what is going on for me right now? What thoughts are here? What feelings? What sensations in my body? Notice them as they are, even if they are unwelcome. |
| **2. Gather** | Narrow your attention to the breath. Feel each in-breath and each out-breath in your belly. Use the breath to anchor you here. |
| **3. Widen** | Let your attention spread to your whole body: your posture, your face, the space around you. Carry this wider awareness into the next moments of your day. |

## When to use it

- [ ] At set times: on waking, at lunch, before bed
- [ ] Before a meeting or a difficult conversation
- [ ] When I notice stress or low mood building
- [ ] When I catch myself worrying or ruminating
- [ ] Between one task and the next
- [ ] Before reaching for the phone or a drink

**The times I will practise this week**

*Cut along the dashed lines. Keep a card in your wallet or phone case.*

**Breathing space**

1. What is here? Thoughts, feelings, body.
2. Gather on the breath.
3. Widen to the whole body and the room.

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**My reminder**

When I will use it

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*The three-minute breathing space comes from Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy, developed by Zindel Segal, Mark Williams and John Teasdale.*

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# Mindful walking

A moving practice, for when sitting still does not suit.

Walking is a good practice if you are restless, sleepy, or find the breath a difficult anchor. There are two ways to do it.

## Slow practice (5 to 10 minutes)

1. Find a place where you can walk ten or so paces in a line, indoors or out.
2. Stand still. Feel your feet on the ground and the weight of your body.
3. Begin to walk, more slowly than usual. Notice the heel lifting, the foot moving through the air, the heel touching down, the weight shifting.
4. At the end of the line, stop. Turn slowly. Walk back.
5. When your mind wanders, pause, notice where it went, and return to the feeling of your feet.

## Ordinary walking

On any walk, at normal speed:

- For a few minutes, attend only to the sensations in your feet and legs.
- Then switch to sounds. Then to what you can see: colours, light, movement.
- Notice the air on your face and the temperature.
- When you notice you are lost in thought, pick one sense and come back.

## Tips

- Leave the headphones off for the first ten minutes.
- You do not need to look any different from anyone else out for a walk.
- Nature helps, and a street works too.

**Where and when I will try it**

**What I noticed**

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# When mindfulness practice is hard

The common obstacles, and what to do about each.

Everyone who practises runs into the same handful of difficulties. They do not mean that mindfulness does not suit you. Working with them is part of the practice.

| What happens | What helps |
|---|---|
| **"My mind will not stop wandering."** | That is every mind. Noticing it has wandered is the moment of mindfulness. Come back, kindly, a hundred times if need be. |
| **"I get restless and want to stop."** | Notice restlessness as sensations: where is it in the body? Shorten the practice, or try walking. |
| **"I fall asleep."** | Sit upright, open your eyes, practise earlier in the day. Or accept that you may need the sleep. |
| **"I am bored."** | Get curious about boredom itself. What is it actually like? |
| **"I do not think I am doing it right."** | There is no perfect session. If you noticed anything at all, you did it. |
| **"It makes me feel worse."** | Slowing down can bring up what busyness has been covering. Keep it short, eyes open, anchor on sounds or feet. Tell me, and we will adapt it. |
| **"I do not have time."** | Try one minute. Or pick one daily activity and do it with full attention. |
| **"Nothing is happening."** | The effects are gradual, like fitness. Look back after a few weeks, not after each sitting. |

## What helps most

- A regular time and place
- Short and often, not long and rare
- An attitude of kindness, especially when it goes badly
- Someone to practise with, or a recording to follow

**The obstacle I meet most**

**What I will try**

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# Mindfulness practice log

A record of what you did and what you noticed.

Name _____ Date _____

| Day | What I practised | How long | What I noticed (thoughts, feelings, body, obstacles) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | | |
| **Tue** | | | |
| **Wed** | | | |
| **Thu** | | | |
| **Fri** | | | |
| **Sat** | | | |
| **Sun** | | | |

**What am I learning from practising?**

**What would help me keep going?**

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# Getting through exams

Studying and sitting exams without burning out.

Some pressure before exams is useful. It gets you to the desk. Too much, and your mind goes round in circles instead of taking anything in. The aim is to keep the pressure in the useful range.

## Studying

- **Plan in blocks.** 25 to 45 minutes on one topic, then a real break. Three or four good blocks beat a whole day at the desk.
- **Start with a small, easy task.** Starting is the hardest part.
- **Test yourself.** Closing the book and writing down what you remember works better than reading your notes over and over.
- **Decide when you stop.** A fixed finishing time protects your evening and your sleep.
- **Compare less.** Other people's hours are not a measure of yours. Step back from group chats that wind you up.

## Looking after yourself

- **Sleep.** Memories are filed during sleep. Staying up to cram usually costs more marks than it gains.
- **Food, water, movement, daylight.** Twenty minutes outside clears more fog than another coffee.
- **People.** Keep some contact that has nothing to do with exams.

## The thoughts that pile on pressure

| The thought | A fairer way to see it |
|---|---|
| **"If I fail this, my life is ruined."** | "It would be a setback. There are repeats and other routes, and people recover from worse." |
| **"Everyone else is ahead of me."** | "I see their best moments. I do not see their panic." |
| **"I know nothing."** | "That is a feeling, not a fact. Let me test myself on one topic." |
| **"Top marks, or it is not worth it."** | "My best on the day is the only thing I control." |

## On the day

1. Pack the night before. Arrive early, and stay away from people comparing notes at the door.
2. Read the whole paper. Start with a question you can do.
3. If your mind goes blank: pen down, feet on the floor, three slow breaths out. Move to another question and come back.
4. Afterwards, do not go through the paper with others. It is done.

**Talk to someone**

If the pressure is making you feel hopeless, or you are not sleeping or eating, tell someone: family, a tutor, the college counselling service or your GP.

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# Understanding anger

What anger is, when it becomes a problem and what helps.

Anger is the feeling that comes up when something seems unfair, threatening or in the way. It gives you energy to protect yourself, set a limit or put something right. Everyone feels it.

Anger is a feeling. Aggression is a behaviour. You can feel very angry and still choose what you do.

## What happens

**Body**
Heart speeds up, muscles tense, face gets hot, jaw and fists clench. The same alarm system as fear, pointed towards fight.

**Thoughts**
"How dare they." "This is not fair." "They did that on purpose." Blame, demands and snap judgements.

**Urges**
To shout, hit out, slam, argue, or go cold and withdraw.

## When anger becomes a problem

- [ ] It comes up very often, or very fast
- [ ] It is much bigger than the situation
- [ ] It lasts a long time
- [ ] It leads to shouting, threats or violence
- [ ] It damages relationships or work
- [ ] I regret what I said or did
- [ ] I bottle it up until I explode
- [ ] I turn it on myself

## What is often underneath

Anger often covers another feeling. Underneath there may be hurt, fear, shame, tiredness or feeling powerless. Anger can feel safer than those.

## What helps

1. Learning your triggers and early warning signs.
2. Stepping back before the point of no return.
3. Cooling the body down.
4. Checking how you are reading the situation.
5. Saying what you need, firmly and without attack.

**The aim**
To notice anger sooner, understand what it is about, and stay in control of what you do. The aim is not to get rid of it.

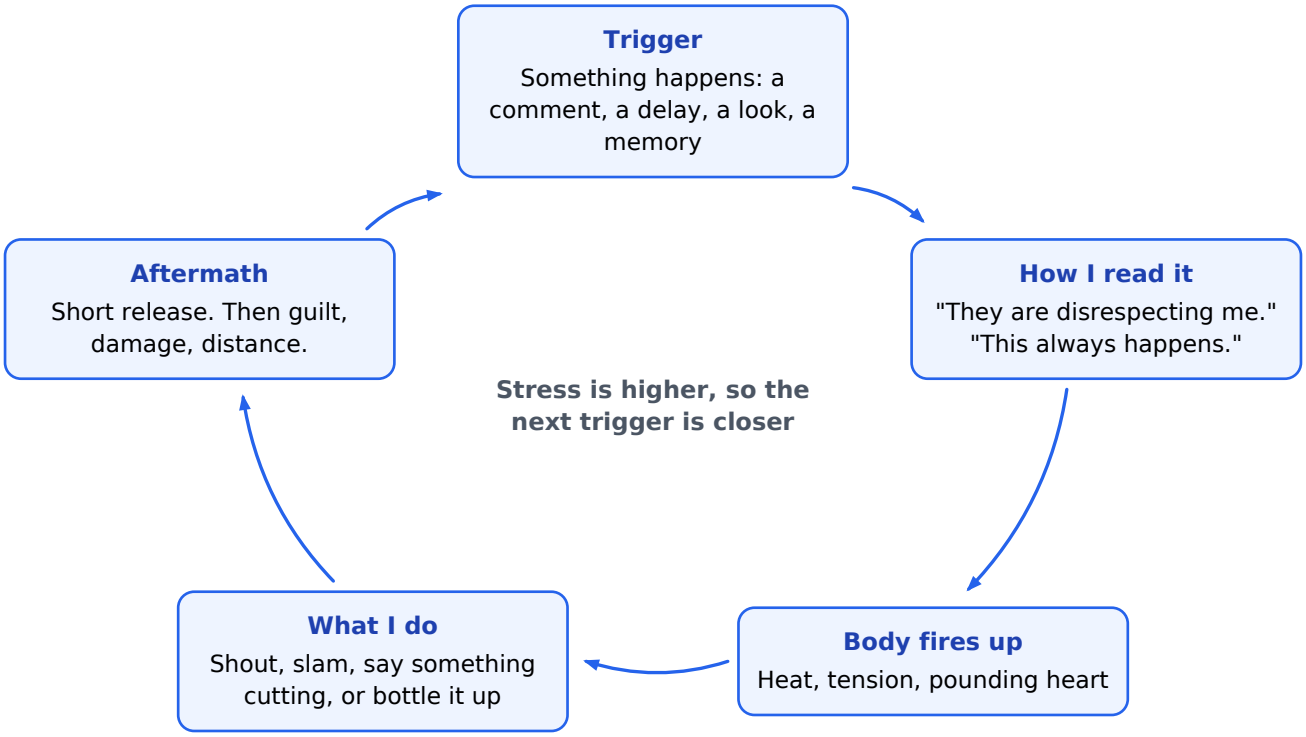
**My notes and questions**

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# The anger cycle

How anger builds from trigger to outburst, and where you can interrupt it.




## Three things that speed it up

- **Being run down.** Tiredness, hunger, pain, stress and alcohol all lower the threshold.
- **How you read it.** Your reading of the trigger decides how angry you get. "He is an idiot" and "He did not see me" lead to different reactions.
- **Rehearsing.** Going over the wrong again and again keeps the body fired up for hours.

## Where you can interrupt it

1. **Before:** look after the basics, and know your triggers.
2. **At the first signs:** notice the heat rising and name it. "I am getting angry."
3. **At how you read it:** ask what else might be going on.
4. **At the peak:** take a time out. Nothing useful is said above a 7 out of 10.
5. **Afterwards:** repair, and work out what you would do differently.

> **The gap**
> There is a gap between the trigger and what you do, even if it is only a second. The work is to make that gap longer.

**My notes and questions**

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# My anger thermometer

What each level of anger looks like for you, and what helps at that level.

Name _____ Date _____

For each level, write what you notice in your body, what you tend to think and do, and what helps at that point. The earlier you catch it, the easier it is to turn around.

**9 to 10 Rage**

What it is like, and what I need to do

**7 to 8 Furious**

What it is like, and what helps

**5 to 6 Angry**

What it is like, and what helps

**3 to 4 Irritated**

What it is like, and what helps

**1 to 2 Calm**

What I am like when I am steady

**The level at which I need to step away**

**How I will know I have reached it**

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# My anger warning signs

The first signs that you are getting angry.

Name _____ Date _____

### Situations that set me off

People, places, topics, times of day

### Things that shorten my fuse

- [ ] Tired
- [ ] Hungry
- [ ] Stressed
- [ ] In pain
- [ ] Drinking
- [ ] Rushed

## The first signs

### In my body

- [ ] Heat
- [ ] Tight jaw
- [ ] Fists
- [ ] Shoulders
- [ ] Breathing
- [ ] Shaking

### In my thoughts

What do I start telling myself?

### In what I do

- [ ] Loud voice
- [ ] Pacing
- [ ] Going quiet
- [ ] Sarcasm
- [ ] Glaring
- [ ] Swearing

**What other people notice before I do**

**My "point of no return". What does it feel like just before?**

**What I will do the moment I notice the first signs**

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# Anger diary

A record of when you got angry, what you did and what happened next.

Name _____ Date _____

| Date and time | What happened | Anger (0 to 10) | What I told myself | What I did | What happened next |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |
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**Patterns I notice (who, where, when, what state I was in)**

**A time this week I handled it well. What did I do?**

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# Time out plan

Stepping away before things are said or done that cannot be taken back.

Name _____ Date _____

A time out is not storming off, and it is not avoiding the issue. It is a planned pause to let your body calm down so the conversation can go better. It works best when the people close to you know about it in advance.

## The steps

1. **Notice.** I am at my step-away level.
2. **Say it.** Use the agreed words, calmly. No parting shot.
3. **Leave.** Go somewhere else for the agreed time. At least 20 minutes: the body needs that long to settle.
4. **Cool down.** Walk, breathe, stretch, splash cold water. Do not rehearse the argument. Do not drink or drive.
5. **Come back.** Return when I said I would. If I am not ready, say so and name a new time.
6. **Talk, or agree when to talk.**

**My step-away level (0 to 10) and how I know I am there**

**The words I will use. For example: "I am getting too angry to talk well. I am taking 30 minutes and I will come back."**

**Where I will go**

**What I will do to cool down**

**How long, and how I will come back**

## Agreed with the people I live with

**What they will do when I call a time out**

☐ Let me go ☐ Not follow me ☐ Not have the last word

**When we will come back to what the row was about**

*If there is any risk of violence, safety comes first. Talk to me, your GP or a support service.*

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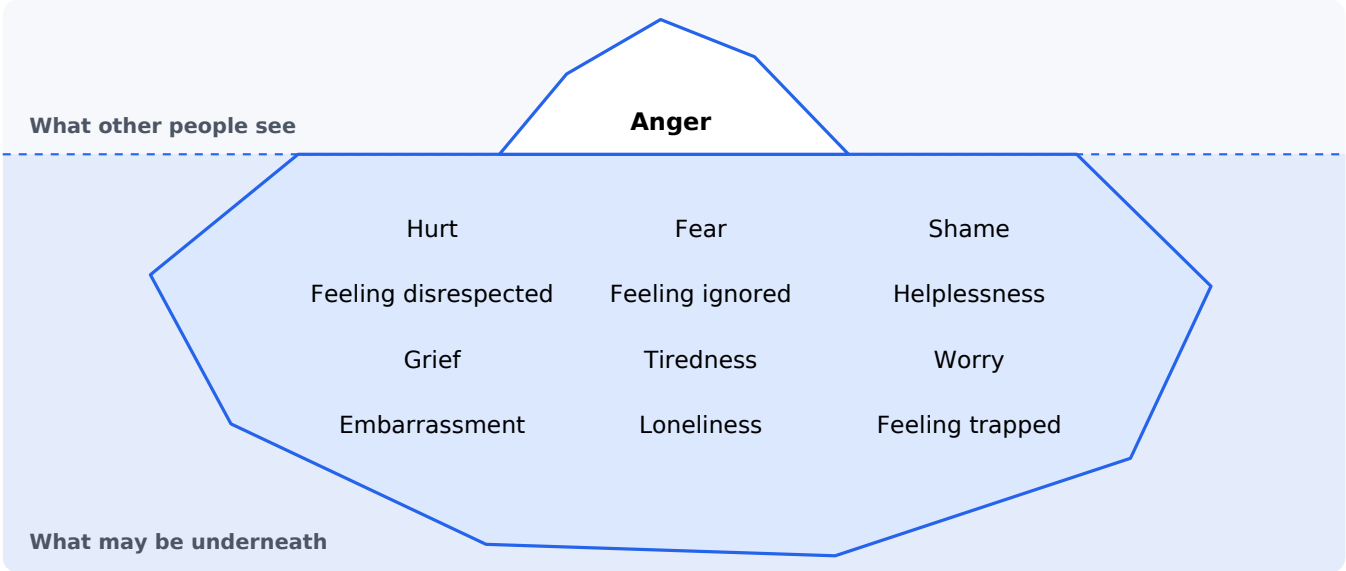
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# The anger iceberg

Look at the feelings that are underneath your anger.

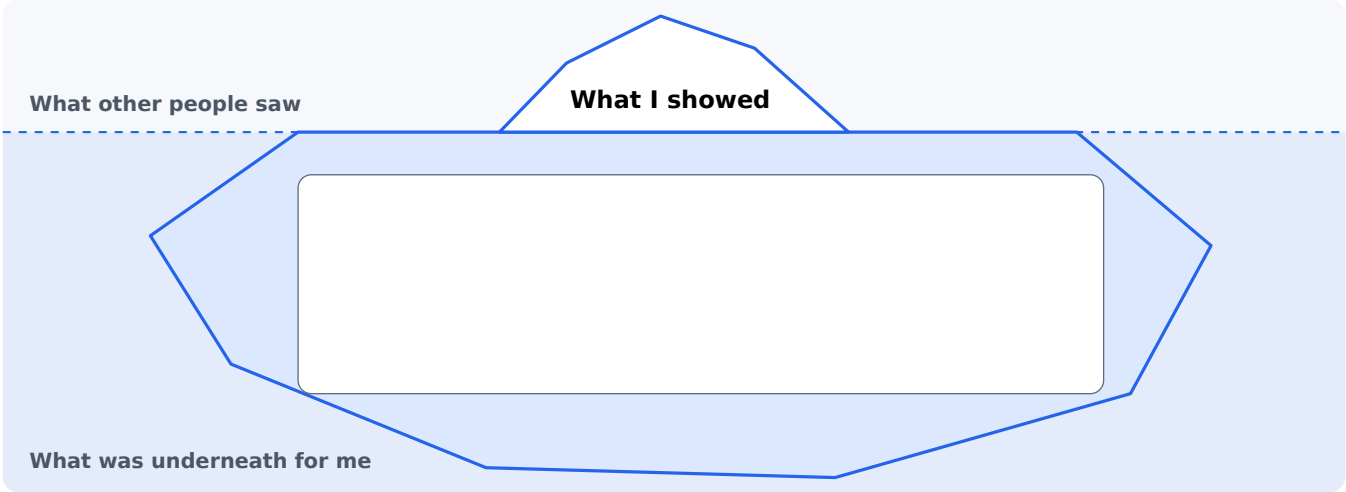
Name _____ Date _____

Anger is often a secondary emotion. It rises fast to cover something more vulnerable. Other people see the anger. They do not see what is driving it.




## My iceberg

**A recent time I was angry**




**If I had been able to say what was underneath, what would I have said?**

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# Hot thoughts and cool thoughts

Spot the thoughts that make anger worse and write calmer versions.

Name _____ Date _____

The same event can leave you mildly annoyed or raging, depending on how you read it.

**Mind reading**
"She did that on purpose to wind me up."

**Should and must**
"People should not behave like that. He must apologise."

**Labelling**
"What an idiot." "They are useless."

**Always and never**
"You never listen. This always happens."

**Taking it personally**
"They are disrespecting me."

**"I cannot stand it"**
"This is unbearable. I will not put up with it."

| Hot thought | Cool thought |
|---|---|
| "He cut me up on purpose." | "He probably did not see me. It is not about me." |
| "She never helps." | "She did not help today. I can ask clearly for what I need." |
| "I cannot stand this queue." | "It is annoying, and I can cope with ten minutes." |

| Situation | My hot thought | Anger (0 to 10) | A cooler thought | Anger now |
|---|---|---|---|---|
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# Assertive, not aggressive

How to say what the problem is and what you want, with respect for both people.

Anger usually has a fair point behind it: something is not OK for me. What matters is how you say it.

**Aggressive**
Attacks, blames, threatens or humiliates. Gets heard as an attack, so the other person defends or fights back. The message is lost.

**Passive**
Says nothing, gives in, seethes. The problem stays, resentment builds, and it tends to come out later or sideways.

**Assertive**
Says clearly what the problem is and what you want, with respect for both people. The best chance of being heard.

## The assertive message

1. **Describe** what happened, without judgement. "When the plans changed at the last minute..."
2. **Say how it affected you.** "...I felt frustrated, because I had arranged my day around it."
3. **Ask for what you want.** "Next time, could you let me know the day before?"

## How it sounds and looks

**Aggressive**

- "You always..." "You never..."
- Raised voice, pointing, standing over
- Sarcasm and name-calling
- Aiming to win

**Assertive**

- "I feel..." "I would like..."
- Steady voice, relaxed posture, eye contact
- Sticking to this one issue
- Aiming to sort it out

## Before you speak

- Am I below a 5 out of 10? If not, wait.
- What exactly do I want to happen?
- Is this the right time and place?

**Something I need to say. My three sentences: what happened, how it affected me, what I would like.**

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# Cooling down: a menu

Ways to calm your body before you decide what to do.

When anger is high, it is hard to think clearly. Calm your body first and think afterwards. Tick the ones worth trying.

## In the first minute

- [ ] Stop talking
- [ ] Breathe out slowly, five times
- [ ] Drop my shoulders, open my hands
- [ ] Count backwards from 20
- [ ] Step back, or sit down
- [ ] Say to myself: "Not now. Later."

## In the next half hour

- [ ] Leave the room or go outside
- [ ] Walk fast, run or cycle
- [ ] Splash cold water on my face
- [ ] Have a glass of water
- [ ] Listen to music
- [ ] Do something with my hands
- [ ] Ring someone who calms me down
- [ ] Write it all down, then put it away

## Things that feel good and make it worse

- [ ] Going over and over what they did
- [ ] Punching pillows or "letting it out"
- [ ] Drinking
- [ ] Driving while angry
- [ ] Firing off a message or email
- [ ] Getting others on my side

**About venting**

Research suggests that hitting things or ranting keeps the body fired up and makes anger more likely next time. Burning off energy by walking or running works. Rehearsing the grievance does not.

**My top five for cooling down**

**Where I will keep this list so I see it when I need it**

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# Repairing after an outburst

Steps for putting things right once you have calmed down.

Name _____ Date _____

Everyone loses it sometimes. Putting it right afterwards protects the relationship. Use this once you have calmed down.

**What happened, in a few plain sentences**

**What was going on for me**

Trigger, state I was in, what was underneath

**How it may have been for the other person**

**What I am responsible for (my words and actions, not theirs)**

## A good apology

- [ ] Says exactly what I did
- [ ] Shows I understand the effect
- [ ] Has no "but"
- [ ] Says what I will do differently
- [ ] Does not ask them to be over it straight away

**What I want to say**

**What still needs to be talked about, calmly, and when**

**What I will do differently next time I feel that anger rising**

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# Anger and the rules in my head

Anger often means a rule of yours has been broken.

Name _____ Date _____

We all carry rules about how people should behave and how the world should work. When a rule is broken, anger follows. Some rules are fair. Some are so rigid that they are broken many times a day.

| Rigid rule | Flexible preference |
|---|---|
| "People should always be on time." | "I prefer people to be on time. Sometimes they will not be." |
| "Nobody should speak to me like that." | "I do not like being spoken to like that, and I can say so." |
| "Things should go the way I planned." | "I like things to go to plan. Often they do not, and I can adapt." |

**A situation that keeps making me angry**

**The rule of mine that is being broken ("They should...", "It is not right that...")**

**Where did I get this rule?**

**What happens to me when I hold it rigidly?**

**My rule, rewritten as a preference**

**How might I feel and act differently if I held it that way?**

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# What my anger does for me, and what it costs

List what your anger gets you and what it costs.

Name _____ Date _____

Anger would not keep happening if it did nothing for you. It can get results, give a sense of power, or keep people at a distance. It also has a price. Being honest about both sides helps you decide what you want to change.

| | Benefits | Costs |
|---|---|---|
| Short term | **What my anger gets me in the moment** | **What it costs me in the moment** |
| Long term | **What it gets me over time** | **What it costs me over time** |

**Who else is affected, and how?**

**What I want to keep (for example: standing up for myself)**

**What I want to change, and why it matters to me**

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# What emotions are for

What each emotion tells you and what it gets you ready to do.

Emotions are fast signals that tell you something matters and get your body ready to respond. Having them is not a weakness or a fault.

| Emotion | What it is telling me | What it pushes me to do |
|---|---|---|
| **Fear** | Something may be dangerous | Escape, avoid, freeze, get ready |
| **Anger** | A boundary has been crossed, or something is unfair | Stand up, push back, protect |
| **Sadness** | I have lost something that matters | Slow down, withdraw, seek comfort |
| **Guilt** | I have acted against my own values | Put it right, apologise |
| **Shame** | I fear being rejected or seen as less | Hide, or try to repair my standing |
| **Disgust** | Something could be harmful or contaminating | Move away, reject |
| **Joy** | This is good for me | Do more of it, share it |
| **Love** | This person or thing matters to me | Move closer, care, protect |

## Three things emotions do

1. **They inform.** A feeling points to something that needs attention.
2. **They motivate.** Each emotion comes with an urge to act.
3. **They communicate.** Faces, voices and posture tell other people how we are, faster than words.

## When emotions cause trouble

- The signal is too strong for the situation.
- The feeling fits an old situation better than the present one.
- We act on the urge without checking the facts.
- We push the feeling down, and it comes back stronger or sideways.

## Noticing a feeling without acting on it

You can take in what a feeling is telling you without doing what it urges. Ask: "What is this telling me? Does it fit the facts? What do I want to do about it?"

> **Note**
> No emotion is bad. Some are painful, but each one has a purpose.

**My notes and questions**

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# A vocabulary for feelings

Words for feelings, grouped by type and strength.

Many of us get by on a handful of words: fine, stressed, bad, upset. Finding a more exact word is not being fussy. Research suggests that people who can name feelings precisely manage them better.

| Family | Mild | Medium | Strong |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Sad** | Flat, low, disappointed, wistful | Sad, hurt, lonely, discouraged, let down | Heartbroken, grief-stricken, despairing, empty |
| **Angry** | Irritated, annoyed, impatient, put out | Angry, frustrated, resentful, indignant | Furious, enraged, bitter, seething |
| **Afraid** | Uneasy, wary, nervous, unsure | Anxious, worried, scared, apprehensive | Terrified, panicked, petrified, dread |
| **Ashamed** | Self-conscious, awkward, sheepish | Embarrassed, guilty, regretful, inadequate | Humiliated, mortified, worthless, disgraced |
| **Happy** | Content, pleased, calm, relieved | Happy, cheerful, hopeful, grateful, proud | Joyful, delighted, elated, thrilled |
| **Loving** | Warm, friendly, fond, appreciative | Affectionate, caring, close, tender | Devoted, adoring, deeply connected |
| **Surprised** | Curious, puzzled, uncertain | Surprised, confused, startled | Shocked, stunned, astonished |
| **Disgusted** | Put off, uncomfortable | Repelled, appalled, contemptuous | Revolted, sickened, loathing |
| **Worn out** | Tired, bored, restless | Drained, overwhelmed, stuck | Exhausted, burnt out, numb |

## Using this list

- When you notice a feeling, start with the family, then look along the row for the word that fits best.
- Try the sentence: "If I had to be more exact, the word closer to it would be..."
- Feelings often come in blends. You can be relieved and sad, or angry and hurt, at once.
- Check the word against your body. Does it match what you feel in your chest, stomach or throat?

**Words that fit how I have been feeling lately**

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# Feelings check-in

A few times a day, stop and write down what you are feeling.

Name _____ Date _____

Two or three times a day, stop for a moment. What is happening? What do I notice in my body? What is the feeling, and how strong is it?

| Day and time | What was happening | What I noticed in my body | The feeling (be exact) | How strong (0 to 10) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
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**What am I noticing about my feelings this week?**

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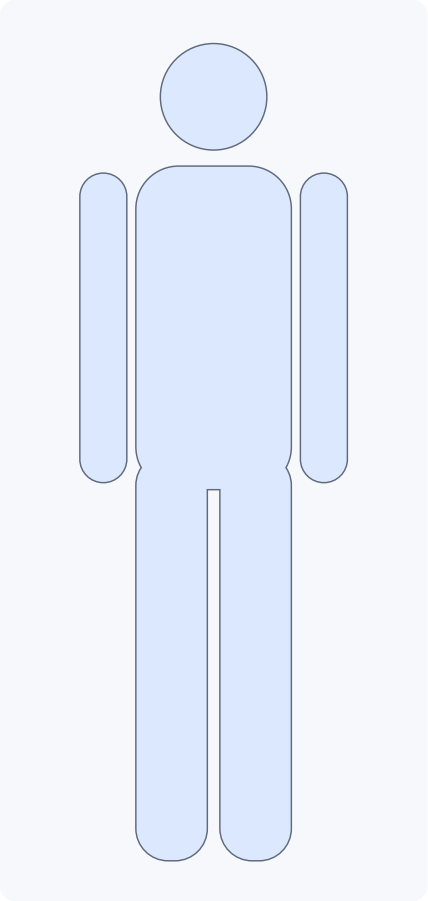
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# Where I feel it in my body

Mark where in your body you notice different feelings.

Name _____ Date _____

Think of a recent moment with a clear feeling. Close your eyes and bring it back. Where in your body do you notice it? Mark the figure, or describe it in the boxes. Do this for two or three different feelings.



**Feeling 1**

What is the feeling, where is it, and what is it like (tight, heavy, hot, fluttery, hollow)?

**Feeling 2**

Where is it, and what is it like?

**Feeling 3**

Where is it, and what is it like?

**What does my body tend to do first when a feeling starts?**

**How could I use these signals as an early warning?**

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# First feelings and cover feelings

Tell apart your first reaction and the feeling that covers it.

Name _____ Date _____

A **first feeling** is your immediate response to what happened. A **cover feeling** is a reaction to the first one, and often arrives so fast that it is the only one you notice.

| What happened | First feeling | Cover feeling |
|---|---|---|
| My partner forgot our plans | Hurt | Anger |
| I made a mistake in front of colleagues | Shame | Irritation with everyone else |
| I felt sad about a loss | Sadness | Guilt for "wallowing" |
| I got frightened by a near miss | Fear | Rage at the other driver |

Cover feelings protect us from something more vulnerable. The cost is that the first feeling, and the need that goes with it, never gets attended to.

## Finding the first feeling

| Situation | What I felt on top | What might have been underneath | What that feeling needed |
|---|---|---|---|
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**Which first feelings do I find hardest to stay with?**

**Which cover feelings do I reach for most?**

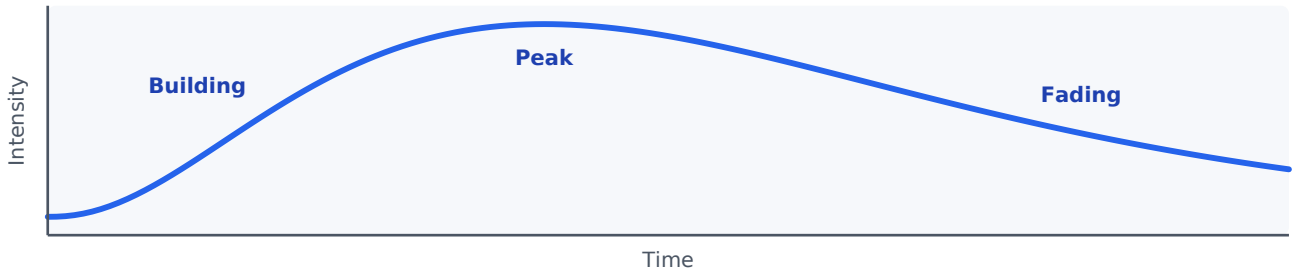
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# The emotion wave

How a feeling rises, peaks and passes, and what to do while it does.

An emotion is like a wave. It builds, it reaches a peak, and it falls away. Left alone, the body's response to a feeling lasts a surprisingly short time, often a matter of minutes.




## What keeps the wave up

- **Feeding it.** Going over what happened, building the case, imagining what comes next.
- **Fighting it.** Trying to push the feeling away, which adds tension and a second feeling on top (anxious about being anxious, ashamed of being sad).
- **Acting on it at the peak.** The thing done in the heat of the moment often creates the next wave.

## Riding it

1. **Name it.** "This is anger." "This is sadness."
2. **Find it in your body.** Where is it? What does it feel like?
3. **Breathe and make room.** You do not have to like it. Let it be there.
4. **Do not act yet.** Notice the urge. You do not have to obey it.
5. **Watch it change.** It may rise again before it falls. Stay with it.
6. **Afterwards, decide.** Is there something that needs doing, now that I can think?

## Reminders

- "This feeling is not all of me."
- "I have felt this before and it passed."
- "I do not need to fix this right now."

**A recent wave. How long did it actually last? What made it bigger or smaller?**

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# STOP

Four steps for the moment before you do something you will regret.

When emotions are running high, the urge to act can be overwhelming. STOP puts a gap between the feeling and what you do next.

| | |
|---|---|
| **S: Stop** | Freeze. Do not move, speak or type. Your emotions want you to act. Do not, yet. |
| **T: Take a step back** | Step away, in your head or with your feet. Take a slow breath. Give yourself a moment. |
| **O: Observe** | What is happening, inside me and around me? What am I feeling and thinking? What are the facts? |
| **P: Proceed mindfully** | Ask: what do I want from this situation? What will make it better, and what will make it worse? Then act on that. |

## When to use it

- ☐ About to send an angry message
- ☐ In the middle of an argument
- ☐ Urge to walk out, quit or end something
- ☐ Urge to drink, use or hurt myself
- ☐ About to say something I cannot take back
- ☐ Feeling flooded and unable to think

**A situation where I could have used STOP**

**What might have gone differently**

*Cut along the dashed lines. Keep a card in your wallet or phone case.*

**STOP**

**S**top.
**T**ake a step back.
**O**bserve.
**P**roceed mindfully.

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**What I want to remember**

My goal when emotions are high

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*If you are at risk of hurting yourself, call 112 or 999, or Samaritans on freephone 116 123.*

*STOP is a skill from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), developed by Marsha Linehan.*

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# TIPP: changing your body chemistry fast

Four body-based skills for when emotion is too high to think.

At the height of emotion, reasoning does not work. These four skills act on the body directly and can bring arousal down within minutes, far enough for you to think again.

| | |
|---|---|
| **T: Temperature** | Cold water on your face. Hold your breath and put your face in a bowl of cold water, or hold a cold pack over your eyes and cheeks, for 20 to 30 seconds. This sets off a reflex that slows the heart. |
| **I: Intense exercise** | Burn off the energy. Run, do star jumps, climb the stairs fast, for a few minutes, as hard as is right for your fitness. |
| **P: Paced breathing** | Slow your breathing right down, with the out-breath longer than the in-breath. For example, in for 4 and out for 6 or more. |
| **P: Paired muscle relaxation** | As you breathe in, tense a group of muscles. As you breathe out, say "relax" in your mind and let the tension go. |

**Medical caution**

Cold water can lower heart rate quickly. Check with your GP before using the temperature skill if you have a heart condition, take beta blockers, have an eating disorder or have any other medical concern. Choose exercise that suits your health.

## Tips

- These work fast and wear off fast. Use the calmer window to take the next sensible step.
- Practise when you are not in crisis, so you know what to do.
- Keep what you need to hand: a cold pack in the freezer, runners by the door.

**The one I am most likely to use, and where I will keep what I need**

**When I tried it: distress before and after (0 to 10), and what I noticed**

*TIPP is a skill from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), developed by Marsha Linehan.*

*If you are at risk of hurting yourself, call 112 or 999, or Samaritans on freephone 116 123.*

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# Soothing with the five senses

Things that comfort you through sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and movement.

Name _____ Date _____

Self-soothing is doing something kind for your body through its senses. It will not solve the problem. It helps you get through a hard moment without making things worse. Tick what appeals under each sense and add anything else. Movement is on the list too, because it settles the body in the same way.

**Sight**

☐ A view ☐ Photos ☐ Candlelight ☐ The sky

**Sound**

☐ Music ☐ Rain ☐ Birdsong ☐ A familiar voice

**Smell**

☐ Fresh air ☐ Coffee ☐ A favourite scent ☐ Clean laundry

**Taste**

☐ Tea ☐ Something warm ☐ A mint ☐ A favourite food

**Touch**

☐ A hot shower ☐ A soft blanket ☐ A pet ☐ Hand cream

**Movement**

☐ Rocking ☐ Stretching ☐ Walking ☐ Swaying to music

**A soothing kit: things I could gather in a box or bag**

**What gets in the way of soothing myself (for example, feeling I do not deserve it)? What would I say to a friend who felt that?**

*Self-soothing is one of the distress tolerance skills in Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT).*

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# Healthy distraction

Turning your attention elsewhere for a while, on purpose.

Name _____ Date _____

When a feeling is too strong to work with, and nothing can be done about the situation right now, shifting your attention gives the feeling time to pass. Use it for the short term only.

| Way of distracting | Ideas | What I will try |
|---|---|---|
| **Activities** | Walk, clean, cook, a game, a puzzle | |
| **Contributing** | Help someone, send a kind message | |
| **Comparisons** | Remember a time I coped with worse | |
| **Opposite emotions** | A funny clip, uplifting music | |
| **Pushing away** | Park the problem for an hour, on purpose | |
| **Other thoughts** | Count, do a crossword, plan a meal | |
| **Sensations** | Hold ice, a hot shower, a strong taste | |

### Distraction helps when...

- The feeling is too strong to think
- Nothing can be done right now
- I need to get through the next hour
- I come back to the issue later

### It becomes avoidance when...

- It is my only way of coping
- The problem needs solving and I never return to it
- I use it to never feel anything
- It causes problems of its own

### My top three, ready to go

*Based on the ACCEPTS skill from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), developed by Marsha Linehan.*

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# Making a hard moment more bearable

Seven ways to get through when you cannot change what is happening.

Some situations cannot be fixed straight away. These skills do not change the situation. They change your experience of it enough to get through.

### Imagery

Picture a calm, safe place in detail. Or picture yourself coping well and coming out the other side.

### Meaning

Ask what matters to you in this. What do you want to stand for in how you handle it?

### Prayer or reaching out

If you have a faith, pray. If not, open up to something bigger than the moment: nature, people you love, your own wiser self.

### Relaxation

Loosen your body. A bath, a stretch, slow breathing, a hand on your chest.

### One thing at a time

Put your whole attention on what you are doing this minute. Just this cup of tea. Just this step.

### A brief break

Give yourself a short holiday from it. Twenty minutes with a book, a walk, a nap. Then come back.

### Encouragement

Talk to yourself as a good coach would. "This is hard, and I am getting through it. I have done hard things before."

**The ones I want to try**

**What I would say to encourage myself**

**A time I got through something very hard. What helped then?**

*Adapted from the IMPROVE skill in Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), developed by Marsha Linehan.*

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# Pros and cons of acting on an urge

Do this when you are calm, so it is ready when you are not.

Name _____ Date _____

**The urge (for example: to drink, or to send the message)**

| | Pros | Cons |
|---|---|---|
| **Acting on the urge** | **Good things about acting on it** | **Bad things about acting on it** |
| **Riding it out** | **Good things about not acting on it** | **Bad things about not acting on it** |

**Looking at short term and long term, which choice fits the life I want?**

**What I will read back to myself when the urge is strong**

*Keep this somewhere you can find it fast. Pros and cons is a distress tolerance skill from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT).*

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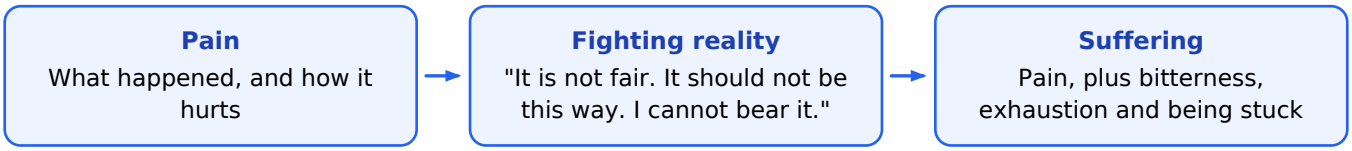


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# Radical acceptance

What it means to accept something you cannot change, and how to practise it.

Some things cannot be changed: something that has already happened, a loss, another person's choices, a fact about your health. You can spend enormous energy on "this should not be". The pain is unavoidable. The extra suffering that comes from fighting reality is not.




## What acceptance is not

- It is not approving, liking or agreeing.
- It is not saying it was OK.
- It is not giving up or doing nothing.
- It is not forgiving, unless you choose to.

It is acknowledging, fully, that this is how things are. Only from there can you decide what to do next.

## How to practise

1. **Notice the fight.** "It should not have happened." "Why me?" Bitterness and tension are clues.
2. **State the facts.** "This is what happened. This is where things stand."
3. **Remember it has causes.** Things came about through a long chain of events. Given all of them, it could not have been otherwise.
4. **Accept with your body.** Unclench your hands, soften your face, breathe out.
5. **Allow the feelings.** Sadness and grief often rise when the fighting stops. Let them.
6. **Turn again.** Acceptance is not done once. You choose it over and over, sometimes many times an hour.

**Something I am fighting that cannot be changed**

**What the fight is costing me**

**What might become possible if I stopped fighting it?**

*Radical acceptance is a skill from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), developed by Marsha Linehan.*

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# Opposite action

When a feeling does not fit the facts, do the opposite of what it tells you.

Name _____ Date _____

Every emotion comes with an urge. Acting on the urge keeps the emotion going. When the feeling does not fit the situation, or acting on it would not help, doing the opposite, fully, changes the feeling.

| Emotion | The urge | Opposite action |
|---|---|---|
| Fear | Avoid, escape | Approach. Stay. Do the thing, again and again. |
| Anger | Attack, criticise | Step back gently. Be a little kind. Try to see their side. |
| Sadness | Withdraw, stay in bed | Get active. Do things that give a sense of achievement. Be with people. |
| Shame | Hide | Share it with someone who will be kind. Head up, eye contact. |
| Guilt (not deserved) | Over-apologise, punish myself | Stop apologising. Carry on doing the thing. |

## How to do it

1. Name the emotion and the urge.
2. Check the facts. Does the feeling fit? Would acting on it help?
3. If not, pick the opposite action.
4. Do it all the way: actions, posture, face, words and thoughts.
5. Keep going until the feeling shifts.

| Situation | Emotion and urge | Did it fit the facts? | Opposite action I took | What happened |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
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*Opposite action is a skill from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), developed by Marsha Linehan.*

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# Check the facts

Check whether your feeling fits what actually happened.

Name _____ Date _____

**The emotion I want to check, and how strong it is (0 to 10)**

**What happened? Only what a camera would have recorded.**

**What am I telling myself about it? My interpretations and assumptions.**

**What other ways are there of seeing it?**

**Am I assuming a threat or a disaster? What is the realistic outcome, and could I cope?**

## Does it fit?

**How well does my emotion fit the facts?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Not at all — Completely

**Does its strength fit the facts?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Far too strong — About right

**If it fits**

What problem needs solving? What do I need to say or do?

**If it does not fit**

What opposite action could I take?

**How I feel now**

*Check the facts is a skill from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), developed by Marsha Linehan.*

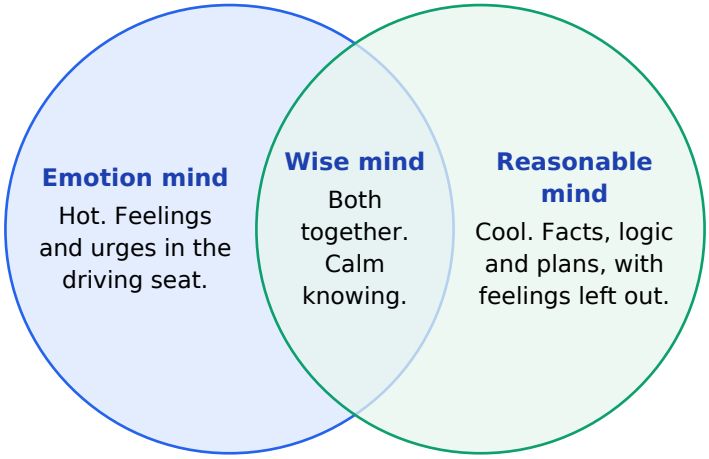
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# Wise mind

Emotion mind, reasonable mind and wise mind, and how to find the third.

We can be in three states of mind. None is bad. Trouble comes when one of the first two is in sole charge.




**In emotion mind**
I act on impulse. Facts get bent to fit the feeling. "I feel it, so it is true."

**In reasonable mind**
I am practical and detached. I may ignore what I or others feel and need.

Wise mind takes both into account. It is the part of you that knows what is true and what matters, even when it is hard. Everyone has it, but it is easy to miss.

## Ways to find it

- **Pause and breathe.** Follow your breath down to the bottom of the out-breath and rest your attention there.
- **Ask.** "What would my wise mind say about this?" Then wait and listen. Do not force an answer.
- **Check the body.** Wise mind decisions tend to come with a sense of settling, even when they are difficult.
- **Sleep on it.** If the answer changes with your mood, it is not wise mind yet.

**A decision or situation I am facing**

**Emotion mind says**

**Reasonable mind says**

**Wise mind says**

*Wise mind is a core idea in Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), developed by Marsha Linehan.*

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# Emotion diary

Tracking feelings, urges and what you did.

Name _____ Date _____

| When | What set it off | Emotion (0 to 10) | The urge | What I did | How it turned out |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |
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**Which emotions came up most?**

**When I did not act on an urge, what happened to the feeling?**

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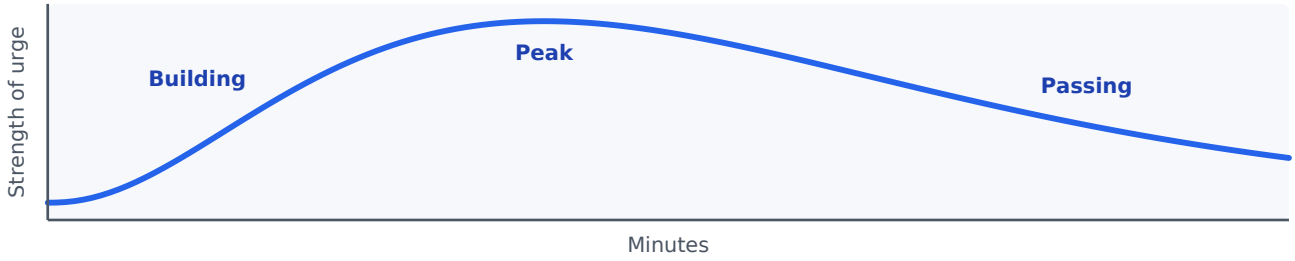


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# Urge surfing

How to wait out an urge without acting on it.

Urges feel as if they will keep building until you give in. They do not. An urge rises, peaks and falls, usually within 20 to 30 minutes, whether or not you act on it. Each time you ride one out, the next is a little weaker.




## How to surf

1. **Notice and name it.** "I am having an urge to..."
2. **Find it in your body.** Where is it strongest? Tight, restless, hollow, buzzing?
3. **Breathe and watch.** Keep your attention on the sensations. Describe them to yourself as they shift.
4. **Do not fight it and do not feed it.** No arguing, no planning how to give in. Just watching.
5. **Rate it** from 0 to 10 every few minutes.
6. **Stay until it drops.** Then turn to something that matters to you.

| When | The urge | Start (0 to 10) | Peak | After 20 minutes | Did I act on it? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
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*Urge surfing was developed by Alan Marlatt as part of relapse prevention.*

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# My distress kit

A plan for getting through the worst moments without making them worse.

Name _____ Date _____

Fill this in when you are steady. Keep it where you can reach it.

**Signs that I am heading into crisis**

**First, to bring my body down**

- ☐ Cold water
- ☐ Slow breathing
- ☐ Fast movement
- ☐ Tense and release

**Then, to take my mind off it**

Activities, people, tasks

**To soothe myself**

Sight, sound, smell, taste, touch

**People I can be with or contact**

**What I must not do, because it makes things worse**

**What I want to remember (why it is worth getting through this)**

**If none of this is working, I will...**

**If you need help right now (Ireland)**

| | |
|---|---|
| **In an emergency** | Call **112** or **999**, or go to your nearest emergency department. |
| **Samaritans** | Freephone **116 123**, any time, day or night. Email jo@samaritans.ie |
| **Text About It** | Free text **HELLO** to **50808**, any time, for an anonymous text conversation. |
| **Pieta** | Freephone **1800 247 247**, any time, or text **HELP** to **51444**. For thoughts of suicide or self-harm. |
| **Your GP** | Contact your GP or the out-of-hours GP service in your area. |

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# Looking after your body to steady your mind

Check the physical basics that make emotions harder to manage.

Name _____ Date _____

When you are ill, tired, hungry or hungover, small things hit harder. Looking after the basics does not remove difficult emotions. It makes you less vulnerable to them.

| Area | How I am doing now | One small change |
|---|---|---|
| **Physical health: treating illness and pain, taking medication as prescribed** | | |
| **Eating: regular, balanced meals** | | |
| **Mood-altering substances: alcohol, drugs, too much caffeine** | | |
| **Sleep: enough, at regular times** | | |
| **Movement: some activity most days** | | |

| | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Ate regularly** | | | | | | | |
| **Slept enough** | | | | | | | |
| **Moved my body** | | | | | | | |
| **Kept alcohol low or none** | | | | | | | |
| **Looked after my health** | | | | | | | |

**What do I notice about my mood on the days I looked after the basics?**

*Based on the PLEASE skills from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), developed by Marsha Linehan.*

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# Building in good experiences

Plan enjoyable and meaningful things for this week and for the longer term.

Name _____ Date _____

Good feelings do not just happen. They come from doing things that are enjoyable or meaningful, and from paying enough attention to notice them.

## This week

| Day | One small good thing | Did I do it? | Was I really there for it? |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | | |
| **Tue** | | | |
| **Wed** | | | |
| **Thu** | | | |
| **Fri** | | | |
| **Sat** | | | |
| **Sun** | | | |

Being there means giving it your attention. If your mind goes to worries, or to when it will end, notice that and come back.

## Over time

**What matters to me that I would like more of in my life**

**A goal that would move me towards it**

**The first small step, and when I will take it**

**Notice the "yes, but"**

When something good happens, watch for the thoughts that take it away: "It will not last." "I do not deserve it." You can notice those thoughts and still enjoy the moment.

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# Myths about emotions

Things many of us were taught about feelings that are not true.

Name _____ Date _____

We pick up rules about feelings from family, school and culture. Many of them make emotions harder to deal with. Tick the ones you have believed, and write a fairer statement beside each.

| Myth | A fairer way of seeing it |
|---|---|
| **There is a right way to feel in every situation.** | |
| **Letting others know I feel bad is weakness.** | |
| **Negative feelings are bad and should be got rid of.** | |
| **If I start crying I will never stop.** | |
| **Being emotional means being out of control.** | |
| **Other people know better than I do how I feel.** | |
| **If I feel it strongly, it must be true.** | |
| **I should be able to just get over it.** | |

**Where did I learn these?**

**The one I most want to let go of**

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# Dropping anchor

Three steps for steadying yourself when emotions are overwhelming.

When a storm hits, a boat drops anchor. The anchor does not make the storm go away. It holds the boat steady until it passes. This exercise does the same for you. Run through the three steps slowly, three or four times.

| | |
|---|---|
| **A: Acknowledge** | Silently name what is here. "I notice anxiety." "Here are thoughts that I cannot cope." "There is a knot in my stomach." No fighting it, no judging it. |
| **C: Come back into your body** | Push your feet into the floor. Straighten your back. Press your fingertips together. Stretch your arms. Take a slow breath. You are taking back control of your body. |
| **E: Engage with the world** | Look around. Name five things you can see, three you can hear. Notice where you are and what you are doing. Then give your attention to the task or the person in front of you. |

## Things to remember

- You are not trying to distract yourself or make the feeling go. The feeling can stay. You are widening your attention so it is not the only thing there.
- It takes a minute or two. Repeat the steps until you feel steadier.
- Practise in mild stress first, so it is ready for the big storms.

| When | What was going on | How caught up before (0 to 10) | After (0 to 10) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
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| | | | |
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*Dropping anchor and the ACE steps were developed by Russ Harris.*

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# Making room for feelings

Opening up around a difficult feeling instead of fighting it.

This is the opposite of what we usually do with painful feelings. Go gently, and start with something moderate, not the hardest thing in your life.

1. **Bring it up.** Think of a situation that brings on a difficult feeling. Let the feeling come.
2. **Observe.** Scan your body. Where do you feel it most? Look at it with curiosity, as if you had never met it before. Where are its edges? Is it heavy or light, moving or still, warm or cool?
3. **Breathe.** Breathe slowly into and around the sensation. Imagine your breath flowing to that place.
4. **Expand.** Imagine opening up space around it. You are not trying to shrink the feeling. You are getting bigger, so there is more room for it.
5. **Allow.** Let it be there. You do not have to like it or want it. Say to yourself: "I do not like this, and I can make room for it." If it changes, fine. If it does not, fine.
6. **Widen.** Keep the feeling in view, and also notice your breathing, your whole body, the room. The feeling is one part of your experience, not all of it.

## Reflection

**Where was it in my body, and what was it like?**

**What happened when I stopped fighting it?**

**What might I do, with this feeling along for the ride, that I have been putting off?**

**Go carefully**

If the feeling becomes overwhelming, open your eyes, press your feet into the floor and look around the room. Come back to it another time, or with me in a session.

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# Understanding low self-esteem

How a harsh view of yourself is formed, and how it keeps itself going.

Self-esteem is the overall opinion you have of yourself. Low self-esteem means that opinion is harsh and negative: "I am not good enough", "I am unlikeable", "I am a failure". It feels like a fact. It is actually a conclusion, drawn a long time ago, from experiences that were often not your doing.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Early experiences** | Criticism, neglect, bullying, being compared, being the odd one out, too little praise or warmth |
| ↓ | |
| **The bottom line** | The verdict on myself. "I am not good enough." |
| ↓ | |
| **Rules for living** | Ways to get by in spite of it. "I must never fail." "I must keep everyone happy." |
| ↓ | |
| **Trigger** | A situation where a rule is broken or might be |
| ↓ | |
| **Anxious predictions and self-criticism** | "I will mess this up." "Typical. I am useless." |
| ↓ | |
| **The bottom line seems confirmed** | Low mood, avoidance, and more evidence for the verdict |

## How it keeps going

- **Biased attention.** You notice everything that fits the verdict and overlook what does not.
- **Biased interpretation.** You put successes down to luck and treat failures as proof.
- **Avoidance and safety behaviours.** If you never take the risk, you never find out you could have managed.
- **Self-criticism.** Constant criticism lowers your mood and confidence, as it would for anyone.

## How it changes

1. Catching and questioning anxious predictions, then testing them.
2. Answering self-criticism with something fairer.
3. Noticing and recording good qualities and things that go right.
4. Loosening the rules.
5. Building a new bottom line, based on all the evidence.

> **Note**
> The bottom line is an opinion. It was formed by a child or young person with limited information, and it can be revised.

*Based on the cognitive model of low self-esteem developed by Melanie Fennell.*

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# My self-esteem map

Where my view of myself came from, and what keeps it in place.

Name _____ Date _____

**Experiences that shaped how I see myself**

What happened, and what was missing?

↓

**My bottom line**

"I am..."

↓

**My rules for living**

"I must...", "If I..., then..."

↓

**Situations that set it off**

When is the bottom line triggered?

↓

**What I do and say to myself then**

Predictions, self-criticism, avoiding

**What does living by this bottom line cost me?**

**If I saw a child being treated the way I treat myself, what would I think?**

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# Getting to know my inner critic

A close look at your self-critical voice: what it says, when and how.

Name _____ Date _____

Most of us have a critical voice. For some it is constant and vicious. The first step is to notice it as a voice, and to stop treating what it says as fact.

**What does it say? Write its typical lines, word for word.**

**How does it say it?**

- ☐ Cold
- ☐ Angry
- ☐ Contemptuous
- ☐ Disappointed
- ☐ Mocking
- ☐ Loud

**When does it turn up?**

Situations, moods, times of day

**Whose voice does it remind me of?**

**How do I feel when it speaks?**

In my body and mood

**What do I think it is trying to do for me?**

- ☐ Keep me safe from failure
- ☐ Protect me from rejection
- ☐ Make me try harder
- ☐ Keep me in line

**Does it work? What does it cost?**

**If I spoke to a friend the way it speaks to me, what would happen to that friendship?**

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# Critic or coach?

Compare what your inner critic says with what a good coach would say.

Name _____ Date _____

Many people fear that without self-criticism they would become lazy or selfish. Think about who gets the best out of a child learning something hard: the teacher who shouts and shames, or the one who believes in them and shows them how?

### The critic

- Attacks who I am
- Looks backwards at the mistake
- Harsh, contemptuous tone
- Says "you always" and "you never"
- Leaves me anxious, ashamed and stuck

### The coach

- Looks at what I did
- Looks forwards to what would help
- Warm, firm tone
- Says "this time" and "next time"
- Leaves me able to try again

| What my critic says | What a good coach would say |
|---|---|
| *"You idiot. You have ruined it, as usual."* | *"That did not go the way you wanted. It is one mistake. What would help put it right?"* |
| | |
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**What does my coach sound like? Whose voice could I borrow?**

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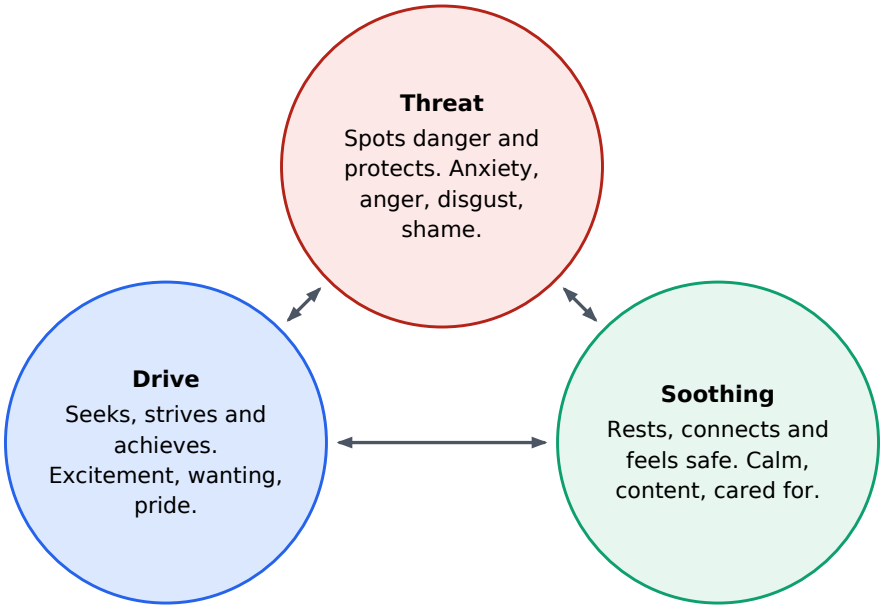


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# The three emotion systems

The threat, drive and soothing systems, and what happens when they are out of balance.

Our brains have three main systems for managing emotions. Each evolved for a reason, and each has its own feelings and body chemistry.




## When the systems are out of balance

- The **threat** system is the fastest and loudest. It is built to be over-cautious: better safe than sorry.
- Many of us use **drive** to keep threat quiet. We achieve, please and keep busy so as not to feel like a failure. It works until we stop or fall short.
- The **soothing** system is what settles threat. It grows through experiences of warmth, safety and care. If those were in short supply early on, it may be under-developed. It can be built at any age.

## Self-criticism and the threat system

Your brain reacts to an attack from inside much as it does to one from outside. Self-criticism keeps the threat system switched on. Kindness towards yourself activates soothing.

## Building the soothing system

- Slow, steady breathing
- Kind, warm self-talk
- Time with people and animals you feel safe with
- Compassionate imagery
- Rest that is really rest

**Not your fault**

You did not choose your brain, your genes or your early life. You are still responsible for what you do now, and you can take that on without shaming yourself.

*The three systems model comes from Compassion Focused Therapy, developed by Paul Gilbert.*

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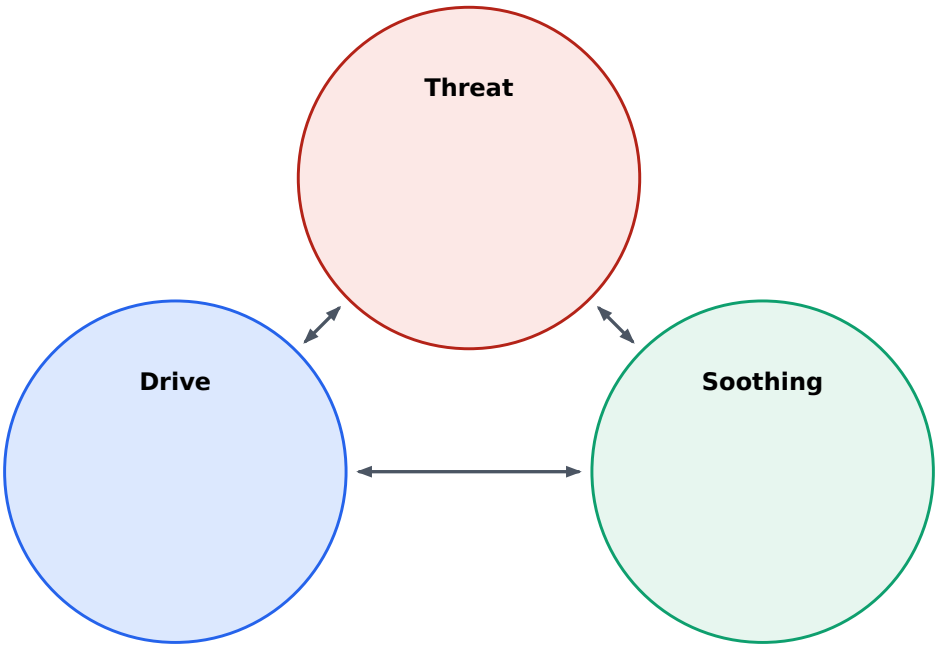
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# My three systems

How big is each circle in your life at the moment?

Name _____ Date _____

For each system, note what switches it on for you and what you do when you are in it.




| System | What sets it off for me | How much of my week I spend here |
|---|---|---|
| **Threat** | | |
| **Drive** | | |
| **Soothing** | | |

**What do I notice about the balance?**

**Ways I could give the soothing system more time: people, places, activities, and how I talk to myself**

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# What is self-compassion?

Treating yourself the way you would treat someone you care about.

Compassion is noticing suffering and wanting to help. Self-compassion is turning that same attitude towards yourself when you are struggling, have failed, or do not like something about yourself.

## Three parts

**Kindness, not judgement**
Being warm and understanding with yourself when things go wrong, instead of attacking.

**Common humanity, not isolation**
Remembering that struggling, failing and feeling inadequate are part of being human. You are not the only one.

**Mindful awareness, not over-identifying**
Seeing your pain clearly, without ignoring it and without being swept away by it.

## What it is not

| The worry | What the evidence suggests |
|---|---|
| "It is self-pity." | Self-pity says "poor me, nobody suffers like I do". Self-compassion says "this is hard, and everyone has hard times". |
| "It is letting myself off the hook." | People who are kinder to themselves are more able to admit mistakes and put them right, because they can bear to look. |
| "I will lose my drive." | Self-compassionate people are just as motivated. They are less afraid of failing, so they try more and bounce back faster. |
| "It is selfish." | It leaves you with more to give to other people. |
| "It is weak." | Facing your own pain with kindness takes courage. |

## Starting small

- Notice when you are having a hard time, and say so: "This is difficult."
- Ask: "What would I say to a friend in this exact position?"
- Put a hand on your chest and slow your breathing.
- Ask: "What do I need right now?"

**If it feels strange or upsetting**
That is common, especially if kindness was scarce when you were growing up. Go gently. It gets easier with practice.

*The three elements of self-compassion were described by Kristin Neff.*

**My notes and questions**

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# What gets in the way of being kind to myself

Fears about self-compassion are common, and worth looking at.

Name _____ Date _____

For many people, being kind to themselves feels wrong, dangerous or just impossible. Tick anything you recognise.

- [ ] If I am kind to myself, I will become lazy or lower my standards
- [ ] I do not deserve kindness
- [ ] If I stop criticising myself, I will make more mistakes
- [ ] Kindness feels unfamiliar and uncomfortable
- [ ] When I am kind to myself, I feel sad or tearful
- [ ] It feels self-indulgent or selfish
- [ ] If I let my guard down, something bad will happen
- [ ] I am afraid I will become dependent on it
- [ ] Other people matter more than I do
- [ ] I do not know how

**The block that is strongest for me**

**Where might it have come from? What did I learn about kindness growing up?**

| What I fear would happen if I were kinder to myself | What might actually happen |
| --- | --- |
| | |

**One small act of kindness to myself I am willing to try this week, as an experiment**

*Feeling sad when you are kind to yourself is a recognised reaction. It is common in people who did not get much kindness earlier in life.*

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# A compassionate letter to myself

Writing to yourself as a wise and caring friend would.

Think of something you are struggling with or criticising yourself for. Now imagine someone who cares about you deeply and sees you clearly: your strengths, your flaws and everything you have been through. Write to yourself from their point of view.

## What to include

1. **Acknowledge the difficulty.** "I can see how hard this has been."
2. **Make sense of it.** How do your history and circumstances explain why you feel and react this way?
3. **Remember you are not alone.** Others struggle with this too.
4. **Be warm.** Use the tone you would use with someone you love.
5. **Offer encouragement, not orders.** What would help? What do you need?

Write without stopping to edit. If the critic interrupts, notice it and carry on.

**Dear me,**

## Afterwards

- Read it back slowly, out loud if you can, in a kind tone.
- Notice how it feels to receive it.
- Keep it, and read it again on a hard day.

*Compassionate letter writing is used in Compassion Focused Therapy, developed by Paul Gilbert.*

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# Soothing rhythm breathing

A slower, deeper breathing rhythm that settles the body.

This is the foundation for the other compassion practices. The aim is to slow down enough for your body to feel steadier and safer. You do not need to relax completely.

1. Sit upright and comfortable, feet on the floor, shoulders back and down. Chest open.
2. Let your face soften. Try a slight, friendly half-smile.
3. Breathe a little more slowly and deeply than usual. Find a rhythm that feels soothing to you: perhaps in for 4 or 5, out for 4 or 5.
4. Let the breath be smooth and even. Feel it move down into your belly.
5. Notice your body slowing down. Feel the weight of your body held by the chair.
6. When your mind wanders, which it will, gently bring it back. No telling off.
7. If you like, on each out-breath say to yourself, in a warm inner voice, "slowing down" or "mind slowing, body slowing".
8. Carry on for two to five minutes.

## Tips

- Short and often works best. Try a minute, several times a day.
- Practise when things are fine, so it is there when they are not.
- If focusing on the breath makes you anxious, focus on your feet on the floor or an object in your hand instead.

| Day | When I practised | What I noticed |
|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | |
| **Tue** | | |
| **Wed** | | |
| **Thu** | | |
| **Fri** | | |
| **Sat** | | |
| **Sun** | | |

*From Compassion Focused Therapy, developed by Paul Gilbert.*

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# Imagining my compassionate self

An imagery exercise for practising being wise, strong and kind towards yourself.

Actors step into a character by imagining how that person thinks, stands and speaks. You can do the same with your own compassionate side. It does not matter whether you feel compassionate. You are practising, as you would a skill.

1. Begin with a minute of soothing rhythm breathing.
2. Imagine you are a deeply compassionate person. Bring to mind three qualities:

- **Wisdom.** You understand that life is hard, that we did not choose our brains or our past, and that everyone is doing their best with what they have.
- **Strength.** You are steady and grounded, like a mountain or a deep-rooted tree. You can face difficult things.
- **Caring commitment.** You want to help, yourself and others, and not to condemn.

3. Sit as this person would sit. Let your face take on their expression.
4. Imagine their voice: warm, slow, steady.
5. From here, look at the part of you that is struggling. What do you see? What do you want for that part?

| Wisdom | Strength | Caring |
|---|---|---|
| What does my compassionate self understand? | How does it stand, sit and breathe? | What does it want for me? |

**What its voice sounds like, and what it says to me**

**A situation this week where I could bring this part of me in**

*From Compassion Focused Therapy, developed by Paul Gilbert.*

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# Compassionate thought record

Answering self-criticism with understanding as well as evidence.

Name _____ Date _____

**What happened?**

**What my critic said**

**How that left me feeling (0 to 10)**

Take a minute of slow, soothing breathing. Then answer from your compassionate side, in a warm tone.

**Understanding**

Why does it make sense that I reacted this way, given my history and what was going on?

**Not alone**

How might other people feel in this situation?

**A fairer view**

What is a more balanced and kinder way of seeing it?

**What would help**

What do I need? What would a caring friend suggest I do?

**How I feel now (0 to 10)**

**What I will do next**

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# My strengths and good qualities

A list of your strengths, skills and good qualities.

Name _____ Date _____

This can feel awkward, even boastful. You are correcting a view of yourself that has been one-sided for a long time. Aim to be accurate. If you get stuck, ask someone who knows you well.

**What do I like about myself, however small?**

**What have I achieved, or got through? (Include things that were hard for me, even if they look ordinary.)**

**What skills and talents do I have?**

**What do other people value in me, or thank me for?**

**What qualities do I appreciate in others that I also have, even a little?**

**What bad qualities do I not have? (Am I cruel? Dishonest?)**

**How might someone who cares about me describe me?**

| A quality | A recent example of it |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

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# Positive qualities log

Each day, three things you did and what they show about you.

Name _____ Date _____

Each day, write down three things you did, however small, and what each says about you. "Rang my mother" shows caring. "Went to work when I did not feel like it" shows perseverance. The aim is to notice what you would normally brush aside.

| Day | What I did | What it shows about me |
|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | |
| **Tue** | | |
| **Wed** | | |
| **Thu** | | |
| **Fri** | | |
| **Sat** | | |
| **Sun** | | |

**What was it like to do this?**

**How much do I believe my old bottom line at the end of the week?**

0 — 10 — 20 — 30 — 40 — 50 — 60 — 70 — 80 — 90 — 100

Not at all — Completely

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# Accepting compliments

Notice how you brush compliments off, and practise accepting them.

With low self-esteem, compliments bounce off. They are dismissed ("she was only being nice"), deflected ("this old thing?") or turned around ("no, you are much better"). So the good things people say never get counted.

## What I usually do

- [ ] Deny it ("No, it was nothing")
- [ ] Give the credit away ("It was all the team")
- [ ] Point out a flaw ("But I messed up the end")
- [ ] Assume they want something
- [ ] Return one straight away
- [ ] Change the subject
- [ ] Feel embarrassed and say nothing

## The practice

1. Notice the urge to deflect.
2. Pause. Look at the person.
3. Say "Thank you." If you can, add "That means a lot" or "I am glad you liked it."
4. Stop there. No "but".
5. Later, write it down.

| Date | What was said, and by whom | What I did | What it might say about me |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

**What is it like to let these in?**

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# Comparing myself with others

How comparing yourself with others affects you, and what to do instead.

Name _____ Date _____

Comparing ourselves with others is automatic. It becomes a problem when we mostly compare upwards, with people who seem to be doing better, and on the things we feel worst about.

## Why the comparison is unfair

- You know all your own doubts and bad days. You see other people's edited best moments.
- You compare your weak spot with someone else's strong suit.
- There is always someone further ahead. The target moves.
- Social media is built to show you exactly the people who will make you feel behind.

## My comparing

**Who do I compare myself with, and about what?**

**When and where it happens most**

- [ ] Scrolling
- [ ] At work
- [ ] With family
- [ ] With friends
- [ ] At the school gate
- [ ] At the gym

**How I feel and what I do afterwards**

**What do I assume about their lives that I do not actually know?**

## Alternatives

- [ ] Mute or unfollow accounts that leave me feeling worse
- [ ] Set a limit on scrolling, or keep the phone out of the bedroom
- [ ] Compare with myself a year ago
- [ ] Ask what the envy is telling me I want
- [ ] Turn admiration into curiosity: "How did they do that?"
- [ ] Notice what I already have that I once wanted

**What I will try this week**

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# Understanding shame

The feeling that there is something wrong with me, and that others can see it.

Shame is one of the most painful human emotions. It is the sense of being flawed, unacceptable or less than other people, and the fear of being seen that way.

**Guilt**

- "I did something bad."
- About behaviour
- Leads to wanting to put it right
- Usually useful

**Shame**

- "I am bad."
- About the whole self
- Leads to hiding, attacking yourself or attacking others
- Rarely useful

## Where it comes from

We are social animals, and we need to belong. Shame evolved as an alarm for the threat of rejection. It grows strongest in people who were criticised, humiliated, bullied, abused or neglected, or made to feel different. The fault lies with what was done, yet it is the person on the receiving end who feels the shame.

## How it shows

- ☐ Wanting to hide or disappear
- ☐ Blushing, looking down, going quiet
- ☐ Harsh self-criticism
- ☐ Perfectionism, never letting a flaw show
- ☐ People-pleasing
- ☐ Anger and blaming others
- ☐ Keeping secrets, avoiding closeness
- ☐ Numbing with drink, food or work

## What helps

- **Naming it.** "This is shame." It is easier to manage once you recognise it.
- **Understanding where it came from.** It is a learned response, not the truth about you.
- **Telling someone safe.** Shame gets worse when it is kept secret and eases when someone responds with acceptance.
- **Self-compassion.** Responding to yourself with understanding in place of attack.
- **Separating who you are from what you did**, or from what was done to you.

**In therapy**

Shame makes it hard to say certain things out loud. There is no rush. Whatever you bring will be met with respect.

**What it would mean to me to carry a little less of this**

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# Treating myself as someone who matters

Acting as if you are worth looking after, before you believe it.

Name _____ Date _____

How you treat yourself both reflects and reinforces how you see yourself. You do not have to wait until you feel worthwhile. Acting as if you matter is one of the ways the feeling changes.

| Area | How I treat myself now | How I would treat someone I cared about |
|---|---|---|
| **Food and rest** | | |
| **Health and appointments** | | |
| **My home and surroundings** | | |
| **Clothes and appearance** | | |
| **Enjoyment and time off** | | |
| **Saying what I need** | | |
| **Money spent on myself** | | |

**Three small things I will do for myself this week, and when**

**What my critic will say about that, and my reply**

**How it felt to do them**

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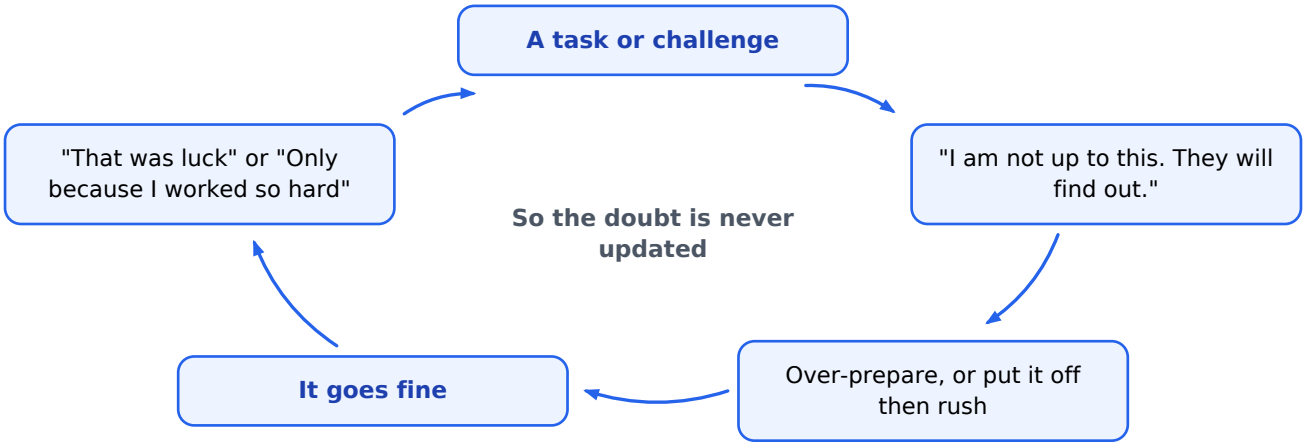
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# Imposter feelings

Feeling like a fraud who is about to be found out.

Name _____ Date _____

Many capable people privately believe they are not as good as others think, that their success is down to luck, and that sooner or later they will be exposed. It is especially common at times of change: a new job, a promotion, a course.




## What keeps it going

- Success is put down to luck, effort or charm. Never to ability.
- Mistakes are counted. Achievements are not.
- Comparing your inner doubt with other people's outward confidence.
- Never asking for help, in case it gives you away.

## Testing it

**A role or area where I feel like a fraud**

**Evidence that I am not up to it**

**Evidence that I am**

Qualifications, feedback, results, things I have handled

**If a colleague had my record, what would I conclude about them?**

**One thing I could do differently: prepare a normal amount, ask a question, or own one success out loud**

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# A self-compassion break

Three sentences for a difficult moment.

Use this whenever you notice you are stressed, hurting or being hard on yourself. It takes about a minute.

| | |
|---|---|
| **1. Notice** | Say to yourself: "This is a hard moment." Or "This hurts." Or "This is stress." Naming it is mindfulness. |
| **2. Connect** | "Struggling is part of life. Other people feel this too. I am not alone." This is common humanity. |
| **3. Be kind** | Put a hand on your chest, or wherever feels soothing. Say: "May I be kind to myself." Or ask: "What do I need right now?" |

## Finding your own words

The exact phrases do not matter. What matters is that they sound like something you could say and mean.

**My way of saying "this is hard"**

**My way of saying "I am not the only one"**

**My way of saying "may I be kind to myself"**

**When I tried it, what did I notice?**

*The self-compassion break was developed by Kristin Neff.*

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# Kinder things to say to myself

Fair and kind statements to use in place of harsh ones.

These are not empty affirmations. They are fair, kind statements that a good friend might say. Tick the ones you could imagine saying to yourself, and change the words to fit.

**When I make a mistake**
"That did not go how I wanted. Everyone gets things wrong. What can I learn, and what would help now?"

**When I am struggling**
"This is really hard. It makes sense that I am finding it hard."

**When I compare myself**
"I only see part of their life. Mine does not have to look like theirs."

**When I am tired**
"I have been carrying a lot. I am allowed to rest."

**When I feel not good enough**
"I do not have to be perfect to be worth something."

**When I am anxious**
"I am scared, and I am doing it anyway. That takes courage."

**When I have let someone down**
"I can be sorry and still be a decent person."

**When nothing is going right**
"This is one bad day. It will pass."

| When I... | A kinder line I could use |
|---|---|
| *Forget something important* | *I have a lot on. I will write it down and sort it.* |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

*Cut along the dashed lines. Keep a card in your wallet or phone case.*

**A kinder line to carry with me**
The one I most need

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**A kinder line to carry with me**
The one I most need

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# Loving-kindness practice

Wishing well, to yourself and to others.

This practice builds warmth and goodwill by repeating simple wishes. You do not need to feel anything in particular while you do it.

## The phrases

Use these, or your own words:

- May you be safe.
- May you be well.
- May you be at ease.
- May you be happy.

## The practice (about ten minutes)

1. Sit comfortably and take a few slow breaths.
2. **Someone easy.** Bring to mind a person, or a pet, you feel uncomplicated warmth for. Picture them. Silently offer them the phrases, slowly, a few times.
3. **Yourself.** Now offer the same wishes to yourself. "May I be safe. May I be well. May I be at ease. May I be happy." If that is hard, imagine yourself as a child, or picture the person from step 2 saying it to you.
4. **Someone neutral.** A neighbour, someone at the shop. Offer them the phrases.
5. **Someone difficult.** Only if you want to, and not the most difficult person in your life. Offer them the phrases. If it is too much, go back to yourself.
6. **Everyone.** Widen it out: "May all of us be safe, well, at ease, happy."
7. Rest for a moment, then finish.

## If it feels forced or brings up sadness

That is common, especially when directing kindness at yourself. It does not mean you are doing it wrong. Keep the tone gentle, shorten the practice, or stay with the easy person for a while.

**Who came to mind for each step?**

**What I noticed**

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# Life patterns: an introduction

Why the same painful themes keep coming round.

Most of us have noticed that certain painful situations seem to repeat: the same kind of relationship, the same feeling of being left out, the same crash after pushing too hard. Schema therapy calls the patterns behind these repeats schemas, or life patterns.

## What a life pattern is

A deep, long-standing theme about yourself and your relationships, made up of beliefs, feelings, memories and body sensations. For example: "I will be abandoned." "I am defective." "My needs do not matter." It is felt as a truth, not as an idea.

## Where patterns come from

| | |
|---|---|
| **Core needs in childhood** | Safety, love, acceptance, freedom to be yourself, play, and sensible limits |
| ↓ | |
| **Needs not met enough** | Through neglect, criticism, loss, over-control, chaos, bullying or abuse, combined with a child's temperament |
| ↓ | |
| **A life pattern forms** | The child draws a conclusion that makes sense of it all |
| ↓ | |
| **Coping style** | Ways of surviving: giving in, avoiding, or fighting back |
| ↓ | |
| **The pattern repeats** | In adult life, the coping keeps the pattern going |

## Why patterns are so persistent

- **They feel familiar.** We are drawn to what we know, even when it hurts.
- **They filter what we see.** We notice what fits and overlook what does not.
- **Coping styles backfire.** Avoiding closeness prevents the experience that would disprove "I will be rejected".

## How they change

1. Recognising the pattern and where it came from.
2. Noticing when it is triggered, as it happens.
3. Meeting the feelings with understanding instead of criticism.
4. Trying new behaviour, and getting the underlying need met in healthy ways.

> **Note**
> A life pattern began as the best explanation a child could find. It was learned, and it can be changed.

*Schema therapy was developed by Jeffrey Young.*

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# Core emotional needs

What every child needs, and what you may still be needing now.

Name _____ Date _____

Schema therapy is built on the idea that all children share certain emotional needs. When these are met well enough, we grow up feeling secure and able. When they are not, life patterns form. For each need, note how well it was met when you were growing up, and how well it is met in your life now.

| Need | Growing up | Now |
|---|---|---|
| **Safety and secure attachment: to be loved, protected, accepted and reliably cared for** | | |
| **Autonomy and a sense of who I am: to be encouraged to do things for myself and to trust my own abilities** | | |
| **Freedom to express needs and feelings: to say what I feel and want without fear** | | |
| **Spontaneity and play: to have fun, be silly and be a child** | | |
| **Realistic limits: to learn self-control and consideration for others** | | |

**The need that was least met when I was young**

**How that still shows up in my life**

**One way I could begin to meet that need for myself now, or ask for it to be met**

*The five core needs come from schema therapy, developed by Jeffrey Young.*

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# Eighteen common life patterns

A reference list. Most people recognise a few.

Mark any that ring true. This is not a test or a diagnosis. We will talk through what you notice.

## Disconnection and rejection

**Abandonment**
People I love will leave me or will not be there when I need them.

**Mistrust**
People will hurt, use or take advantage of me.

**Emotional deprivation**
Nobody will ever really understand me or meet my needs for care.

**Defectiveness and shame**
There is something wrong with me. If people saw the real me, they would reject me.

**Social isolation**
I am different. I do not belong.

## Impaired independence

**Dependence**
I cannot cope with everyday life without a lot of help.

**Vulnerability to harm**
Disaster could strike at any moment and I could not prevent it.

**Enmeshment**
I am so caught up with someone close that I have no life or identity of my own.

**Failure**
I am not as capable as other people and I am bound to fail.

## Impaired limits

**Entitlement**
Ordinary rules should not apply to me. I should get what I want.

**Insufficient self-control**
I cannot make myself tolerate frustration or finish what is boring.

## Focus on others

**Subjugation**
I have to give in to what others want, or there will be trouble.

**Self-sacrifice**
Other people's needs must come before mine.

**Approval seeking**
My worth depends on what other people think of me.

## Over-vigilance and inhibition

**Negativity**
Things will go wrong. I focus on the downside.

**Emotional inhibition**
I must keep my feelings in. Showing them is dangerous or shameful.

**Unrelenting standards**
I must meet very high standards, or I will be criticised.

**Punitiveness**
People, including me, deserve to be punished harshly for mistakes.

*The eighteen schemas were identified by Jeffrey Young and colleagues.*

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# Three ways of coping with a life pattern

Giving in, avoiding and fighting back, and how each keeps the pattern going.

When a life pattern is triggered, it hurts. As children we found ways to cope. Those same ways tend to run automatically in adulthood, and each one, in its own way, stops the pattern from changing.

**Giving in**
Acting as if the pattern were true. Choosing situations and people that confirm it. Feeling the pain directly.

**Avoiding**
Arranging life so the pattern is never triggered. Staying away from people, challenges or feelings. Numbing with work, drink, food or screens.

**Fighting back**
Doing the opposite, to prove the pattern wrong. It looks strong from outside and is fragile underneath.

| Pattern | Giving in | Avoiding | Fighting back |
|---|---|---|---|
| **"I will be abandoned"** | Choosing partners who are unavailable | Avoiding close relationships altogether | Clinging, checking, or leaving first |
| **"I am defective"** | Putting myself down. Choosing critical people | Hiding the real me. Keeping conversations shallow | Acting superior. Criticising others |
| **"I will fail"** | Not trying. Doing things half-heartedly | Putting things off. Avoiding challenges | Driving myself relentlessly |
| **"My needs do not matter"** | Doing what everyone else wants | Avoiding situations where I might have to ask | Demanding, or rebelling against every request |

## Why they keep the pattern going

Each style prevents the corrective experience. If you never let anyone close, you never find out that some people stay. If you never stop driving yourself, you never find out you are acceptable without the achievements.

## A fourth option

Noticing the pattern has been triggered, soothing the feeling, and choosing a response that fits the present, not the past. We call this the healthy adult.

**The coping style I use most**

**What it protects me from, and what it costs me**

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# Modes: the different parts of me

Why you can feel like a different person from one hour to the next.

We all have different sides that take over at different times. Schema therapy calls these modes. Knowing which one is in charge helps you understand your reactions and choose what to do.

**The vulnerable child**
The part that holds the old hurt: lonely, frightened, ashamed, unloved. Triggered when a need is not met.

**The angry or impulsive child**
The part that rages at unfairness, or acts on impulse to get a need met right now.

**The critic**
An internalised voice, often from a parent, teacher or peers. It attacks ("you are pathetic") or demands ("not good enough, try harder").

**The detached protector**
Shuts feelings off. Numb, flat, busy, distracted. "I am fine."

**The pleaser**
Gives in and goes along to avoid conflict or rejection.

**The overcontroller or fighter**
Takes charge, attacks, or strives for perfection to stay safe.

**The happy child**
Playful, curious, spontaneous, connected. Present when needs are met.

**The healthy adult**
Sees clearly, soothes the vulnerable child, sets limits on the critic and the impulsive side, and takes sensible action.

## How modes work together

A trigger touches the vulnerable child. Often, before you even feel that hurt, the critic attacks or a coping mode jumps in to shut it down. From outside, people see the anger, the withdrawal or the people pleasing. They do not see the hurt underneath.

## The aim of therapy

1. To recognise each mode when it shows up.
2. To care for the vulnerable child and get its needs met.
3. To stand up to the critic.
4. To thank the coping modes and need them less.
5. To strengthen the healthy adult, so it is in charge more of the time.

**The modes I recognise most in myself**

**When is my healthy adult strongest?**

*The mode model comes from schema therapy, developed by Jeffrey Young.*

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# My modes map

Describe each of your modes and what brings it out.

Name _____ Date _____

Give each part a name of your own if you like.

| Part of me | When it shows up | What it feels, says or does | What it needs |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Vulnerable child** | | | |
| **Angry or impulsive child** | | | |
| **Critic** | | | |
| **My main coping mode (detached, pleasing, controlling)** | | | |
| **Healthy adult** | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

**Which part is in charge most of the time?**

**What could my healthy adult say to my vulnerable child this week?**

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# Pattern diary

A record of one time a life pattern was triggered, and how you responded.

Name _____ Date _____

**What happened? (The trigger)**

**What I felt, in my emotions and body**

**What went through my mind**

**What I did, or wanted to do**

**Which life pattern was this? Which part of me took over?**

**What does this remind me of from earlier in my life?**

**What fits the present situation**

**What belongs to the past**

Where is my reaction bigger than today's event?

**What my healthy adult would say about it**

**What my healthy adult would do**

**What I did in the end, and how it turned out**

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# Strengthening my healthy adult

The part of you that can comfort, protect and decide.

Name _____ Date _____

The healthy adult is the part of you that is wise, kind and firm. It is the part that looks after a frightened child, tells a bully to stop, and gets on with what needs doing. It may not show up often at the moment. It gets stronger with use.

**People I know, or know of, who are warm, steady and fair. What do they do and say?**

**Times I have been like that, perhaps with someone else**

| How my healthy adult sounds | How it stands and breathes | What it believes about me |
|---|---|---|
| Tone, pace, words | | |

## Putting it to work

| When this happens | My healthy adult says or does |
|---|---|
| **The critic attacks me** | |
| **I feel small, scared or ashamed** | |
| **I want to act on impulse or lash out** | |
| **I want to shut down or avoid** | |

**One situation this week where I will call on this part of me**

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# What I needed then, what I need now

Linking an old hurt to today's reactions, and answering the need.

Name _____ Date _____

Strong reactions in the present are often linked to something from the past. This exercise traces the link. If it stirs up a lot, stop, and bring it to our next session.

**A recent situation where my reaction was stronger than the event seemed to deserve**

**What I felt**

**When have I felt like this before? What is the earliest time I can remember?**

**What I needed back then, and did not get**

- [ ] Comfort
- [ ] Praise
- [ ] Someone on my side
- [ ] Protection
- [ ] To be listened to
- [ ] To be believed

**What a caring adult would have said or done**

**What the younger me concluded about myself or about people**

**Is that conclusion still fair?**

**What I need now when that feeling comes, and how I, or someone else, could give it to me**

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# A letter to my younger self

Saying what that child needed to hear.

Bring to mind yourself at a particular age, perhaps a time when things were hard. If you have a photograph, look at it. See what that child is wearing, the look on their face, where they are.

Write to them as the adult you are now, who knows what they went through and what happened afterwards.

## You might include

- What you can see they are feeling
- That what happened was not their fault
- What they deserved, and should have had
- What you admire about them
- What you know now that they could not know then
- That you are here, and they are not alone any more

**The age I am writing to, and what was happening then**

**Dear**

## Afterwards

- Read it back slowly.
- Notice what you feel towards that child.
- Do something kind for yourself today. The child you were is still part of you.

*If this brings up painful memories, go easy on yourself and bring the letter to our next session.*

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# Forgiving myself

Taking responsibility without punishing yourself for life.

Name _____ Date _____

Guilt has a job. It tells us we have acted against our own values, and it pushes us to put things right. Once we have listened, it has done its work. Punishing yourself for years does not help the person you hurt, and it does not make you a better person. Forgiving yourself is not letting yourself off. It is taking responsibility, and then allowing yourself to carry on.

**What I did, or did not do. In plain words, without excuses and without insults.**

**What I knew and could do at the time**

**What I know now that I did not know then**

**The part that was mine**

**The parts that were not**

Other people, circumstances, chance

**Who was affected, and how**

**What I have done to put it right, and what I could still do: say sorry, repair it, or do some good elsewhere**

**What I have learned, and what I do differently now**

**What I would say to a friend who had done the same and felt as I do**

**A sentence of forgiveness to myself. Write it even if you do not fully believe it yet.**

*If what happened involved serious harm, or the guilt will not ease, bring it to therapy. Some things are too much to work through alone on a page.*

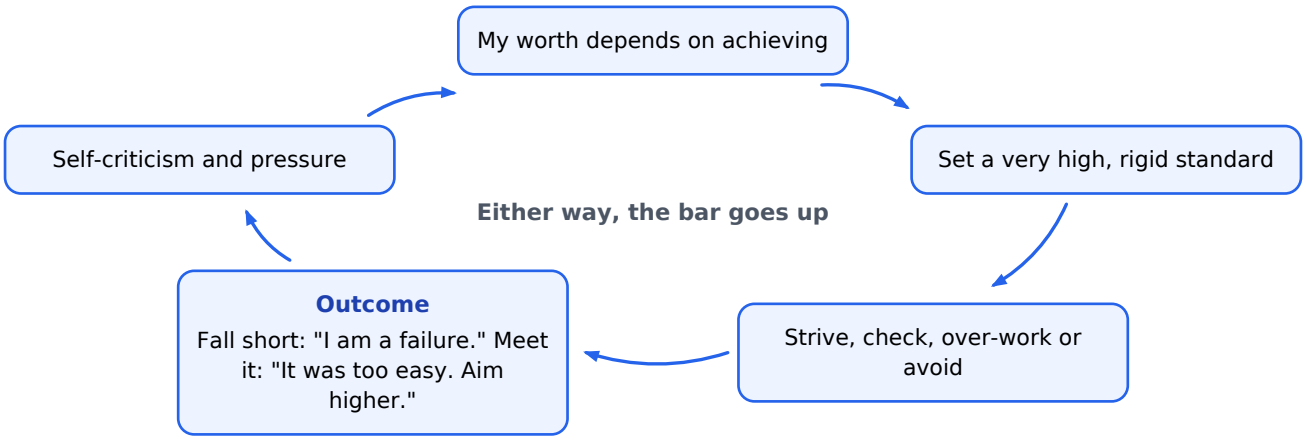
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# Understanding perfectionism

When high standards start to do more harm than good.

Wanting to do things well is healthy. Perfectionism is different. It means setting standards that are relentlessly high, judging your worth by whether you meet them, and carrying on even when it is doing you harm.




## How it shows up

- [ ] All-or-nothing thinking: perfect or worthless
- [ ] Spending far too long on tasks
- [ ] Checking, redoing, tweaking
- [ ] Putting things off for fear of not doing them well enough
- [ ] Finding it hard to delegate
- [ ] Rarely feeling satisfied, even with success
- [ ] Harsh self-criticism over small errors
- [ ] Avoiding things I might not excel at
- [ ] Difficulty resting without guilt

## What it costs

Exhaustion, anxiety, low mood, strained relationships, missed deadlines, and a life with very little room for enjoyment. Often, in the end, worse work too.

## What change looks like

You do not have to stop caring about quality. The aim is:

1. **Flexible standards.** Different tasks deserve different levels of effort.
2. **Worth that does not depend on results.** You are more than what you produce.
3. **Experiments.** Trying "good enough" and finding out what really happens.
4. **A kinder response to mistakes.** A mistake shows you what to change. It is not a verdict on you.

> **A useful question**
> "What would good enough look like here, and what would I do with the time I saved?"

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# The costs and benefits of my high standards

What perfectionism gives you, and what it takes.

Name _____ Date _____

Perfectionism has benefits, which is why it is hard to give up. An honest look at both sides helps you decide what is worth changing. Tick what fits and add anything else.

### What my high standards give me

- ☐ Good results
- ☐ A sense of control
- ☐ Pride in my work
- ☐ Praise or respect
- ☐ Safe from criticism
- ☐ Being relied on

### What they cost me

- ☐ Time
- ☐ Sleep
- ☐ Enjoyment
- ☐ Peace of mind
- ☐ Energy
- ☐ Health
- ☐ Time with people

| Area of life | Effect of my perfectionism |
|---|---|
| **Work or study** | |
| **Relationships and family** | |
| **Health and rest** | |
| **Hobbies and enjoyment** | |
| **How I feel about myself** | |

**What am I afraid would happen if I eased off?**

**Is that definitely true? How could I find out?**

**What I would like to be different**

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# Good enough experiments

Do it less than perfectly, on purpose, and see what happens.

Name _____ Date _____

The fear behind perfectionism is that anything less will lead to disaster: criticism, failure, being found out. The only way to check is to try.

## Ideas

- [ ] Send an email after one read-through
- [ ] Set a time limit for a task and stop when it ends
- [ ] Leave one small thing untidy
- [ ] Hand in something at 80%
- [ ] Say "I do not know" in a meeting
- [ ] Ask for help with something
- [ ] Leave on time
- [ ] Try something I am not good at
- [ ] Let someone else do it their way
- [ ] Make a small mistake deliberately

| What I did differently | What I predicted would happen | What actually happened | What I did with the time or energy saved |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

**What am I learning?**

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# My perfectionism behaviours

Tick the things you do that keep perfectionism going.

Name _____ Date _____

Perfectionism is kept going by two kinds of behaviour: doing too much, and avoiding. Tick the ones you recognise.

## Doing too much

- ☐ Checking work over and over
- ☐ Rewriting and redoing
- ☐ Over-preparing
- ☐ Making lists of lists
- ☐ Working long hours
- ☐ Researching far beyond what is needed
- ☐ Correcting other people
- ☐ Tidying and organising excessively
- ☐ Seeking reassurance that it is OK
- ☐ Taking over, not delegating

## Avoiding

- ☐ Putting tasks off until the last minute
- ☐ Not starting unless I can do it perfectly
- ☐ Giving up early when it is not going well
- ☐ Not trying new things
- ☐ Avoiding being evaluated
- ☐ Not finishing, so it cannot be judged
- ☐ Being indecisive
- ☐ Hiding my work

| The behaviour | What I fear would happen if I stopped | How hard to change (0 to 10) |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**The first one I will work on**

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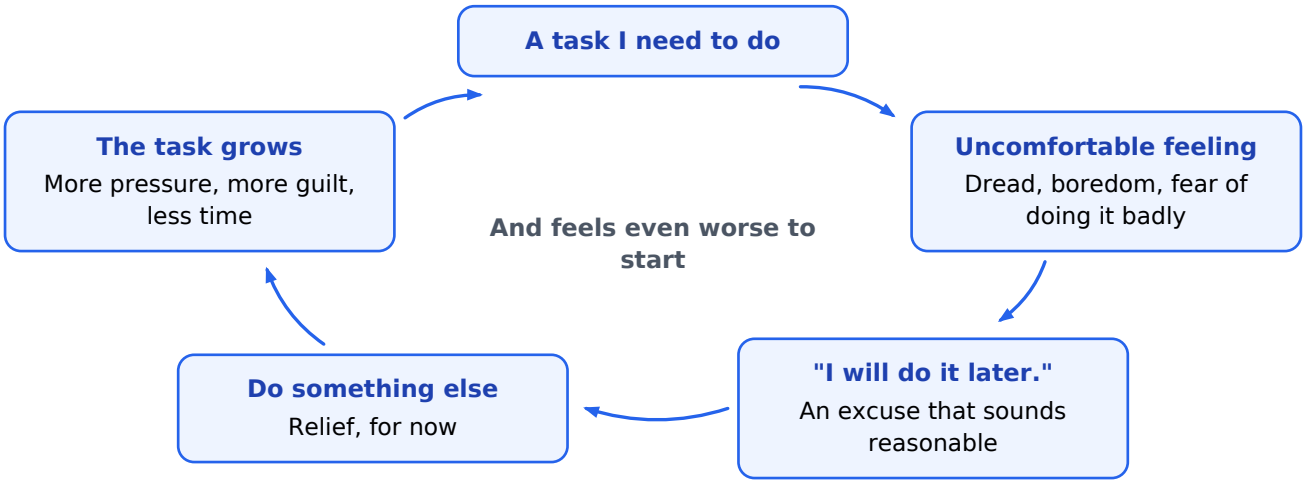


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# Understanding procrastination

Why we put things off, and ways to get started.

Procrastination is delaying something you intend to do, even though you know the delay will cost you. It is rarely a problem with time management. Usually it is a way of escaping how the task makes you feel: bored, overwhelmed, anxious, not good enough.




## What makes a task easy to put off

- [ ] It is vague, or I do not know where to begin
- [ ] It feels huge
- [ ] I am afraid of doing it badly
- [ ] It is boring
- [ ] The deadline is far away
- [ ] I resent having to do it
- [ ] I am tired or low
- [ ] There is something more appealing to hand

## Ways through

1. **Make the first step tiny and specific.** "Open the document and write the title."
2. **Five minutes only.** Then decide whether to continue.
3. **Name the feeling.** "I am avoiding this because I am scared it will not be good." Feelings shrink a little when named.
4. **Catch the excuse.** "I work better under pressure" is rarely true.
5. **Set the scene.** Phone in another room. One tab open.
6. **Fix a time and a place.** "At 10, at the kitchen table."
7. **Be kind about past delay.** Self-criticism makes the task more unpleasant and the avoidance stronger.

> **Note**
> You do not need to feel ready before you start. The feeling of being ready usually comes after you have begun.

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# Procrastination: excuses and replies

The things we tell ourselves to let ourselves off, and what to say back.

Name _____ Date _____

Most procrastination starts with a thought that makes putting it off sound sensible.

| The excuse | A reply |
|---|---|
| "I am not in the mood." | "I do not have to be. Mood usually follows once I start." |
| "I work better under pressure." | "I work faster under pressure. It is not better, and it is stressful." |
| "I have plenty of time." | "Starting now gives me room for things to go wrong." |
| "I need to do X first." | "Is that needed, or is it a way of avoiding?" |
| "It has to be done properly, and I do not have a clear run." | "Twenty rough minutes now beats a perfect afternoon that never comes." |
| "I am too tired." | "I can do five minutes tired." |
| "I do not know where to start." | "I will start anywhere and tidy it up later." |

| My excuse | My reply |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

**The task I am putting off most right now**

**The first two-minute step, and when I will do it**

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# How long does it really take?

Testing your predictions about time and effort.

Name _____ Date _____

We put things off when we expect them to be long and awful. We over-work when we expect anything less than hours to be inadequate. Both are predictions, and both can be checked.

| Task | Predicted time | Actual time | Predicted difficulty (0 to 10) | Actual difficulty | What I noticed |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |
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**Do I tend to over-estimate or under-estimate?**

**What does that mean for how I plan and start things?**

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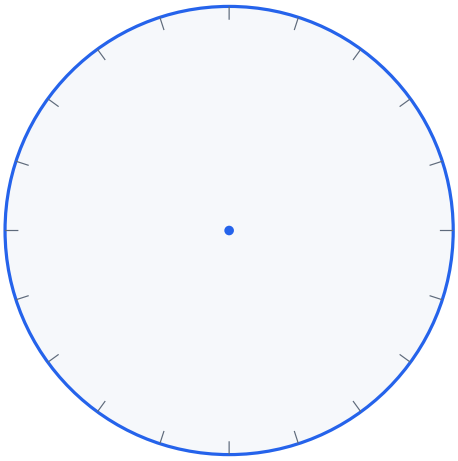
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# What my self-worth rests on

A pie chart of the things your sense of worth depends on.

Name _____ Date _____

How do you judge yourself as a person? List the things your sense of worth depends on: work or study, appearance, being a good parent or friend, being liked, being useful, sport, creativity, kindness, and so on. Then give each a share, according to how much it really affects how you feel about yourself.



| What I judge myself on | % share |
| --- | --- |
| | |
| | |
| | |
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| | |
| | |
| | |

**What do I notice? What happens to me when the biggest slice goes badly?**

## How I would like it to be

**Areas I would like to count for more (things I value but neglect)**

**What I could do this month to give them more room**

**How would I describe the worth of someone I love? What is that based on?**

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# A different response to mistakes

Go through one mistake: what happened, how much it matters and what to take from it.

Name _____ Date _____

**What happened? Just the facts.**

**What did my critic say about it?**

**How bad does it feel right now?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Not at all — The worst

## Putting it in proportion

**What actually followed from it? Who noticed? What was the real effect?**

**What else contributed, apart from me? (Time, information, other people, tiredness)**

**How much will this matter in a month?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Not at all — Hugely

**If someone I respect had made this mistake, what would I think of them?**

## Using it

**Anything I need to put right**

- [ ] An apology
- [ ] A correction
- [ ] A conversation
- [ ] Nothing

**What I will take from it for next time**

**A fair, kind summary to tell myself**

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# Focus blocks

One thing, for a short set time, with a break built in.

Name _____ Date _____

Long stretches of trying to concentrate usually turn into switching between tasks and screens. Short, protected blocks work better.

## How it works

1. Choose one task. Write it down.
2. Clear the decks: phone away, one window open, door shut if you can.
3. Set a timer for 25 minutes. Work only on that task.
4. If something else pops into your head, jot it on the list below and go back.
5. When the timer goes, take a real five-minute break. Stand up. Look out of a window.
6. After four blocks, take a longer break.

| Block | The one task | Done? | How focused (0 to 10) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | |
| 2 | | | |
| 3 | | | |
| 4 | | | |
| 5 | | | |
| 6 | | | |

**Things that popped into my head (to deal with later)**

**What pulled me away, and what would help next time**

**What I got done**

*Based on the Pomodoro Technique, developed by Francesco Cirillo.*

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# How good is good enough?

Decide how much effort each task really needs.

Name _____ Date _____

Perfectionism treats every task as if it mattered equally. In reality a few things deserve your very best, most need to be decent, and some just need to be done.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Needs my best** | Rare. High stakes, hard to undo, or very important to me or others. |
| **Needs to be good** | Most things. Solid, accurate, on time. Small flaws do not matter. |
| **Just needs doing** | Routine, low stakes, nobody will remember. Quick is better than polished. |

| Task | Which level? | Time limit | What good enough looks like |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
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**Which tasks have I been over-doing?**

**What would I do with the time I get back?**

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# Asking for what you want: DEAR MAN

A structure for making a request or saying no, and being heard.

Name _____ Date _____

**The situation, and what I want from it**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Describe** | The facts, without judgement. "What happened was..." |
| **Express** | How I feel about it, using "I". "I feel..." |
| **Assert** | Ask clearly for what I want, or say no. "I would like..." |
| **Reinforce** | What is in it for them, or for us both. "That would mean..." |

## While I say it

**Stay Mindful**
Keep to the point. If they change the subject or attack, come back to it calmly, like a broken record.

**Appear confident**
Steady voice, eye contact, upright posture. Even if I do not feel it.

**Negotiate**
Be willing to give to get. "What would work for you?"

**What they might say, and how I will respond**

**How it went**

*DEAR MAN is a skill from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), developed by Marsha Linehan.*

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# Keeping the relationship and your self-respect

Two short guides for how you say it, as well as what you say.

In any difficult conversation you are balancing three things: getting what you want, keeping the relationship, and keeping your self-respect. These two sets of reminders look after the second and third.

## When the relationship matters: GIVE

| | |
|---|---|
| **Gentle** | No attacks, threats, eye-rolling or sarcasm. Say hard things kindly. |
| **Interested** | Listen. Do not interrupt. Be curious about their side. |
| **Validate** | Show that you understand their feelings or point of view, even if you disagree. "I can see why that annoyed you." |
| **Easy manner** | A little warmth or lightness. Loosen your face and shoulders. |

## When your self-respect matters: FAST

| | |
|---|---|
| **Fair** | Be fair to them and to yourself. Your needs count as much as theirs. |
| **Apologies kept for when they are due** | Do not apologise for having an opinion, asking, or taking up space. |
| **Stick to your values** | Do not give up what matters to you to be liked or to keep the peace. |
| **Truthful** | No lying, exaggerating or acting helpless. |

**A conversation coming up. Which matters most this time: the result, the relationship or my self-respect?**

**Which reminders do I most need to hold on to?**

*GIVE and FAST are skills from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), developed by Marsha Linehan.*

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# Validation

Showing someone that their feelings make sense. It works on yourself too.

Validation means letting another person know that their feelings and reactions are understandable. It is not the same as agreeing, approving or giving in. You can validate how someone feels and still hold a different view.

## Why it matters

People who feel dismissed tend to push harder. People who feel understood tend to settle. Validation is often the quickest way to calm a row.

## How to do it

1. **Pay attention.** Put the phone down. Look at them.
2. **Reflect back.** "So you were waiting for an hour and nobody told you."
3. **Name what is unsaid.** "I would guess that felt pretty disrespectful."
4. **Make sense of it.** "Given what happened last time, of course you were worried."
5. **Say it is normal, when it is.** "Anyone would be upset by that."
6. **Be real.** Treat them as an equal, not as fragile.

### Invalidating

- "You are overreacting."
- "It is not that bad."
- "You should not feel like that."
- "At least..."
- Jumping in with advice

### Validating

- "That sounds really hard."
- "I can see why you would feel that."
- "That makes sense to me."
- "Tell me more."
- "What do you need right now?"

## Validating yourself

Many of us are quick to tell ourselves we are being stupid or dramatic. Try the same steps inwards: "I feel hurt. Given what happened, that makes sense. Anyone might."

**Someone I could practise validating this week, and how**

**Something I am feeling that I could validate in myself**

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# Four communication styles

Passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive and assertive.

We all use every style at times. Most of us lean on one or two, especially under stress. Only one of them respects both people.

| | Passive | Aggressive | Passive-aggressive | Assertive |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **The message** | "You matter. I do not." | "I matter. You do not." | "I will not say it, but you will know about it." | "We both matter." |
| **Sounds like** | "I do not mind." "Whatever you want." "Sorry." | "You always..." "That is ridiculous." | "Fine." Sarcasm, sulking, "forgetting". | "I would like..." "I feel..." "No, I cannot." |
| **Looks like** | Quiet voice, little eye contact, hunched | Loud, staring, pointing, in your space | Sighs, eye-rolling, the silent treatment | Steady voice, relaxed, open, direct |
| **Short term** | Avoids conflict | Gets its way | Avoids direct conflict | May feel uncomfortable |
| **Long term** | Resentment, being overlooked, low self-worth | Fear and distance in others, guilt | Mistrust, confusion, problems unsolved | Respect, clearer relationships, more needs met |

## Why we end up passive or aggressive

- We were taught that our needs come last, or that being nice means agreeing.
- We fear conflict, rejection or being disliked.
- We hold it in for so long that it finally bursts out.
- Nobody ever showed us another way.

## Assertiveness is a skill

It is not a personality type, and it can be learned. It means saying what you think, feel and need, clearly and respectfully, while accepting that the other person may say no.

**The style I use most, and with whom**

**A situation where I would like to be more assertive**

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# Saying it with "I"

A structure for raising something without starting a row.

Name _____ Date _____

Sentences that start with "You" tend to sound like accusations, and the other person gets ready to defend. Sentences that start with "I" describe your own experience, which is much harder to argue with.

**When...**
Describe what happened, plainly. No "always" or "never".

→

**I feel...**
Name the feeling. One word if you can.

→

**Because...**
The effect on you, or what you need.

→

**I would like...**
A clear, specific request.

| Instead of | Try |
|---|---|
| "You never listen to me." | "When I am talking and you are on your phone, I feel unimportant. I would like us to put phones down at dinner." |
| "You are so selfish." | "When plans are made without me, I feel left out. I would like to be asked first." |
| "You always leave everything to me." | "When I do the tidying alone, I feel worn out and resentful. Could we split it?" |

## Watch out for

- "I feel that you..." is a "you" statement in disguise.
- Keep to one issue.
- Choose a calm moment.

## Try it

**What I want to say, the way it first comes out**

| When... | I feel... | Because... | I would like... |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |

**How it went when I said it**

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# Saying no

How to say no briefly and clearly, with words you can use.

Each time you say yes, you give up something else: time, rest, your own priorities. Saying no is not selfish. It protects the things you have already said yes to.

## How to do it

1. **Keep it short.** "No, I cannot do that." Long explanations invite debate.
2. **Be clear.** "I will have to pass" is clearer than "I am not sure, maybe".
3. **Be kind, not sorry.** One "I am afraid not" is enough. You do not need to apologise for having limits.
4. **Buy time if you need it.** "Let me check and come back to you."
5. **Repeat if pushed.** Same words, same tone. You do not need a better reason.

## Words you can use

> *"Thanks for asking. I cannot this time."*
>
> *"That does not work for me."*
>
> *"I am not able to take that on at the moment."*
>
> *"I cannot do Saturday. I could do an hour on Sunday."*
>
> *"I understand it is important to you. The answer is still no."*

## What gets in the way

- [ ] Fear they will be upset or think less of me
- [ ] Guilt
- [ ] Feeling responsible for their problem
- [ ] Wanting to be seen as helpful
- [ ] Not wanting to miss out
- [ ] Believing my needs matter less

## Practice, from easier to harder

| A request I could say no to | How hard (0 to 10) | What I will say |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

*The discomfort after saying no is usually brief. Resentment after saying yes can last much longer.*

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# Asking for what I need

Plan a clear, direct request.

Name _____ Date _____

Many of us hint, hope or wait for others to notice. Then we feel hurt when they do not. A clear, direct request is kinder to both of you.

**What do I need? Be specific.**

**Who am I asking?**

**What has stopped me from asking before?**

## A good request is

- [ ] Specific ("Could you collect the kids on Thursdays?" not "I need more help")
- [ ] About what I want, not what I do not want
- [ ] Something they can actually do
- [ ] A request, not a demand: they can say no
- [ ] Made at a reasonable time

**The words I will use**

**When and where I will ask**

**If they say yes**

**If they say no**

Can I ask someone else? Meet the need another way? Negotiate?

**How it went**

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# Understanding boundaries

What boundaries are, the main kinds and how to state one.

A boundary is a limit you set to look after yourself: what you are willing to do, give, accept and share. A boundary is not meant to shut people out or to punish them. Clear limits make it easier to be close to people.

## Kinds of boundaries

**Time and energy**
How much you give to work, family, friends, favours.

**Emotional**
How much of other people's feelings and problems you take on. What you share about yourself.

**Physical**
Personal space, touch, privacy.

**Material and digital**
Money, belongings, your home. When you are reachable, and what gets shared online.

### Too loose

- Saying yes when I mean no
- Taking responsibility for others' feelings
- Oversharing, or letting others overshare
- Feeling drained and resentful
- Being taken for granted

### Too rigid

- Keeping everyone at a distance
- Never asking for help
- Not sharing anything personal
- Cutting people off quickly
- Feeling lonely and unknown

## Healthy boundaries

- Are clear and stated calmly.
- Are about what you will do, not about controlling the other person.
- Can flex with the person and the situation.
- Are followed through.

## How to word it

"If (this happens), I will (do this)."

> *"If the shouting starts, I will leave the room and we can talk when things are calmer."*

**Expect some pushback**
People who benefited from your lack of boundaries may not like the new ones. Their discomfort does not mean you are doing something wrong.

**Where in my life is a boundary most needed?**

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# Setting a boundary

Plan one boundary: the wording, how they may react and how you will stick to it.

Name _____ Date _____

**The situation. What keeps happening that is not OK for me?**

**How it affects me**

**What I need instead**

**My boundary, in one or two sentences. ("I am not willing to..." "From now on I will..." "If... then I will...")**

**How they might react**

**How I will respond**

Stay calm. Repeat it. No need to justify, argue or over-explain.

**What I will do if the boundary is not respected**

**What might tempt me to back down, and what I will remind myself**

**After I said it: what happened, and how do I feel?**

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# My rights

A list of basic rights that apply to you and to everyone else.

These apply to you, and to everyone you deal with. Tick the ones you already live by. Circle the ones you find hard to believe.

- [ ] I have the right to be treated with respect.
- [ ] I have the right to say no without feeling guilty.
- [ ] I have the right to have feelings and to express them.
- [ ] I have the right to have needs, and for them to matter as much as other people's.
- [ ] I have the right to ask for what I want, knowing the answer may be no.
- [ ] I have the right to change my mind.
- [ ] I have the right to make mistakes.
- [ ] I have the right to say "I do not know" or "I do not understand".
- [ ] I have the right to take time to think before I answer.
- [ ] I have the right to my own opinions and values.
- [ ] I have the right not to be responsible for other adults' feelings or problems.
- [ ] I have the right to privacy and time to myself.
- [ ] I have the right to be listened to and taken seriously.
- [ ] I have the right to end a conversation in which I am being disrespected.
- [ ] I have the right to choose not to assert myself.

**The rights I find hardest to believe apply to me**

**Where did I learn that they did not?**

**How would I act this week if I fully believed one of them?**

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# Listening so people feel heard

How to listen so the other person knows they have been understood.

Feeling heard is one of the things people want most from those close to them. Good listening is a skill. It depends more on paying attention than on saying the right thing.

## The basics

1. **Stop what you are doing.** Phone down, screen off, turn towards them.
2. **Let them finish.** Hold back your own story, your advice and your defence.
3. **Show you are with them.** Nod, "mm", "go on".
4. **Reflect back what you heard.** "So what you are saying is..." "It sounds as if..."
5. **Check the feeling.** "That must have been frustrating."
6. **Ask open questions.** "What was that like?" "What happened then?"
7. **Ask what they need.** "Do you want ideas, or do you want me to just listen?"

### Blocks to listening

- Interrupting
- Jumping in with advice
- "That is nothing, wait till you hear what happened to me"
- Defending yourself before they finish
- Planning your reply
- Checking your phone

### What helps

- Staying quiet a bit longer
- Summarising in your own words
- Naming the feeling
- "Tell me more"
- Tolerating silence
- Asking before advising

## When it is about you

Listening is hardest when you are the one being complained about. Try to hear the whole thing first. "Let me check I have got this right..." You can give your side afterwards. Understanding is not the same as agreeing.

### Try this

Once this week, in a conversation with someone close, do nothing but listen and reflect back for five minutes. No advice, no stories of your own.

**What I noticed**

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# Four habits that damage relationships

And what to do instead.

Researchers who studied couples for decades found four habits that reliably predict trouble. Every couple does some of them sometimes. The aim is to catch them and use the alternative.

| The habit | What it sounds like | Instead |
|---|---|---|
| **Criticism: attacking the person, not the problem** | "You are so thoughtless. You never think of anyone else." | A gentle start: "I felt let down when the plans changed. Could we talk about it?" |
| **Contempt: sneering, mocking, eye-rolling, put-downs** | "Oh, well done. Brilliant. What a surprise." | Build a habit of appreciation. Say what you value. Describe your own feeling, not their flaw. |
| **Defensiveness: denying, excuses, counter-attack** | "It is not my fault. What about the time you..." | Take responsibility for even a small part: "You are right, I should have rung." |
| **Stonewalling: shutting down, going silent, walking off** | Silence. Looking away. One-word answers. | Say you are flooded and take a break of at least 20 minutes. Calm down. Come back. |

## What the research found

- **Contempt does the most harm.** It comes from long-held resentment. The cure is to rebuild respect and say the good things out loud.
- **Stonewalling is usually overwhelm, not indifference.** The body is flooded. A proper break helps both people.
- **How a conversation starts predicts how it ends.** Raising something gently makes a good outcome far more likely.
- **Repair matters more than avoiding every row.** A touch, a joke, "can we start again?"

**The habit I fall into most**

**What I will try instead next time**

*Based on the research of John Gottman and colleagues, who called these the Four Horsemen.*

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# Ground rules for arguments

Rules to agree in a calm moment for how you will argue.

Every close relationship has conflict. Agreeing some rules in a calm moment makes it far more likely that rows end in understanding instead of damage. Tick the ones you both agree to.

- [ ] One issue at a time. No bringing up old ones.
- [ ] No name-calling, insults or put-downs.
- [ ] No shouting. If voices rise, we pause.
- [ ] No "always" or "never".
- [ ] We each speak for ourselves: "I feel", not "you are".
- [ ] We take turns, and let each other finish.
- [ ] No threats, including threats to leave.
- [ ] Either of us can call a time out, and we agree when to come back.
- [ ] No arguing in front of the children, by text, or after drinking.
- [ ] We attack the problem, not each other.
- [ ] We look for a solution we can both live with, not a winner.
- [ ] We do not go to bed, or leave, without at least agreeing when we will talk again.

## Before raising something

- Is this a good time? Are we both fed, rested and sober?
- What exactly do I want to be different?
- Can I start gently?

## Afterwards

- Say what you appreciated about how the other person handled it.
- Repair: a hug, an apology for your part, a cup of tea.

**Other rules we agree to**

**Agreed by, and date**

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# Attachment styles: an introduction

How early experiences of closeness shape what we expect from people now.

As children, we learn what to expect from other people through our earliest relationships: whether comfort comes when we need it, and whether it is safe to depend on someone. Those lessons become a kind of template for closeness.

Attachment styles are tendencies, not fixed types or diagnoses. Most people are a mix. Patterns differ between relationships and can change over time.

**Secure**
Comfortable with closeness and with being apart. Can ask for support and give it. Trusts that problems can be talked through.

**Anxious**
Longs for closeness and worries about losing it. Sensitive to signs of distance. May seek a lot of reassurance or find it hard to be alone.

**Avoidant**
Values independence. Closeness can feel crowding. Tends to pull back, keep feelings private and handle things alone.

**Fearful**
Wants closeness and fears it. May swing between reaching out and pushing away. Often linked with early experiences of being hurt by people who were meant to be safe.

## How this plays out

A common pattern is one person who pursues and one who withdraws. The more one reaches, the more the other backs off, and the more the first reaches. Each is trying to feel safe, in the opposite way. Neither is to blame.

## What helps

- **Knowing your pattern,** and what sets it off.
- **Saying the need under the behaviour.** "I get anxious when I do not hear from you" works better than twenty texts. "I need half an hour to myself, and then I will come and find you" works better than disappearing.
- **Relationships that are steady.** Consistent, kind experiences with partners, friends or a therapist gradually update the template.

**Note**
Your pattern made sense in the situation where you learned it. It can change.

**What I recognise in myself, and what I tend to do when I feel insecure with someone**

*Attachment theory was developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth.*

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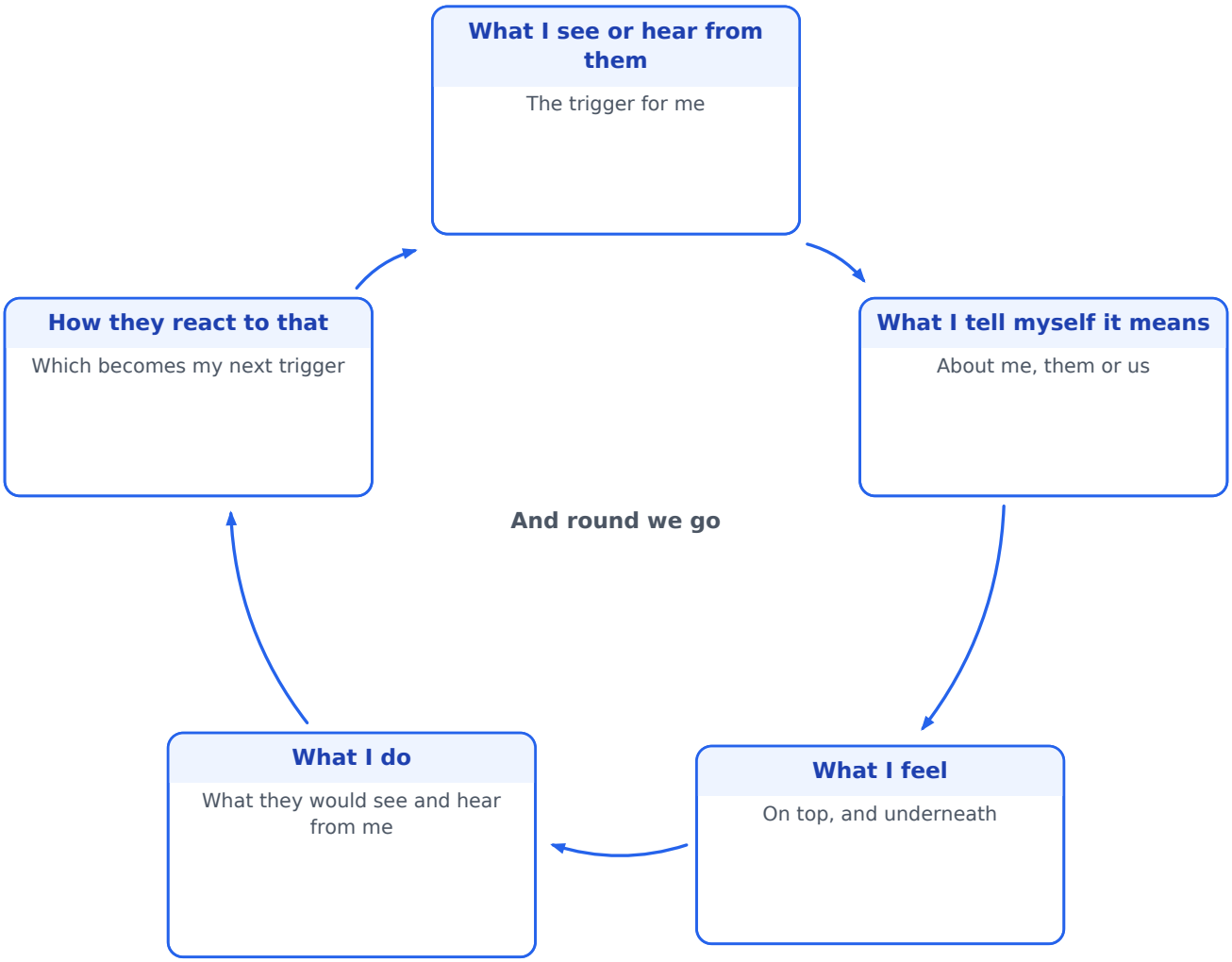
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# The pattern we get stuck in

Map the steps of an argument you keep having.

Name _____ Date _____

Most couples and families have one or two rows they have over and over, with different subjects each time. Mapping the steps helps you both step out of it. Fill this in separately, or together when you are calm.




**Underneath my reaction, what am I really needing or afraid of?**

**What might they be needing or afraid of?**

**What could each of us do differently at the very start of the cycle?**

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# What I need in my relationships

Rate how important each need is to you and how well it is being met.

Name _____ Date _____

Rate how important each need is to you, and how well it is being met at the moment in your close relationships.

| Need | How important (0 to 10) | How well met (0 to 10) |
|---|---|---|
| **To feel safe and able to trust** | | |
| **To be listened to and understood** | | |
| **Affection and warmth** | | |
| **To be accepted as I am** | | |
| **Respect** | | |
| **Honesty** | | |
| **Support when things are hard** | | |
| **Fun and shared time** | | |
| **Independence and space** | | |
| **To feel appreciated** | | |
| **Fairness in who does what** | | |

**The biggest gaps between importance and how well it is met**

**What have I done so far to get these needs met? Have I asked directly?**

**One thing I could ask for, or do differently**

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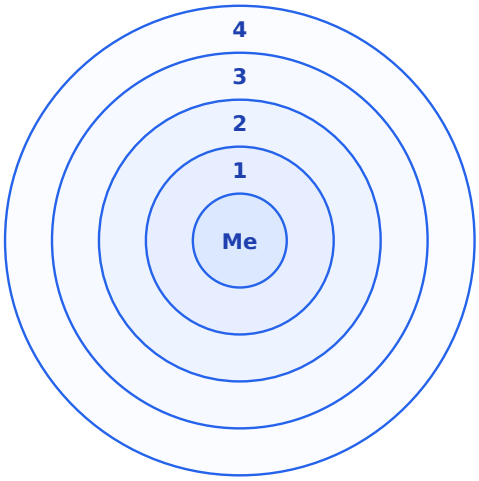
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# My support network

Who is around you, and who could you lean on a little more?

Name _____ Date _____

Put yourself in the centre. Then write the names of people in each ring, according to how close they are.




**1 Closest to me**
The people I could tell almost anything

**2 Good friends and family**
People I enjoy and can rely on

**3 Wider circle**
Neighbours, colleagues, groups, people I see regularly

**4 Professionals and services**
GP, therapist, support lines

| When I need... | I could go to... |
|---|---|
| **Someone to listen** | |
| **Practical help** | |
| **Company or distraction** | |
| **Advice** | |
| **A laugh** | |

**Who would I like to move closer in? What is one step towards that?**

**What stops me from asking for support, and what would I say to a friend who felt that way?**

*In an emergency call 112 or 999. Samaritans: freephone 116 123. Text HELLO to 50808.*

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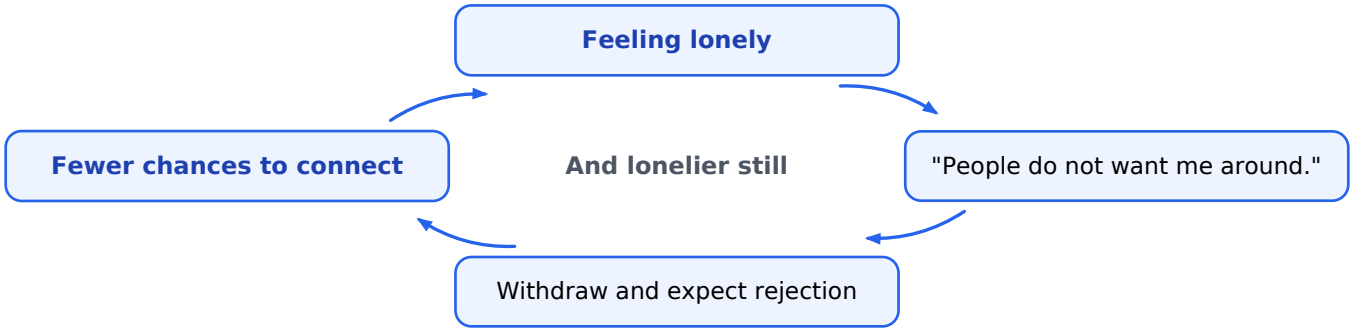
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# Loneliness: small steps towards connection

What loneliness is, why it tends to get worse, and small steps to more contact.

Name _____ Date _____

Loneliness is the gap between the contact you have and the contact you want. You can be lonely in a crowd or a marriage. It is very common, and it tends to feed on itself.




## Steps, from small to bigger

- [ ] Say hello to someone I pass every day
- [ ] Chat briefly with a shop assistant or neighbour
- [ ] Reply to a message I have been leaving
- [ ] Text someone I have lost touch with
- [ ] Ask a colleague to have lunch or a coffee
- [ ] Go to the same café, class or walk each week
- [ ] Join a group built around something I like
- [ ] Volunteer for an hour a week
- [ ] Invite someone to do something small
- [ ] Tell one person a bit more about how I really am

## Things to keep in mind

- Start with regular, low-pressure contact. Familiar faces become friends slowly.
- Shared activity is easier than face-to-face conversation.
- Expect your mind to predict rejection. Treat that as a thought, not a fact.
- It takes many small contacts for a connection to form. One awkward chat is not a verdict.

| This week I will | When | How it went |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

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# Planning a difficult conversation

Ten minutes of planning makes a hard conversation much more likely to go well.

Name _____ Date _____

**Who do I need to talk to, and about what?**

**What do I want to come out of it? (One realistic thing.)**

**How do I want to behave, whatever they do?**

**How I see it**

**How they might see it**

**My opening line. Calm, specific, no blame.**

**The two or three points I most need to make**

**What I am willing to give, and what I am not**

**What might throw me**

- [ ] Tears
- [ ] Anger
- [ ] Silence
- [ ] Blame

**How I will stay steady**

- [ ] Breathe out
- [ ] Slow down
- [ ] Ask for a pause

**When and where**

**Afterwards: what went well, and what is the next step?**

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# People pleasing

The signs of people pleasing, where it comes from and experiments in doing less of it.

Name _____ Date _____

Being kind and helpful is a good thing. People pleasing is something else: putting others' wants ahead of your own so automatically that you lose track of what you want at all, usually out of fear of conflict, disapproval or rejection.

## Signs

- [ ] I say yes when I want to say no
- [ ] I apologise a lot, even when it is not my fault
- [ ] I feel responsible for how other people feel
- [ ] I avoid conflict at almost any cost
- [ ] I change my opinions to fit in
- [ ] I find it hard to know what I want
- [ ] I feel guilty doing things for myself
- [ ] I feel resentful, then guilty about that

## Where it comes from

Often from growing up somewhere it was not safe or welcome to have needs: where love depended on being good, where someone's moods had to be managed, or where you were praised for being no trouble. Pleasing made sense then.

## What keeps it going

Each time you give in, the anxiety drops. You never find out that people can cope with your no.

## Experiments

| What I will try | What I fear will happen | What happened |
|---|---|---|
| *Say which film I would actually prefer* | *They will be annoyed* | *She said "great, I had no idea you liked those"* |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**What would I do this week if I were not worried about anyone's reaction?**

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# Rebuilding trust

What each person needs to do when trust has been broken.

Trust is the belief that someone will be honest with you, will do what they say, and will not knowingly hurt you. When it is broken, by a lie, a betrayal or a let-down, both people have work to do if the relationship is to continue.

### If I broke the trust

- Take full responsibility, with no "but"
- Answer questions honestly, even when it is uncomfortable
- Be open about where I am and what I am doing, without being asked
- Be patient. I do not decide when they should be over it.
- Keep small promises, every time
- Show that I understand the hurt

### If my trust was broken

- Allow myself to feel what I feel
- Say what I need in order to feel safer
- Notice the efforts being made
- Decide whether I want to rebuild, and say so
- Try not to use it as a weapon in every row
- Get support for myself

## What rebuilds trust

- **Consistency over time.** Not grand gestures. Being reliable in small things, week after week.
- **Transparency.** Volunteering information before being asked.
- **Empathy.** Hearing the pain without getting defensive.
- **Repair when there is a slip.** Owning it at once.

## What gets in the way

- Pressure to move on quickly
- Minimising ("it was not that bad")
- More secrets coming out later
- Punishing with no end in sight
- Never talking about it at all

## What to expect

- Setbacks, bad days and sudden waves of hurt are part of the process.
- Trust comes back in stages, and it is often different afterwards. Different can still be strong.
- Not every relationship should be rebuilt. If there is ongoing dishonesty, or you are not safe, your wellbeing comes first.

**What would need to happen for trust to grow here? What is my part?**

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# A weekly check-in for couples

Twenty minutes a week to talk about how things are between you.

Name _____ Date _____

Pick a regular time when you are both reasonably rested. Phones away. Take turns for each section. The listener's only job is to listen and say back what they heard.

**1. Something I appreciated about you this week**

**2. A moment I felt close to you**

**3. Something that was hard for me this week (in or outside the relationship)**

**4. Anything between us that needs clearing up. Start gently: "I felt... when... and I would like..."**

**5. Practical things for the week ahead (plans, money, who is doing what)**

**6. One thing I would like from you this week**

**7. Something we can look forward to together**

*Finish with something warm: a hug, a walk, a cup of tea. If section 4 gets heated, take a break and come back to it.*

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# Appreciation log

Noticing what is going right between you.

Name _____ Date _____

When a relationship is under strain, we start to notice only what the other person gets wrong. This rebuilds the habit of seeing the rest. Each day, write one thing they did or one quality you value. Then tell them.

| Day | Something I appreciated | Did I say it? | How they responded |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | | |
| **Tue** | | | |
| **Wed** | | | |
| **Thu** | | | |
| **Fri** | | | |
| **Sat** | | | |
| **Sun** | | | |

**What do I notice after a week of this?**

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# Coping with a breakup

What to expect after a relationship ends, and how to look after yourself.

Whether you chose it or not, a breakup means losing a person, a routine, a shared future and part of your sense of who you are. It is normal to feel a great deal, and for the feelings to change by the hour.

## What you might feel

**Grief and longing**
Waves of sadness. Missing them, even if things were bad.

**Anger and blame**
At them, at yourself, at the unfairness.

**Anxiety**
About being alone, money, the children, the future.

**Relief and guilt**
Sometimes at once.

## In the first weeks

- **Look after the basics.** Eat, sleep, move, wash. They slip quickly.
- **Lean on people.** Tell a few friends what you need: company, distraction, a listener.
- **Go easy on alcohol.** It deepens low mood and loosens the urge to text.
- **Limit contact, where you can.** Constant checking of their social media keeps the hurt fresh.
- **Put off big decisions.**
- **Let yourself be sad.** Grieving is part of getting over it.

## Over the months

- Rebuild a routine that is yours.
- Pick up things you let go during the relationship.
- Notice what you are telling yourself. "I am unlovable" and "I always get it wrong" come from grief. They are not facts.
- When you are ready, look honestly at what you would do differently. Without attacking yourself.
- There is no timetable. Good days and bad days will alternate for a while.

**Get more help if**
you cannot function after several weeks, you are drinking heavily, or you are having thoughts of harming yourself. Talk to your GP or therapist. In an emergency call 112 or 999. Samaritans: freephone 116 123.

**What I need most right now, and who I could ask**

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# Handling criticism

How to take criticism in, sort what is fair and respond.

Name _____ Date _____

Criticism stings, especially if you are already hard on yourself. The usual reactions are to crumple ("I am useless") or to counter-attack. There is another option.

## In the moment

1. **Pause and breathe.** You do not have to answer straight away.
2. **Listen for the content,** not the tone.
3. **Ask for specifics.** "Can you give me an example?"
4. **Buy time if you need to.** "I would like to think about that."

## Sorting it

| Type | What to do |
|---|---|
| Fair | Agree, without grovelling. "You are right. I was late with that. I will sort it." |
| Partly fair | Agree with the true part only. "I did forget to ring. I do not agree that I never think of you." |
| Unfair | Disagree calmly. "I do not see it that way." |
| A put-down | Name it. "I am happy to hear feedback. I am not willing to be spoken to like that." |

## My example

**What was said**

| What is fair in it | What is not fair, or exaggerated |
|---|---|
| | |

**What my critic added on top (the leap from "I made a mistake" to "I am a failure")**

**A balanced reply I could give, to them and to myself**

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# The kind of partner, friend or relative I want to be

Decide how you want to behave in one relationship that matters to you.

Name _____ Date _____

Think of one relationship that matters to you. Set aside, for a moment, what the other person does or should do.

**The relationship**

**If they were describing me at my best in this relationship, what would I want them to say?**

**Three qualities I want to bring**

- ☐ Patient
- ☐ Honest
- ☐ Playful
- ☐ Reliable
- ☐ Warm
- ☐ Calm
- ☐ Fair
- ☐ Fun
- ☐ Kind
- ☐ Loyal
- ☐ Open
- ☐ Present

**How closely have I been living those lately?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Not at all — Completely

**What pulls me away from being that person (moods, old hurts, habits, tiredness)?**

| A small thing I could do this week | Which quality it shows |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |

**What I noticed when I did them**

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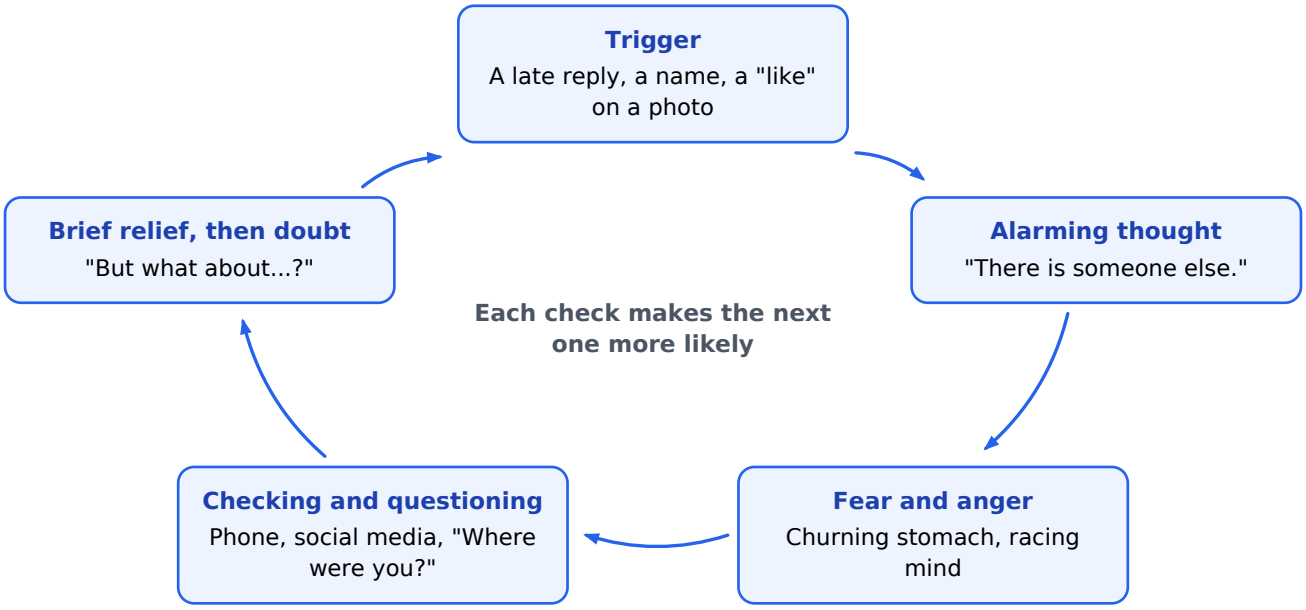
# Understanding jealousy

What jealousy is, what feeds it and what helps.

Jealousy is the fear of losing someone important to a rival, real or imagined. Almost everyone feels it at times. A flicker of jealousy is not a problem. It becomes one when it takes up hours of your day, drives you to check and question, and starts to damage the relationship you are trying to protect.

Envy is different. Envy is wanting what someone else has. Jealousy is fearing that someone will take what you have.

## How it keeps itself going




Checking gives a few minutes of relief, then the doubt comes back with a new question. Meanwhile the other person feels accused and pulls back, which looks like more evidence.

## What helps

1. **Name it.** "This is jealousy" is different from "this is a fact".
2. **Separate what you know from what you fear.** A late reply is a late reply.
3. **Cut back the checking.** Delay it first, then drop it. The urge rises, peaks and passes, like any urge.
4. **Say the fear, not the accusation.** "I felt insecure when..." is better than "Who were you with?"
5. **Look after your own life.** Friends and interests of your own make you less dependent on one person for your sense of worth.
6. **Ask where it comes from.** Being cheated on or left before, or doubting your own worth, can set the alarm too sensitive.

**When it is more than jealousy**

Sometimes distrust is a response to real lies or broken agreements. That is something to talk about openly, not a habit to treat. And if a partner uses jealousy to control where you go, who you see or what is on your phone, that is control, not love. Women's Aid: freephone 1800 341 900, any time. Men's Aid: 01 554 3811, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

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# When jealousy shows up

Record a jealous moment: the trigger, the urge and what you did.

Name _____ Date _____

**What set it off (what I saw, heard or imagined)**

**What my mind told me**

**How strong was the feeling?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Mild — Overwhelming

## What I felt like doing

- [ ] Checking a phone, email or social media
- [ ] Asking questions I have asked before
- [ ] Looking for reassurance
- [ ] Accusing or testing
- [ ] Following, or turning up unannounced
- [ ] Going quiet or pulling away
- [ ] Comparing myself with someone
- [ ] Something else

**What I know for a fact**

**What I am guessing or fearing**

**What I would say to a friend who told me this**

**What I did instead of acting on the urge, or what I will try next time**

**An hour later: how strong was the feeling, and what did I learn?**

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# Forgiveness: what it is and what it is not

What forgiving someone does and does not mean, and why it is your choice.

Being hurt by someone leaves a mark. Anger and resentment are natural, and often they are fair. Forgiveness is one way of loosening the hold the hurt has on you. It is a choice, it takes time, and nobody else gets to decide when or whether you make it.

**Forgiveness is...**

- Letting go of the wish to make them pay
- Something you do for your own peace
- A process, often with steps backwards
- Possible without ever telling the other person
- Compatible with remembering clearly

**Forgiveness is not...**

- Saying that what happened was acceptable
- Forgetting, or pretending it did not hurt
- Trusting the person again
- Going back to the relationship
- A duty, or proof that you are a good person

## Forgiving and reconciling are different

Forgiveness happens inside you. Reconciling takes two people, and it needs the other person to be safe, honest and willing to change. You can forgive someone and still keep your distance. Where there has been abuse, your safety comes first.

## If you are not ready, or do not want to

That is allowed. Being pushed to forgive too early usually just buries the anger. There are other ways forward:

- Accepting that it happened, without forgiving it
- Putting it down for now, and picking it up when you have more strength
- Putting your energy into your own life, so the hurt takes up less of it

## If you want to move towards it

1. Say fully what happened and what it cost you. Out loud, on paper or in therapy.
2. Let yourself feel the anger and the sadness. Forgiveness comes after them, not instead of them.
3. See the person as a whole human being who did harm. That explains it. It does not excuse it.
4. Decide what, if anything, you need from them, and what you will do if you never get it.
5. Expect to do it more than once. Old anger comes back. That does not mean you have failed.

**What carrying this costs me now**

**What I would want forgiveness, or acceptance, to give me**

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# Understanding grief

What grief is, how it tends to change over time and what is normal.

Grief is the natural response to losing someone or something that mattered. It is not an illness, and it is not a problem to be solved.

## Grief does not come in stages

You may have heard of five stages. They were never meant as steps everyone goes through in order. Real grief is messier. Feelings come in waves, sometimes several in an hour, and return when you least expect them.

## Two kinds of work

Most people move back and forth between two things:

**Facing the loss**

- Feeling the pain and longing
- Remembering, crying, talking about them
- Looking at photos
- Visiting the grave or special places

**Rebuilding life**

- Dealing with practical changes
- Taking on new roles and tasks
- Having a break from grief
- Finding moments of enjoyment

Both are needed. Going between them, even within a day, is healthy. Time away from the pain is not forgetting or disloyalty. It is how people get the strength to go back to it.

## What changes with time

For most people the pain does not shrink so much as life slowly grows around it. The waves come less often and with more warning. The loss stays part of you, and there is room for other things as well.

## Things that are normal

- Feeling relief, anger or guilt as well as sadness
- Feeling nothing for a while
- Sensing their presence, or thinking you saw them
- Grieving differently from others in the family
- Being hit hard on anniversaries, years later

**Be patient with yourself**

There is no correct way to grieve and no set length of time.

*The idea of moving between loss and rebuilding comes from Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut. The picture of life growing around grief comes from Lois Tonkin.*

**My notes and questions**

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# How grief can show up

Grief affects the whole person: feelings, body, mind and behaviour.

People are often frightened by the strength and variety of what they feel after a loss. All of the following are common.

### Feelings

Sadness, yearning, anger, guilt, anxiety, loneliness, relief, numbness. Sometimes several at once. Sometimes none.

### Body

Exhaustion, tightness in the chest or throat, a hollow stomach, aches, poor sleep, appetite changes, restlessness, getting ill more easily.

### Thinking

Disbelief, confusion, poor memory and concentration, going over and over what happened, "if only".

### Behaviour

Crying, or being unable to. Withdrawing, or keeping very busy. Searching for them. Avoiding reminders, or holding on to them.

### Sensing them

Hearing their voice, feeling them near, dreaming of them. This is common and usually comforting.

### Meaning and faith

Questioning beliefs. Asking "why?" Feeling life is pointless, or seeing what matters more clearly.

## Things people rarely say out loud

- "I feel relieved, and I hate myself for it."
- "I am angry with them for leaving."
- "I cannot cry, and I think something is wrong with me."
- "I laughed today and felt terrible."
- "I am jealous of people who still have theirs."

Each of these is a normal part of grief.

## Waves

Grief often comes in bursts, set off by a song, a smell, an empty chair, or nothing at all. In the early days the waves are close together. Over time there are longer gaps, though a big one can still knock you over years later.

**What I have been noticing in myself**

**What has surprised me**

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# A plan for hard days

Anniversaries, birthdays, holidays and other days you are dreading.

Name _____ Date _____

The lead-up to a significant day is often worse than the day itself. Having a plan, even a loose one, gives you something to hold on to. You can change it on the day.

**The day I am thinking about**

**What I expect to find hardest**

**How I would like to mark it, if at all**

☐ A visit ☐ A meal ☐ A candle ☐ A walk ☐ Their music ☐ Something they loved

**Who I want to be with**

**What I want to avoid, or say no to**

**What I will tell people about what I need**

**Something gentle for myself that day**

**If it gets too much, I will...**

**Afterwards: how it went, and what I would keep or change next time**

*There is no right way to spend these days. Ignoring it completely, doing something big, or anything in between are all fine.*

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# Staying connected to someone who has died

Ways of keeping a bond with the person, and what you want to remember.

Name _____ Date _____

It used to be thought that grieving meant letting go. Most bereaved people find the opposite: they keep a bond, in a new form, and it helps.

## Ways people stay connected

- [ ] Talking to them, out loud or in my head
- [ ] Keeping something of theirs close
- [ ] Visiting a place that was theirs
- [ ] Cooking their recipes, playing their music
- [ ] Marking their birthday or anniversary
- [ ] Telling stories about them
- [ ] Asking "what would they say about this?"
- [ ] Carrying on something they cared about
- [ ] Looking at photos and videos
- [ ] Writing to them

**What I most want to remember about them**

**What they gave me or taught me that I carry with me**

**The ways I already stay connected**

**A way I would like to try**

**How I want them to be part of my life from here**

*The idea of continuing bonds comes from Dennis Klass, Phyllis Silverman and Steven Nickman (1996).*

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# A letter to someone I have lost

For the things that did not get said.

There are often things left unsaid when someone dies. Writing a letter gives you a way to say them. Nobody else needs to read it. You do not have to do it in one go.

## Prompts, if you want them

- What I miss most about you is...
- A memory I keep coming back to...
- Something I never told you...
- I am sorry for...
- I forgive you for... or, I am still angry about...
- Thank you for...
- Since you died, I have...
- What I want you to know is...

**Dear**

## Afterwards

- You might keep the letter, read it at the grave, burn it, or put it away in a box.
- Notice how you feel. Give yourself some quiet time.
- You can write again, whenever there is more to say.

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# Looking after yourself while grieving

A checklist for looking after your body, your routine and your contact with people.

Name _____ Date _____

Grieving uses a great deal of energy. You do not need to do all of these. Tick what you are managing, and circle one or two to give more attention to.

## Body

- [ ] Eating something at regular times
- [ ] Drinking water
- [ ] Getting some rest, even if sleep is poor
- [ ] A little movement or fresh air each day
- [ ] Keeping alcohol low
- [ ] Seeing my GP if I am run down

## Routine

- [ ] Getting up and dressed
- [ ] One small task each day
- [ ] Some structure to the week
- [ ] Putting off big decisions where I can

## People

- [ ] Letting someone know how I am really doing
- [ ] Accepting offers of help
- [ ] Saying no to things I cannot face
- [ ] Time with people who do not need me to be OK

## Feelings

- [ ] Letting myself cry when it comes
- [ ] Letting myself laugh when it comes
- [ ] Taking breaks from grief without guilt
- [ ] Being as kind to myself as I would be to someone else

**One thing I will do for myself each day this week**

**What helps most at the moment**

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# Supporting someone who is grieving

What helps and what does not when someone you know is bereaved.

Most people worry about saying the wrong thing, so they say nothing or stay away. The bereaved person usually remembers who turned up, not what they said.

### What helps

- Saying their name
- "I am so sorry. I do not know what to say."
- Listening to the same story again
- Specific offers: "I will bring dinner on Tuesday"
- Remembering dates
- Keeping in touch after the first weeks
- Letting them be sad

### What does not help

- "They are in a better place"
- "At least they had a long life"
- "I know how you feel"
- "You need to be strong"
- "Let me know if you need anything"
- Changing the subject
- Expecting them to be over it

## Practical things

- Bring food. Do a school run. Cut the grass.
- Sit with them. You do not need to talk.
- Send a text that needs no reply: "Thinking of you today."
- Invite them along, and do not take a no personally. Ask again.

## Later on

Support tends to disappear after the funeral, when the shock wears off and the loss sinks in. The months afterwards, and the first birthday, Christmas and anniversary, are when people need you most. Put the dates in your phone.

## If you are worried

If they are not eating or functioning after many weeks, drinking heavily, or talking about not wanting to be here, encourage them gently to see their GP, and offer to go with them. If you think they are in immediate danger, call 112 or 999. Samaritans are on freephone 116 123, day or night.

**Look after yourself as well**
You may be grieving too.

**My notes and questions**

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# Between loss and rebuilding

Checking your balance between facing the grief and getting on with life.

Name _____ Date _____

Healthy grieving moves back and forth between spending time with the loss and attending to the life that has to go on. Too much of one can leave you stuck: overwhelmed by pain, or running from it. Tick what you have been doing and add anything else.

### Time with the loss

- [ ] Remembering
- [ ] Crying
- [ ] Talking about them
- [ ] Looking at photos
- [ ] Visiting places

### Time rebuilding

- [ ] New tasks and roles
- [ ] Practical matters
- [ ] Taking a break
- [ ] Seeing people
- [ ] Small pleasures

**Lately I have been mostly...**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Facing the loss — Rebuilding

**What do I notice about my balance?**

**Do I avoid one side? What am I afraid would happen if I went there?**

**One thing I could do this week on the side I have been neglecting**

*Based on the dual process model of Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut.*

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# Other kinds of loss

Not all grief follows a death.

We grieve whenever we lose something we were attached to. Many of these losses go unrecognised by other people, which can leave you feeling you have no right to be so upset. You do.

**Relationships**
Separation, divorce, a friendship ending, falling out with family.

**Health**
A diagnosis, chronic illness or pain, losing abilities, a change in how your body looks or works.

**The future you expected**
Infertility, miscarriage, not having the family, career or life you pictured.

**Work and role**
Redundancy, retirement, children leaving home, no longer being needed in the same way.

**Home and belonging**
Moving, emigrating, losing a community or a place.

**Someone who is still here**
A loved one changed by dementia, addiction or brain injury. They are present and also gone.

**Safety and trust**
After trauma, betrayal or abuse.

**A pet**
Often a daily companion for years.

## Why these can be harder

- There is no funeral and no cards. Other people may not see it as a loss at all.
- There may be no clear ending, so the grief cannot settle.
- You may be told to look on the bright side.
- You may tell yourself the same.

## What helps

1. Name it as a loss. "I am grieving this."
2. Let yourself feel it, without ranking it against other people's troubles.
3. Tell someone who will take it seriously.
4. Mark it in some way: write about it, plant something, hold your own small ritual.
5. In time, ask what still matters to you, and how you might carry that forward.

**A loss of mine that has not been fully recognised**

**What I would want someone to understand about it**

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# Memories worth keeping

Gathering what you do not want to lose.

Name _____ Date _____

Many people fear they will forget. Writing things down keeps them safe. Fill this in over time, alone or with family. Some answers will make you smile and some will hurt.

**Their name, and what I called them**

**What they looked like, sounded like, smelled like**

**Things they always said**

**What made them laugh**

**What they were good at, and what they were hopeless at**

**A story that sums them up**

**My favourite memory of us together**

**What I learned from them**

**What I want other people to know about them**

*You could add photos and keep these pages in a folder or box.*

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# Grief: myths and facts

Common beliefs about grieving that are not true.

| Myth | Fact |
|---|---|
| **Grief follows five stages.** | There are no fixed stages. Feelings come and go in no particular order. |
| **You should be over it in a year.** | There is no timetable. Many people find the second year harder than the first. |
| **If you are not crying, you are not grieving.** | People grieve in very different ways. Some cry a lot, some hardly at all. |
| **Staying strong means not showing it.** | Showing grief is not weakness. Children especially learn that feelings are safe when adults show theirs. |
| **Keeping busy is the best cure.** | Activity helps, in balance. Grief that is constantly outrun tends to catch up. |
| **You have to let go to move on.** | Most people stay connected to the person in a new way, and that is healthy. |
| **Talking about them will upset people.** | The bereaved are already thinking about them. Hearing their name is usually a comfort. |
| **If you feel relief, you did not love them.** | Relief is common, especially after a long illness or a difficult relationship. It sits alongside love. |
| **Time heals.** | Time alone does not. What you do with the time is what helps. |

**A belief about grief that has been weighing on me**

**Where I picked it up (family, culture, something someone said)**

**What I would like to believe instead**

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# When grief gets stuck

Sometimes grief does not ease, and extra help is needed.

For most people, the raw pain of grief gradually softens. They still miss the person, and they are able to take part in life again. For some, the grief stays as intense as in the first weeks, or gets worse, and life stays on hold.

## Signs that grief may be stuck

These are worth attention if they are still strong and getting in the way of life many months on (as a rough guide, six months to a year or more).

- [ ] Constant, intense longing or preoccupation with the person
- [ ] Feeling that part of me died with them
- [ ] Being unable to accept that they are gone
- [ ] Avoiding anything that reminds me of the death
- [ ] Intense bitterness, anger or guilt
- [ ] Feeling that life is meaningless or empty
- [ ] Feeling numb, or cut off from other people
- [ ] Being unable to plan or picture a future
- [ ] Not being able to get back to work, friends or interests

## What can make it more likely

- A sudden, violent or traumatic death, or the death of a child
- A very close or very dependent relationship, or things left unresolved
- Little support, several losses close together, or earlier depression or trauma

## What helps

Getting stuck is not your fault and is not a sign of weakness. There are therapies designed for this, which help you face the reality of the loss, work through what was left unfinished, and begin to rebuild a life that still has the person in it.

**Talk to your GP or therapist**
if you recognise yourself here, and straight away if you are having thoughts of wanting to die or to join the person.

**If you need help right now (Ireland)**

| | |
|---|---|
| **In an emergency** | Call **112** or **999**, or go to your nearest emergency department. |
| **Samaritans** | Freephone **116 123**, any time, day or night. Email jo@samaritans.ie |
| **Text About It** | Free text **HELLO** to **50808**, any time, for an anonymous text conversation. |
| **Pieta** | Freephone **1800 247 247**, any time, or text **HELP** to **51444**. For thoughts of suicide or self-harm. |
| **Your GP** | Contact your GP or the out-of-hours GP service in your area. |

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# When a pet dies

Grief after the death of a pet, and what helps.

A pet is part of the household. They are there every morning and every evening, they shape your routines, and they ask for nothing complicated. When they die, the house feels wrong. Grief after losing a pet can be as strong as grief for a person, and there is nothing silly or excessive about it.

## What makes it harder

- **"It was only a dog."** Other people may not understand, and there is no funeral and no time off. Grief that is not recognised is lonelier.
- **The day is full of gaps.** The walk, the feeding time, the sound at the door. Each one is a reminder, many times a day.
- **Guilt about the end.** If you had to decide to have your pet put to sleep, you may go over it again and again. Too soon? Too late? Should I have noticed earlier? Nearly everyone does this. You made the kindest decision you could with what you knew.
- **It can stir up other losses.** An older grief sometimes comes back with this one.

## What helps

1. Let yourself be sad. You do not have to justify it to anyone.
2. Talk to people who understand, especially others who have lost a pet.
3. Mark it. A photo, a tree planted, a collar kept, a few words said.
4. Keep the walk, if it was good for you. The routine looked after you as well.
5. Go gently with children. Use plain, honest words. "Died" is kinder than "went to sleep", which can frighten them.
6. Other pets may be unsettled too. Keep their routine steady.

## Another pet?

There is no right time, and no disloyalty in it. Some people are ready in weeks and some never are. A new animal does not replace the old one. It is the start of a different relationship.

**What I miss most about them**

**How I would like to remember them**

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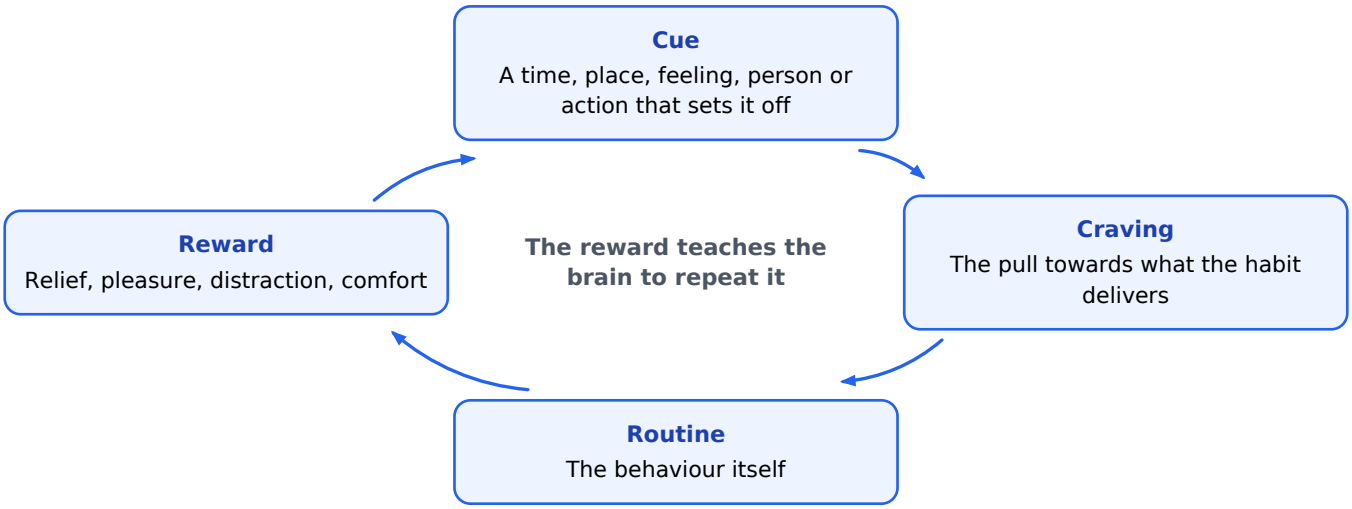
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# The habit loop

The four parts of a habit, and how to change one of your own.

Name _____ Date _____

A habit is a behaviour that has become automatic because it was repeated in the same context and brought some kind of reward. This is why willpower alone rarely changes one.




## Changing a habit

1. **Spot the cue.** When and where does it happen? What am I feeling? Who is there?
2. **Name the reward.** What do I really get from it? Often it is relief from a feeling.
3. **Keep the cue and the reward. Swap the routine** for one with a similar pay-off.
4. **Make the old routine harder and the new one easier,** then repeat. New loops take weeks, and slips are part of it.

## My habit

**The habit I want to change**

| Cue | Reward |
|---|---|
| When, where, feeling, who, what just happened? | What do I really get from it? |

**A different routine that could give me something similar**

**How I will make the old routine harder and the new one easier**

*The habit loop was popularised by Charles Duhigg in The Power of Habit.*

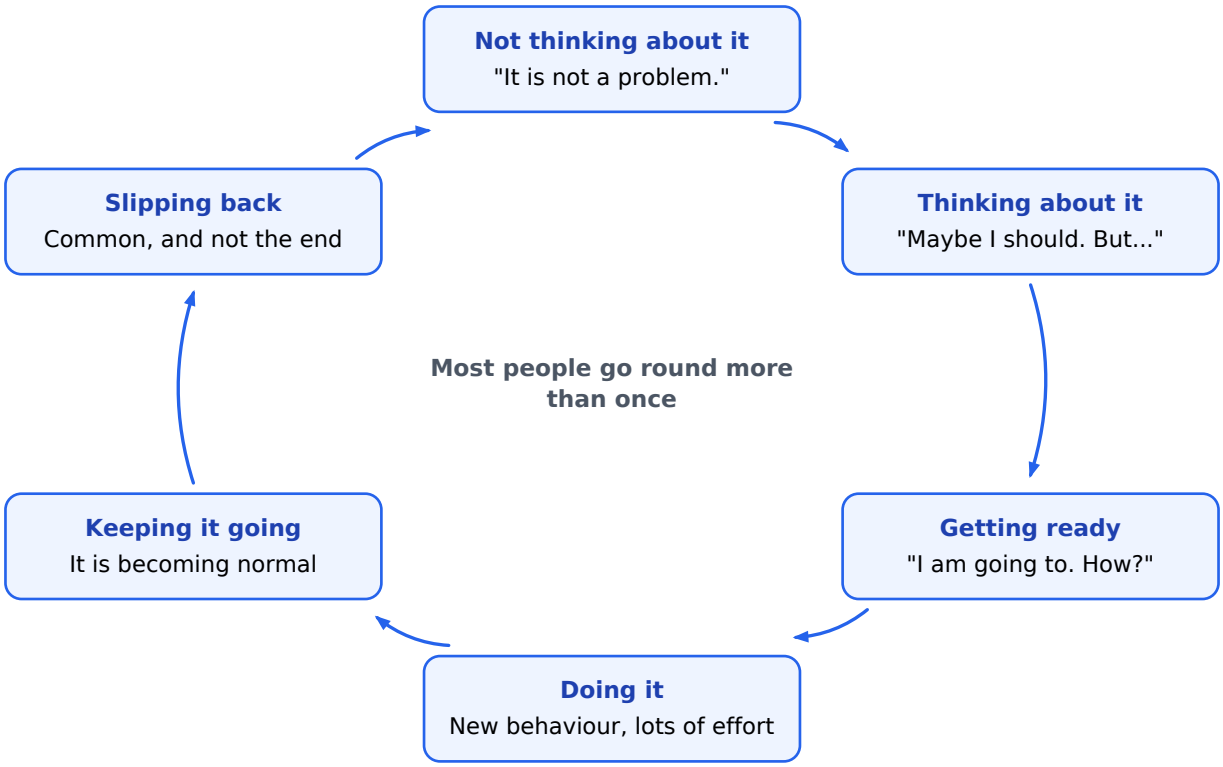
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# The stages of change

The stages people go through when changing a habit, and what helps at each.

People rarely change a habit in one go. Most move through stages, often more than once. Knowing where you are helps you choose the right next step.




| Stage | What helps |
|---|---|
| **Not thinking about it** | Information, without pressure. Noticing the effects of the habit. |
| **Thinking about it** | Weighing up pros and cons. Thinking about what matters to you. Talking it through. |
| **Getting ready** | A clear, realistic plan. A start date. Telling someone. Removing temptations. |
| **Doing it** | Support. Coping with urges. Rewards. Taking it one day at a time. |
| **Keeping it going** | Knowing your risky situations. Building a life that makes the habit less needed. |
| **Slipping back** | Kindness, not shame. Learning what led to it. Starting again quickly. |

Being in two minds is a normal stage of change. A slip does not send you back to the beginning. You keep what you have learned.

**The change I am thinking about, and the stage I am at**

**What would help me take the next step?**

*Based on the stages of change model developed by James Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente.*

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# How ready am I?

Rate how important the change is to you and how confident you are that you can make it.

Name _____ Date _____

**The change I am considering**

**How important is it to me to make this change?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Not at all — Extremely

**Why did I choose that number and not a lower one?**

**What would have to happen for it to go up by one or two?**

**How confident am I that I could do it if I decided to?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Not at all — Extremely

**Why that number and not a lower one? What gives me some confidence?**

**What would help it go up by one or two?**

**What I have managed to change before, and how I did it**

**The next small step that feels possible**

*If importance is low, the work is in looking at what matters to you. If confidence is low, the work is in skills, support and smaller steps.*

*The importance and confidence rulers come from Motivational Interviewing, developed by William Miller and Stephen Rollnick.*

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# My triggers and risky situations

List what sets off your urges and decide in advance what you will do.

Name _____ Date _____

Urges are set off by particular people, places, times and feelings. List yours, and decide in advance what you will do.

**Outside triggers**
Places (the pub, the kitchen, the sofa). People. Times of day. Pay day. Celebrations. Seeing or smelling it.

**Inside triggers**
Stress, boredom, loneliness, anger, tiredness, hunger. Feeling good and wanting to reward myself. "Just one will not hurt."

| Trigger | How risky (0 to 10) | What I will do: avoid it, change it or cope with it |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
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| | | |

**My riskiest time of the day or week**

**Who or what helps me stay on track**

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# Alcohol: standard drinks and low-risk limits

Facts about standard drinks and low-risk limits in Ireland.

Many people drink more than they realise, because measures poured at home are bigger than pub measures and because it is easy to lose count.

## What is a standard drink?

In Ireland a standard drink has about 10 grams of pure alcohol. That is roughly:

**Beer or lager**
A half pint of normal-strength beer

**Wine**
A small glass (100ml). A bottle has about seven.

**Spirits**
A pub measure (35.5ml)

## The HSE low-risk guidelines

- No more than 11 standard drinks a week for women, and 17 for men
- Spread over the week, with two to three alcohol-free days
- No more than 6 standard drinks on any one occasion

The HSE says that no level of drinking is completely safe for health, and that the less you drink, the lower the risk. These guidelines were under review in 2026, so check hse.ie for the current figures.

## Signs that drinking is becoming a problem

- [ ] Drinking more, or more often, than I mean to
- [ ] Needing more to get the same effect
- [ ] Drinking to cope with stress, sleep or feelings
- [ ] Feeling guilty or secretive about it
- [ ] Other people commenting on it
- [ ] Gaps in memory after drinking
- [ ] Arguments, missed work or risks taken because of it
- [ ] Finding it hard to imagine a week without it

## Alcohol and mood

Alcohol lifts mood for an hour or two, then lowers it. It worsens anxiety the next day, disrupts sleep and makes low mood harder to shift.

**Important**
If you drink heavily every day, do not stop suddenly. Withdrawal can be dangerous. Talk to your GP first about cutting down safely. The HSE Drugs and Alcohol Helpline can also advise: freephone 1800 459 459, Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 5.30pm.

**What I notice about my own drinking**

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# Drink diary

Record every drink for one week.

Name _____ Date _____

Record every drink, as close to the time as you can. One standard drink is a half pint of beer, a small glass of wine (100ml) or a pub measure of spirits.

| Day | What I drank | Standard drinks | Where and who with | What was going on (mood, reason) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | | | |
| **Tue** | | | | |
| **Wed** | | | | |
| **Thu** | | | | |
| **Fri** | | | | |
| **Sat** | | | | |
| **Sun** | | | | |

| Total for the week | Alcohol-free days | Most in one day |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

**What do I notice? When and why do I drink most?**

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# My plan for cutting down

Set your limits and choose the strategies you will use to keep to them.

Name _____ Date _____

**First**

If you drink heavily every day, talk to your GP before cutting down. Stopping suddenly can be dangerous.

**My reasons for cutting down**

| My limit for the week (standard drinks) | Alcohol-free days | Most on any one day |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

## Strategies I will use

- [ ] Decide my limit before I start
- [ ] Have something to eat first
- [ ] Alternate with water or a soft drink
- [ ] Choose smaller measures or lower-strength drinks
- [ ] Start later, finish earlier
- [ ] Do not keep it in the house
- [ ] Avoid rounds, and have a reason ready for saying no
- [ ] Plan something for the times I usually drink

**Situations where it will be hardest, and what I will do or say**

**Who knows my plan and will back me**

**What I will do instead to relax, reward myself or cope**

**How I will review it, and when**

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# What to do after a slip

Why one slip does not have to become a relapse, and what to do next.

Almost everyone who changes a habit slips at some point. A slip, or lapse, is a single return to the old behaviour. A relapse is going back to the old pattern. One does not have to lead to the other.

## How a slip turns into a relapse

After a slip, the thought arrives: "I have blown it. I am back to square one. I may as well carry on." Shame and hopelessness follow, and the old habit is the quickest way to escape those feelings. That reaction does more damage than the slip did.

**Thinking that leads to relapse**

- "I have ruined everything."
- "I obviously cannot do this."
- "I am weak."
- "I may as well keep going."

**Thinking that gets you back on track**

- "I slipped. That is common."
- "One slip does not wipe out my progress."
- "What led up to this?"
- "My next choice is what matters."

## What to do after a slip

1. **Stop.** As soon as you notice. You do not have to finish the bottle, the packet or the evening.
2. **Get out of the situation** if you can.
3. **Talk to yourself kindly.** As you would to a friend.
4. **Tell someone** who supports you.
5. **Work out what happened.** What was the trigger? What was I feeling? What did I tell myself?
6. **Adjust the plan.** What would help next time?
7. **Start again straight away.** Not on Monday.

## My slip plan

**The first thing I will do**

**Who I will contact**

**What I want to say to myself**

*The "what the hell" effect is known as the abstinence violation effect, described by Alan Marlatt and Judith Gordon.*

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# Staying on track: my plan

A plan for keeping a change going once you have made it.

Name _____ Date _____

## The change I have made, and why it matters to me

## What has helped me get this far

### My high-risk situations

People, places, times, feelings

### What I will do in each

## Early warning signs that I am heading for a slip (thoughts, moods, behaviour)

## Thoughts that tempt me, and my replies

### People who support me

### Things in my life that make the old habit less needed

- [ ] Enough sleep
- [ ] Things I enjoy
- [ ] Company
- [ ] Being active
- [ ] A sense of purpose

## If I slip, I will...

## How I will mark my progress

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# What does the habit do for me?

Work out what need the habit meets, and other ways to meet it.

Name _____ Date _____

Habits we want to drop are usually solving a problem. They calm us, reward us, fill time, numb something or help us fit in. If you take the habit away without another way of meeting the need, it comes back.

**The habit**

| What it does for me | Is that true every time? | Other ways I could get the same thing |
|---|---|---|
| **Helps me relax or switch off** | | |
| **Takes the edge off difficult feelings** | | |
| **Gives me a reward or treat** | | |
| **Fills time or relieves boredom** | | |
| **Helps me feel part of things** | | |
| **Gives me a break or time to myself** | | |
| **Something else:** | | |

**The need that matters most**

**The alternative I am most willing to try**

**When I tried it: how well did it meet the need (0 to 10)?**

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# Building a new habit

Make it small, attach it to something, and make it easy.

Name _____ Date _____

Habits stick when they are small, specific and tied to something you already do. Motivation comes and goes. A good set-up keeps the habit going on the days when you have none.

**The habit I want to build, and why it matters to me**

## Make it tiny

**The two-minute version (so small I could do it on my worst day)**

## Attach it to something I already do every day

| After I... | I will... (the tiny version) |
|---|---|
| | |

## Make it easy and satisfying

**What I will set up in advance (for example: lay out my clothes the night before)**

**What usually gets in the way, and my plan for it. "If..., then I will..."**

**How I will mark it when I have done it (a tick, telling someone)**

| Week | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | | | |

*Missing once is normal. Try not to miss twice in a row.*

*Starting tiny and attaching a habit to an existing routine comes from the work of BJ Fogg. If-then plans come from Peter Gollwitzer.*

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# Habit tracker

Tick each day you do your habits, for four weeks.

Name _____ Date _____

Write your habits in the left column and tick each day you do them. Keep the list short.

## Week 1

| Habit | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |

## Week 2

| Habit | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |

## Week 3

| Habit | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |

## Week 4

| Habit | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |

**What helped on the days I did it? What got in the way on the days I did not?**

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# My phone and screen habits

Look at how you use your phone and decide what you want to change.

Name _____ Date _____

Phones and apps are designed to hold attention, so finding them hard to put down is not a personal failing. If you want to use yours differently, you need to set it up that way on purpose.

**Roughly how much I use it each day, and what for**

**What I get from it**

- [ ] Connection
- [ ] Information
- [ ] Fun
- [ ] Escape
- [ ] Something to do
- [ ] Staying in the loop

**What it costs me**

- [ ] Sleep
- [ ] Time
- [ ] Attention
- [ ] Mood
- [ ] Being present

**When do I reach for it without deciding to? What am I usually feeling?**

## Things to try

- [ ] Phone charges outside the bedroom
- [ ] No phone for the first 30 minutes of the day
- [ ] Notifications off, except calls and messages
- [ ] Social media apps off the home screen, or deleted from the phone
- [ ] A daily time limit on particular apps
- [ ] Phone away at meals and with the kids
- [ ] Greyscale screen in the evening
- [ ] One screen-free evening a week
- [ ] Something else within reach: a book, a puzzle, knitting

**The two I will try for a week**

**What I noticed**

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# Coping with cravings

Three steps for getting through a craving: delay, distract, decide.

Name _____ Date _____

A craving feels urgent, but it passes. Most peak and fade within 20 to 30 minutes, whether or not you act on them.

| | |
|---|---|
| **1. Delay** | Tell yourself: "Not now. I will wait 20 minutes and see." Set a timer. |
| **2. Distract** | Do something that takes attention and, ideally, moves your body or gets you out of the room. |
| **3. Decide** | When the timer goes, check the urge. Remind yourself why you are doing this. Then choose. |

## What works for me

**Things I can do for 20 minutes**

- ☐ A walk
- ☐ Ring someone
- ☐ Cook
- ☐ A shower
- ☐ Tidy
- ☐ A game

**What I will remind myself**

My reasons. What happened last time.

## What makes cravings worse

- ☐ Being hungry, tired or thirsty
- ☐ Being around it
- ☐ Arguing with the craving
- ☐ Telling myself "just one"
- ☐ Stress with no outlet
- ☐ Too much unplanned time

**My riskiest times, and what I will have ready**

*Cut along the dashed lines. Keep a card in your wallet or phone case.*

**Craving plan**

Delay 20 minutes. Distract. Decide.
It is a wave and it will pass.

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**My reasons**

Why I am doing this

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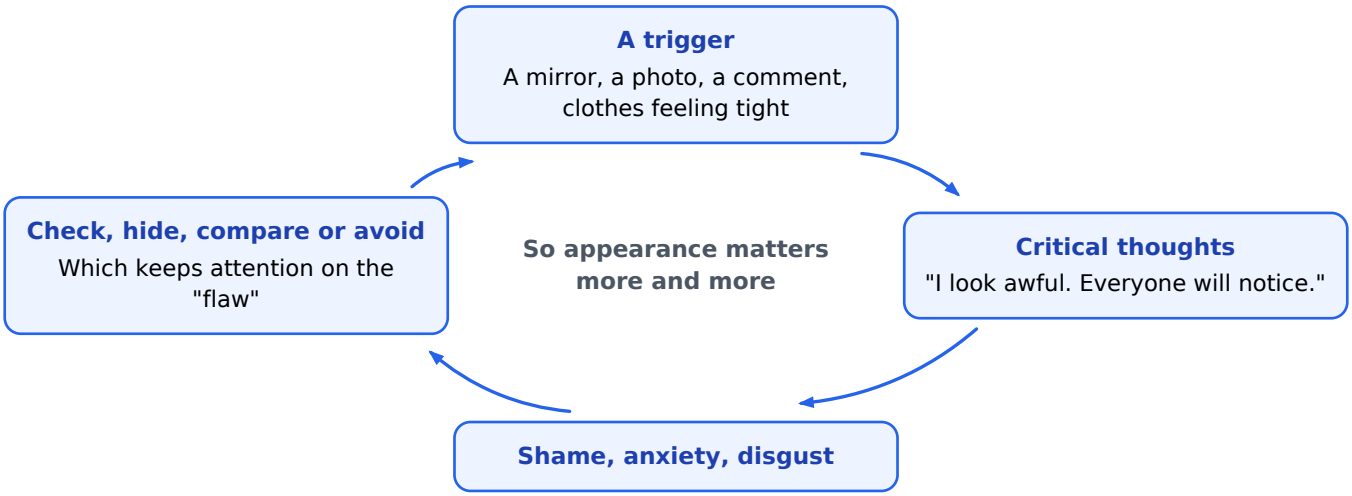
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# Understanding body image

How you see and feel about your body, which is not the same as how it looks.

Body image is the picture you hold of your body in your mind, and the thoughts and feelings that go with it. It is shaped by family comments, teasing, culture, media and experiences, and it can be very different from what other people see.

## How a negative body image keeps going




## Things that keep it going

- **Checking.** Mirrors, pinching, weighing, comparing photos. Looking closely magnifies what you see.
- **Avoiding.** Mirrors, photos, swimming, intimacy, certain clothes. You never find out that it would have been all right.
- **Comparing.** Usually with people who seem to look better, and often with edited images.
- **Measuring your worth by your appearance.**

## What helps

1. Cutting back on checking and comparing.
2. Gradually doing the things you have been avoiding.
3. Noticing what your body does for you, not only how it looks.
4. Widening what your self-worth rests on.
5. Speaking to yourself as you would to someone you love.

**When to get specialist help**

If you are restricting food, bingeing, making yourself sick, exercising to compensate, or thinking about your shape and weight most of the day, please talk to your GP. Bodywhys, the Eating Disorders Association of Ireland (bodywhys.ie), offers information and support.

**How my feelings about my body affect what I do, and do not do**

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# Body checking and avoiding

Two habits that keep you focused on what you dislike.

Name _____ Date _____

Tick what you do.

## Checking

- [ ] Looking in mirrors or windows repeatedly
- [ ] Studying particular parts of my body
- [ ] Pinching or measuring
- [ ] Weighing myself often
- [ ] Checking how clothes fit
- [ ] Taking and examining photos
- [ ] Comparing myself with others
- [ ] Asking if I look OK

## Avoiding

- [ ] Mirrors
- [ ] Being in photos
- [ ] Swimming, the gym or the beach
- [ ] Fitted or light clothing
- [ ] Being seen without make-up or styling
- [ ] Shopping for clothes
- [ ] Being touched or seen undressed
- [ ] Social events

| The behaviour | How often | What I hope it will do | What it actually does |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

**One checking habit I will cut back, and how (for example: one look in the mirror before leaving, for getting dressed, not for inspecting)**

**One thing I avoid that I will try, as an experiment**

**What I noticed**

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# What my body does for me

Shifting attention from how it looks to what it makes possible.

Name _____ Date _____

We tend to judge our bodies by how they look. Your body also does things for you all day long. You do not have to pretend to love how you look. This exercise asks you to notice what your body does as well.

**What my senses let me enjoy (things I love to see, hear, taste, smell, touch)**

**What my body lets me do (for example: hold, make, play)**

**What it does without being asked (for example: heals a cut)**

**What it has got me through**

**How it connects me to other people**

**If I treated my body as a friend who has stuck by me, how would I treat it differently?**

**A thank-you note to one part of my body, for what it does**

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# Living in the body I have

The things you are waiting to do until your body changes.

Name _____ Date _____

Body dissatisfaction often comes with a deal: "When I look different, then I will..." Years can pass that way. What would it be like to do some of those things now, in the body you have?

| Something I have been putting off | Why it matters to me | A small first step |
|---|---|---|
| *Going swimming with the kids* | *I want to be part of their fun* | *Go to the pool at a quiet time, for 20 minutes* |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**What do I fear would happen?**

**What actually happened when I tried one?**

**What I want my life to be about, apart from how I look**

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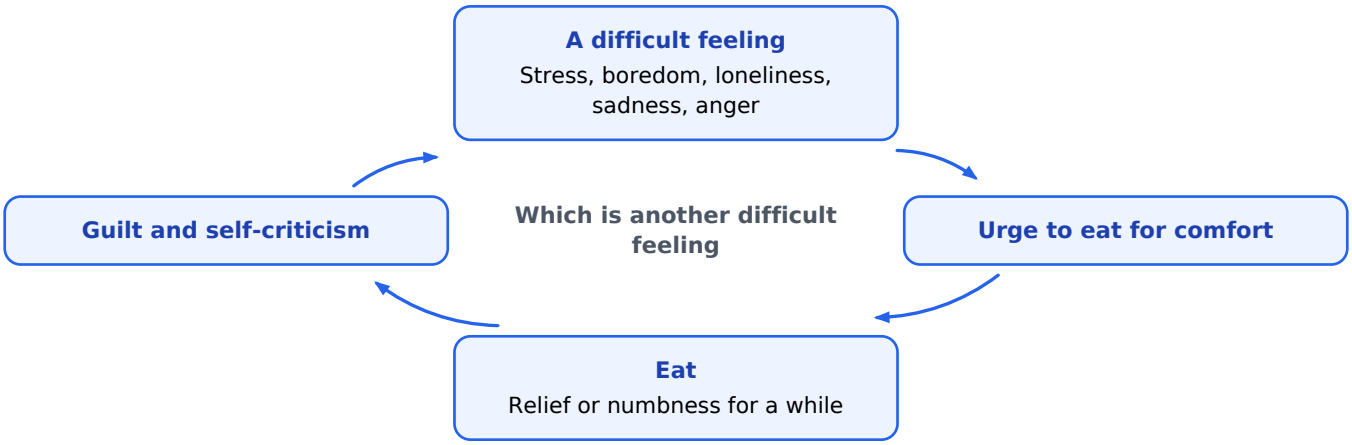
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# Eating to cope with feelings

Notice when you eat for comfort, and what else might help.

Name _____ Date _____

Almost everyone eats for comfort sometimes. It becomes a problem when food is the main way of coping, and is followed by guilt.




## Two kinds of hunger

### Physical hunger

- Builds gradually
- Felt in the stomach
- Open to different foods
- Stops when I am full
- No guilt afterwards

### Emotional hunger

- Comes on suddenly
- Felt as a craving in the mind
- Wants one particular thing
- Hard to satisfy
- Often followed by guilt

## Noticing the pattern

| When and where | What I was feeling | What I really needed (rest, comfort, company, a break) | Another way to get it |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

## Things that help

- Eat regular meals. Getting over-hungry makes everything harder.
- Pause for five minutes first. Ask: "What am I feeling? What do I need?"
- If you do eat, do it without the telling-off. Criticising yourself keeps the cycle going.

*If eating feels out of control, or you are restricting, bingeing or making yourself sick, talk to your GP. Bodywhys (bodywhys.ie) offers support in Ireland.*

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# Mindful eating

One small piece of food, eaten as if for the first time.

We eat much of our food without tasting it. This exercise slows the whole thing down. Use a raisin, a segment of orange or a square of chocolate. Take about five minutes.

1. **Look.** Hold it in your palm. Look at it as if you had never seen one before. Colour, shape, surface, the way the light catches it.
2. **Touch.** Feel its weight and texture. Roll it between your fingers.
3. **Smell.** Bring it to your nose. Notice any scent, and anything that happens in your mouth or stomach.
4. **Place.** Put it on your tongue without chewing. Explore it. Notice the urge to bite.
5. **Taste.** Bite once. Notice the flavour released. Chew slowly, and notice how the taste and texture change.
6. **Swallow.** Notice the intention to swallow before you do. Follow it down.
7. **After.** Notice the aftertaste, and how your body feels.

**What did I notice that I usually miss?**

**What was my mind doing?**

## At ordinary meals

- Sit down to eat, without a screen, for at least one meal a day.
- Give the first three mouthfuls your full attention.
- Put your fork down between bites now and then.
- Check in halfway through: how hungry am I now?

**A meal this week I will eat this way**

*The raisin exercise comes from Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn.*

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# Understanding persistent pain

Why pain can carry on after the body has healed, and what that means for living with it.

Pain that lasts longer than three months is called persistent or chronic pain. It is real, whatever scans do or do not show. It also works differently from short-term pain, and understanding the difference opens up new ways to manage it.

## Pain is a protector, not a damage meter

Pain is produced by the nervous system when it judges that the body needs protecting. With a new injury, that judgement is usually right. With persistent pain, the alarm system itself has become over-sensitive. It keeps sounding even after tissues have healed, or far more loudly than the state of the tissues warrants.

This is why hurt does not always mean harm.

## What turns the volume up and down

**Turns pain up**

- Stress, worry and low mood
- Poor sleep
- Fear of movement
- Doing far too much, or far too little
- Focusing on the pain
- Feeling alone with it

**Turns pain down**

- Feeling safe and calm
- Good sleep
- Gentle, regular movement
- Pacing activity
- Absorbing, enjoyable things
- Support and understanding

None of this means the pain is "in your head". It means the brain and nerves are part of every pain, and they can be influenced.

## What helps

1. Understanding pain, as you are doing now.
2. Gradually building activity, without boom and bust.
3. Better sleep and less stress.
4. Addressing fear and unhelpful beliefs about pain.
5. Getting back to what matters to you, with the pain if need be.

**The aim**

To get back to living well now and let the pain system calm down over time, without waiting for the pain to go first. Many people find that pain eases as they do more.

*Always have new, changed or worrying symptoms checked by your GP.*

*Draws on the pain education work of Lorimer Moseley and David Butler.*

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# The persistent pain cycle

How pain, fear and doing less feed each other.




## How each step feeds the next

- **Beliefs about damage** make ordinary movement feel dangerous.
- **Fear and tension** tighten muscles and turn the pain system up.
- **Resting and guarding** help with a new injury. Over months they lead to weakness and stiffness, so less activity causes more pain.
- **Life shrinks.** Fewer good things, more time to notice pain, lower mood.

## Breaking the cycle

| Where | What helps |
|---|---|
| Beliefs | Learning that hurt does not always mean harm. Asking your doctor or physio what is safe. |
| Fear and tension | Relaxation, breathing, addressing worries, graded return to feared movements. |
| Activity | Finding a steady baseline and building up slowly. Pacing. |
| Life | Getting back to valued activities and people, in adapted ways if needed. |

**Where am I in this cycle at the moment?**

**The link I could most easily work on**

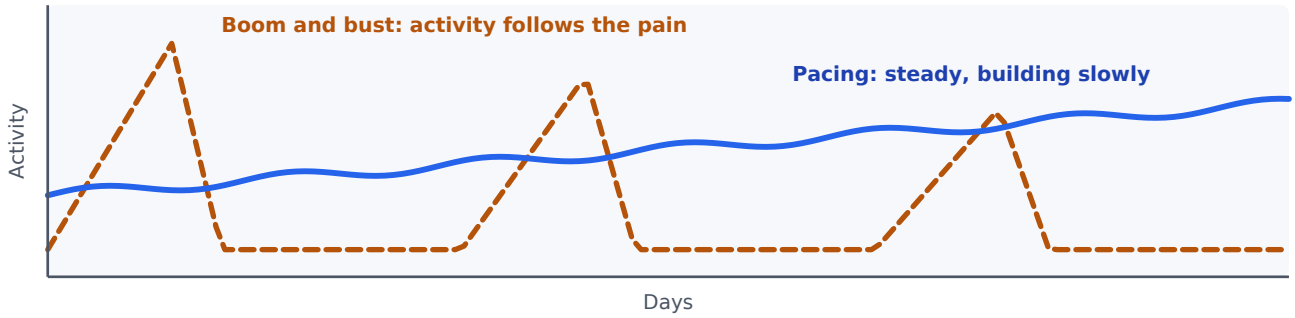
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# Boom and bust

Why good days can lead to bad weeks, and what to do about it.

On a good day it is tempting to catch up on everything. The next day, or the day after, pain or exhaustion hits and you are forced to rest. Then, once you recover, you push again. Over time the good days get fewer and the crashes get longer.




## Why it happens

- Activity is guided by how you feel, not by a plan.
- There is a backlog, and guilt about it.
- "I must make the most of feeling OK."
- Stopping only when pain or fatigue forces you to.

## The alternative: pacing

Pacing means doing a planned amount, on good days and bad days alike, and stopping before you have to.

1. **Find your baseline.** How much of an activity can you do without a flare-up afterwards, even on a bad day? Start below that.
2. **Go by the clock or the count, not the pain.** "Ten minutes of weeding" or "walk to the second lamppost".
3. **Take breaks before you need them.** Short and frequent.
4. **Switch tasks and positions.** Sit, stand, move.
5. **Build up slowly.** A small increase every week or two, and only when the current level is comfortable.
6. **On good days, stick to the plan.** This is the hardest part and the one that matters most.

**The result**

You do a little less on good days and a lot more on bad days. Over a month, you get more done with fewer crashes.

**An activity where I tend to boom and bust**

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# My pacing plan

Set a baseline for each activity and build up from it slowly.

Name _____ Date _____

For each activity, work out how much you can manage on a bad day without a flare-up. That is your baseline. Start a little below it (about four fifths), and do that amount every time, good day or bad.

| Activity | My baseline | Starting amount | How often | Rest afterwards |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Walking* | *10 minutes* | *8 minutes* | *Twice a day* | *5 minutes* |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

## Building up

Increase by a small amount (around a tenth) only when you have managed the current level comfortably for a week or more.

| Week | Activity and amount | How it went | Change for next week |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | | | |
| **2** | | | |
| **3** | | | |
| **4** | | | |
| **5** | | | |
| **6** | | | |

**What will tempt me to do more on a good day, and what I will tell myself**

**My plan for a bad day (do a reduced amount, not nothing)**

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# Finding my baseline

A week of timing what you can do before symptoms build.

Name _____ Date _____

Choose two or three everyday activities (sitting, standing, walking, housework, screen work). Each time you do one, note how long you managed before pain or fatigue started to rise noticeably. Do not push through. You are measuring, not testing yourself.

| Day | Activity | How long before symptoms rose | Good day or bad day? | Any flare-up afterwards? |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
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| | | | | |

| Activity | Shortest time this week | My baseline (use the shortest) |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

*Using your bad-day figure means you can keep to the plan every day.*

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# My flare-up plan

What you will do when symptoms flare up.

Name _____ Date _____

A flare-up is a temporary increase in symptoms. It does not usually mean new damage, and it will settle. The aim is to stay calm, ease off without stopping altogether, and return to your usual level step by step.

**Early signs that a flare-up is starting**

**Things that tend to set one off**

**What I will cut back for a few days**

**What I will keep doing, at a lower level**

- [ ] Gentle movement
- [ ] My routine
- [ ] Company

**What eases it**

- [ ] Heat
- [ ] Stretches
- [ ] Relaxation
- [ ] Distraction
- [ ] Medication as prescribed

**Unhelpful thoughts that turn up, and what I will say back**

**Who I will tell, and what help I will ask for**

**How I will build back up afterwards**

**See your GP**

if the pain is new or different, or comes with symptoms you have been told to watch for.

**Afterwards: what I learned from this one**

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# Managing fatigue

How to prioritise, plan and pace when your energy is limited.

With long-term fatigue, energy is like a phone battery that charges slowly and never quite to full. Running it flat costs days. The skill is to stay within what you have and let the capacity grow gradually.

## The four Ps

**Prioritise**
What has to be done? What matters most to me? What can wait, be dropped or be done by someone else?

**Plan**
Spread demanding tasks across the day and week. Put the hardest at your best time. Leave gaps.

**Pace**
Break tasks into chunks. Stop before you are tired. Alternate heavy and light, physical and mental.

**Position**
Sit to do things where you can. Keep what you use within reach. Use tools that save effort.

## Rest that counts

- Rest before you are exhausted, not after.
- Short and regular beats long and rare.
- Proper rest means low stimulation: eyes closed, no screen, no conversation.
- Rest is part of the plan, not a sign of failing at it.

## Things that drain more than you expect

- [ ] Noise and busy places
- [ ] Screens and concentrating
- [ ] Emotional conversations
- [ ] Rushing
- [ ] Standing still
- [ ] Poor sleep
- [ ] Skipping meals
- [ ] Worry

## Building up

Once your days are steadier, add activity in small amounts and hold each level for a week or two. If symptoms climb and stay up, step back to the last level that was comfortable.

**What drains me most**

**What recharges me, even a little**

**One change I will make to how I spend my energy this week**

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# Living well with a long-term condition

What the condition has changed, what it has not, and adapted ways to keep doing what matters.

Name _____ Date _____

A long-term health condition brings real losses and limits. It can also crowd out everything else. This sheet is about keeping the other parts of your life going.

**What the condition has changed or taken away**

**What I feel about that (it is all right to be angry or sad)**

**What has not changed: things I still value, enjoy or am good at**

| Something that matters to me | How the condition gets in the way | An adapted way I could still do it |
|---|---|---|
| *Being involved with my grandchildren* | *I cannot run around after them* | *Reading, baking and board games at my house* |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**Who and what supports me**

**One thing I will do this week because it matters, not because I feel up to it**

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# Coping with a diagnosis

The first weeks after hearing difficult health news.

Being told you have a serious or long-term condition can turn everything upside down. However you react is normal. There is no right way to take in news like this.

## What you might feel

**Shock and disbelief**
"This cannot be right." Feeling numb, as if it is happening to someone else.

**Fear**
Of the illness, the treatment, the future, what it means for the people you love.

**Anger**
"Why me?" At your body, at doctors, at people who are well.

**Sadness and grief**
For the health and the plans you had.

**Relief**
At finally having a name for what has been wrong.

**Guilt**
Wondering if you caused it, or feeling you are a burden.

## Things that help

- **Take it in stages.** You do not need to understand everything in the first week.
- **Choose how much you want to know,** and tell your team. Some people want every detail. Others want only the next step.
- **Use reliable sources.** Your own doctors and nurses, and the main charity for your condition. Be wary of general searching and of forums.
- **Write questions down** before appointments, and bring someone to help listen.
- **Decide who to tell, and when.** It is your news. You can ask one person to pass it on.
- **Keep to ordinary routines** where you can. They are steadying.
- **Let people help,** and give them something specific to do.
- **Look after sleep, food and movement,** within what your condition allows.

## Thoughts to watch

"My life is over." "I will not cope." Thoughts like these come from fear. Most people adjust better than they expect.

**Tell your GP or care team**
if low mood or anxiety is constant, or if you are having thoughts that life is not worth living. In an emergency call 112 or 999. Samaritans: freephone 116 123.

**What I most need right now, and who I could ask**

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# Thoughts about pain

What you tell yourself about pain changes how much it hurts and how much you do.

Name _____ Date _____

Pain grabs attention and sets off alarming thoughts. Those thoughts raise fear and tension, which turn pain up. A calmer, more accurate thought does not remove pain. It stops fear being added to it.

| Alarming thought | A steadier version |
|---|---|
| "This pain means I am doing damage." | "Hurt does not always mean harm. I have been told this movement is safe." |
| "I cannot stand this." | "It is very unpleasant, and I have got through it before. It will ease." |
| "It will only get worse." | "It goes up and down. I am learning what helps." |
| "I cannot do anything any more." | "There are things I do differently now, and things I can build back." |
| "I should push through." | "A steady amount works better than forcing it." |

| Situation | What I told myself | Fear or distress (0 to 10) | A steadier thought | Distress now |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
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| | | | | |

**The thought about pain that affects me most**

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# Pain and activity diary

A week of pain ratings and activities, to show what makes it better or worse.

Name _____ Date _____

Rate pain from 0 (none) to 10 (worst). Keep notes brief. One week is usually enough to see a pattern. Tracking for much longer can keep attention on the pain.

| Day | Pain: am, pm, evening | What I did | Sleep last night (0 to 10) | Mood and stress | What helped |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | | | | |
| **Tue** | | | | | |
| **Wed** | | | | | |
| **Thu** | | | | | |
| **Fri** | | | | | |
| **Sat** | | | | | |
| **Sun** | | | | | |

**What seems to turn my pain up?**

**What seems to turn it down?**

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# Getting the most from a medical appointment

What to prepare beforehand, questions to ask and what to note afterwards.

Name _____ Date _____

## Before

**The main thing I want from this appointment (one sentence)**

**What I have noticed: symptoms, when they started, what makes them better or worse**

**Medication and supplements I am taking**

**My questions, most important first**

**Who is coming with me, or who I will ring afterwards**

## Useful questions

- What do you think is going on?
- What are the options, and what do you recommend?
- What should I look out for, and when should I come back?
- Can you write that down for me?

## During and after

**What I was told**

**What happens next, and who does it**

**Anything I did not understand, to follow up**

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# What is ACT?

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: making room for what you cannot control, and acting on what matters.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (said as one word, "act") starts from one observation. A lot of suffering comes from the struggle to get rid of painful thoughts and feelings, more than from the thoughts and feelings themselves. The harder we fight them, the more they run our lives.

ACT does not aim to remove difficult thoughts and feelings. It aims to change how you respond to them, so they have less say over what you do.

## The two parts

**Acceptance**
Opening up to thoughts, feelings and sensations as they are, without fighting them or being pushed around by them.

**Commitment**
Getting clear on what matters to you, and taking action towards it, even when difficult feelings come along.

## Six skills, in everyday words

| Skill | What it means |
|---|---|
| Being present | Paying attention to here and now, instead of being lost in the past or future |
| Unhooking | Seeing thoughts as thoughts, not as orders or facts |
| Making room | Letting feelings be there without a struggle |
| The noticing self | Finding the part of you that observes, and is bigger than any thought or feeling |
| Knowing what matters | Getting clear on your values: the kind of person you want to be |
| Doing what matters | Taking steps guided by those values |

## What it is like

ACT is practical. We use exercises, metaphors and experiments more than debate. I will not try to convince you that your thoughts are wrong. I will keep asking a different question: "If you act on this thought, does it take you towards the life you want, or away from it?"

**The aim**
To be able to have difficult thoughts and feelings and still do what matters to you. The aim is not to feel good all the time.

*ACT was developed by Steven Hayes, Kirk Strosahl and Kelly Wilson.*

**My notes and questions**

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# Dropping the struggle

Why trying to control thoughts and feelings often backfires, and what to do instead.

We are taught that if something is unpleasant, we should get rid of it. That works well in the outside world. If the room is cold, close the window. With thoughts and feelings it works badly, and often makes them worse.

## Two pictures

**Quicksand**

When you fall into quicksand, the instinct is to thrash. Thrashing pulls you under. The way to survive is to do the opposite: stop fighting, lie back and spread out, so that more of you touches the surface.

**Tug of war with a monster**

Imagine you are in a tug of war with a huge monster, with a pit between you. You pull as hard as you can. It pulls back. The harder you pull, the harder it pulls. There is another option. Drop the rope. The monster is still there. But your hands are free.

## Ways we struggle

- [ ] Avoiding situations that bring up feelings
- [ ] Distracting, keeping busy, scrolling
- [ ] Drinking, eating or spending to take the edge off
- [ ] Arguing with thoughts
- [ ] Trying to think positively
- [ ] Telling myself off for feeling this way
- [ ] Waiting to feel better before doing things
- [ ] Searching for the reason or the fix

Most of these work in the short term. That is why we keep doing them. The question is what they cost over months and years: time, energy, health, relationships, and a life that keeps getting put off.

## The alternative

Dropping the rope does not mean giving up or liking how you feel. It means you stop fighting your own thoughts and feelings, so that your energy can go into living.

**What have I been struggling against?**

**If I did not have to win this fight first, what would I do with my time and energy?**

*These metaphors come from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Hayes, Strosahl and Wilson).*

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# What have I tried, and how has it worked?

List what you have done to get rid of difficult thoughts and feelings, and how each has worked.

Name _____ Date _____

**The thoughts and feelings I most want to get rid of**

List everything you have done to avoid, reduce or escape them. Include the sensible things and the ones you are not proud of.

| What I have tried | Did it help in the short term? | Did it help in the long term? | What did it cost me? |
|---|---|---|---|
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**Looking at the whole list, what do I notice?**

**Has all this effort got rid of the thoughts and feelings for good?**

*If the answer is no, it does not mean you have not tried hard enough. It may mean that control is the wrong approach here.*

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# A list of values

Words to help you put a name to what matters.

Values are the qualities you want to bring to how you live: the kind of person you want to be and what you want to stand for. They are not goals to tick off and not rules you must follow. Circle any that matter to you, then star your top five.

**Connection**
Loving, caring, loyal, supportive, present, open

**Kindness**
Compassionate, generous, forgiving, gentle, patient

**Honesty**
Truthful, sincere, real, trustworthy, fair

**Courage**
Brave, persistent, willing to be uncomfortable

**Growth**
Curious, learning, open-minded, creative, self-aware

**Contribution**
Helpful, useful, giving back, making a difference

**Responsibility**
Reliable, hard-working, committed, conscientious

**Independence**
Self-reliant, free, choosing my own way

**Fun**
Playful, humorous, adventurous, spontaneous

**Health**
Looking after my body and mind, active, rested

**Respect**
For myself, for others, for difference

**Calm**
Peaceful, accepting, simple, unhurried

**Fairness**
Just, equal, standing up for others

**Skill**
Doing things well, mastering a craft, excellence

**Spirituality**
Faith, meaning, connection with something larger

**My top five**

**The one I am living most fully at the moment**

**The one I most want to bring more of into my life**

*There are no right answers. If you find yourself choosing what you think you should value, pause and ask what you would choose if nobody ever knew.*

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# What matters to me, area by area

The kind of person you want to be in each part of your life.

Name _____ Date _____

For each area, write a few words about how you want to behave and what you want to stand for. Not what you want to get or how you want to feel. Skip any area that does not matter to you. Then rate how important it is, and how closely your actions have matched it lately.

| Area | The kind of person I want to be here | Importance (0 to 10) | Living it (0 to 10) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Partner or intimate relationship** | | | |
| **Parenting and family** | | | |
| **Friends and community** | | | |
| **Work, study or contribution** | | | |
| **Health and body** | | | |
| **Fun, rest and creativity** | | | |
| **Growth, learning or spirituality** | | | |
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**Where is the biggest gap between importance and how I am living?**

**One small thing I could do this week to close it a little**

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# Values and goals

The difference between a value and a goal, and how to turn one into the other.

People often mix the two up.

**Values**

- A direction, like heading west
- Never finished
- Available right now, in any situation
- About how I act
- "Being a caring friend"

**Goals**

- A destination, like a town on the way
- Can be ticked off
- In the future
- About what I achieve
- "Ring Maeve on Friday"

## Why the difference matters

- **Goals without values feel empty.** You reach one and wonder why you bothered, or you chase the next.
- **Values without goals stay vague.** Good intentions that never turn into action.
- **Values are always available.** You may not be able to reach a goal today. You can always take one small step in the direction of a value.

## From value to goal to action

| | |
|---|---|
| **Value** | Being a present, involved parent |
| ↓ | |
| **Goal for this month** | A regular evening with each child |
| ↓ | |
| **Action this week** | Board game with Seán on Thursday, phone in another room |

## A check for any goal

1. Which of my values does it serve?
2. Is it something I can do, not only something I hope will happen?
3. Does it say what I will do, not only what I will stop? ("Stop shouting" and "not drink" only say what to avoid. Turn them round: what will I do instead?)

**A value that matters to me, and a goal that would serve it**

**The first small action, and when**

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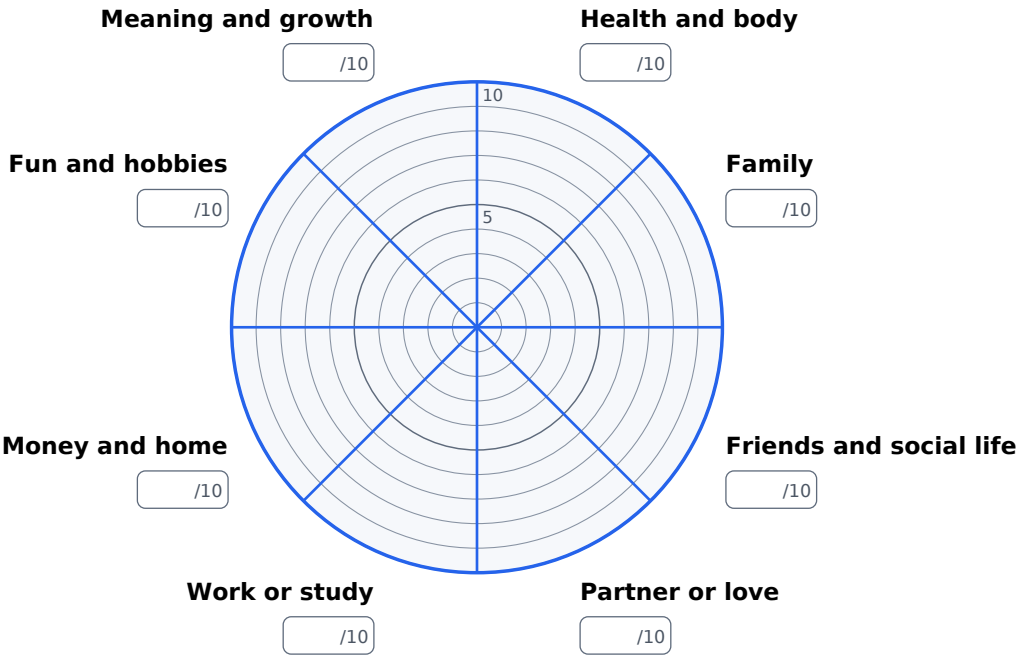
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# Life check: how am I doing in each area?

Rate how satisfied you are with each area of your life.

Name _____ Date _____

Rate how satisfied you are with each area, from 0 (not at all) to 10 (completely). Write the number in the box, and shade the segment out to that ring if you like.




**What stands out when I look at the whole wheel?**

**The area I most want to give attention to**

**What would move it up by one point?**

**A first step this week**

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# Committed action plan

Turning what matters into something you do this week.

Name _____ Date _____

**The value I want to act on**

**A goal that serves it (specific, and mine to do)**

**The smallest next step: what, when, where, with whom**

## What will get in the way

**Thoughts and feelings that will try to stop me**

- ☐ "I cannot"
- ☐ "What is the point?"
- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ Tiredness
- ☐ Self-doubt
- ☐ Guilt

**Practical obstacles**

- ☐ Time
- ☐ Money
- ☐ Other people
- ☐ Energy

**How I will respond to each**

**How willing am I to have those thoughts and feelings and do it anyway?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Not at all — Completely

*If willingness is below 7, make the step smaller until it is not.*

**Who I will tell**

**After I did it: what happened, and what I noticed**

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# Unhooking from thoughts

Ways to step back from a thought so it has less control over what you do.

Minds produce thoughts all day long: judgements, predictions, memories, rules. When we are hooked by a thought, we treat it as the truth and it dictates what we do. Unhooking means stepping back and seeing a thought for what it is: words and pictures passing through.

**Hooked**

- The thought feels like a fact
- It demands all my attention
- I do what it says
- It feels like a threat or a command

**Unhooked**

- I see it as a thought
- I can notice it and still pay attention to my life
- I choose what to do
- It is just my mind talking

In ACT the useful question is "If I let this thought decide what I do, where does it take me?" Whether the thought is true matters less.

## Ways to unhook

**"I am having the thought that..."**
Put this phrase in front of the thought. Then: "I notice I am having the thought that..."

**Thank your mind**
"Thanks, mind. Good story." Said lightly, not sarcastically.

**Name the story**
"Ah, the 'I am not good enough' story. I know this one."

**Say it slowly, or in a silly voice**
The words stay the same, but they affect you less.

**Sing it**
To the tune of "Happy Birthday".

**Put it on a screen**
Imagine the thought as text on a phone. Change the font and colour.

**Leaves on a stream**
Place each thought on a leaf and watch it float past.

**Carry it with you**
Write it on a card and put it in your pocket. It can come along, and you can still get on with your day.

## Tips

- You are not trying to get rid of the thought or to feel better. You are practising seeing it as a thought.
- Try several. Different ones suit different people and different thoughts.
- If a technique feels like mocking yourself, choose a gentler one.

**The thought that hooks me most often, and the technique I will try**

*From Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. Several of these techniques were popularised by Russ Harris.*

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# "I am having the thought that..."

A two-minute exercise in getting distance from a painful thought.

1. Bring to mind a self-critical or upsetting thought that often hooks you. Write it as a short sentence. For example: "I am a failure."

**The thought**

2. Silently repeat it to yourself, believing it as much as you can, for ten seconds. Notice how it feels.

**How much does it hook me?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Not at all — Completely

3. Now put this in front of it: **"I am having the thought that..."** Repeat the whole sentence for ten seconds. Notice what happens.

4. Now make it: **"I notice I am having the thought that..."** Repeat for ten seconds.

**How much does it hook me now?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Not at all — Completely

**What changed? Did the thought go away? Did I get some distance from it?**

## What this shows

The thought is the same. What has changed is where you are standing. You have moved from looking at the world through the thought to looking at the thought.

## Using it in daily life

| When | The thought | With "I am having the thought that..." | What I noticed |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
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| | | | |

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# Leaves on a stream

Practising letting thoughts come and go.

Allow five to ten minutes. You can read this through first and then try it, or record yourself reading it slowly.

1. Sit comfortably. Close your eyes, or rest them on a spot in front of you.
2. Imagine you are sitting beside a gently flowing stream. Leaves are floating past on the surface.
3. For the next few minutes, take each thought that comes into your mind, place it on a leaf, and let it float by. Do this with every thought: pleasant, painful or neutral.
4. If your thoughts stop for a while, just watch the stream. They will start again.
5. Let the stream flow at its own speed. Do not try to hurry the leaves along. You are not trying to get rid of thoughts. You are letting them come and go in their own time.
6. If your mind says "this is silly" or "I cannot do this", put those thoughts on leaves too.
7. If a leaf gets stuck, let it stay until it is ready to move.
8. If a difficult feeling comes up, acknowledge it. "Here is boredom." "Here is frustration." Put that on a leaf.
9. From time to time you will get hooked by a thought and find you have left the stream. That is normal. As soon as you notice, gently come back and carry on.
10. When you are ready, let the image go and bring your attention back to the room.

## Afterwards

**What kinds of thoughts turned up?**

**Which ones hooked me and pulled me away?**

**What was it like to let thoughts pass without following them?**

*If you find pictures hard, imagine thoughts as cars passing on a road, or clouds crossing the sky. From Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Hayes, Strosahl and Wilson).*

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# Passengers on the bus

A story about thoughts and feelings as passengers, with space for your own.

Name _____ Date _____

Imagine your life is a bus and you are the driver. You know where you want to go. On the bus are passengers: your thoughts, feelings, memories and urges. Some are pleasant. Some are loud, ugly and threatening.

When you turn towards something that matters, the rough ones come up to the front. "You will fail." "You will make a fool of yourself." "Turn round." They are frightening, so you make a deal: you will drive where they say, and they will sit quietly at the back.

The bus is now going where the passengers want. You are no longer heading where you meant to go.

The passengers can shout. They can look terrifying. They cannot touch the steering wheel. Only you can.

| Where I want my bus to go | Where I have been driving instead |
|---|---|
| The direction that matters to me | To keep the passengers quiet |

| My passengers (thoughts, feelings, urges) | What they say | What I usually do when they shout |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**What has it cost me to let them steer?**

**If I kept my hands on the wheel this week, with the passengers shouting, what is one turn I would make?**

*A metaphor from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Hayes, Strosahl and Wilson).*

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# The part of you that notices

An exercise in noticing the part of you that observes thoughts and feelings.

Thoughts, feelings, sensations and roles change all the time. There is one part of you that does not change: the part that notices them. It has been there all your life.

## The sky and the weather

Your thoughts and feelings are like the weather: sunshine, drizzle, storms. The noticing part of you is like the sky. The sky has room for any weather. However fierce the storm, it cannot harm the sky. And sooner or later the weather changes.

## A short exercise

1. Sit comfortably and take a few slow breaths.
2. Notice your breathing. And notice that you are noticing it. There is the breath, and there is you, aware of it.
3. Notice what you can hear. There are the sounds, and there is you, hearing them.
4. Notice what is in your body. There are sensations, and there is you, aware of them.
5. Notice what you are thinking. There go thoughts, and there is you, watching them.
6. Notice any feeling. There is the feeling, and there is you, noticing it.
7. Your breath, body, thoughts and feelings keep changing. The you that notices is the same you who was there last year, and when you were a child.

## Why it helps

- If you can notice a thought, you are not the thought.
- However painful a feeling, there is a part of you that is not damaged by it.
- From this place, it is easier to let things come and go, and to choose what you do.

**What was that like?**

**When could a reminder of "I am the sky, not the weather" help me?**

*The sky and weather metaphor is widely used in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.*

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# Towards and away

Sorting what you do into moves towards the life you want and moves away from it.

Name _____ Date _____

Everything we do is either a move towards what matters or a move away from discomfort. Away moves are normal. Trouble comes when they take over.

Start bottom right and go round clockwise.

| | Away | Towards |
|---|---|---|
| **What I do (others could see it)** | **3. Away moves**<br>What do I do to get away from those thoughts and feelings? | **4. Towards moves**<br>What could I do, or do I already do, to move towards who and what matters? |
| **Inside me** | **2. What shows up and gets in the way?**<br>Difficult thoughts, feelings, memories, urges | **1. Who and what matters to me?**<br>People, and the kind of person I want to be |

**What do I notice when I look at the whole picture?**

**This week I will practise noticing, in the moment: "Is this a towards move or an away move?"**

*The same action can be either. A walk can be a move towards health, or a move away from a conversation. Only you can tell. Based on the ACT matrix developed by Kevin Polk and colleagues.*

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# What I want my life to stand for

Imagining how you would like to be remembered.

Imagine it is your eightieth birthday. The people who matter most to you have gathered. Some may not have been born yet. Three of them stand up to say a few words about what you have meant to them and the kind of person you have been.

Write what you would most love to hear them say. It does not have to match what they would say as things stand.

| Who is speaking | What I would love them to say about me |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |

**What do these speeches tell me about what matters most to me?**

**What qualities do I want to be known for?**

**How closely does the way I spend my time now match that?**

**One thing I could do this week that the eighty-year-old me would be glad of**

*This exercise can stir up sadness or regret. That is a sign of how much these things matter. It is not too late to act on them.*

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# When my mind says no

The reasons your mind gives for not acting, and how to answer them.

Name _____ Date _____

As soon as you decide to do something that matters, your mind produces reasons not to. It is trying to protect you from discomfort. You can thank it and act anyway.

| My mind says | A possible response |
|---|---|
| "I am too tired / anxious / low." | "I can feel that and still take one small step." |
| "I will do it when I feel more confident." | "Confidence comes from doing it, not before." |
| "I will probably fail." | "Maybe. I would rather try and fail than not try." |
| "It will not make any difference." | "I am having the thought that it is pointless. I can check by doing it." |
| "I do not deserve it." | "There is the 'not good enough' story again. Thanks, mind." |
| "I should wait for the right time." | "There is rarely a right time. What is the smallest version I can do now?" |

**Something that matters to me that I have not been doing**

| What my mind says to stop me | What I will say back | The step I will take anyway |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**After I acted: was my mind right?**

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# What is mindfulness?

Paying attention, on purpose, to what is happening now, with kindness.

Mindfulness is a way of paying attention. It means noticing what is going on, inside you and around you, as it happens, and meeting it with curiosity instead of judgement.

Most of the time our attention is somewhere else: replaying the past, rehearsing the future, running on autopilot. Mindfulness is the practice of noticing that, and coming back.

**Mindfulness is**

- Noticing what is here
- Coming back when the mind wanders
- A skill that grows with practice
- Possible in any activity
- Being kind about what you find

**Mindfulness is not**

- Emptying the mind
- Stopping thoughts
- Relaxation (though that can happen)
- A religion
- Getting it right

## How it helps

- You catch thoughts and moods earlier, before they snowball.
- You get a gap between a feeling and what you do about it.
- You spend less time in worry and rumination.
- You notice more of the ordinary good moments.

## How to start

1. **Small.** Two or three minutes a day is plenty to begin with.
2. **Regular.** The same time each day, attached to something you already do.
3. **Simple.** Follow your breath. When your mind wanders, notice where it went and bring it back.
4. **Kind.** A wandering mind is not failing. Noticing and returning is the exercise. Each return is one repetition, like a lift in the gym.

## In daily life

Pick one routine activity, such as the first cup of tea, brushing your teeth or the walk to the bus, and give it your full attention each day.

**Go carefully**

If you have a history of trauma, or if sitting quietly with your eyes closed brings up distress, keep practices short, keep your eyes open, and focus on something outside you such as sounds or your feet on the floor. Talk to me about adapting it.

**My notes and questions**

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# Autopilot

What autopilot is, what we miss on it and ways to notice the present.

Have you ever driven a familiar route and arrived with no memory of the journey? Or finished a meal without tasting it? That is autopilot. The body does one thing while the mind is somewhere else.

Autopilot is useful. It lets us tie laces and drive cars without thinking through each step. It becomes a problem when we live most of our lives that way.

## What we miss on autopilot

- **Good moments.** They happen, and we do not notice them.
- **Early warning signs.** Tension, tiredness and low mood build unnoticed until they are hard to shift.
- **Choices.** Old habits run by themselves: reaching for the phone, the biscuit, the sharp reply.
- **Other people.** We hear the words but miss how the person is.

## Where the mind goes

When attention is not on the present, it usually drifts to worry about the future or to going over the past. Studies suggest the mind wanders for a large part of the day, and that people tend to be less happy when it does, whatever they are doing.

## Ways to come off autopilot

**Use a bell**
Pick an everyday cue, such as a phone ringing, a red light or a door handle, as a reminder to notice where your mind is.

**One breath**
Feel one whole breath, in and out, with full attention.

**Senses**
Name three things you can see, hear or feel right now.

**Do one thing**
For one small task a day, do only that task.

**When am I most on autopilot?**

**What do I tend to miss?**

**The cue I will use this week to wake up**

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# Mindful breathing

The basic practice: following the breath and coming back.

Set a timer for five minutes to begin with. Read this through once, then try it.

1. Sit in a way that is comfortable and upright, feet on the floor, hands resting. Close your eyes, or lower your gaze.
2. Notice the places where your body meets the chair and the floor.
3. Bring your attention to your breathing. You do not need to change it. Find where you feel it most clearly: the nostrils, the chest or the belly.
4. Follow one breath all the way in and all the way out. Notice the small pause before the next one.
5. Before long, your mind will wander: to plans, memories, sounds, an itch. That is what minds do.
6. When you notice it has wandered, note where it went ("planning", "worrying"), and gently bring your attention back to the breath. No telling off.
7. Do this again and again. Each time you come back is the practice working.
8. When the timer goes, widen your attention to your whole body and the room. Open your eyes.

## Common experiences

- **"My mind would not stay still."** Nobody's does. You noticed, which is the point.
- **"I got sleepy."** Sit more upright, open your eyes, or practise at a different time of day.
- **"I felt restless."** Notice restlessness as a set of sensations. You can stay with it, or do a walking practice instead.

> **If the breath is not comfortable**
> For some people, focusing on breathing increases anxiety. Use another anchor: the sounds around you, or the feeling of your feet on the floor.

## A week of practice

| Day | How long | What I noticed |
|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | |
| **Tue** | | |
| **Wed** | | |
| **Thu** | | |
| **Fri** | | |
| **Sat** | | |
| **Sun** | | |

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# The body scan

Moving your attention slowly through the body, from toes to head.

Lie on your back or sit comfortably. Allow ten to twenty minutes. The aim is not to relax, though that may happen. It is to notice what is there.

1. Take a few slow breaths. Feel the weight of your body being held.
2. Bring your attention to the toes of your left foot. Notice any sensations: warmth, coolness, tingling, contact with a sock, or nothing much at all.
3. Move slowly to the sole, the heel, the top of the foot, the ankle.
4. Travel up the lower leg, the knee, the thigh. Spend a few breaths in each place.
5. Do the same with the right foot and leg.
6. Move through the hips and pelvis, the lower back, the belly. Notice the movement of breathing.
7. Continue up through the chest, the upper back and the shoulders.
8. Go down both arms to the fingertips, and back up.
9. Move into the neck, the jaw, the face, the scalp.
10. Finally, feel your whole body at once, breathing.

## As you go

- When your mind wanders, notice, and return to the part of the body you had reached.
- If you find tension or discomfort, see if you can breathe with it and let it be, without having to fix it.
- If there is no sensation in an area, notice that.
- If you fall asleep, that is fine. Try sitting up next time if you would like to stay awake.

> **Adapting it**
> If any part of your body is difficult to pay attention to, skip it, or move your attention to your hands or feet. Keep your eyes open if that feels safer. You are in charge of this.

| Day | How long | What I noticed |
|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | |
| **Tue** | | |
| **Wed** | | |
| **Thu** | | |
| **Fri** | | |
| **Sat** | | |
| **Sun** | | |

*The body scan is taught in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn.*

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# Everyday mindfulness

Use things you already do every day as mindfulness practice.

Name _____ Date _____

Choose one or two things you do every day and use them as practice. Do them a little more slowly than usual, with all your attention.

## Ideas

- ☐ The first drink of the day
- ☐ Showering
- ☐ Brushing my teeth
- ☐ Washing up
- ☐ Walking to the car, bus or shop
- ☐ Eating the first three mouthfuls of a meal
- ☐ Waiting in a queue
- ☐ Listening to one person, fully
- ☐ Putting the children to bed
- ☐ Getting into bed

## How

1. Notice what you can see, hear, smell, taste and feel.
2. When your mind drifts to planning or worrying, notice, and come back to your senses.
3. That is all.

**The activity I have chosen**

| Day | Did I do it? | What I noticed |
|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | |
| **Tue** | | |
| **Wed** | | |
| **Thu** | | |
| **Fri** | | |
| **Sat** | | |
| **Sun** | | |

**What difference, if any, did it make to the rest of my day?**

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# Getting through a big change

The three phases of adjusting to a major change, and what helps in each.

Change is what happens on the outside: a new job, a move, a baby, a retirement, a separation. Transition is what happens on the inside as you come to terms with it. Even changes you chose and wanted involve a transition, and it usually takes longer than expected.

| | |
|---|---|
| **An ending** | Something is over: a role, a routine, an identity, a way of life. There is loss here, even in good changes. |
| ↓ | |
| **The in-between** | The old way has gone and the new one has not taken shape. Confusing, flat, anxious, sometimes freeing. |
| ↓ | |
| **A new beginning** | New routines, a new sense of who you are. It arrives in fits and starts. |

## What helps in each phase

| Phase | What you may feel | What helps |
|---|---|---|
| **Ending** | Sadness, anger, relief, disbelief | Name what you are losing. Mark the ending in some way. Let yourself grieve. |
| **In-between** | Lost, unsettled, low in energy, doubtful | Keep small routines. Do not rush big decisions. Stay in touch with people. Treat it as a time to take stock. |
| **New beginning** | Hope, energy, nerves, wobbles | Take small steps. Expect setbacks. Notice what is working. |

## What to expect

- The phases overlap. You can be in all three at once.
- The in-between is the hardest phase and the most tempting to skip. A lot of the change happens there.
- Feeling unsettled does not mean you made the wrong choice.

**The change I am going through, and what has ended**

**What might be beginning**

*Based on William Bridges's model of transitions.*

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# Making a decision

Score your options against what matters to you.

Name _____ Date _____

**The decision I need to make**

**When does it really need to be made by?**

List your options across the top, including doing nothing for now. Down the side, write what matters to you in this decision. Score each option from 0 to 10 on each one.

| What matters to me in this | Option A: | Option B: | Option C: |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

**What do the scores suggest? Does that feel right?**

**If a friend were in my position, what would I say to them?**

**Which option fits best with the kind of person I want to be?**

**What is the worst that could realistically happen with the option I am leaning towards? Could I cope?**

**My decision, or the next thing I need to find out before deciding**

*There is rarely a perfect choice. A good enough decision, made and acted on, usually beats months of going back and forth.*

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# My best possible self

Imagining a future in which things have gone as well as they realistically could.

Imagine yourself a few years from now. You have worked hard and things have gone as well as they realistically could. You have not won the lottery. You have made good use of your chances and become the person you hoped to be.

Take ten minutes and write about that life in as much detail as you can. Write in the present tense, as if you are already there. Do not worry about spelling or how it reads.

## Think about

- Where am I living, and who with?
- What does an ordinary day look like?
- What am I doing for work, or with my time?
- What are my relationships like?
- How do I look after myself?
- What am I proud of?

**A few years from now...**

## Afterwards

**What stands out? What matters most in that picture?**

**What strengths of mine would get me there?**

**One small thing I could do this week in that direction**

*The best possible self exercise was developed by Laura King (2001).*

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# Using my strengths

Doing more of what you are good at and what gives you energy.

Name _____ Date _____

A strength is something you do well, that feels like you, and that leaves you with more energy afterwards. People who use their strengths regularly tend to feel better and cope better.

## Finding them

**Things I do that make time fly**

**A time I was at my best. What was I doing, and what qualities was I using?**

## Some to consider

- [ ] Curiosity
- [ ] Creativity
- [ ] Love of learning
- [ ] Courage
- [ ] Perseverance
- [ ] Honesty
- [ ] Kindness
- [ ] Humour
- [ ] Fairness
- [ ] Teamwork
- [ ] Patience
- [ ] Hope

**My top three**

| Strength | A new way I could use it this week |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |

**How could one of these strengths help with a difficulty I am facing?**

*The study of character strengths was led by Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman.*

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# Weekly planner

The week on one page.

Name _____ Date _____

**My three priorities for this week**

| Day | Morning | Afternoon | Evening |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Mon** | | | |
| **Tue** | | | |
| **Wed** | | | |
| **Thu** | | | |
| **Fri** | | | |
| **Sat** | | | |
| **Sun** | | | |

**Something for my health**

**Something with people**

**Something just for me**

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# My reasons for change

Write down your own reasons for making this change.

Name _____ Date _____

**The change I am thinking about**

**Why would I want to make this change?**

**If I decided to, how would I go about it? What would I do first?**

**My three best reasons for doing it**

**How important is it to me, and why?**

**What will my life be like in a year if nothing changes?**

**What will it be like if I do make the change?**

**So, what do I think I will do?**

*Read your answers back out loud. Hearing your own reasons in your own voice matters more than hearing them from anyone else.*

*Based on Motivational Interviewing, developed by William Miller and Stephen Rollnick.*

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# If–then plans

Deciding in advance what you will do when the obstacle shows up.

Name _____ Date _____

Good intentions fail at predictable moments: when you are tired, when the weather is bad, when someone offers you a drink. An if-then plan decides your response ahead of time, so you do not have to rely on willpower in the moment.

**What I want to do**

**The best thing about doing it. Picture it for a moment.**

**What is most likely to get in the way, inside me or outside?**

| If... (the obstacle or cue) | Then I will... (a specific action) |
|---|---|
| *If it is raining when I planned to walk* | *then I will do ten minutes on the stairs at home* |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

**How I will know it is working**

**After a week: which plans held, and which need changing?**

*If-then plans (implementation intentions) were developed by Peter Gollwitzer.*

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# A letter from my future self

Write to yourself from ten years on, looking back at what you are facing now.

Imagine yourself ten years from now. You have come through what you are facing today. You are wiser, calmer, and kind towards the person you were. Write a letter from that future self to you, as you are today.

## You might include

- What I can see you are going through
- What I want you to know about how things turn out
- What I am grateful to you for doing
- What I wish you would worry about less
- What I hope you will start, or stop
- What matters, looking back

**Dear me,**

## Afterwards

**What piece of advice stands out?**

**One thing I will do because of it**

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# Coping with losing a job

How losing a job can affect you, and what helps in the weeks afterwards.

Losing a job can shake your routine, your finances, your confidence and your sense of who you are, all at once. Strong reactions are normal, even if the job was not one you loved.

## What you may feel

**Shock and anger**
At how it happened, at the unfairness.

**Shame**
As if it says something about your worth. It does not.

**Anxiety**
About money, and about what comes next.

**Grief**
For colleagues, purpose and status.

**Relief**
Sometimes, and sometimes with guilt attached.

**Low mood**
As weeks pass and structure falls away.

## What helps

1. **Keep a routine.** Get up, get dressed and have a plan for the day. Structure is the first thing to go, and keeping it protects your mood.
2. **Treat the job search as a part-time job.** Set hours, with a start and a finish. Then do other things.
3. **Face the money early.** Work out what you have and what you need. Check your entitlements. In Ireland, Citizens Information and MABS (the Money Advice and Budgeting Service) give free advice.
4. **Stay in contact.** Isolation makes everything harder. Tell people. Many jobs come through people you know.
5. **Look after your body.** Sleep, movement, food, daylight. Go easy on alcohol.
6. **Keep some achievement and enjoyment in every day,** unrelated to work.
7. **Separate what you do from who you are.** Your skills, your character and your relationships are still there.
8. **Expect ups and downs.** Rejections sting. They are a normal part of looking for work.

**Talk to your GP**
if low mood or anxiety lasts more than a couple of weeks, or if you are having thoughts that life is not worth living. In an emergency call 112 or 999. Samaritans: freephone 116 123.

**What I miss most about the job**

**What I want from the next chapter**

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# Goal planner

Make a goal specific, give it a date and break it into steps.

Name _____ Date _____

### What I want, and why it matters to me

## Sharpening it

| | My answer |
|---|---|
| **Specific: what exactly will I do?** | |
| **Measurable: how will I know I have done it?** | |
| **Achievable: is it realistic for me now? What might I need?** | |
| **Relevant: how does it fit with what matters to me?** | |
| **Time: by when?** | |

### My goal, in one sentence

| Step | What I will do | By when | Done |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | | | |
| **2** | | | |
| **3** | | | |
| **4** | | | |

### Who will I tell, and when will I review it?

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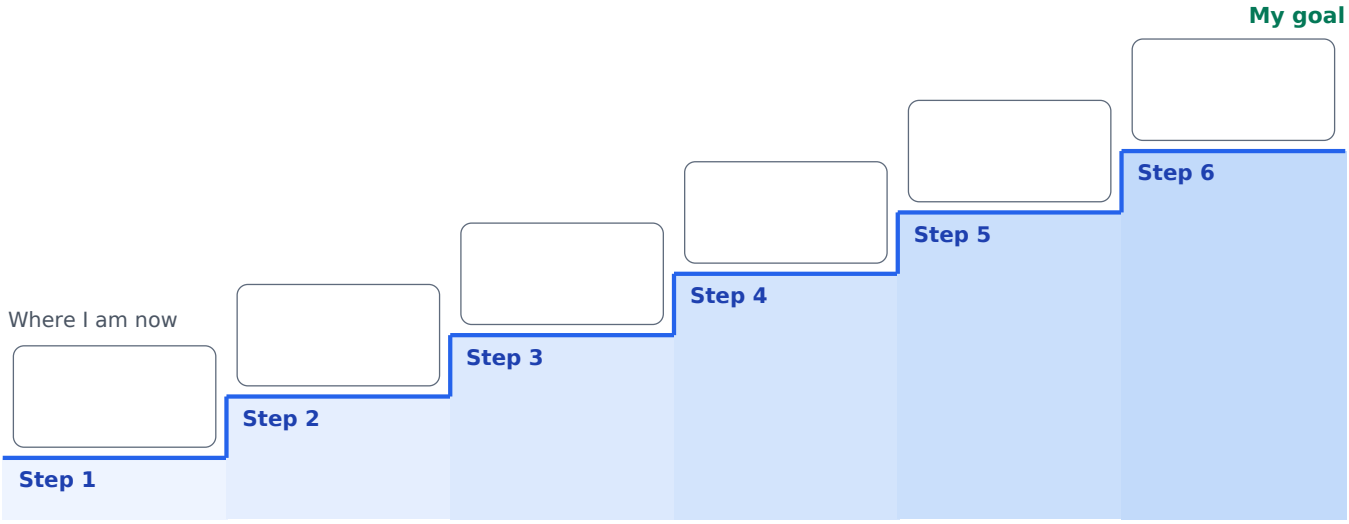
# Steps to a goal

Break a goal into small steps, starting with one you could do in the next few days.

Name _____ Date _____

**My goal**

Write the goal at the top. Then fill in the steps, starting with something you could do in the next few days. Each step should be a small stretch from the one before.




**My first step: exactly what, when and where**

**What might stop me, and what I will do about it**

**Who could help**

**How I will mark each step when I reach it**

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# What gives my life meaning

The people, contributions and experiences that give your life meaning.

Name _____ Date _____

Meaning does not have to be grand. For most people it is found in a few ordinary places: the people they love, the things they contribute, the experiences that move them, and how they face what cannot be changed.

## People and connections

Who matters to me? Who do I matter to?

## What I give or contribute

- ☐ Work
- ☐ Creating
- ☐ Teaching
- ☐ Caring
- ☐ Helping
- ☐ Passing things on

## Experiences that move me

- ☐ Nature
- ☐ Beauty
- ☐ Music
- ☐ Faith
- ☐ Sport
- ☐ Laughter

## What I have learned or become through hard times

**When did I last feel that what I was doing really mattered?**

**What has pushed these things to the edge of my life?**

**One way I could give more room to something on this page**

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# Feeling stuck

When you know something needs to change and cannot see what or how.

Name _____ Date _____

Being stuck is uncomfortable. It usually means that something in your life no longer fits. You do not need the whole answer before you make a start.

**Where in my life do I feel stuck?**

**What exactly is not working?**

**What do I keep telling myself I should do? Do I actually want that?**

**What would I try if I knew I could not fail, or if nobody would judge me?**

**What will staying exactly as I am cost me over the next year?**

## Small experiments

You cannot think your way out of being stuck. Try something small and see what you learn.

| A small experiment (a conversation, a taster class, an hour spent differently) | When | What I learned |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**What I am a little clearer about now**

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# My goals for therapy

What you want to be different, and how close you are to it now.

Name _____ Date _____

**What has brought me to therapy now?**

**If therapy goes well, what will be different? What will I be doing that I am not doing now?**

**A useful goal**

is specific, is about what you will do (not only how you will feel), and is within your own influence. "Go for coffee with a friend once a week" is easier to work towards than "be more confident".

**Goal 1**

**How close am I to this today?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Nowhere near ... There

**Goal 2**

**How close am I to this today?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Nowhere near ... There

**Goal 3**

**How close am I to this today?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Nowhere near ... There

**What might get in the way, and what would help?**

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# Keeping well plan

A summary of what you have learned, and a plan for staying on track.

Name _____ Date _____

**What brought me to therapy, and how things are now**

**The most useful things I have learned**

**The tools and strategies that helped most**

**What I want to keep doing every week to stay well**

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## Looking out for setbacks

Setbacks are normal and do not mean you are back at the start. Spotting one early makes it much easier to turn around.

**Times and situations that could be risky for me**

| Thoughts | Feelings | Body | Behaviour |
|---|---|---|---|
| What might I start thinking? | What might I feel? | What might I notice physically? | What might I start or stop doing? |

**If I notice these signs, I will...**

**People who can support me, and how to reach them**

## Looking ahead

| Time | What I am working towards |
|---|---|
| **In 3 months** | |
| **In 6 months** | |
| **In a year** | |

**A message to myself for a hard day**

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# Session notes: what I am taking away

Fill this in straight after a session, while it is fresh.

Name _____ Date _____

**The main things we talked about**

**What stood out, surprised me or hit home**

**What I want to remember**

**What I am going to try before next time**

**Questions, or things I want to bring to the next session**

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# Between-session practice plan

What you will try before the next session, and how it went.

Name _____ Date _____

**Why this practice matters to me**

| What I will do | When and where | What might get in the way | How it went |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

**How confident am I that I will do this?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Not at all — Very

*If confidence is below 7, make the task smaller until it feels doable.*

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# Weekly review

A short review of your week, to fill in before each session.

Name _____ Date _____

**My mood this week overall**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Very low — Very good

**What went well this week, even slightly**

**What was hard**

**What I practised, and what I noticed**

**The main thing I want to use the next session for**

**Anything else I want my therapist to know**

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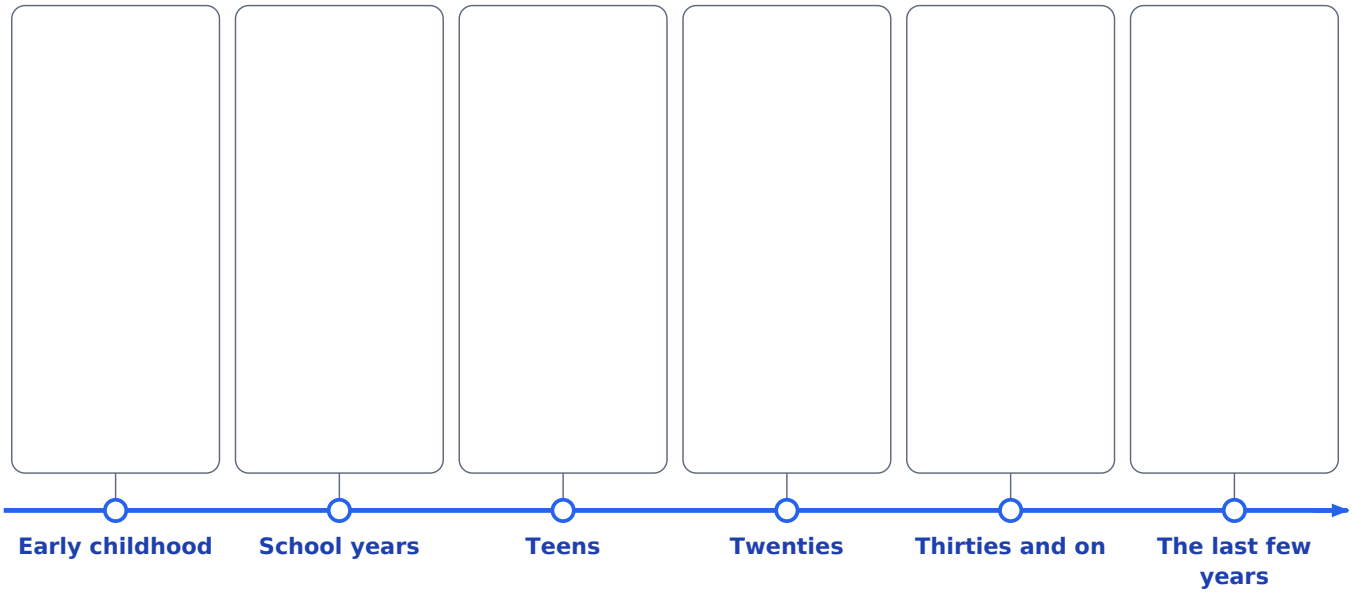
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# My life timeline

The main events, people and changes in your life, in order.

Name _____ Date _____

Mark the events, people and changes that shaped you: moves, losses, illnesses, relationships, achievements, hard times and good times. Put as much or as little detail as you want. There is no need to write about anything you are not ready to look at.




**The times that were hardest**

**What, or who, got me through them**

**Themes I notice running through my story**

**What I would like the next chapter to be about**

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# What to expect from therapy

A short guide for anyone starting out.

It is normal to feel nervous about starting therapy, unsure what to say, or doubtful about whether it will help. You do not need to prepare anything or have it all worked out.

## What happens

- **The first session or two** are about getting to know you: what has brought you, what is going on in your life, what you are hoping for. You can say as much or as little as you want.
- **After that,** we work on what matters to you. Sometimes that is talking and making sense of things. Sometimes it is learning and practising something specific.
- **We review as we go.** I will ask how you are finding it. You can tell me at any time if something is not working for you.

## What helps therapy work

1. **Being as open as you can.** Including about things that seem small, embarrassing or unrelated.
2. **Saying when something does not fit.** If I get it wrong, or go too fast, I want to know.
3. **Coming regularly.** Long gaps make it harder to build on the last session.
4. **Trying things between sessions.** An hour a week is a small part of your life. Most of the change comes from what you do in the rest of the week.
5. **Patience.** It is common to feel a bit worse before feeling better, as things that have been pushed down come up.

## Common worries

| The worry | A response |
|---|---|
| "I will not know what to say." | That is fine. I will help. Silences are allowed. |
| "My problems are not serious enough." | If it matters to you, it is worth bringing. |
| "I might cry." | Many people do. Tissues are provided, and it is nothing to apologise for. |
| "What if I do not like it?" | Tell me. We can change how we work, or I can help you find someone who is a better fit. |

## Practical things

I will explain confidentiality and its limits, fees, and how to cancel or rearrange when we first meet. Ask about anything that is not clear.

**What I am hoping for, and anything I am worried about**

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# Before my first session

A few notes to bring with you. Fill in as much or as little as you like.

Name _____ Date _____

**What has led me to look for therapy now**

**How long it has been going on, and anything that made it start or get worse**

**How it affects my day-to-day life (sleep, work, relationships, mood)**

**What I have already tried**

**What I hope will be different**

**Who and what supports me at the moment**

**Anything I want my therapist to know about what helps me feel comfortable**

**Questions I want to ask**

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# Therapy review

A check on how it is going, for both of us.

Name _____ Date _____

**What I came for, and my goals at the start**

**Overall, how are things compared with when I started?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Much worse — Much better

**What has changed, even slightly**

**What has been most helpful so far**

**What has been less helpful, or what I would like to be different**

**How comfortable do I feel saying what I really think in sessions?**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Not at all — Completely

**Anything I have been holding back**

**What I want to focus on next**

**Any changes to how often we meet, or how we work**

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# When therapy does not feel right

How to tell your therapist that something is not working.

Name _____ Date _____

Almost every therapy has moments when something feels off. You may feel misunderstood, pushed, not pushed enough, or unsure where it is going. Saying so is not rude or ungrateful. It is one of the most useful things you can do, and good therapists welcome it.

## What might be going on

- [ ] I do not feel understood
- [ ] We are going too fast, or too slowly
- [ ] We talk, but I am not sure what we are working on
- [ ] Something my therapist said bothered me
- [ ] I am holding something back
- [ ] I am not doing the between-session tasks, and I am not sure why
- [ ] I do not feel I am getting anywhere
- [ ] I feel worse
- [ ] Practical things: time, cost, format

**What does not feel right?**

**What I would like more of, or less of**

**What makes it hard to say this**

**How I could say it. For example: "There is something I have been finding hard to bring up..."**

**What happened when I raised it**

*If you would find it easier, hand this sheet over at the start of a session.*

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# Ending therapy

Review what has changed, plan for what is ahead and finish properly.

Name _____ Date _____

Endings matter. Taking time over this one helps you keep what you have gained.

**Where I was when I started**

**Where I am now**

**What I have learned about myself**

**What I do differently**

**What I am most proud of**

**What is still unfinished, and how I will keep working on it**

**How I feel about finishing**

**What I will do if things get difficult again, and when I would come back**

**What I want to remember**

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# Getting set up for online sessions

A few practical things that make a video session work as well as one in the room.

Online therapy can be just as effective as meeting in person. A little preparation makes a big difference.

## Your space

- [ ] Somewhere private where I will not be overheard or interrupted
- [ ] A door I can close. Headphones if others are at home.
- [ ] Tell the people I live with that I am not available for the hour
- [ ] If home is not private, the car (parked) or a walk with headphones can work
- [ ] A comfortable seat. Tissues and water within reach.

## Your set-up

- [ ] Device charged or plugged in
- [ ] Camera at eye level, face well lit, with the light in front of me
- [ ] A steady connection. Close other apps and tabs.
- [ ] Notifications off
- [ ] Log in a few minutes early

## Getting the most from it

- Give yourself ten minutes before and after. In person you would have the journey. Online, you go straight back to the kitchen.
- Do not schedule a session between two meetings.
- Tell me if you cannot see or hear well, or if something feels different from being in the room.
- If you are in a different place than usual, let me know where you are at the start.

## If the connection drops

We will agree a back-up plan in our first session, usually that I will ring you on the phone number you have given me.

**Where I will have my sessions**

**Anything that would make online sessions easier for me**

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# My safety plan

A plan for the times when things feel unbearable, written in advance.

Name _____ Date _____

Fill this in with me, or with someone you trust, when you are feeling steadier. Keep a copy where you can find it quickly: on your phone and somewhere at home. Work down the steps in order. If one step is not enough, go on to the next.

**1. My warning signs. Thoughts, feelings, situations or behaviours that tell me a crisis may be building.**

**2. Things I can do by myself to get through the next while. (Go for a walk, have a shower, music, breathing, something that has helped before.)**

**3. People and places that take my mind off things. (Names, a café, the library, the park.)**

**4. People I can tell how I am really feeling, and ask for help. (Names and numbers.)**

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| 5. Professionals and services | Number |
|---|---|
| **My therapist** | |
| **My GP** | |
| **Out-of-hours GP service** | |
| | |

**6. Making my surroundings safer. What I will put out of reach or ask someone to mind for me, and who can help me do that.**

**What matters most to me, and is worth staying for**

**If you need help right now (Ireland)**

| | |
|---|---|
| **In an emergency** | Call **112** or **999**, or go to your nearest emergency department. |
| **Samaritans** | Freephone **116 123**, any time, day or night. Email jo@samaritans.ie |
| **Text About It** | Free text **HELLO** to **50808**, any time, for an anonymous text conversation. |
| **Pieta** | Freephone **1800 247 247**, any time, or text **HELP** to **51444**. For thoughts of suicide or self-harm. |
| **Your GP** | Contact your GP or the out-of-hours GP service in your area. |

*The six steps follow the Safety Planning Intervention developed by Barbara Stanley and Gregory Brown.*

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# Help in a crisis: who to contact in Ireland

Numbers to keep in your phone and on the fridge.

If you feel you cannot keep yourself safe, or someone else is in immediate danger, call 112 or 999, or go to the nearest emergency department. You will not be wasting anyone's time.

**If you need help right now (Ireland)**

| | |
|---|---|
| **In an emergency** | Call **112** or **999**, or go to your nearest emergency department. |
| **Samaritans** | Freephone **116 123**, any time, day or night. Email jo@samaritans.ie |
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| **Pieta** | Freephone **1800 247 247**, any time, or text **HELP** to **51444**. For thoughts of suicide or self-harm. |
| **Your GP** | Contact your GP or the out-of-hours GP service in your area. |

## Other support

| Service | What it is for | Contact |
|---|---|---|
| HSE Your Mental Health information line | Information on mental health supports and services near you, any time | Freephone 1800 111 888 |
| Your GP | First point of contact for mental and physical health. Ask for an urgent appointment. | My GP's number below |
| Out-of-hours GP | Urgent medical help when your surgery is closed | Number for my area below |

## My numbers

| Who | Number |
|---|---|
| **My GP** | |
| **Out-of-hours GP service** | |
| **My therapist** | |
| **Someone I trust** | |
| **Someone else I trust** | |

*Cut along the dashed lines. Keep a card in your wallet or phone case.*

**If I need help now**
Emergency **112** or **999**
Samaritans **116 123**
Text **HELLO** to **50808**
Pieta **1800 247 247**

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**My people**
Names and numbers

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*These numbers were checked in November 2026. Services change, so check hse.ie if a number does not connect.*

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# My hope box

A box of reminders of what matters to you, for the worst moments.

Name _____ Date _____

When things are at their worst, it is hard to remember anything good. A hope box does the remembering for you. It is a real box, or a folder on your phone, filled with things that connect you to what matters and to getting through.

## What to put in it

- [ ] Photos of people, pets and places I love
- [ ] Letters, cards or messages that meant something
- [ ] A list of reasons to keep going
- [ ] Something that smells or feels comforting
- [ ] Music, or a playlist
- [ ] A letter to myself, written on a better day
- [ ] Things that make me laugh
- [ ] Reminders of what I have come through
- [ ] Things I am looking forward to, however small
- [ ] My coping cards and safety plan
- [ ] Names and numbers of people I can contact

**People, animals and places that matter to me**

**Things I still want to do, see or be around for**

**What I would say to someone I love who felt the way I sometimes do**

**Where I will keep my hope box, so I can reach it easily**

**A message to myself for a hard night**

*Add to it whenever something good happens. In an emergency call 112 or 999. Samaritans: freephone 116 123.*

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# Early warning signs and action plan

A traffic-light plan for staying well and acting early.

Name _____ Date _____

**Green: I am well**

How I feel, think and behave when things are going well. What I do each day and week to stay here.

**Amber: warning signs**

The first changes I notice, or others notice in me. Sleep, mood, thinking, habits, withdrawal.

**Red: I need help**

Signs that I am in real difficulty.

### Amber actions

What I will do myself. Who I will tell.

### Red actions

Who I will contact, and what I will ask for

### Things that tend to tip me from green to amber

### People who have agreed to tell me if they see warning signs

### What has helped me turn things around before

*In an emergency call 112 or 999. Samaritans: freephone 116 123. Text HELLO to 50808.*

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# Getting through the next hour

Steps for when everything is too much.

You do not have to work out your whole life right now. You only have to get through the next hour. Then the one after that.

1. **Stop and breathe out,** slowly, five times.
2. **Get safe.** Move away from anything you could use to hurt yourself. Go to where other people are, if you can.
3. **Tell someone.** Ring or text a person you trust, or one of the lines below. You do not need the right words. "I am having a hard time" is enough.
4. **Change your body state.** Cold water on your face. A fast walk. A hot shower.
5. **Do one small, ordinary thing.** Make tea. Feed the cat. Step outside.
6. **Put off any big decisions.** Nothing has to be decided tonight.
7. **Remind yourself:** "This feeling is at its peak. It will come down. I have felt this before and it passed."

**If you need help right now (Ireland)**

| | |
|---|---|
| **In an emergency** | Call **112** or **999**, or go to your nearest emergency department. |
| **Samaritans** | Freephone **116 123**, any time, day or night. Email jo@samaritans.ie |
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| **Pieta** | Freephone **1800 247 247**, any time, or text **HELP** to **51444**. For thoughts of suicide or self-harm. |
| **Your GP** | Contact your GP or the out-of-hours GP service in your area. |

**What has got me through before (fill this in on a calmer day)**

*Cut along the dashed lines. Keep a card in your wallet or phone case.*

**The next hour**

Breathe out. Get safe. Tell someone. Cold water or a walk. One small thing. No big decisions tonight.

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**I can contact**

Names and numbers

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# After a crisis: looking back

Once things have settled, look at what happened and what would help next time.

Name _____ Date _____

Do this when you feel steadier, ideally with me or someone you trust. The purpose is to be better prepared, not to blame yourself.

**What was happening in the days before? What built up?**

**The first signs, looking back**

**What tipped it over**

**What I did that helped, even a little**

**Who helped, and how**

**What did not help, or made it worse**

**What I would want to do differently, or sooner, next time**

**What needs to change in my safety plan**

**What I want to remember about having got through it**

*In an emergency call 112 or 999. Samaritans: freephone 116 123. Text HELLO to 50808.*

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