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Cardiff and Vale
University Health Board

Safe Space Group Information And Exercises

Cardiff and the Vale UHW
Renal Psycho-Social Team



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Introduction

This booklet contains information and exercises to enable you to manage your feelings of anxiety. It was created using content from our 'safe space' anxiety management group. At the back of the booklet there are resources which contain suggestions of different meditations/websites which you may find helpful.

This booklet contains relaxation techniques and breathing exercises. These exercises will be practised within the weekly sessions. Some individuals who have a history of panic attacks or post-traumatic stress disorder may find these techniques difficult. You may want to consider whether you need one-to-one psychology support or group support before proceeding with this booklet.

If you have any problem with these exercises either during or following group sessions please speak to one of the group facilitators and you will be provided with appropriate support.

This course is not designed to be a substitute for psychological interventions, rather it is designed to help you to understand more about anxiety and learn some strategies to help you manage anxious thinking.

If you feel you need one to one psychology support please speak to a member of your renal team who can refer you to the psychology department or you contact the psychology department directly for a referral on **02920 748455**. If you are feeling in crisis and need urgent support please contact your GP in the first instance who can refer you to the most appropriate mental health services.



Session 1: Physiology of Anxiety/Fear

Anxiety/fear is a natural bodily response that developed in order to protect us from threat. Without the ability to respond to danger humanity would not have survived. The fear response provides us with an evolutionary advantage. The fight or flight response is necessary to support us with life threatening situations however if you are suffering from anxiety you may have an overactive fight or flight response.

When we experience a threat or perceived threat, our body releases 2 hormones, Adrenalin and Cortisol.

These hormones prepare us to respond in one of 2 ways to fight off the threat or to flee. This is known as the Fight or Flight response.

These hormones have a very specific effect on our bodies;

- Divert blood supply from non-essential bodily processes to muscles (you may experience 'butterflies' as blood diverted from digestion)
- Widen pupils
- Make us sweat (hands feel sweaty)
- Reduce blood supply to our extremities (cold hands)
- Increase our heart rate (aware of our heart beating very fast)

The experience of anxiety/fear is extremely unpleasant; however, remember this is the body's way of responding to a perceived threat.

In a similar way, fire alarms are necessarily loud and irritating to ensure that we react to the alarm.

When we experience anxiety the symptoms can be so unpleasant that we believe that we may be experiencing a heart attack or are likely to collapse.

This isn't the case and over time stress hormones will naturally drop down to normal levels and symptoms will subside. Depending on how we respond this usually takes between 20 and 30 minutes. If anxious thoughts keep reappearing the anxiety cycle may be up-and-down as well.

There are a number of ways that we can help to reduce levels of these hormones and alleviate the associated symptoms. When you notice the fight or flight response has occurred you can use relaxation techniques to help to calm yourself and return the body to a normal state of response.

Slow breathing increases oxygen supply to our body and sends signals to our brain that everything is under control, this has the effect of reducing the levels of stress hormone released and reducing bodily symptoms.

The more you practice breathing exercises, and relaxing these responses, the quicker you will find your body can calm after the response has been triggered.

In the relaxation exercises section of the booklet you will find some helpful techniques to practice. For this session you may find it helpful to practice the 4 x 4 breathing on page 23 of the booklet.



Session 2: Thinking errors associated with Anxiety/Fear

When we experience anxiety we tend to be focussing on the future rather than the present moment. There are a number of thinking errors that we are more inclined to make;

Crystal ball thinking – believing that we can predict the future based on our past experiences or based on our anxious thoughts. Generally, when this is a thinking error we are usually predicting a negative outcome. For example, worrying about going to a social event and assuming no one will talk to you. We do not have a crystal ball and we cannot predict the future accurately.

Black and White thinking – This thinking error is when we tend to think things are either all good or all bad losing sight of the grey area. This can lead to us thinking we have failed if something does not succeed. For example, if we are on a diet plan and we have a bad day, we may take the 'black and white' approach and give up all together. In fact, we can learn from situations where things do not go to plan.

Overgeneralising – believing that because something happened on one occasion it will happen every other time. This thinking error can mean we avoid situations or opportunities because of one bad experience. We can also create a label for ourselves, for example saying 'I'm a failure' or 'I'm a bad friend' because one event went 'wrong'. We can also overgeneralise about people, for example we may say 'all people are out to hurt me'.

Mindreading – believing that we know what others are thinking about. This can cause us to believe that someone is thinking negatively about us even though they may not even be thinking about us at all.

Selective abstraction – receiving lots of positive feedback but only focusing on the negative aspects, or small mistakes. Therefore, your interpretation of the experience will be a negative one regardless of the overwhelming positive response.

In the Safespace group, we suggest that worry is a thinking error- we think it may help us solve problems but worry alone is usually unhelpful.

When we become anxious we make 2 significant errors

Overestimate the threat

Under estimate our ability to cope

On average our brain generates around 50,000 thoughts per day!

Thoughts are JUST thoughts we do not have to give them meaning!

Thoughts are NOT FACTS!

When you find yourself overthinking and experiencing anxious thoughts use SOS!

S - Stop, notice your thoughts

O - Observe what you are saying to yourself and the effect it is having on your body

S - Shift your focus remember cognitive distortions and the effect these have on your body.
Find something to distract yourself

To help manage these thinking errors it can be helpful to use positive affirmations.

- I am stronger than I think
- This feeling will pass
- I am safe in this moment

Write these affirmations on postcards and pin them up where you can see them!

Here are some tips for writing your own affirmations

Start by identifying the negative thought and write down the polar opposite.

For example the negative thought is: I can't go out with my friends because I will say something wrong and they won't invite me again.

An example of a positive affirmation from this is: *'I am capable of holding good conversations'* or *'I am stronger than I think and I can do this'*

Start your affirmations with 'I' or 'My' (make sure you write in the present tense).

You need to believe the affirmation so if you feel the affirmation does not hold true for you then you could try using phrases like *'I am open to new experiences'* or *'I am willing to try this'*.

Session 3: Levels of Anxiety

The feeling of anxiety is NORMAL. It is an adaptive response that has proved to be very important in the survival of humankind.

Anxiety alerts us to potential threat and danger and prepares our body to either defend ourselves or escape.

Any sense of threat or danger will result in anxiety though sometimes we may develop anxiety without any awareness of what the threat might be. We may also experience anxiety that feels out of proportion to the actual threat.

Typical anxiety response

This is caused by an obvious 'threat' such as visiting the dentist for some people, or attending a hospital appointment. For some attending interviews, taking exams or public speaking can result in anxiety.

It is usually related to an upcoming event and then subsides when the event is over. We can usually help ourselves by using breathing techniques to help us through the experience.

Phobias

A phobia is a severe anxiety response to a specific situation or object. Common phobias include those of spiders, needles, using lifts, balloons.

Generalised Anxiety

Generalised anxiety is often persistent and excessive sometimes without an obvious cause. We may worry about everyday matters and feel unable to relax. Sometimes it may cause difficulty concentrating on other matters and result in difficulty sleeping, particularly difficulty in dropping off to sleep. Sometimes individuals might be easily startled and at times feel shaky.

This can be helped by paying attention to ensuring that we cut back on caffeine, eat well and incorporate some daily exercise. Self-care is of great importance.

We can also use the breathing and relaxation techniques mentioned but on a regular basis making time every day for relaxation or meditation or breathing exercises.

Severe anxiety disorder

Some people suffer with a more severe level of anxiety that may result in panic attacks. Symptoms of panic attacks include; fast heartbeat, sweaty palms, feeling numb/dizzy. All of these symptoms are caused by the release of the stress hormones we experience when we become anxious.

When people experience a panic attack, they often believe that the symptoms are caused by a heart problem or serious illness or they may believe that they are going to lose control. Panic attacks do not cause lasting damage our bodies are designed to tolerate high levels of anxiety.

It is important to seek professional help if you are suffering from panic attacks. All of the above suggestion should be followed such as reducing caffeine intake, improving self-care and using relaxation techniques. It may also be necessary to seek Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or even medication.

For this session you may find it helpful to look at the graded relaxation exercise on page 23.



Session 4: Anxiety and the need for control

People who fear loss of control often fear being at the mercy of others.

This can stem from past trauma and in particular from events that have left us feeling helpless.

The kind of experiences that may result in this kind of trauma may be related to;

- Childhood experiences of abuse
- Experiences as a child during medical/dental procedures where restraint may have been used
- Dental experiences as an adult when we may have wanted to escape but social pressures may have made this feel difficult
- Surgical procedures involving anaesthetic
- Medical/surgical procedures that caused intense anxiety but again societal pressures prevent us from refusing to proceed

We all want to feel in control it helps us to feel safe and feel that life is predictable.

When people experience trauma often they become to expect further negative experiences. This is when it is important to remember the thinking errors that we commonly make such as-

Black and white thinking – experiences are either ALL good or ALL bad

Over generalising – If we have a negative experience on one occasion this will continue to be the case.

Sometimes the sense of helplessness can be learned if we experience frequent difficulties, we can begin to lose the belief that we have any control.

Even if we cannot control external events we CAN control our internal experience using techniques such as mindfulness, breathing techniques and relaxation methods.

Routines and rituals are very important in providing a sense of structure and predictability. Routines around bedtime, bathing, hobbies etc. can be very holding providing routine and a sense of knowing what to expect.

It is also worth challenging the idea of having complete control. Have you ever had complete control or is the anxiety about control being influenced by the thinking errors.

Session 5: Safe space and use of imagery

Our minds create the reality we live in based on our thoughts. It might be helpful to know that the majority of our thoughts can be 'unconscious' (we may not be aware of them or they have become habitual) and yet can still create an emotional reaction. This is why sometimes we feel a sense of panic without knowing what has triggered this. Our thoughts can create an emotional reaction which often leads us to believe these thoughts are a true reflection of our situation.

When we have an anxious thought we can have an immediate physical/emotional reaction causing us to believe we are in danger and need to act. This can then release stress hormones and as discussed previously initiate the fight or flight response.

It is important to notice when this response is activated and use techniques such as the safe space exercise below to calm your body and engage the logical part of your brain which enables you to fully assess the situation.

Our mind can also confuse physical symptoms for symptoms of anxiety. For instance, many people experience 'butterflies' in their stomach when they become anxious. Indigestion can produce a similar sensation leading some people to believe that they are experiencing anxiety rather than indigestion. We can also be health anxious, especially if we are experiencing a health problem, and over-evaluate the threat to us through thinking errors e.g. crystal ball thinking.

When we do experience anxiety our heart level can increase and some people can interpret this sensation as indicating that they are having a problem with their heart when it is simply our hearts natural response to the release of stress hormones.

Research has shown that in athletes visual (imaginary) practise can be as effective as actual practise.

This is something that can be used in our favour when we are feeling anxious. We can use our imagination and visualise ourselves in a safe place.

On the next page there are details of the Safe space exercise.

Safe space exercise

Think of a place where you feel relaxed and comfortable. This can be an imaginary place such as the beach, walking in a forest or sat on a mountainside.

It may be a place from your childhood or a place you visited as an adult. Make sure that there are no negative memories associated with this place.

Take yourself to a quiet room and close your eyes. Focus on taking some deep breathes and make sure that you are sitting or lying comfortably.

Think about the safe place that you have chosen.

Now visualise yourself in this setting. See yourself walking towards a spot where you will sit and take in the scenery around you.

Become aware of yourself walking towards this spot. As you are walking focus on what is happening around you.

What can you see? Look up at the sky, look from right to left and straight in front noticing the scenery the plant life. Look into the distance and notice what can be seen in the far distance. Notice the colours around you the colour of the sky the vegetation, the path that you walk upon.

Now focus on the sounds maybe you can hear the breeze in the leaves or the sound of the sea. Maybe you can hear sounds in the distance voices, cars or barking dogs. Sounds closer may include rustling of leaves, insects or the sound of your feet as you move towards the area where you will sit.

What can you feel? The sun on your skin? The breeze? Your feet as you walk step by step. Notice any smells, the smell of the sea or of the vegetation.

When you reach the spot you have chosen sit and soak in all that you can sense. Sight sound smell and texture taking your time as if experiencing this for the first time.

Send some time immersed in this setting feeling peaceful and calm and safe.

When you are ready see yourself stand and slowly return along the path you previously waked all the while taking time to enjoy the beauty around you.

When you are ready take some deep breathes and open your eyes.

Session 6: Mindfulness

“Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we’re doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what’s going on around us.

Mindfulness is a quality that every human being already possesses, it’s not something you have to conjure up, you just have to learn how to access it.” (www.mindfulness.org)

Mindfulness encourages us to acknowledge our thoughts and feelings without getting caught up in them. We can often get caught in worrying about the future and the past. We can find ourselves getting upset about possibilities of what could happen in the future and we can obsess over trying to think our way through any potential problems that could occur. Mindfulness enables us to bring ourselves back to the present.

When you find yourself obsessing over thoughts about future or past events, take a moment to stop and notice that this is what happening. Once you have noticed this is happening you can bring yourself back to the present by focusing on what is happening around you. Try to take some deeper breaths. Notice the things around you, using all of your senses notice any smells or textures and let your mind focus on these.

You can practice mindfulness at any time during the day. A good example is when you are drinking a cup of tea. Have you ever drank a cup of tea and then found you can’t remember doing it, or that you didn’t enjoy it? In the resources page of the booklet you will find a link to a mindfulness tea drinking video. Paying attention using all your senses can bring your thinking back to the here and now.

Some people find it helpful to use mindfulness colouring books as a way of staying present. If you find that you are getting overwhelmed by focusing on colouring you are enabling your mind to refocus on something other than the thoughts.

You can practice mindfulness at any time of the day whether you are out for a walk, by focus on the colours of the trees, smell of the flowers and consciously notice things on your walk, or while you are waiting for the kettle to boil and find your thoughts are wondering.

There are so many ways to include mindfulness in your day including doing a meditation, yoga, mindful walking, mindful eating etc. Try find something that works for you. Remember its ok if you find your mind has wandered, or you have gotten caught up in some of the thinking errors, you can always bring yourself back by focusing back on your breath.

There are also some good apps which can help you to practise mindfulness which are included in the resource page. Please read the following information before starting your mindfulness practice.

For the vast majority of people Mindfulness practice is safe and effective. It shifts us from our future thoughts and worries, drawing us towards our present moment awareness. It invites us to notice what is there, to hear the whole of ourselves, and if this self is loudly saying “I don’t like this,” then we owe it to ourselves to take notice of this voice.

Tips for staying safe:

Take account of your personal history

If you have a past history of trauma, panic attacks, or PTSD, consider carefully whether the practices may re-trigger something for you. You may want to consider limiting the length of your practice, discussing your needs with your teacher, and avoiding some forms of mindful practice.

During practice

If you start to feel uncomfortable, particularly if you feel rising anxiety, do not assume your feeling is a barrier to break through, because this is likely to make things worse. Stop your practice. Open your eyes, and look around the room. Move your body, shake, fidget, rub your skin, get up and walk around. Say to yourself “I am OK, this feeling will pass, I am safe now.” Let your teacher know.

After practice

If you have a strong feeling of panic or anxiety, it may leave you feeling strange for a considerable period afterwards. You may have feelings of disorientation, being in a fog, unreality, your body feeling distorted, or a sense of floating. You may also have these kinds of feelings after a pleasant mindful experience. Take extra care, especially if you are considering driving or performing complex tasks.

Seek help

If the strange feelings do not subside, or you experience further troubling episodes of anxiety or intrusive thoughts or images, speak to a health professional so they can signpost you for support.

On the following page is a well-known poem which illustrates the practise of mindfulness in a natural setting

Leisure

What is this life if full of care,
We have no time to stop and stare.

No time to stand beneath the boughs,
And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.

No time to turn at beauty's glance,
And watch her feet how they can dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can,
Enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this if full of care,
We have no time to stop and stare.

(William Henry Davies)



Session 7: Dealing with Morning anxiety

Many people find that their level of anxiety is increased first thing in the morning. There is a specific reason for this. We have already discussed the body releases stress hormones when we are feeling anxious; however, these stress hormones can also be released at different times to support us. Stress hormones like Cortisol can have a positive effect on us, it can motivate us and help us to deal with increased demands.

It is also necessary for levels of Cortisol to increase in our bodies first thing in the morning in order to wake us up. This usually lasts for between 20-30 minutes.

Most people won't be aware of this increase but for those who suffer from anxiety who already have existing high levels of Cortisol this can result in an increased level of anxiety. In order to deal with increased anxiety first thing it is important to be aware of this. Having an established routine is a good way of dealing with increased anxiety in the morning.

1. Make sure that your alarm, if you have one, is alerting but not too jarring.
2. On first waking bring your attention to your body and stretch out both fingers and toes. Remind yourself that increased anxiety level at this time is normal.
3. Have a positive affirmation next to your bed.
4. Sit yourself up on the side of the bed place your feet on the floor and focus on your breathing, reminding yourself that the increase in anxiety level is normal. Do a few more stretches and focus on your breathing for 5 minutes.

It is very important to try to establish a good morning routine. If necessary getting up a little earlier. Think about your usual morning routine and try to stick to the same routine every morning.

- Up from bed
- Shower (Maybe use essential oils or scented body wash)
- Sit down, take your time and have a healthy breakfast
- Write in a journal – If feeling anxious write about your feelings, If it feels like a good day maybe write a short list of things to do, including time for further relaxation or hobbies.
- Put aside some time for a mindful or relaxation exercise

By following this plan you will notice an improvement in your level of anxiety at the beginning of the day.

On the following page is a relaxation technique to practise which uses all of your senses to ground yourself

1. Sit comfortably and notice what you can see, focus on what is in front of your eyes. Objects, colours, patterns, objects.

2. What can you hear? Pleasant noises, birds? Somebody talking? Annoying noises? Machines e.g. washing machine
3. What can you feel, put your hands near your sides, can you feel the texture of the seating or floor covering?
4. What can you smell? Coffee, air freshener, laundry, perfume?
5. What can you taste? Toothpaste, tea/coffee sugar, breakfast? Maybe nothing?

It may be helpful to practice the rainbow breathing exercise on page 24 which is a simple relaxation exercise you can do if you experience morning anxiety.



Session 8: How to sleep well

Many individuals develop problems with their sleeping patterns for any number of reasons. Once we develop a poor sleeping pattern it can be very difficult to change.

These are some guidelines for re-setting your sleep pattern and generally improving the quality of your sleep.

In order to improve the quality of your sleep there are a number of changes that can be made.

1. Stop drinking caffeine containing drinks at least 3-4 hours before bedtime including strong tea and coffee
2. Turn off Tablets and mobile phones at least 2 hours before bedtime. Both the light and the content of information on line can be very stimulating and prevent our brains from recognising that it needs to get ready to sleep.
3. Go to bed when you feel sleepy, not at a particular set time if you are still wide awake.
4. If possible do not have technology in the bedroom, remove the TV and any other stimulating devices like laptops and tablets.
5. Try a relaxation or mindfulness exercise to help you fall asleep.
6. If you find yourself over thinking try a mindfulness exercise or a distraction method like counting backwards from 100 in 3's.
7. If you are in bed any longer than 20 minutes without falling asleep get up and do something calming like reading or knitting. Do not go back to bed until you feel sleepy.
8. No matter how well you sleep GET UP at the same time every morning.
9. Avoid sleeping or napping during the day.
10. Try not to stress about how many hours you sleep, some people need much less sleep than others. Although the average is 7-8 hours per night this varies a great deal. As we get older we need less sleep.

Session 9: How to talk about Mental illness

1 in 4 adults have a mental health illness in any year
67% continue to work

What is a stigma?

- A stigma is a mark of disgrace a stain or reproach on one's reputation.
- Stigma erodes confidence that mental illnesses are real and treatable health conditions.
- We have allowed stigma to erect barriers around effective treatment and we need to remove them.
- 'To not have your suffering recognised is an almost unbearable form of violence'. (Andrei Lankov)

Positive aspects of anxiety

- Increased levels of empathy and ability to understand others pain and joy easier
- Ability to understand on a deeper level
- Strong levels of intuition and accuracy

How to open a conversation about your mental health

- Make sure you have time and privacy to hold a conversation
- Don't make a huge deal about it, avoid a build up just introduce it within the conversation
- Think about undertaking an activity with the person you want to speak to such as a walk, it can feel less intimidating to talk
- Some people appreciate directness, think about the person you are communicating with
- If talk is too much maybe, text, phone or write a letter.
- If the person is uncomfortable stop the conversation
- Try not to interrupt the other person

Session 10: Self-care

Self-care is a really important part of looking after your wellbeing. Self-care isn't just about taking time to do nice things for yourself (although this is important) but being kind to yourself when you might be having a difficult time.

Being aware of your self-talk is important. Are you constantly beating yourself up and putting yourself down with your self-talk? If the answer to this is mostly yes then it might be helpful to practice some self-compassion.

If your friend or family member was talking this way about themselves how would you respond to them? We are much better at responding with kindness and empathy to others when we see them struggling with self-doubts and anxious thinking than we are at responding with kindness to ourselves.

Next time you notice that you are engaging in negative self-talk try to stop and consider if you would say the same thing to a friend who was having a difficult time. Try think of what you would say to your friend in the same situation and change your own self-talk to reflect this approach.

Sometimes we can try to do everything perfectly as a form of protection or to put up a shield around us. We can try to control situations by overthinking each possible outcome and trying to plan things perfectly. We can then be really negative about ourselves if things do not go to plan. Or in some cases the need to control the outcome can prevent us from doing things that would benefit us.

"Perfectionism is a 20 tonne shield that we lug around thinking it will perfect us, when in fact it's the thing that that's really preventing us from being seen and taking flight" (Bréne Brown).

Remember its ok to take some time out to recharge your batteries. Looking after yourself helps you to be more available for others too. Try having some time in the week where you are able to focus on something for you, such as doing yoga, spending time with friends or listening to relaxing music.

In the resource section you can find a self-compassion exercise on page 24 that you might like to try.

Threat, Drive, Soothe

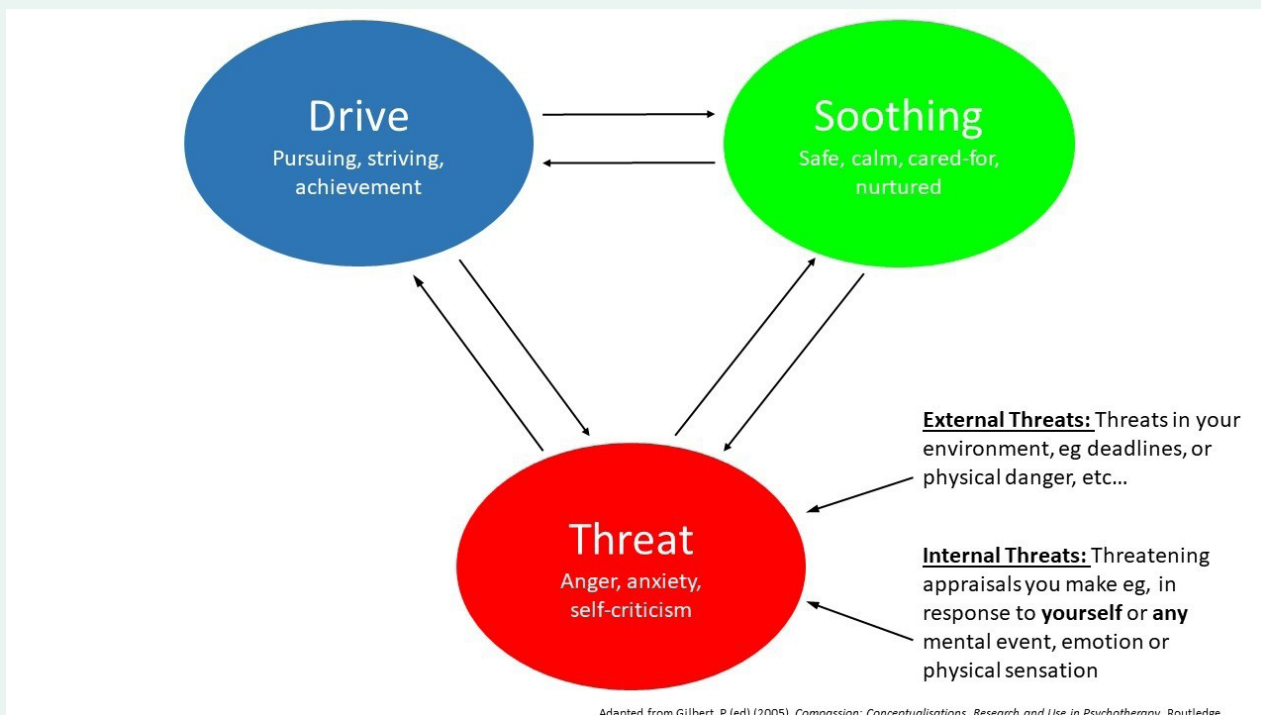
Paul Gilbert claims that there are three emotional regulation systems, Threat, Drive and Soothe. The threat system is activated when we perceive danger to help us survive this threat. In today's society our threat system can be activated early due to an overstimulation. When we experience anxiety we can find that we are in the threat system a much larger proportion of time than in the other two systems. As noted in the diagram below threat is not only threat from the environment but also internal threats such as self-criticism.

The Drive system helps us to strive towards achievement, take on new tasks, and helps us to try to meet our perceived needs and wants.

The Soothe system helps us to feel safe, calm and connection. This system can us to balance the other two systems. Equally it can be harmful to over soothe when that turns into inaction. For example when we find food comforting we can find ourselves over eating. It is difficult if we are trying too hard to stay in soothe to activate our drive system.

We need a balance of all three systems.

(www.mindfulpath.com.au/application/files/5115/6583/0031/The_three_emotional_systems.pdf)



Reflecting on values

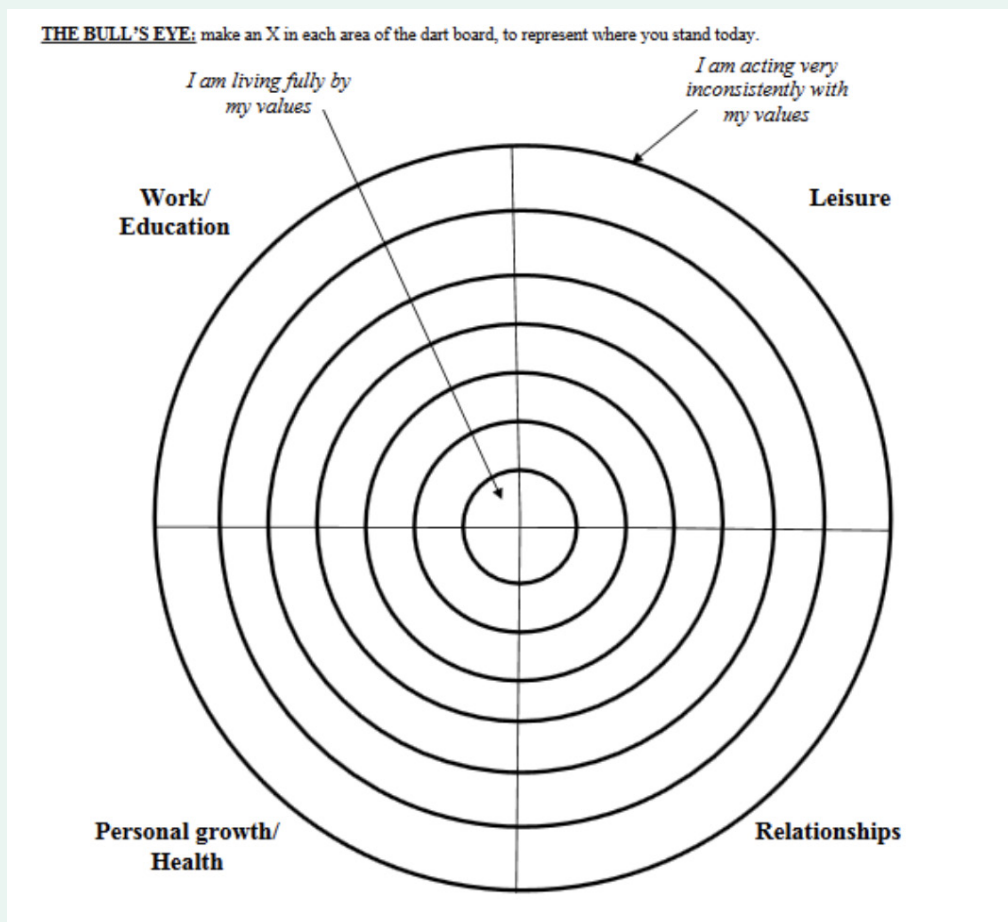
It can help to look at your values and what is important to you in your life. What areas do you think you might be neglecting.

An example of this could be if one of our values is to try to live compassionately. You could reflect on whether you are able to act compassionately to others but also to yourself. Are there any barriers to being able to show compassion and what would be helpful to support you to be able to engage more with this personal value?

Another value could be to live more mindfully. Again you could identify if there are any barriers to this and what would support you to be able to integrate a mindfulness practice into your life.

Other examples of values could be spending time with family, learning new things, creativity, taking care of others etc. We may not be able to achieve all our goals because of circumstances which are outside of our control but we can try to live by our own values.

The bull's eye exercise might be a helpful reflection exercise to look at your values and how currently in -line you are with them. Remember this is not to criticise.

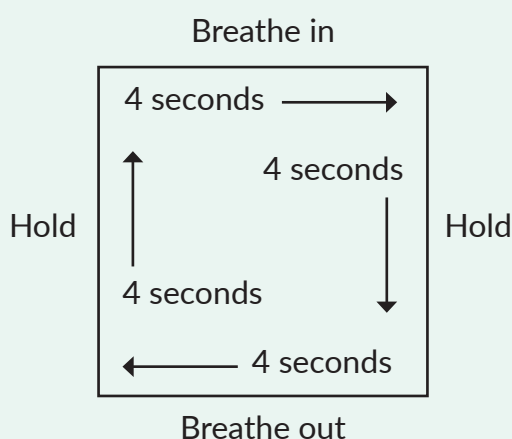


Relaxation Exercises/Meditations

4x4x4 breathing

4x4x4 breathing can help; breathing in for four seconds holding for 4 seconds and breathing out for 4 seconds and repeating this pattern.

Square breathing can also help focusing on any square shape that is in view such as a window or picture frame at the top left corner breathing in and breathing out as your eyes follow along to the top right hand corner. Breathing in at the top right hand corner and breathing out as eyes follow down to the bottom right hand corner. Continue this practise following the square for as long as necessary.



Graded relaxation exercise

Find a space where you can relax without being disturbed. Remember do not cause any pain during this exercise and only create as much tension as is comfortable for you. Start by taking a deep breath in and out.

Clench your fist on your right hand as tight as you can without causing any pain. Hold this for a few seconds then release. Repeat this another two times then focus on your left hand. Again clench as tight as you can without causing pain, then after a few seconds release.

Next lift your shoulders as high as you can squeezing them. Hold for a few seconds then release them. Again repeat this a further two times.

You can continue this with the rest of your body including tightening your facial muscles then releasing them.

Notice how your body feels when it's tense and the difference when you relax the muscles. Hopefully by practicing this relaxation exercise you can start to be more aware when you are carrying tension and be able to use this technique to let some of it go.

Dr Kristin Neff's Self compassion exercise

Exercise 1: How would you treat a friend?

Please take out a sheet of paper and answer the following questions:

- First, think about times when a close friend feels really bad about him or herself or is really struggling in some way. How would you respond to your friend in this situation (especially when you're at your best)? Please write down what you typically do, what you say, and note the tone in which you typically talk to your friends.
- Now think about times when you feel bad about yourself or are struggling. How do you typically respond to yourself in these situations? Please write down what you typically do, what you say, and note the tone in which you talk to yourself.
- Did you notice a difference? If so, ask yourself why. What factors or fears come into play that lead you to treat yourself and others so differently?
- Please write down how you think things might change if you responded to yourself in the same way you typically respond to a close friend when you're suffering.

Why not try treating yourself like a good friend and see what happens?

(self-compassion.org/category/exercises/)

Rainbow breathing exercise

This is a simple relaxation exercise focussed on deep breathing through the colours of the rainbow.

- Begin by sitting comfortably, closing your eyes and taking 3 deep breathes
- Now use your imagination to picture the colour yellow imagine being surrounded by yellow and as you take a deep breath in inhaling the colour.
- Imagine yellow flooding down into your lungs filling the space. Visualise the colour yellow travelling up into your neck and head and down through the shoulders and into the arms and hands.
- Now down through the trunk of your body into the upper legs, knees lower legs, feet and toes.
- As you exhale visualise the colour yellow leaving your body up from the feet, legs and trunk, from the hands, arms, shoulders, head and neck aware of the colour leaving your body.
- Next imagine being surrounded by the colour orange, again as you inhale visualise the colour entering your body flooding up into the head, shoulders and arms and filling the lungs before spilling down through the trunk and down into the leg's feet and toes.
- As you exhale visualising the colour leaving your body from the head, arms and shoulder and up through the feet, legs, trunk and lungs. Watching the colour leave your body and evaporating into the air.
- Next once again visualise yourself surrounded by the colour red. Then taking a deep breathe in as you see the colour filling your body head, shoulders arms and hands, flooding the lungs and proceeding to travel through the trunk down into the legs and

feet into the toes.

- Breathing out and visualising the colour red leaving your body from the head, arms and shoulders and up through the toes, legs, trunk and lungs.
- Proceed through the remaining colours of the rainbow - Green, Blue, Violet, Purple
- End with three consecutive breaths.

Resource page

www.bemindful.co.uk

website from mental health foundation.

www.bangor.ac.uk/mindfulness

The Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice

www.franticworld.com

The website for the book by Williams and Penman

www.getselfhelp.co.uk/mindfulness.htm

self-help information

www.headspace.com

online resource and mobile app

www.mindfulnet.org/

online resources

www.mindfulnessinschools.org

project encouraging Mindfulness in schools

www.mentalhealth-uk.org

There are online resources on this site including the stress bucket exercise.

www.oxfordmindfulness.org

The Oxford Centre for Mindfulness

www.palousemindfulness.com

Palouse mindfulness: A helpful website for meditations is Palouse mindfulness. There is a link to the mountain meditation on this page. Free online MBSR course

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kv5K-4VwYlg

Mindful exercise: A link to a tea break mindfulness exercise by Catherine O'Leary Clinical Psychologist

self-compassion.org/guided-self-compassion-meditations-mp3-2/

self-compassion.org/exercise-1-treat-friend/

Self-compassion exercise and meditation – by Dr Kristen Neff's

www.stepiau.org

This has been developed by the primary mental health support service in Cardiff and the Vale. It provides self-help resources and links to local services.

Alternative Local Mindfulness Resources

Please note that all resources are offered in good faith, they may not have been visited or experienced by us. There is one free 8 week course and the others have a cost as noted below.

The Mindfulness and Wellbeing Centre – Samye Foundation Wales

8 week Mindfulness courses in Canton, Cardiff

Tel: 02920 228040

www.sfwales.org

£180 / concessions

Mindfulness in Action

8 week MBCT or MBSR courses, mornings and evenings, follow on courses in Roath, Cardiff

Tel: 07910 829084

www.mindfulnessinaction.co.uk

£200 / £125 unwaged (evening)

£200 / £80 unwaged (day)

Change Talk – Ariana Faris

8 week Mindfulness courses in Cardiff

Tel: 029 2048 6553

www.changetalk.co.uk/mindfulness-therapy

£195 / £175 early bird

Mindful Space – Vicki Worsley

8 week MBCT and MBSR Courses, silent practice days, weekend courses, Cardiff

Tel: 07706 830313

www.mindfulspace.co.uk

£200 / £180 early bird

Christopher Joseph

Breathworks Mindfulness introductory sessions and courses in Roath, Cardiff

Tel: 07773 641027

www.christopherjoseph.co.uk

£197 / £137 unwaged

Apps:

Calm

Has some free meditations if you do not wish to pay for the premium account.

Headspace app

Mindfulness app however there is a monthly/yearly fee for full access to this content.

