

Anxiety

What is Anxiety?

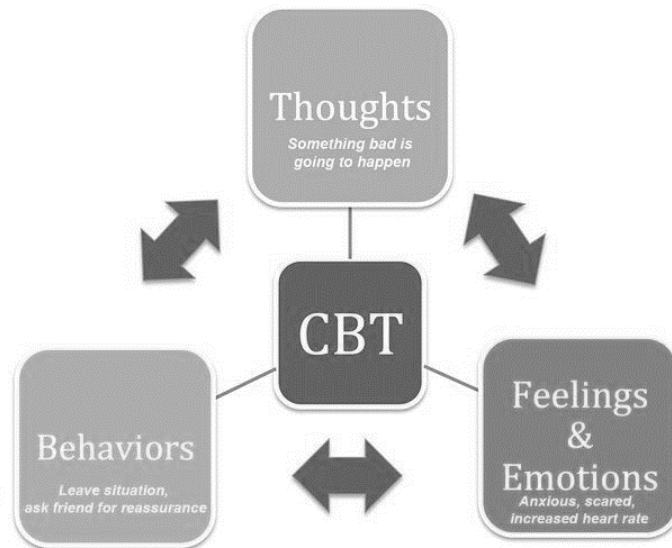
Anxiety is something that all humans experience, and it looks different for everyone! We may feel nervous when meeting new people, worried about an upcoming test, or even feel our heart racing when we have to speak in front of a lot of people. Some people might experience somatic or physical symptoms which is when your body reacts to anxiety, while others might experience cognitive symptoms such as having a lot of worries, racing thoughts, ruminating thoughts, fears, and nervousness. Some people even experience a combination of both types of symptoms and feel anxiety in their body and in their mind. When anxiety begins to get in the way of your day or change your lifestyle, that is when it might be helpful to talk to someone about your anxiety and learn new coping strategies to help manage your anxiety.

Common Symptoms:

- Increased heart rate
- Trouble breathing
- Increased adrenaline
- Stomach aches
- Difficulty managing emotions.
- Excessive worries
- Nausea
- Trouble focusing
- Tight muscles
- Excessive sweating
- Dizziness
- Chest pains
- “Fight”, “Flight”, or “Freeze”
- Nervousness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Racing thoughts

What Causes Anxiety?

Anxiety occurs when your mind believes that you are in danger despite there being no actual threat around you. Your mind sends messages to your body which makes your body go into survival mode to try to protect you. This shift into survival mode results in the physical symptoms of anxiety such as trouble breathing, shakiness, or nausea. It is important to remember that none of these physical reactions can harm you—they are designed to keep you safe. Since anxiety starts in your brains, it is important to understand the connection between your body and mind which can be understood if we focus on our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.



Anxiety often makes our minds think about the past and the future rather than the present, we often think of all of the what ifs (what if this happens or what if that happens), and our mind goes to the worse case scenarios or the worst possible thing that could happen. Your worries, negative or anxious thoughts, and fears can all start a chain reaction of events in your body. Once you have an anxious thought, you begin to experience emotions and physical feelings that are a result of that anxious thought, your body begins to react to your anxiety. Due to your physical and emotional reactions to anxiety, your behavior is very likely to change as well. For example, if you are worried about a test that you have at school the next day and you have the negative thought that you will fail the test, you may have an emotional reaction of nervousness and fear, you may have the physical reaction of feeling nausea or having a headache, and behaviorally, you may not be able to fall asleep the night before your test or you may try to avoid going to school the next day. Understanding this cycle between our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors is the first step towards managing our anxiety!

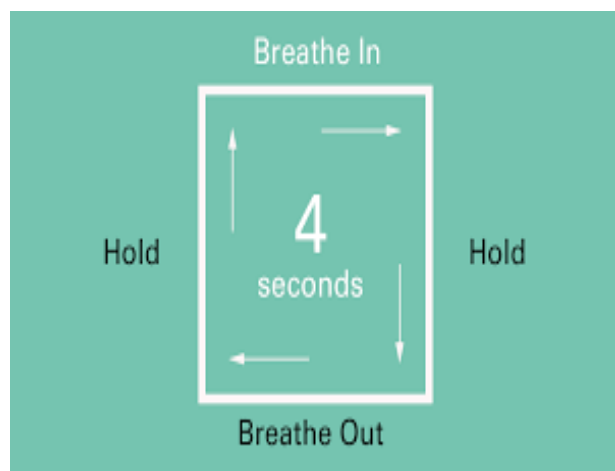
How to Manage Anxiety:

Identify and create a list of your triggers and warning signs: The more that you understand about how you experience anxiety and what makes you anxious, the easier it will be to manage your anxiety!

- Warning signs are changes in your thoughts, emotions, your body, or your behavior when you begin to feel anxious.
 - These are things that show you or tell you that you are beginning to feel strong emotions.
- Triggers are things, people, places, and/or experiences that cause anxiety.
 - These are things that make us feel strong emotions.

Mindfulness: Practicing these tools helps your body get used to and make a habit out of these strategies which will help you be prepared for when you start to feel anxious. Some common tools are...

- Muscle relaxation: tense your muscles one muscle at a time from your feet to your head, hold the tension for a few seconds, and release them.
- Breathing exercises: these can be fun and interactive!
 - Box breathing breathe in through your nose for four seconds, hold your breath for four seconds, breathe out through your mouth for four seconds, and rest for four seconds.
 - High-five breathing trace the outside of your hand and in-between your fingers with your pointer finger while breathing in through your nose as you move upward on your hand and breathing out through your mouth as you move downward on your hand.



- Grounding techniques: using your 5 senses to help calm down your body and mind and become more present in the here-and-now.

- Name 5 things you can see, four things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.
- Go to your happy place by choosing any place in the world that makes you feel calm and relaxed and think of all the details of that place until you make it come to life! (What does it look like, what does it smell like, who is there, what do you do in your happy place, etc.)

Focus on what you can control rather than what you cannot: It is common to worry or feel anxious about things that happen in life that are out of our control:

- First, ask yourself, “What am I worried about?”.
- Write down all of the details of your worry, include all of your anxious thoughts.
- Next reread what you have wrote, and cross out everything that you cannot control.
- Finally, what is left will be what you are able to control. Focus on what you can control and create a gameplan to help manage that worry or situation.

Challenge Your Anxiety: Become the detective against your anxious thoughts and use a thought log to challenge your anxiety by finding all the evidence against your worries!

- First identify what the event within your worry is
- Next, identify what your thought around your worry is (If your worry was to come true, why does that concern you or what do you think may happen as a result of your worry?)
- Next, identify your emotional, physical, and behavioral consequences (what emotions do you feel, how does your body feel, and how does your behavior change when you have this worry)
- Then identify all the evidence against your worry! Ask yourself, why would my worry not come true? What knowledge do I have against my worry?
- Lastly, create a new positive thought using the evidence that you found that you can use as a reminder when you have this worry! Overtime, the more that you remind yourself of this new positive thought, the more you will start to belief it rather than believing your worry!
 - Include in your new thought a positive statement, a piece of evidence you have found, and reassurance.

Thought Log

Event	Thought	Consequences	Evidence	New Thought
Taking a test	I am going to fail the test	Nervous, shaky, being quiet	I have studied, I have never failed a test before, I did well on all of my assignments, I completed the review packet	I am not going to fail my test because I have studied, and I am prepared which means that I am going to do well on my test.
Going to summer camp	Nobody will want to be my friend and I will be lonely	Scared, nauseous, trying to avoid going to camp	I have a lot of friends at school, I am a good friend, I am nice and kind, I am not the only person going to camp that might feel this way, I have made friends before at school	I will make friends because I am nice and kind which means that I will not be lonely.

Recommended Reading Materials & Apps

Adolescents:

- “The Teen Girl’s Anxiety Survival Guide: Ten Ways to Conquer Anxiety and Feel Your Best” By Lucie Hemmen PhD
- “The Anxiety Workbook for Teens” By Lisa M. Schab LCSW (2008)
- “The Shyness and Social Anxiety Workbook for Teens” By Jennifer Shannon LMFT (2012)
- “Mindfulness for Teen Worry” By Jeffrey Bernstein PhD (2018)

Apps:

- Headspace (Teens)
- Mindshift (Teens)
- Calm (Teens)

References:

Adopted from: Mayo Clinic Health System (2021)

Adopted from: Child Mind Institute (2023)

Adopted from: National Institutes of Health (2021)