



Wednesday's Child



Anti-Anxiety Exercises

Exercise 1

What are your anxiety symptoms?

Being aware of what you feel when you become anxious is a great starting point. Keep a note of these feelings and thoughts, start a diary or journal. Write down when you feel anxious and what you think caused the anxious episode.

1. Note down anxiety issue and the effect it has – read it back to yourself outloud. When you read it back the rational and logical (left brain) helps the right brain (emotional brain).The body starts to respond and reduces its fear response. Over time the brain and body get used to the response and reduces it, acknowledging and accepting the anxiety.

Tip 1: Write it down and create a list of all of them. It may take several days to do this. It's fine to take your time. By doing this you process the information better.

List your current anxiety thoughts and concerns	On scale of 1-10 how bothersome has this source of anxiety been?	Where have these feelings come from? Is it linked to something else you may not have thought of before? How long have you had this concern?	How do you respond to this anxiety? What thoughts do you have? What is your reaction? How do you behave?

Exercise 2

Take each source of anxiety and complete the following exercise.

Imagine sitting down opposite yourself. Say each anxiety concern out loud. Have a conversation with yourself about the validity of each statement. How likely are they to happen? Have they happened before? What is the effect of these concerns on your emotional wellbeing, relationships, work, mood, communication?

Other Questions To Challenge Irrational Thoughts

- "Is my thought based on fact or feeling?"
- "How likely is it that my fear will come true?"
- "Will this still matter in a week? A month? A year?"
- "What would I tell a friend if he/she had the same thought?"
- "If it did happen, what could I do to cope with or handle it?"
- "Am I falling into a thinking trap, e.g. catastrophizing or overestimating danger?"
- "Are you looking at the bigger picture?"
- "How much worry is the situation worth?"

Exercise 3

Anti-Anxiety Imagery

You have the power to change how you feel with just your thoughts. If you are feeling sad or anxious then continuing to immerse yourself in that feeling will give you more of that feeling. When you think of something calming or positive, you will feel that. You can only feel one thing at a time.

First identify what you want to feel instead of the anxiety. I.e relaxed, peaceful, happy etc. Think of what you are doing, where you are, what's happening around you or if there is a particular place where you feel that feeling. Visualize yourself in that place that you love. Perhaps it's your favourite place to watch the sunset, a stream, a lush forest, a secret beach, or a field of wildflowers. Invite all of your senses to imagine yourself there. Hear the evening crickets, feel the sand in between your toes, and smell the flowers.

Use your senses for 5-10 minutes to imagine this setting in detail. (Your brain cannot distinguish between reality and something that is vividly imagined).

- Notice if you are alone or with others
- What can you see? What colours are there? Notice what you notice about what you can see, what's happening around you.
- Notice what you can hear. What noises are happening around you? How do they sound? Soft, loud, harsh, quiet? What are you saying to yourself, Notice what you notice about what you can hear
- Notice if you are touching anything, and if you are how does it feel against your skin. Is it smooth, rough, prickly
- Notice what you can smell. How does the air smell? Notice what you notice about the smell.
- Now notice how you feel. Notice where you feel that feeling in your body. Notice if that feeling has a colour. Notice its temperature, is it cool, warm, hot or cold. Notice how that feeling moves, does it spin, shake, splash, move up and down or side to side. Notice what you notice about that feeling.

Exercise 4

Gradual Exposure

When you can repeatedly allow yourself to become involved in the situation or thing that is giving you anxiety, you can rewire your brain and teach it that you are safe. Whilst confronting the things that are making you anxious can be a daunting thought, it is manageable. This exercise will help to remove and safety or avoidance behaviours that are keeping the anxiety there.

1. Make an exposure hierarchy

Taking your list of anxiety issues from above, list them in order of the one's which are the least anxiety provoking to the most anxiety provoking.

You can use the anxiety scale of 1-10. Where 10 is the most anxiety provoking and 1 is the least anxiety provoking.

Hierarchy Items

Predicted Anxiety

2. Confront the first item on your hierarchy.

Confront the item on the hierarchy that is predicted to be the least anxiety provoking for you, first.

Remember that although your anxiety might rise initially during an exposure task, it will fall if you remain in the situation for long enough. The feeling is not dangerous and will gradually pass.

Try to remain in the situation until your anxiety reduces by at least half. Avoid using safety behaviours as they slow down the progress. You can reduce these safety behaviours gradually, over time.

3. Repeat the Exposure

Keep repeating the exposure as often as possible, until the situation no longer makes you feel anxious. It will get easier. The more often you expose yourself to the item, the quicker you will overcome your fear towards it.

4. Move on to the next item on the hierarchy

Follow the same steps with the other items on the hierarchy.

Tips and Troubleshooting:

If an attempt at an exposure task does not go as well as you had hoped – it's ok, this can happen sometimes. Be sure to relax yourself after and spend some time doing something you enjoy. Then try again as soon as you can.

If the task still seems difficult, try to build in an extra step or two before it. This will help your confidence grow before facing it.

If the anxiety is not reducing, it might be because you are using a safety behaviour, which is preventing you from fully confronting the situation. Ask yourself if you are completing a safety behaviour, and if you are then remove it.