



Let's Talk Stress and Anxiety: A Self Help Guide

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Let's Talk is Gloucestershire's Improving Access to Psychological Therapy (IAPT) Service.

Let's Talk is a free service from the NHS.

We offer short-term talking therapies to people with mild to moderate depression and anxiety.

Our Self Help guides provide an introduction to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy at Step 1 of our programme of support.

The authors have made every effort to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information in this workbook. However, it is not intended to be a substitute for medical advice or treatment. Any person with a condition requiring medical attention should consult a qualified medical practitioner or suitable therapist. Evidence suggests that a self-help material is most effective when you are supported by an appropriately qualified clinician. We strongly advise that when using this workbook you stay in touch with your named clinician. If for any reason you are unable to reach them and you are feeling concerned about your mental health we recommend you go to see your doctor. Other agencies that can help you are listed in the back of this workbook.

For further information please contact:

Let's Talk

2gether NHS Foundation Trust

Rikenel, Montpellier, Gloucester, GL1 1LY

Website: www.talk2gether.nhs.uk

Let's Talk Stress and Anxiety

Managing Stress and Anxiety using Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

Introduction

The aim of this self help guide is to tell you a little about stress and anxiety and to help you identify whether you may be experiencing symptoms of stress. It also includes a number of helpful steps you may wish to take to manage your symptoms and improve your wellbeing using cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT).

Anybody can experience stress or anxiety and levels of severity can vary considerably from person to person. You may find that after completing this self help guide, you wish to develop further strategies for improvement and increase your understanding. To do this you can contact Let's Talk, Gloucestershire's Free NHS IAPT Service. We tell you more about this at the end of the leaflet.

If you feel in need of immediate support please contact your GP.

What is stress and anxiety?

Everybody experiences stress and anxiety; they are normal reactions to pressure, challenges or danger. Both stress and anxiety are helpful to a certain degree. They enable us to respond quickly and focus our attention on the problem at hand to respond to these threats or pressures effectively (i.e. dodging a bus, managing interviews, aggressive neighbour).

Historically humans have faced difficult situations where our lives were regularly at threat (i.e. from bears, tigers etc.) and it was crucial for us to have an effective response for our survival. Threats today are usually more subtle but we still have the same inbuilt automatic primitive (fight or flight) response.

What happens when faced with threats or pressures?

We experience a release of the hormone adrenaline which leads to mental and physical changes which help us to deal with the

immediate threat or pressure (i.e. getting out of the way of an oncoming bus)

Physical changes are aimed at getting blood to our muscles so we can react quickly. Increasing heart rate to pump the blood around faster and shallow breathing to allow oxygen to the muscles (this can get our muscles primed to jump back onto the pavement quickly).

Psychological changes focusing on the problem and improved concentration (which would help us figure out how long we have to get out of the way of the bus, and to notice the kerbs we jump). These changes can enhance our performance and fully prepare us to either fight or flight from the threat or pressure at hand.

Everybody experiences anxiety and this is helpful to us in such situations. However, when stress or anxiety stays with us for a length of time it becomes damaging and distressing. When this happens our performance will drop, and we may notice many other physical, emotional and psychological changes.

Do I have stress and anxiety?

Everyone's' experience of stress and anxiety is unique to them; however most will experience the following symptoms which are commonly associated with stress and anxiety.

Thoughts:

Time spent thinking about potential threats, maybe in the form of worries. Often people get caught up in worrying, fear the worst case scenarios or spend time mentally preparing for a variety of potential negative outcomes, sometimes people worry about worrying itself.

Common thoughts include: 'what if....', 'I won't be able to escape', 'I might make a fool of myself', 'I can't cope', or 'There is too much to do'.

Behaviours:

When anxious you may notice changes to some of your behaviours – maybe to your eating/sleeping habits. You may be more restless and this may lead to getting snappy, pacing, or fidgeting.

Often our behaviours aim to help us relieve our anxiety in the short term; one behaviour that helps in the short term only is avoiding things (walk up the stairs instead of getting in a lift, avoiding social events, distracting self).

Emotions:

Many emotions may be present, such as: nervous, apprehensive, on edge, on guard, irritable, fearful or panicky

Physiology:

Fidgeting, restless, hard to relax and switch off, butterflies, or a churning stomach, muscular tension, dizziness, increased focus can lead to blurred vision, breathlessness, Chest pains, Stomach cramps, Shaking or Trembling, Heart racing or palpitations, Nausea, Problems concentrating, sweating.

All or some of these thoughts, behaviours, emotions and physical symptoms may be present when we feel anxious. They can interact in a way which increases our anxiety.

For example:

My fear is having a heart attack when there is nobody nearby to help. Whenever I am on my own I feel anxious, I think 'I might have a heart attack'. This triggers the stress response and my body changes - my heart rate increases. I become aware that my heart rate increases, I start pacing and fidgeting and feel *more* fearful and more anxious

What causes stress and anxiety to develop?

- One or more stressful events or changes occurring in life (change in job role, moving house, becoming ill)
- Relationship difficulties
- Financial pressures
- Other peoples' unrealistic or unfair expectations of us.
- Undertaking a challenge of some kind (exams, interviews, starting something new)
- How we think – sometimes the way we think makes us more aware of potential threats and leads to anxiety.

These events undoubtedly crop up from time to time and we all react differently due to our past experiences and internal coping strategies. If we have had a difficult experience previously, or adopt an unhelpful thinking style, then the next time we face a similar situation we may encounter more stress or anxiety. This booklet provides you with strategies which may helpful to you when you are feeling anxious or stressed

What maintains my stress and anxiety?

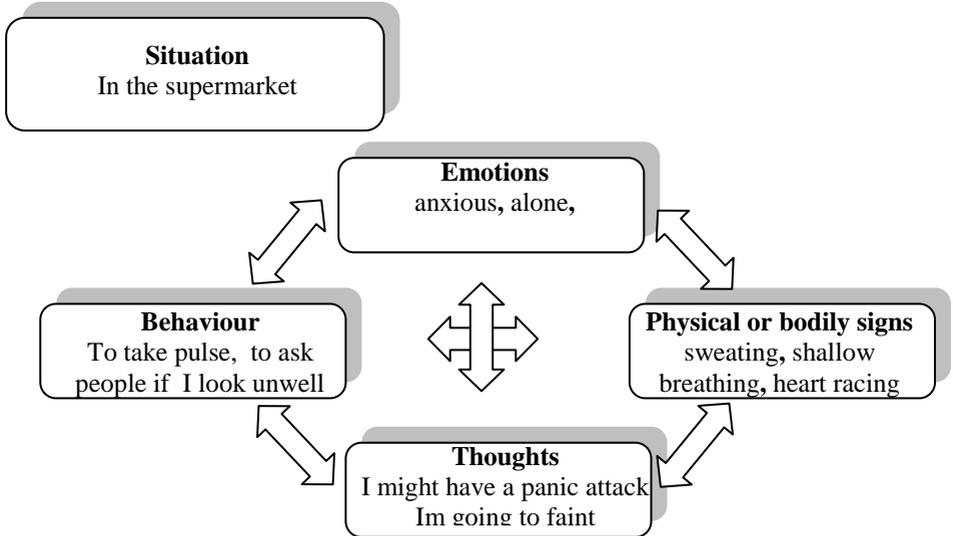
Thoughts

We often develop patterns of thoughts, behaviours, physical symptoms and emotions which maintain our anxiety and stress. These create vicious cycles which keep our anxiety going.

Behaviours

As discussed previously, our thoughts can lead to anxiety, which in turn triggers physical symptoms. Although these are natural

actually long term - this cycle can increase your anxiety. The next time we are faced with the situation we are more fearful as we did not learn how well we could manage it. The thought may be 'I cannot manage this', the heart will race and we may be more aware of this symptom or experience other symptoms (shallow breathing, shaking), we may feel *more* anxious and fearful, and are more likely to avoid the situation further.



The more we focus on the threat the more fearful we become. This creates more symptoms of anxiety which leads us to believe our thoughts about the threat even more. However the symptoms were a natural reaction to the initial thought.

Understanding our own cycles and patterns of thoughts, behaviours, physical symptoms and emotions is helpful as then we can identify how we can make some changes, break these vicious cycles, reduce the anxiety and feel better

What steps can I take to overcome my stress and anxiety?

Understanding your experiences and making changes to either your thoughts, or to your behaviours, which will stop your anxiety from escalating.

Understanding your anxiety:

This questionnaire lists symptoms of anxiety and asks how often they have bothered you in the last two weeks; by using this regularly it can help you to monitor how your anxiety changes over time.

		Wk.....	Date.....	
Over the last 2 weeks, on how many days have you been bothered by any of the following problems?	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1 Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge	0	1	2	3
2 Not being able to stop or control worrying	0	1	2	3
3 Worrying too much about different things	0	1	2	3
4 Trouble relaxing	0	1	2	3
5 Being so restless it is hard to sit still	0	1	2	3
6 Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	0	1	2	3
7 Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen	0	1	2	3

A12 – GAD-7 Total Score

Anxiety diary:

Keeping a diary can help you to understand your anxiety and your coping strategies. You may identify some themes or patterns which occur for you. It can be helpful to use these to understand your vicious cycles, and to consider if your coping strategies help in the long term, short term, or if they maintain your anxiety.

Situation	How extreme is my anxiety	Emotions (list)	Thoughts (list)	What I did to cope	How extreme is my anxiety afterwards
EG: Getting into a lift	8/10	Scared irritable	'there too many people' 'I will be stuck'	I walked up the stairs	2/10
<i>Please complete with your own examples</i> ..					

This example shows a short term reduction in anxiety, but does not solve the problem in the long term. It therefore maintains anxiety.

Considering our thinking styles:

How we think becomes a habit, the more we have certain thoughts the more automatic they become, even if they are inaccurate or damaging to us.

We rarely stop to examine our thoughts and often take it as read that they are accurate. We also rarely consider if our thoughts

help or hinder us. We may correct others if they say negative things about themselves, but do we do this for ourselves?

Unhelpful thinking styles can become our default. However, we can change our thoughts and this starts with recognising some of our own unhelpful thinking styles.

1. Bias against myself

A tendency to be self-critical, overlook my strengths, focus on my weaknesses, place unreasonable demands on myself, and not recognise my achievements, e.g. 'I never do anything well enough'.

2. Putting a negative slant on things (negative mental filter)

A negative mental filter where I see things through dark tinted glasses, nothing is ever good enough, I focus on the things that don't go so well and pay no attention to things that do go well, e.g. 'I made two mistakes in that letter, it's a complete mess'.

3. Having a gloomy view of the future (making negative predictions)

Assuming that things in the future will go wrong or not work out as I want, always waiting for the next thing to go wrong, e.g. 'If I try and improve my mood it won't last, it's pointless'.

4. Jumping to the worst conclusion (catastrophic thinking)

Catastrophising and predicting the very worst outcome will happen, e.g. 'I will be completely overwhelmed and not able to cope'.

5. Bearing all responsibility/taking all the blame

Always blaming myself when things go wrong, automatically taking responsibility for others' problems or emotional reactions, placing pressure on myself to sort out others' problems, e.g. 'It's my fault', 'I have to help everyone who asks for help'.

6. Black and white thinking.

Seeing things from either one extreme or another with no middle ground or shades of grey e.g. 'I can't do anything properly, therefore I might as well give up', 'I didn't get all the shopping I wanted, it was a complete waste of time'.

Making changes:

The Worry Tree

Worrying excessively can cause a lot of distress and be difficult to control. This technique can help us decide what to do with our worries; hopefully it will lead to them having less negative impact upon you and take up less of your time.

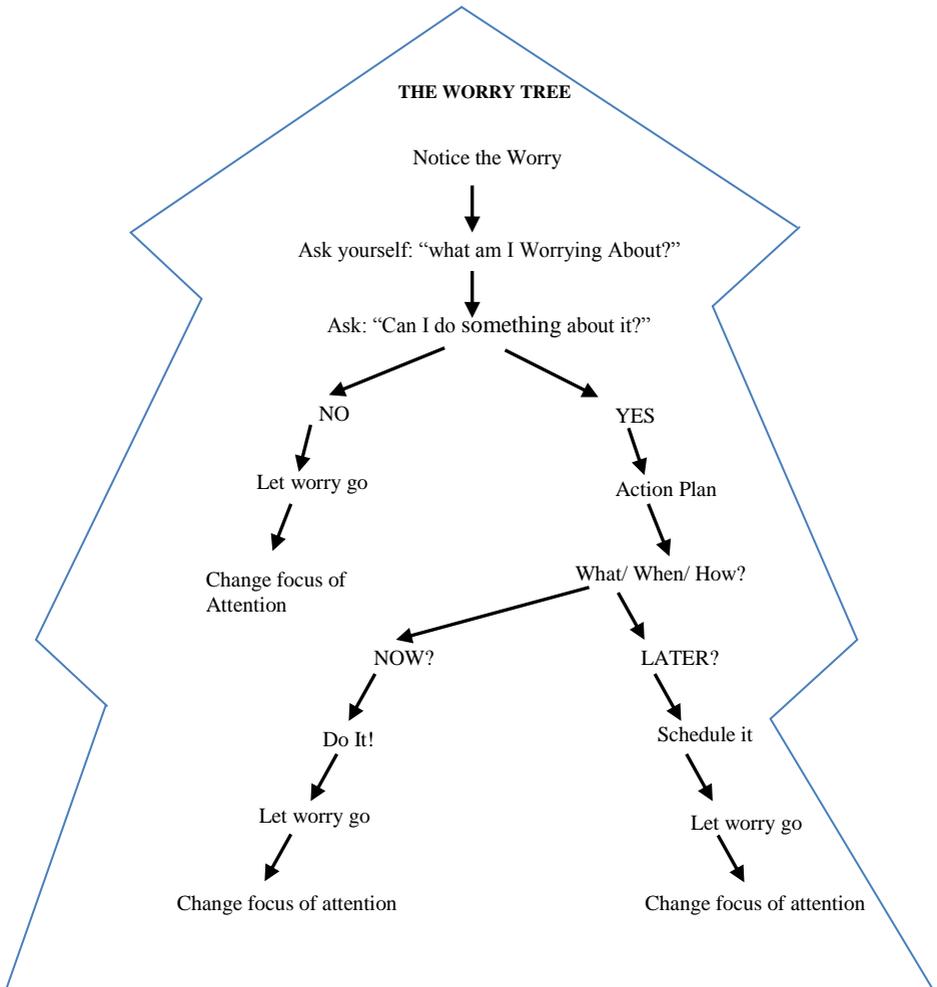
It asks you to identify if each worry is either;

- a) A real event worry – about things in the here or now (i.e. my car has broken down)

Or

- b) A hypothetical worry – about things which may (or may not) happen in the future (i.e. if my car breaks down I will lose my job, I will have no money and I will then lose my home).

Use the diagram below to help you to decide what to do with your worries



Thought Challenging:

Thoughts themselves can be damaging, even if they are inaccurate we may believe them. This technique can help you to evaluate our negative thoughts and develop a new thought which is more accurate as you have spent time considering it.

Situation What was happening, where and when	Emotions (usually one word or labels)	Thoughts (list all thoughts which ran through your mind – they will be sentences)	Revised thought (spend time developing a new thought which is balanced and realistic)
<i>I saw friends in the street and waved, but they did not respond</i>	<i>Hurt Embarrassed Angry sad</i>	<i>‘They do not like me’ ‘everyone thinks I am a fool for waving’ ‘nobody likes me’</i>	<i>‘I am not certain they do not like me, other people make an effort so some people do like me’.</i>
<i>Please complete with your own examples..</i>			

How this might affect my life?

Anxiety and stress can impact on all aspects of our lives: such as work, home-life, relationships, social life, or hobbies. It can impact on us when we are starting new things, or maintaining old routines. How it impacts and the degree to which it impacts, will vary from person to person.

i.e. under performance in some or all areas of life, Not reaching full potential, Avoiding friends, not meeting new people, loss of support systems, missing opportunities at home or in work, not being able to relax, avoiding certain places or activities, time spent worrying may feel like time lost.

You may need to practise the self-help exercises in this guide for a while before you feel any benefit. If you still find you are struggling with stress or anxiety then you may like to access further help from Let's Talk.

Can it be treated?

Yes. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) who publish guidelines for treatments in the NHS recommend CBT for the treatment of stress and anxiety. CBT can help you understand and manage the relationship between your behaviours, thoughts and feelings and physical sensations and how this maintains your stress or anxiety.

At Let's Talk we aim to help you develop more positive ways of behaving, thinking, feeling etc.

Situation	How extreme is my anxiety	Emotions (list)	Thoughts (list)	What I did to cope	How extreme is my anxiety afterwards
E.g.: Getting into a lift	8/10	Scared irritable	'there are too many people' 'I will be stuck'	I realised I was jumping to negative conclusions. I developed the revised thought 'There are 4 people, lifts are designed to carry more than 4'.	2/10

What further help is available?

You can contact Let's Talk on 0800 073 2200.

Let's Talk is Gloucestershire's Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) service. We offer courses and one to one work at a range of levels of intensity. .. CBT focuses on the 'here and now' and uses specific techniques to help you manage your symptoms. CBT encourages you to work on tasks between sessions to help you achieve your goals.

You can access our website on www.talk2gether.nhs.uk where you will find more information about your difficulties, and also our leaflets and questionnaires that we would like you to complete before you phone us.

Alternatively you can speak to your GP, who can refer you and also give you a copy of the 'Introducing the Let's Talk Service' leaflet, which has our questionnaires on it.

Useful Books on Prescription

Let's Talk can provide you with a book prescription to take to your local library. You can then choose from a range of self-help books to borrow, which provide helpful information and step by step self-help techniques for managing common conditions, including depression and anxiety. These include:

Overcoming social anxiety and shyness, Butler, G. (2009).

Other Self-help Guides in the Let's Talk Service

Let's Talk Panic

Let's Talk Low Self Esteem

Let's Talk Health Anxiety

Let's Talk Social Anxiety

Let's Talk OCD

Let's Talk PTSD

Let's Talk Bereavement and Loss

Let's Talk Managing Negative Thinking

Let's Talk Managing Negative Behaviours

Useful websites

Let's Talk website: www.talk2gether.nhs.uk

Moodometer:

<http://www.2getherinclusion.nhs.uk/themoodometer.php>

Living Life to the Full website: www.lltff.com

MoodGym: <https://moodgym.anu.edu.au/welcome>

Other helpful contacts:

The Samaritans: www.samaritans.org

Call on 116 123; 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Mind: www.mind.org.uk

Info line: 0300 123 3393

Mental Health Helplines Partnership: www.mhhp.org.uk

The Royal College of Psychiatrists: www.rcpsych.ac.uk/info

Community Health Trainers, Gloucestershire

(Community Health Trainers offer support, information and guidance to people who want to make changes to their lifestyle whatever their faith or culture)

Email: gloshealth.trainers@independencetrust.co.uk

Website: www.gloshealthtrainers.nhs.uk

Telephone: 0845 863 83 23