



Managing Your Anxiety

Session Two

PLEASE REMEMBER

Changes take time, patience and hard work.

The more you put in whilst completing the course, the more you get out of it.

Do you have any questions from last week's session?



Home Practice Review

How did your home practice go? Did you achieve your goals?

What did you learn from your home practice?

Attention Bias: Focusing on Threat

Bring to mind a minor difficulty or source of anxiety, which doesn't score more than 2-3/10 on the anxiety rating scale (where 10 = highly anxiety provoking). Focus on any sensations of anxiety arising in your body. Locate where you feel the sensations most strongly and to concentrate on those sensations as much as possible for a couple of minutes.

Rate your anxiety from 0-10.

Now change your focus of attention to the sounds that you can hear around you, noticing what you can hear in the room, in the building and outside of the building. Notice whether sounds are continuous or intermittent, whether they are loud or quiet and notice what direction they come from. Focus on the sounds for 2-3 minutes.

Rescore your anxiety from 0-10

What did you notice? What happened to your anxiety when you changed your focus of attention from the experience of anxiety in your body to the experience of the sounds around you?

One feature of anxiety is the tendency to be hyper-alert for possible threat. This means that we may focus our attention on possible sources of threat. This can include the things that usually trigger our anxiety, as well as some of the symptoms of anxiety itself.

If we are worried about our health, we may focus on sensations of discomfort or pain in our bodies. If we are worried about panic attacks, we may focus on our heart beat or our breathing. If we are worried about being judged for appearing hot and flustered we may focus on our temperature and whether we feel flushed.

By looking for and focusing on threat we:

- Get a distorted view of the world in which we tend to mainly see threat rather than safety.
- Often find that physical symptoms of discomfort, pain or anxiety get stronger just because we are focusing on them.
- Get into cycles of anxious thinking that leads to increased symptoms of anxiety, that in turn leads to increased anxious thinking.

Attention Switching

By simply switching our attention from perceived threat to something neutral, we cut straight across the cycle of increasingly anxious thoughts fuelling increasingly anxious sensations and feelings.

Depending on what you find useful, you can switch your attention to:

- What you can see around you, including looking for specific colours or shapes.
- What you can hear around you.
- Where your body is in contact with the world. For example, if you are sitting in a chair, you might feel your feet on the ground, where you are sitting on the seat of the chair and where your back touches the back of the chair. You may feel the temperature of the air on your skin.
- You can also switch your attention to a task or activity such as listening to music or reading.

Perceived threat

Information is continuously coming in through our senses, and this information is rapidly processed in parts of our brain that detect both opportunities and threats before it fully comes into our awareness.

If we detect something that we perceive as threatening, our anxiety circuits are switched on and we go into the fight, flight or freeze response.

As we touched on in the first session, because we can think about the past and imagine the future, we not only respond to immediate, tangible threats, but also to imagined possible threats. We can also imagine what other people might be thinking. Depending on our past experience and how we made sense of it, we will all interpret current events differently and also imagine different future threats.

As such, when we are anxious we not only ask ourselves:

What is going on? What do I need to do?

We may also ask ourselves:

What might happen? Will what happened in the past happen again? What could possibly go wrong? What are people thinking of me? Why aren't I happy? How do I compare with others?

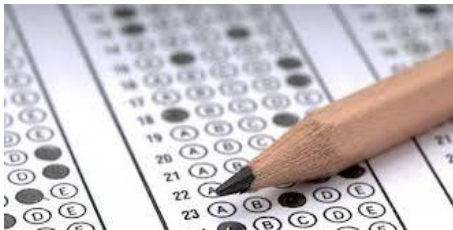
Anticipation of threat exercise:

Look at the pictures on the next page.

For each picture, notice whether you associate each scenario with any particular possible threat.

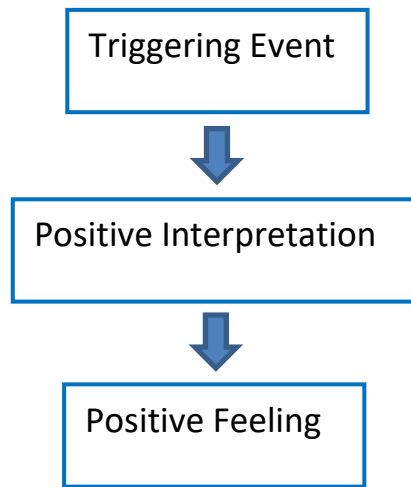
What anxious thoughts do you have about what might happen if you were involved in that scenario?

What might you do in that scenario to prevent anything from going wrong?



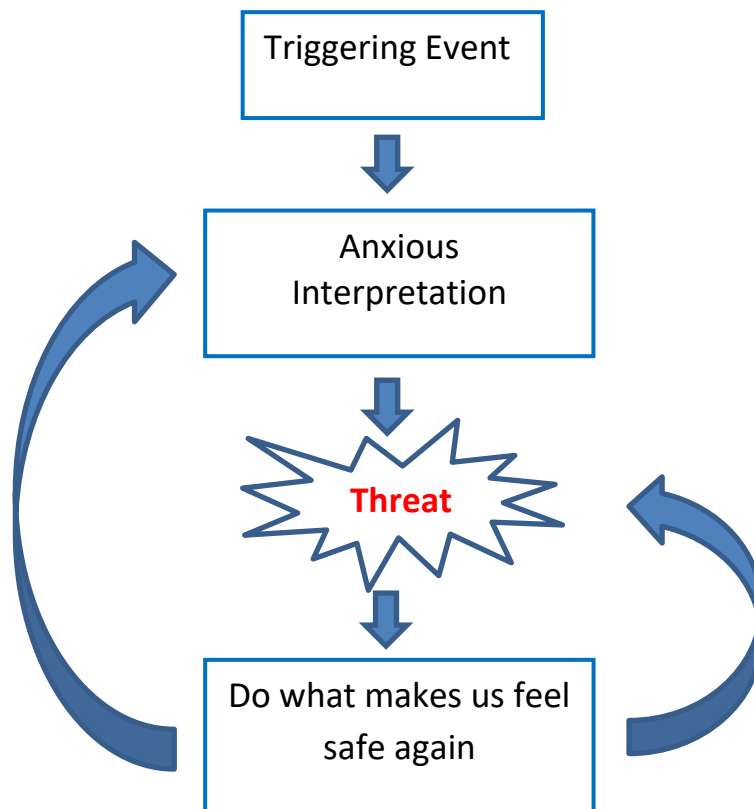
What did you notice? Did you find yourself having thoughts about anticipating and preparing for threat?

Mapping Your Anxiety – Introduction to Formulation:



The diagram above illustrates what happens inside us when something occurs and we interpret it in a positive way. We have positive feelings and don't feel anxious. This is what happens when we don't feel threatened.

Something quite different happens when we feel anxious:



When something happens and we interpret it in a way that is threatening, we have anxious thoughts.

These thoughts trigger the fight, flight or freeze response – the automatic and very rapid reaction to threat that happens before we become fully consciously aware of the trigger and how we have interpreted it. This is shown as the spikey “threat” box on the diagram above.

We then make conscious decisions about what is happening and what we can do to reduce the threat and return to safety. These are sometimes called strategic reactions. We will talk about two sorts of strategic reaction - avoidance and safety-seeking behaviours - later in the course.

As the course progresses, we will look at the different parts of the anxiety formulation and help you to gradually build a formulation that maps out how your own particular anxiety is maintained.

In this session of the course we will look at how what we think affects the symptoms and sensations of anxiety that we feel in our bodies.

Look at the diagram on the following page:

In the thought bubble, write down an anxious thought. Many anxious thoughts tend to begin with, “What if....”

In the body, write down all of the sensations / symptoms linked to anxiety that you feel in response to the anxious thought – do your best to write them where they are felt most vividly in the body.



The link between anxious thoughts and the symptoms / sensations of anxiety:



Home Practice



In order to get the most from CBT it helps to practice at home.

Summary of Session Two:

Key themes in week two included our tendency to pay excessive attention to possible threats and how the way that we interpret events affects whether we feel anxious or not.

We also introduced using a formulation to map out how anxiety is maintained, something that we will return to and build on in later weeks.

We looked at how deliberately switching our attention away from focusing on threat may break up cycles of anxious thoughts feeding anxiety symptoms and help us feel safer and calmer.

Write down one or more key points that you have learnt today:

Suggested Home Practice for Week Two

- Notice the kinds of events or situations that you find trigger anxiety in you.
- Notice how you think about these events and how this affects your anxiety.
- Notice what happens if you shift your focus of attention to what you can see, hear or feel in your body as described in the section on attention switching.

Try using the record below to record 3 examples of what you experience when you do your home practice over the next week.

Situation	Thoughts	Anxiety 0-10	Switch Focus of Attention	Anxiety 0-10
Mild pain in my leg	It's a blood clot	7/10	Focused on the birds singing	2/10

Are there any SMART goals that you want to set for yourself this week? If so, write them here:

1)

2)

3)