



# Managing your anxiety

## Session Three

### **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?

## **A Practice of Mindfulness and Acceptance:**

Take up a comfortable posture, that allows you to be alert, yet doesn't create excessive discomfort. Many people find that sitting in a chair in which their hips are higher than their knees, with their feet flat on the floor is a good way to practice. You can use cushions on the chair or under your feet to help with this. Your back should be upright, rather than leaning back, but it is okay to have the lower part of your back touching the back of the chair. Relax your shoulders and very slightly lower your chin so that there is a very small lengthening of the back of your neck. Lower your gaze to look at a point on the floor the same distance along the ground that your eyes are off the ground. Keep a relaxed, but normal focus. If you wish you can close your eyes, but be cautious as it is more likely to make you sleepy. Do a quick scan of your body to make sure that you are as comfortable as you can be and let go of any unnecessary muscle tension.

Turn your awareness to your breathing. Notice whether you are breathing in your chest or your belly. If you can, breathe so that your belly is moving when you breathe, rather than just your chest, but try and keep your breathing relaxed and natural. At the start of the practice, deliberately slow down and deepen your breathing to the extent that this still feels comfortable. With time, a complete cycle of breathing in and breathing out may last 10-15 seconds, which is optimal for developing relaxed awareness.

Spend a couple of minutes focusing on the sensations of breathing in your body. Notice whether you can feel your body relaxing and your mind settling as you breathe slowly and deeply. If you notice that your mind has wandered and you are lost in thinking that is absolutely fine, as this is what minds naturally do. If you notice that this has happened note where your mind has drifted to and bring your attention back to your breathing. Repeat this as often as you need to. When you feel sufficiently relaxed, let your breathing take care of itself. Just notice the sensations of breathing without trying to deliberately alter your breathing in any way.

Notice what is happening inside of you:

What thoughts are arising in your mind? If it helps, name the theme of the thought, for example "self-critical thoughts are here".

What are you feeling emotionally? If it helps, name the emotion, for example, "anxiety is here".

What sensations are you feeling in your body? If it helps, name the sensations, for example, “tense shoulders are here”.

Whatever you notice, say to it, “you are welcome”. For example, “hello self-critical thoughts you are welcome”, “hello anxiety you are welcome” and “hello tense shoulders you are welcome”.

Notice what happens in your body and your mind when you welcome your experience rather than resist it.

Keeping a broad background awareness, not shutting anything out, gently bring your foreground attention back to your breathing, using this as an anchor that keeps you focused and grounded. Maintain an awareness of thoughts, feelings and sensations as they arise and pass, seeing them as the scenery of the mind, not something you have to alter, resist or get involved with. Rather than being the person thinking, just be present and watch thoughts arise and pass.

Every time you become aware that you are lost in thinking, notice where your mind has gone and gently come back to following the sensations of your breathing whilst letting thoughts, images, sensations and feelings arise and pass in their own time. Let your awareness be spacious and broad like the sky and let everything that comes into your awareness pass like clouds floating through the sky.

After a few minutes, lift or open your eyes, move in any way that you need to so that you are comfortable and bring your relaxed, spacious awareness back to your everyday life.



What did you notice? What happened when you slowed down and deepened your breathing? What happened when you turned towards and named thoughts, emotions and sensations? What happened when you welcomed your experience? What happened when you just let things be, without trying to alter things or resist things?

## Mindfulness and Acceptance

In session two we looked at switching our attention away from searching for and focusing on threat by deliberately paying attention to something else instead. In this session we are taking a different approach, which is to turn towards our experience, welcome it and let it be. We often try to resist feeling unpleasant feelings or sensations. This makes perfect sense, as we don't like feeling them! However, in some cases, this can add an extra layer of physical and mental tension and result in us getting caught up in negative thinking about why things should be different, criticising ourselves or others, justifying our point of view to ourselves or getting lost in unproductive worry.

When using the mindfulness and acceptance practice set out here, we are aiming to cut across this process of worry and negative thinking, which generally makes us feel worse. We are not aiming to become passive and just accept the things in our lives that are not okay. We are not giving up on solving problems. We are simply creating some space in our minds to become more aware of what is going on inside us and relating to it in a way that is less painful than our habitual resistance and reactive desire to feel better immediately – to demand that things are different. A more spacious and relaxed mind allows us to see things more clearly and make decisions that are good for us.

We will add some additional approaches to practicing mindfulness and acceptance as the course progresses.



Mindfulness allows us to see the wood and the trees

## Thought Suppression

Polar bear exercise.



Trying not to think about something makes it more likely that we will think about it. If you hold a beach ball under water in a swimming pool, eventually you will get tired, let go and it will shoot back to the surface!

## Understanding Emotions

Although this is a course on anxiety, there are lots of different emotions linked to the fight, flight and freeze response that it can be useful to have an understanding of. These emotions tend to be unpleasant to experience as they aim to compel us to do something so that we can feel safe again. Emotions can be helpful and motivate us to make useful changes. They can also motivate us to behave in less helpful ways, especially if we feel overwhelmed by them and want to get rid of them or avoid situations in which we might feel them. The mindfulness and acceptance practice aims to help us to relate to unpleasant emotions so that we are less reactive and more able to tolerate them and respond wisely.

We are born with the ability to feel certain emotions. Views on exactly what the definitive list includes differ, however one well-regarded model suggests that we come into the world being able to feel anger, disgust, fear, sadness, surprise and happiness. The majority of these emotions are threat-focused and it is believed that we feel them to give us a better chance of surviving. They are instinctive in nature and linked to the part of the brain that governs the fight, flight and freeze response. When we are very young, we feel them in direct response to sensory experience, before we have developed the ability to think in words and make sense of things. As we get older, develop language and develop a self-concept, our emotions become more complex. We feel a broader range of emotions and many of our emotions are related to a mix of instinctive responses, memories and beliefs based on the way that we have made sense of things. This is also true of the emotions linked to the calm and connect and rest and digest responses, such as happiness or contentment.

Emotions are felt internally and displayed externally and have the function of alerting ourselves and others to what is going on and what we need.

Take a moment to think about the function of the following emotions linked to the fight, flight and freeze response:



For each emotion below, think about what it tells us, what it tells others and what result it aims to bring about:

Anger:

Disgust:

Fear:

Guilt:

Shame:

Jealousy:

**Anger:** Anger tells us that we are at risk of being harmed by others. This could be physical harm or emotional harm. Showing anger alerts others that we feel threatened. It has the function of pushing the threat away and of motivating us to assert and defend ourselves or resolve disputes and problems. The spectrum of anger starts at mild irritation or frustration when we are blocked in doing what feels right to us, through to rage.

**Disgust:** The form of disgust we are born with aims to keep us safe from harm. For example, if we are hungry and we pick up food to eat that smells rotten, it is disgust that motivates us to throw the food away from us and alerts others not to eat it too. Later in life we develop what is often termed “moral disgust” that alerts us to what behaviour is very socially unacceptable within our social group. It motivates us to inhibit this behaviour in ourselves and very strongly discourage it in others.

**Fear:** Fear tells us and others that we are in danger and motivates us to escape from the danger and return to safety as soon as possible. It motivates us to look for and monitor threats and find the best way to escape them and avoid them in the future. The threat to us could be physical or emotional, such as the fear of being rejected. The spectrum of fear ranges from mild apprehension through to complete terror. Anxiety is on the fear spectrum and may have the useful function of motivating us to anticipate and prepare for challenges, so that we minimise the chances of things going wrong.

**Guilt:** Guilt is an emotion that strongly regulates the way that we relate to others. It tells us that we have let others down and shows others that we don't feel good about this and want to make up for it. It has the function of motivating the prevention and repairing of rifts. It motivates us to do things for others that will repair any damage that has been done to our relationships with them.

**Shame:** Shame is a rather complicated emotion. We might feel it in response to moral disgust from others or ridicule from others. When we feel shame we may feel that there is something wrong, flawed or defective about who we are on some level. In healthy manifestations of shame we may be motivated to change something about ourselves to make us more acceptable to our social group. In unhealthy versions of shame we may be paralysed by worthlessness and fear of being rejected. There are some overlaps between shame and guilt and in some instances it is not always easy to separate the two. Embarrassment is closely related to shame.

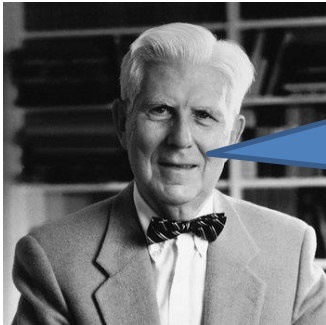
**Jealousy:** Jealousy is also a complex emotion and may combine shame, fear and anger. When we are jealous, we may feel that there is something wrong with us that means that people will find others more appealing. We may be scared that we will therefore be rejected and feel angry towards the person who might reject us or the person who might replace us in their affections. Jealousy may motivate us to try to ensure that we don't get rejected, but seldom in constructive ways.

### **Layers of emotion:**

We often feel more than one emotion at once. We may be more aware of some of these emotions than others. Depending on our biology, our upbringing, culture and experience of revealing and expressing our emotions to other people, we tend to feel more comfortable feeling some emotions than others.

For example, someone who often feels anger, might also be feeling hurt, grief, sadness or fear, but only be aware of their anger. The anger itself might not shift until the other emotions are also felt and processed.

## Home Practice



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

### Summary of Session Three:

Key themes in session three included our desire not to have certain thoughts (polar bear) and feel some emotions.

We looked at some of the emotions linked to the fight, flight and freeze response and what their purpose is.

We looked at how we can use mindfulness and acceptance practice to help us be less reactive to our emotions and more welcoming and accepting; creating more of a sense of space around our emotions and giving us more opportunity to see clearly what the best thing to do is.

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

### **Suggested Home Practice for Week Three:**

- Practice mindfulness and acceptance, starting with slow, deep breathing until you feel a bit more settled. Then tune into what you are thinking, the emotions you feel and the sensations in your body. If it helps use phrases such as, “judgement is here” or “tiredness is here” to help you recognise and create space from what is going on inside of you. Then welcome it, if it helps using phrases such as, “hello anxiety you are welcome”.
- Use awareness of the sensations of your breathing as an anchor to help you stay present with all of the thoughts, sensations and emotions arising in you. If it helps, continue to name them and welcome them. Alternatively, just watch them arise and pass.
- Try doing this for around 5 minutes to start with, perhaps once or twice a day. If it helps, gradually build the amount of time that you do the practice. You might aim for 10 minutes practice time by the end of the week.
- Remember, getting lost in thought before realising this and coming back to the practice is normal and not something you are trying to prevent happening.

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

1)

2)

3)