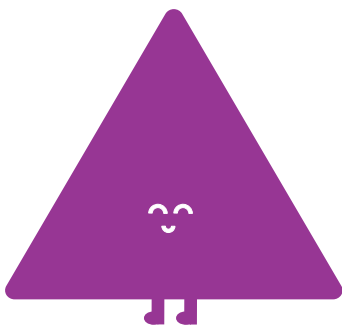


Anxiety

Anxiety is a huge thing in our world today. Over the last couple of years in particular, with all the uncertainty of COVID, lockdowns and financial pressures, more and more people of all ages are seeking help to deal with anxiety.



I tend to think of the nervous system as being like a smoke alarm – it's supposed to be there in case of emergencies, it's part of us, and when it's doing its job properly, it's good and it's healthy. The problem arises when our nervous system becomes over-sensitive and starts to see threat and danger everywhere (for example, when someone looks at you a funny way, maybe someone gives a short snappy answer, or maybe when a text is not replied to).

When this happens, our alarm system goes off, flooding our bodies with stress hormones, and causing all those horrible physical feelings associated with anxiety. Once this cycle has started, it's impossible to stop it by using "mind over matter". We cannot think our way out of anxiety once it's there, because it's already in our bodies, and that's where we have to start to break its cycle.

Three things you can do to help break the anxiety cycle:

Notice the signs – what happens when your anxiety starts to rise? Maybe to begin with you just notice that you can't concentrate so well, and your thoughts seem to speed up? Maybe you feel jittery, nervous or "on edge"? Maybe you notice some changes in your body, for example your breathing speeds up, your heart rate changes, or you might feel shaky or hot? Getting to know your own personal signs of anxiety can help you to recognise it for what it is, and then you can do what you need to do to address it.

Be patient with it – once you recognise it, try to think of it as a frightened part of yourself, and respond to it like you would respond to a frightened friend coming into the room. Ask yourself what might have caused it, what might help and remind yourself it will pass. (Be careful not to try to get rid of it, or be angry with it as this might make it worse).

Focus on your body and breath – pay attention to the feelings in your physical body. Are you hot or cold? Is there any tension in any particular muscles like your shoulders or jaw? Which parts of you are in contact with the ground or chair? Then focus on your breathing. Notice how long your "in breath" is, then try to make your "out breath" twice as long.