



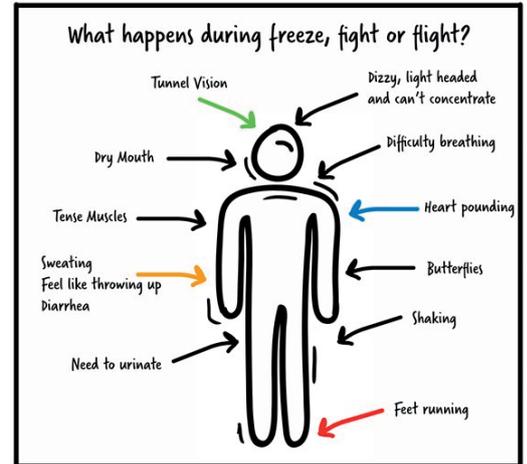
# Anxiety (Self-Help Guide)

Produced by Educational Psychology Service & CAMHS

This fact sheet has been produced to help young people when they are feeling anxious, nervous or worried. There are a number of suggested exercises and strategies that you can try to help manage your anxiety and it might be beneficial to also think about and discuss with someone you trust when these strategies could be most useful to use.

## What is anxiety?

The brain has evolved to try to keep us safe by causing us to experience a sense of anxiety in situations it judges to be threatening. When we are very anxious, the 'rational' part of our brain (called the pre-frontal cortex) is temporarily overridden by a more primitive, instinctual part of the brain called the 'amygdala', often prompting what can be described as a 'fight, flight or freeze' response: this makes us feel more alert, stops us thinking about other things, and even causes the range of physical effects in the picture, all designed to get us out of the stressful situation as quickly as possible.



A person who is highly anxious will find it very difficult to focus on anything but the source of their anxiety and is likely to find it almost impossible to learn.

## When is anxiety a problem?

It is important to remember that a degree of anxiety is both normal and appropriate in stressful situations. Helpful levels of anxiety help us to take sensible steps to keep safe from a dangerous or threatening situation.

It is when a person's anxiety stops being useful and 'adaptive' and gets out of proportion with the level of actual threat, that extra support may be needed.

## What might problematic anxiety look like?

Problematic or unhelpful anxiety may look different depending on the age of the person and what they are anxious about. In older children you may see the following:

Overly irritable  
and/or tearful

Changes in attention &  
concentration

Reduced capacity to keep on top  
of workloads

Social withdrawal

Changes in eating  
habits or sleeping patterns

Body aches  
or restlessness

## Things to try when you feel anxious



**Healthy sleep habits:** Try to keep to a routine and get into bed at a regular time each night. Make sure your room is quiet, dark, calm and turn off electronics an hour before bed to help your mind unwind for a good night's sleep.



**Get active:** Exercise has been shown to make us feel less anxious. You could try going for a walk, run, try a new sport or try some beginners yoga which combines exercise and deep breathing (there are lots of free videos you can try on Youtube).

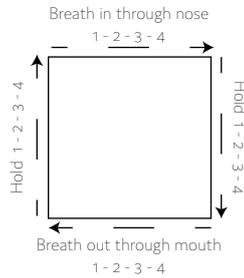
# Breathing and Mindfulness

When we are anxious, our breathing can become shallow and fast. This is to get the body ready to run or fight, but the effects (dizziness) can make us feel more anxious. Taking slow, deep breaths, and becoming mindful of our bodies and our environment can have a calming effect. You could try:

## 4 - 7 - 8 breathing

Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds, hold your breath for 7 seconds and then breathe out through your mouth for 8 seconds making a whoosh sound.

## Square breathing



## Practice mindfulness & meditation

Apps such as Headspace or Calm have lots of easy to follow guided meditations and mindfulness activities to help understand and calm your mind when you are feeling anxious.



**Progressive muscle relaxation:** Starting from the feet and working your way up the body, focus on one part of your body at a time eg. just your legs or just your face. Breathe in and tense that part of your body tightly before breathing out and releasing slowly. Feel your body begin to relax.

## Creative Ideas

**Write it down/draw it out:** Writing your worries in a diary or journal can help identify and process your anxious thoughts. You could also try art journaling to explore your thoughts through drawing or painting.



**Make a calm down box:** Create a box full of things that make you calm for when you are experiencing anxiety. You could fill it with mindful colouring books, stress balls, soothing smells like lavender, bath bombs, bubbles, books, films, your favourite music or pictures, a game you like to play or something soft you could hug.

## Self Care

Self care is an important part of learning to treat ourselves with kindness and compassion. When we feel overwhelmed or stressed it can be helpful to have some self care strategies that help us step back and slow down. Everyone is different but you might try:

Massaging your hands or feet with lotion

Using a facemask or taking a bubble bath

Lighting a scented candle

Listening to your favourite music

Watching a favourite film

Reading a book in a calm space

Taking a rest or nap

## Who can help?

If you or your child is experiencing unhelpful anxiety which is persistently interfering with daily life, you may wish to seek further support – for example, from your GP or from the following organisations:

### 1Point counselling service

[www.1pointbolton.org.uk](http://www.1pointbolton.org.uk) 01204 917745

**Anna Freud** advice and resources on supporting children and young people experiencing anxiety:  
<https://www.annafreud.org/>

**NHS-approved mental health apps**, many of which are tailored to supporting individuals with anxiety, can be found at <https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health>

### Be Kind to My Mind

<https://www.bekindtomymind.co.uk>

### Quell

Mental health and wellbeing service for parents and carers  
[www.qwell.io](http://www.qwell.io)

### Kooth

Ages 11+ anonymous 1:1 text-based counselling, self-help support and moderated peer support forums  
[www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)

[www.bolton.gov.uk](http://www.bolton.gov.uk) [boltoncouncil](https://www.facebook.com/boltoncouncil) [boltoncouncil](https://twitter.com/boltoncouncil)

**Bolton Council**

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# The Worry Tree

Talking through, exploring and validating your worries is an important process to manage your anxieties. The worry tree is a tool you can use to think about whether a worry is hypothetical in that it might happen in the future but it is outside of your control or if it is a current problem that you could take practical action to relieve some of the worry around.

## THE WORRY TREE

