

Safe Haven Connect CIC

Understanding and Managing Anxiety

Self-Help Workbook

Version 1.0

Welcome

Welcome to the Understanding and Managing Anxiety Self-Help Workbook.

If you're reading this, there's a good chance that anxiety has been affecting your daily life in some way. You may feel constantly worried, overwhelmed, restless, or find yourself avoiding situations because they feel too stressful. Perhaps you've experienced panic attacks, racing thoughts, difficulty sleeping, or physical symptoms that seem impossible to control.

If so, you're not alone.

Anxiety is one of the most common mental health challenges experienced by people across the world. While anxiety can feel frightening and exhausting, it is important to remember that it is treatable, manageable, and many people learn effective ways to reduce its impact on their lives.

This workbook has been designed to help you better understand anxiety and develop practical skills that you can use every day.

Inside you'll learn:

What anxiety really is.

Why anxiety happens.

How anxiety affects the body and mind.

Why anxious thoughts can feel so convincing.

Practical coping strategies based on evidence-based approaches such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

Grounding and breathing exercises.

Ways to reduce worry.

How to gradually rebuild confidence.

How to create your own personalised anxiety management plan.

Remember that progress doesn't happen overnight.

Recovery is usually made up of many small steps rather than one giant leap.

Some days will feel easier than others, and that's completely normal.

Every strategy you learn is another tool you can use to help yourself move forward.

Take this workbook at your own pace.

There is no pressure to complete it quickly.

You can revisit any section whenever you need to.

Most importantly, be kind to yourself throughout the process.

Learning to manage anxiety is not about becoming fearless.

It is about learning that you are stronger than your anxiety.

Important Information

This workbook has been created by Safe Haven Connect CIC as an educational self-help resource.

It is designed to help adults understand anxiety and learn practical self-help strategies that may improve wellbeing.

This workbook:

Is not therapy.

Is not counselling.

Is not a diagnosis.

Is not medical advice.

Does not replace support from a GP or qualified mental health professional.

If anxiety is having a significant impact on your daily life, or if you are experiencing thoughts of harming yourself or feeling unable to keep yourself safe, seek immediate support from a healthcare professional or emergency services.

Seeking help is a sign of strength.

Who Is This Workbook For?

This workbook is suitable for adults who:

Frequently feel anxious or worried.

Experience panic attacks.

Avoid situations because of anxiety.

Struggle with overthinking.

Experience physical symptoms of anxiety.

Want to understand how anxiety works.

Want practical techniques to help manage anxiety.

It may also be useful for family members or carers who wish to better understand anxiety.

What You Will Learn

By completing this workbook you will:

- ✓ Understand how anxiety affects the brain and body.
- ✓ Learn why anxiety can become a cycle.
- ✓ Recognise your own anxiety triggers.
- ✓ Learn practical CBT-based coping strategies.
- ✓ Develop healthier thinking patterns.
- ✓ Build confidence gradually.

- ✓ Create your own personalised anxiety management plan.
- ✓ Learn techniques you can continue using long after finishing this workbook.

> "Anxiety tells you that you can't cope. Recovery begins when you discover that you can."

Chapter 1 – Understanding Anxiety

Many people think anxiety is simply "worrying too much."

In reality, anxiety is much more than that.

Anxiety is your body's natural response to perceived danger or uncertainty.

It is a normal human emotion that everyone experiences from time to time.

For example, you may feel anxious before:

A job interview.

An exam.

Public speaking.

Driving somewhere unfamiliar.

Receiving important medical results.

Starting a new job.

In situations like these, anxiety can actually be helpful because it prepares you to deal with challenges.

The problem occurs when anxiety becomes frequent, intense, or begins affecting everyday life.

When anxiety becomes overwhelming, your brain may begin reacting as though ordinary situations are dangerous, even when they are not.

This can lead to ongoing worry, physical symptoms, avoidance, and reduced confidence.

The good news is that anxiety is highly manageable.

Understanding how it works is the first step towards breaking the cycle.

Coming Next

Chapter 2 – Why Anxiety Happens: Understanding Your Brain, Body and the Fight-or-Flight Response

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Anxiety Is Designed to Protect You

Anxiety is not a weakness.

It is part of your body's built-in survival system.

Thousands of years ago, our ancestors needed to react quickly to danger. If they came face to face with a wild animal or another threat, their brain had to decide within seconds whether to:

Fight.

Run away (flight).

Freeze.

This automatic reaction helped people survive.

Today, our brains still use this same survival system.

The difference is that modern-day dangers are often emotional rather than physical.

Your brain may react to situations such as:

Attending social events.

Public speaking.

Financial worries.

Work stress.

Relationship difficulties.

Health concerns.

Driving.

Crowded places.

Even when there is no immediate danger, your brain can still switch on the alarm system.

The Brain's Alarm System

A small part of the brain called the amygdala acts like an alarm.

Its job is to detect possible danger.

When it believes something may be threatening, it sends a signal that prepares your body for action.

Sometimes this alarm is accurate.

Sometimes it becomes overprotective and reacts when there is no real danger.

Anxiety often develops when this alarm system becomes too sensitive.

Think of it like a smoke alarm that goes off every time you make toast—it is trying to protect you, but it is reacting more often than necessary.

What Happens Inside Your Body?

When your brain detects danger, it releases stress hormones such as adrenaline.

These hormones prepare your body to respond quickly.

You may notice:

A racing heart.

Faster breathing.

Tight muscles.

Sweaty palms.

Dry mouth.

Shaking or trembling.

Butterflies in your stomach.

Feeling hot or flushed.

Feeling dizzy or light-headed.

These sensations can feel frightening, but they are a normal part of the body's response to perceived danger.

Although uncomfortable, they are not usually harmful on their own.

Why Anxiety Feels So Real

When anxiety is high, your brain focuses on finding possible threats.

This can make you:

Notice every small bodily sensation.

Expect the worst to happen.

Find it difficult to concentrate.

Feel constantly "on edge."

Misinterpret harmless situations as dangerous.

The more attention you give anxious thoughts, the stronger they can seem.

This does not mean the thoughts are true—it means your brain is trying to protect you.

The Anxiety Cycle

Many people experience anxiety as a repeating cycle:

Situation



Anxious Thoughts



Physical Symptoms



Fear Increases



Avoidance or Safety Behaviours



Short-Term Relief



Anxiety Returns Stronger Next Time

Understanding this cycle is important because it shows why anxiety can continue if it is never challenged.

The good news is that this cycle can be broken with the right strategies.

Remember

Your anxiety is not a sign that you are "going crazy."

It is your brain trying—sometimes too hard—to keep you safe.

Learning how anxiety works can help you respond with understanding rather than fear.

Reflection Exercise

Think about the last time you felt anxious.

What happened?

What physical symptoms did you notice?

What thoughts were going through your mind?

Looking back now, do you think your brain may have been trying to protect you, even if there wasn't a real danger?

Key Message

> Anxiety is your brain's natural alarm system. Sometimes that alarm becomes over-sensitive, but with understanding, patience, and practice, it is possible to teach your brain that you are safe.

Coming Next

Chapter 3 – Recognising the Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety

Chapter 3 – Recognising the Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety

Anxiety Affects More Than Your Thoughts

Many people think anxiety only causes excessive worrying.

In reality, anxiety can affect your body, mind, emotions, and behaviour.

Understanding these symptoms can help you recognise anxiety earlier and respond in a healthier way.

Remember:

> Experiencing these symptoms does not mean there is something "wrong" with you. They are common responses to anxiety.

Physical Symptoms

When your body's alarm system is activated, you may experience physical sensations such as:

A racing or pounding heart.

Shortness of breath.

Fast breathing or hyperventilation.

Tightness in the chest.

Sweating.

Shaking or trembling.

Feeling dizzy or light-headed.

Butterflies in your stomach.

Nausea.

Headaches.

Muscle tension.

Tingling or numbness in your hands or feet.

Dry mouth.

Feeling unusually tired after anxiety passes.

These symptoms can be uncomfortable and sometimes frightening, but they are common in anxiety.

If you experience new, severe, or persistent physical symptoms, it is important to seek medical advice to rule out other possible causes.

Emotional Symptoms

Anxiety can affect how you feel emotionally.

You might notice:

Feeling constantly worried.

Feeling overwhelmed.

Irritability.

Restlessness.

Feeling on edge.

A sense of dread.

Feeling unable to relax.

Feeling emotionally exhausted.

These feelings can come and go or last for longer periods.

Thinking Symptoms

Anxiety can also affect the way you think.

You may experience:

Overthinking.

Expecting the worst.

Constant "what if?" thoughts.

Difficulty concentrating.

Racing thoughts.

Feeling unable to switch your mind off.

Doubting yourself.

Finding it difficult to make decisions.

Anxiety often makes problems seem much bigger than they really are.

Behavioural Symptoms

Many people begin changing their behaviour because of anxiety.

Examples include:

Avoiding certain places.

Cancelling plans.

Staying at home more often.

Seeking constant reassurance.

Checking things repeatedly.

Procrastinating.

Becoming withdrawn.

Struggling to complete everyday tasks.

Although avoidance often brings short-term relief, it can make anxiety stronger over time.

Everyone Experiences Anxiety Differently

No two people experience anxiety in exactly the same way.

Some people mainly notice physical symptoms.

Others notice racing thoughts or overwhelming worry.

Some experience panic attacks.

Others may feel anxious almost constantly without knowing why.

Your experience is unique, and that's okay.

Anxiety Can Change Over Time

Some days anxiety may feel mild.

On other days it may feel much stronger.

Many factors can influence anxiety, including:

Stress.

Poor sleep.

Illness.

Work pressures.

Relationships.

Financial worries.

Life changes.

Alcohol or excessive caffeine.

Recognising patterns can help you understand your own anxiety better.

My Anxiety Symptoms

Tick the symptoms you have experienced recently.

Physical

- ☐ Racing heart
- ☐ Sweating
- ☐ Shaking
- ☐ Dizziness
- ☐ Chest tightness
- ☐ Shortness of breath
- ☐ Muscle tension
- ☐ Upset stomach
- ☐ Headaches
- ☐ Tingling sensations

Other:

Thoughts

- ☐ Overthinking
- ☐ Constant worry

- ☐ Expecting the worst
- ☐ Racing thoughts
- ☐ Difficulty concentrating
- ☐ Self-doubt

Other:

Emotions

- ☐ Feeling overwhelmed
- ☐ Irritable
- ☐ Restless
- ☐ Fearful
- ☐ Unable to relax

Other:

Behaviours

- ☐ Avoiding situations
- ☐ Seeking reassurance
- ☐ Cancelling plans
- ☐ Staying at home
- ☐ Procrastinating

☐ Withdrawing from others

Other:

Reflection

Which symptoms affect your life the most?

Which symptoms would you most like to improve?

Have you noticed any patterns or triggers that make your anxiety worse?

Key Message

> Anxiety can affect your body, thoughts, emotions, and behaviour. Recognising your own symptoms is one of the first and most important steps towards managing anxiety more effectively.

Coming Next

Chapter 4 – Understanding the Anxiety Cycle: How Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviours Keep Anxiety Going

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Why Anxiety Can Become a Cycle

Many people believe anxiety simply "happens."

In reality, anxiety often follows a predictable pattern known as the anxiety cycle.

Understanding this cycle is one of the most important steps towards breaking free from anxiety.

The good news is that every part of the cycle can be changed.

The Anxiety Cycle

Imagine you receive a message saying:

> "Can you call me when you get a chance?"

If you're already feeling anxious, your mind may quickly jump to the worst possible conclusion.

Your brain might think:

"Something must be wrong."

"I've done something wrong."

"This is bad news."

These thoughts trigger your body's alarm system.

Your heart begins to race.

Your breathing becomes faster.

Your muscles tense.

You start feeling worried.

To feel safer, you might delay making the call or avoid it completely.

Although avoiding the call brings temporary relief, it teaches your brain that the situation was dangerous.

The next time something similar happens, your anxiety may become even stronger.

This is how anxiety keeps itself going.

The Five Parts of the Anxiety Cycle

1. A Situation

Something happens.

For example:

Walking into a crowded shop.

Receiving a phone call.

Going to work.

Speaking in a meeting.

Meeting new people.

The situation itself is not always dangerous.

2. Your Thoughts

Your brain quickly interprets what is happening.

Examples include:

"I'm going to embarrass myself."

"People will judge me."

"I won't cope."

"Something terrible will happen."

These thoughts often feel like facts, but they are usually predictions rather than reality.

3. Your Feelings

Those thoughts create emotions such as:

Fear.

Worry.

Panic.

Embarrassment.

Nervousness.

4. Physical Symptoms

Your body prepares for danger.

You may notice:

Racing heart.

Sweating.

Shaking.

Tight chest.

Dizziness.

Fast breathing.

These sensations can make the anxiety feel even more convincing.

5. Behaviour

To escape the uncomfortable feelings, you may:

Leave the situation.

Avoid future situations.

Ask others for reassurance.

Cancel plans.

Stay at home.

Check things repeatedly.

This often provides short-term relief—but it strengthens anxiety in the long term.

Why Avoidance Keeps Anxiety Alive

Avoiding situations can feel helpful at first.

You may think:

> "I feel better because I left."

However, your brain learns:

> "Leaving kept me safe."

The next time you face a similar situation, your anxiety returns even stronger because your brain still believes there is danger.

Breaking this cycle often involves gradually facing fears in a safe and manageable way, rather than avoiding them completely.

A Different Way to Respond

Instead of automatically believing every anxious thought, try asking yourself:

What evidence supports this thought?

What evidence suggests it may not be true?

Am I predicting the future?

What would I say to a friend in this situation?

Is there another explanation?

These questions can help you respond more calmly and realistically.

My Anxiety Cycle

Think about a recent situation where you felt anxious.

Situation

What was I thinking?

How did I feel?

What physical symptoms did I notice?

What did I do?

Looking back, did my actions reduce my anxiety in the long term, or only for a short time?

Reflection

What part of the anxiety cycle do you notice first?

- ☐ My thoughts
- ☐ My emotions
- ☐ Physical symptoms
- ☐ My behaviour
- ☐ It changes each time

Understanding where your anxiety begins can help you decide which coping strategies may be most helpful.

Key Message

> Anxiety is maintained by a cycle of thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, and behaviours. By recognising this cycle and making small changes to how you respond, it is possible to reduce anxiety over time. Recovery is built one step at a time, not all at once.

Coming Next

Chapter 5 – Identifying Your Anxiety Triggers and Understanding What Makes Anxiety Worse

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What Is an Anxiety Trigger?

An anxiety trigger is anything that causes your anxiety to increase.

Triggers are different for everyone.

Something that feels overwhelming for one person may not affect someone else at all.

Understanding your own triggers can help you prepare for them and develop healthier ways to respond.

Remember:

> A trigger is not a sign of weakness. It is simply something your brain has learned to associate with danger or stress.

Common Anxiety Triggers

Some common triggers include:

Work or study pressures.

Financial worries.

Health concerns.

Family or relationship difficulties.

Social situations.

Public speaking.

Driving.

Crowded places.

Conflict or arguments.

Big life changes.

Lack of sleep.

Too much caffeine or alcohol.

Reading upsetting news or spending long periods on social media.

Uncertainty about the future.

Sometimes anxiety develops without an obvious trigger, and that's okay too.

Internal and External Triggers

Triggers can come from outside or inside your body.

External Triggers

These are things happening around you.

Examples include:

A noisy environment.

Being late.

An upcoming appointment.

Meeting new people.

Deadlines.

Unexpected changes.

Internal Triggers

These come from within you.

Examples include:

A racing heart.

Feeling dizzy.

Certain thoughts.

Pain or illness.

Tiredness.

Stress.

Difficult memories.

Sometimes noticing a physical sensation can make anxiety worse if your brain mistakenly believes it signals danger.

What Can Make Anxiety Worse?

Certain habits or situations can increase anxiety over time.

These may include:

Poor sleep.

Skipping meals.

Drinking too much caffeine.

Drinking excessive alcohol.

Using drugs.

Avoiding situations.

Constantly seeking reassurance.

Spending hours worrying.

Never taking time to relax.

Trying to be perfect all the time.

Recognising these factors can help you make positive changes.

Keeping an Anxiety Diary

One of the best ways to understand your anxiety is to write down what happens when you feel anxious.

Over time, you may begin to notice patterns.

You might discover that your anxiety is stronger:

At certain times of day.

Before work.

In busy places.

When you're tired.

After drinking several cups of coffee.

During periods of stress.

Awareness is the first step towards change.

My Anxiety Diary

Date	Situation	Anxiety (0–10)	Thoughts	Physical Symptoms	What Helped?
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Reflection

Think about the last week.

What situations made you feel anxious?

Did you notice any physical symptoms before your anxious thoughts began?

Were there any situations you avoided because of anxiety?

What healthy coping strategy could you try next time?

Remember

You cannot always avoid every trigger.

The goal of recovery is not to remove every difficult situation from your life.

Instead, it is to build the confidence and skills needed to cope with anxiety when it appears.

Every time you respond differently, you are helping your brain learn that you are safe.

Key Message

> Understanding your triggers gives you more control over your anxiety. The more you recognise your patterns, the better prepared you become to respond with calm, confidence, and self-compassion rather than fear.

Coming Next

Chapter 6 – Panic Attacks: Understanding What They Are and How to Cope with Them

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What Is a Panic Attack?

A panic attack is a sudden surge of intense fear or anxiety that can happen with little or no warning.

Although panic attacks can feel frightening, they are not usually dangerous and they do not last forever.

Many people describe panic attacks as feeling like they are:

Having a heart attack.

Unable to breathe.

Losing control.

Going to faint.

"Going crazy."

About to die.

These feelings can be overwhelming, but they are caused by your body's fight-or-flight response becoming highly activated.

Common Symptoms of a Panic Attack

Symptoms can include:

A racing or pounding heart.

Fast or difficult breathing.

Chest tightness or discomfort.

Feeling dizzy or light-headed.

Sweating.

Shaking or trembling.

Tingling or numbness.

Feeling hot or cold.

Nausea.

Feeling detached from yourself or your surroundings.

A strong urge to escape.

Feeling like something terrible is about to happen.

Not everyone experiences every symptom.

How Long Does a Panic Attack Last?

Although it may feel much longer, most panic attacks:

Build up over several minutes.

Peak within around 10 minutes.

Gradually reduce over the next 20–30 minutes.

The physical symptoms eventually settle because your body cannot stay in "high alert" forever.

Why Panic Attacks Feel So Frightening

During a panic attack, your brain believes you are in danger.

It releases stress hormones that prepare your body to protect you.

This creates physical sensations such as a racing heart and fast breathing.

These sensations can make you think:

> "Something is seriously wrong."

This thought increases your fear, which increases the physical symptoms, creating a cycle.

Understanding this cycle can make panic attacks feel less frightening over time.

What To Do During a Panic Attack

If you experience a panic attack, try these steps:

1. Remind Yourself What Is Happening

Say to yourself:

> "This is anxiety."

> "These feelings will pass."

> "I am safe."

2. Slow Your Breathing

Breathe in gently through your nose for 4 seconds.

Breathe out slowly through your mouth for 6 seconds.

Repeat for several minutes.

Focus on making your exhale longer than your inhale.

3. Ground Yourself

Look around and notice:

5 things you can see.

4 things you can feel.

3 things you can hear.

2 things you can smell.

1 thing you can taste.

This helps bring your attention back to the present moment.

4. Stay Where You Are (If Safe)

If it is safe to do so, try not to leave immediately.

Remaining in the situation can help teach your brain that the danger will pass without needing to escape.

If you need to leave for your safety or wellbeing, that's okay too. Be kind to yourself.

5. Be Compassionate With Yourself

A panic attack is not a personal failure.

It is your body's alarm system working overtime.

Treat yourself with patience and understanding.

After a Panic Attack

Many people feel:

Tired.

Emotional.

Shaky.

Drained.

This is normal.

Your body has used a lot of energy.

Afterwards, try to:

Drink some water.

Eat something if you haven't recently.

Rest if possible.

Talk to someone you trust.

Reflect on what happened without judging yourself.

My Panic Plan

If I notice a panic attack starting, I will:

- ☐ Remind myself that panic attacks pass.
- ☐ Slow my breathing.
- ☐ Use the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding exercise.
- ☐ Stay calm and avoid judging myself.
- ☐ Contact someone I trust if I need support.
- ☐ Use another coping strategy that works for me:

Reflection

Have you experienced a panic attack before?

What symptoms do you usually notice first?

Which coping strategy from this chapter would you like to try next time?

When to Seek Medical Advice

Many symptoms of panic attacks can be similar to those of other medical conditions.

If you are experiencing chest pain, difficulty breathing, loss of consciousness, new or unusual symptoms, or you are unsure whether your symptoms are caused by anxiety, seek urgent medical assessment.

If you have already been diagnosed with panic attacks but notice that your symptoms have changed significantly or become more frequent, speak with your GP or another qualified healthcare professional.

Key Message

> Panic attacks can feel overwhelming, but they are temporary. Understanding what is happening, slowing your breathing, grounding yourself, and responding with self-compassion can help you regain a sense of control. Every panic attack you get through is proof that you are stronger than your anxiety.

Coming Next

Chapter 7 – Challenging Anxious Thoughts: Learning to Think More Realistically (CBT Techniques)

Chapter 7 – Challenging Anxious Thoughts: Learning to Think More Realistically (CBT Techniques)

Your Thoughts Are Not Always Facts

When we feel anxious, our minds often jump to the worst possible conclusion.

These thoughts can feel so convincing that we automatically believe them.

However, a thought is not the same as a fact.

Learning to question anxious thoughts is one of the most effective ways to reduce anxiety.

This approach is a key part of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and has helped many people manage anxiety more effectively.

What Are Anxious Thoughts?

Anxious thoughts are often automatic.

They appear quickly and can seem difficult to control.

Examples include:

"I'm going to fail."

"Everyone will laugh at me."

"Something bad is about to happen."

"I won't cope."

"I'm not good enough."

"I'll embarrass myself."

"What if something terrible happens?"

These thoughts are usually predictions—not facts.

Thinking Traps

Our brains sometimes fall into unhelpful thinking habits known as thinking traps or cognitive distortions.

Recognising these patterns can help you respond differently.

Catastrophising

Expecting the worst possible outcome.

Example:

> "If I make one mistake, everything will be ruined."

Mind Reading

Believing you know what other people are thinking.

Example:

> "They think I'm stupid."

The truth is, we cannot know what someone else is thinking unless they tell us.

Fortune Telling

Assuming something bad will happen before it has happened.

Example:

> "The interview will go terribly."

The future has not happened yet, so we cannot predict it with certainty.

All-or-Nothing Thinking

Seeing things in black and white.

Example:

> "If I'm not perfect, I'm a failure."

In reality, life is usually somewhere in the middle.

Overgeneralising

Using one negative experience to predict every future experience.

Example:

> "One relationship ended badly, so they'll all end badly."

One experience does not define every future experience.

Challenging Your Thoughts

When you notice an anxious thought, ask yourself:

What evidence supports this thought?

What evidence goes against it?

Am I confusing possibility with certainty?

Is there another explanation?

What would I say to someone I care about if they had this thought?

Will this still matter in six months' time?

You don't need to convince yourself that everything will be perfect.

Instead, aim for a more balanced and realistic way of thinking.

Changing the Thought

Anxious thought:

"I'll definitely embarrass myself."



Balanced thought:

"I might feel nervous, but that doesn't mean I'll embarrass myself. Most people are focused on themselves, not judging me."

Anxious thought:

"I won't cope."



Balanced thought:

"I've coped with difficult situations before. I can take this one step at a time."

Thought Record Worksheet

Situation

What happened?

Anxious Thought

Emotion

Intensity (0–10): _____

Evidence Supporting the Thought

Evidence Against the Thought

A More Balanced Thought

How Do I Feel Now?

Intensity (0–10): _____

Practice Makes Progress

At first, challenging anxious thoughts may feel difficult.

That is completely normal.

Your brain has often been practising anxious thinking for months or even years.

With regular practice, balanced thinking becomes easier and more natural.

Remember, you are not trying to eliminate every anxious thought.

You are learning not to automatically believe every anxious thought.

Reflection

Think about one anxious thought you have had recently.

Was it based on facts, or was it based on fear?

What would be a kinder and more balanced response?

Key Message

> Your mind can sometimes mistake fear for fact. By slowing down, questioning anxious thoughts, and looking at the evidence, you can begin to respond with greater confidence and balance. Every time you challenge an anxious thought, you weaken anxiety's grip and strengthen your ability to cope.

Coming Next

Chapter 8 – Building Confidence: Facing Your Fears One Step at a Time

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Confidence Can Be Rebuilt

One of the most difficult effects of anxiety is that it can slowly reduce your confidence.

You may begin avoiding situations that once felt easy.

Perhaps you no longer enjoy going to the shops, meeting friends, travelling, speaking in groups, or trying new things.

This is completely understandable.

When anxiety tells us something is dangerous, avoiding it often feels like the safest option.

However, avoiding situations usually gives anxiety more control over our lives.

The good news is that confidence can be rebuilt—one small step at a time.

Why Avoidance Makes Anxiety Stronger

Imagine someone feels anxious about using a supermarket.

The first time they avoid going, they feel relieved.

Their brain learns:

> "Avoiding the supermarket kept me safe."

The next time they need to shop, the anxiety often feels even stronger.

Eventually, they may avoid supermarkets altogether.

This can happen with many situations:

Driving.

Social events.

Phone calls.

Public transport.

Work.

Medical appointments.

Meeting new people.

Avoidance reduces anxiety in the short term but often increases it in the long term.

Facing Fears Gradually

Rather than jumping straight into the most difficult situation, try breaking it down into smaller, manageable steps.

For example, if going to a busy café feels overwhelming:

Step 1: Drive past the café.

Step 2: Sit outside for five minutes.

Step 3: Go inside and order a drink.

Step 4: Stay for ten minutes.

Step 5: Return another day and stay a little longer.

Each step helps your brain learn:

> "I can cope."

The Confidence Ladder

Write one situation that makes you anxious.

Now break it into smaller steps.

Step	Anxiety Level (0–10)	Completed
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1.	_____	_____ ☐
2.	_____	_____ ☐
3.	_____	_____ ☐
4.	_____	_____ ☐
5.	_____	_____ ☐
6.	_____	_____ ☐

Work through each step at your own pace.

There is no rush.

Celebrate Every Success

Recovery isn't about being fearless.

It's about doing something even though you feel anxious.

Celebrate every achievement, no matter how small.

Examples include:

- ✓ Making a phone call.
- ✓ Walking into a shop.
- ✓ Attending an appointment.
- ✓ Speaking to someone new.
- ✓ Going for a short walk.
- ✓ Leaving the house when you didn't feel like it.

Every step forward is progress.

What If It Doesn't Go Perfectly?

Sometimes things won't go as planned.

That doesn't mean you've failed.

Ask yourself:

What went well?

What did I learn?

What could I do differently next time?

Progress is rarely a straight line.

There will be good days and difficult days.

Keep moving forward.

My Confidence Plan

One situation I would like to feel more confident about:

The first small step I can take is:

Who could support me?

When will I try?

How will I reward myself afterwards?

Reflection

Think about a challenge you have overcome in the past.

What helped you succeed?

How could those same strengths help you now?

Remember

Confidence does not usually come before taking action.

Confidence often grows because you took action.

Every time you face a fear—even if you still feel anxious—you are teaching your brain that you are capable.

Key Message

> Anxiety tells you to avoid. Confidence grows when you take small, manageable steps towards the things that matter to you. Every step forward, no matter how small, is evidence that you are stronger than your anxiety.

Coming Next

Chapter 9 – Relaxation, Grounding and Mindfulness: Practical Skills to Calm Your Mind and Body

Chapter 9 – Relaxation, Grounding and Mindfulness: Practical Skills to Calm Your Mind and Body

Learning to Calm Your Nervous System

When anxiety is high, your body enters "survival mode."

Your heart beats faster.

Your breathing becomes quicker.

Your muscles tighten.

Your mind searches for danger.

Although this response is designed to protect you, it can leave you feeling exhausted if it happens regularly.

The good news is that you can learn techniques that help calm your nervous system and signal to your brain that you are safe.

These skills become more effective with regular practice.

Relaxation Is a Skill

Many people think they should naturally know how to relax.

In reality, relaxation is a skill that takes practice.

At first, you may find it difficult to slow your thoughts or sit quietly.

That's okay.

Like learning any new skill, it becomes easier over time.

Box Breathing

This simple breathing exercise can help slow your breathing and reduce feelings of anxiety.

Follow these steps:

1. Breathe in slowly through your nose for 4 seconds.
2. Hold your breath for 4 seconds.
3. Breathe out gently through your mouth for 4 seconds.
4. Pause for 4 seconds.

Repeat this cycle for two to five minutes.

If this pattern feels uncomfortable, shorten the timings or simply breathe in and out slowly.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Anxiety often causes muscles to become tense without us realising.

Progressive muscle relaxation helps you notice and release that tension.

Starting with your feet:

Tighten the muscles for five seconds.

Relax them completely.

Notice the difference.

Work your way through:

Feet

Legs

Stomach

Hands

Arms

Shoulders

Neck

Face

Take slow breaths throughout the exercise.

The 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique

Grounding helps bring your attention back to the present moment.

When you feel overwhelmed, gently notice:

5 things you can see.

4 things you can feel.

3 things you can hear.

2 things you can smell.

1 thing you can taste.

This technique helps interrupt racing thoughts and reconnects you with your surroundings.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness means paying attention to the present moment without judging it.

Instead of worrying about yesterday or tomorrow, mindfulness encourages you to notice what is happening right now.

You might notice:

Your breathing.

The warmth of a cup of tea.

Birds singing.

The feeling of your feet on the floor.

The sound of rain.

The smell of fresh air.

Your mind will naturally wander.

When it does, gently bring your attention back without criticising yourself.

Creating a Calm Space

Having a place where you feel safe and relaxed can be helpful.

This could include:

A comfortable chair.

Soft lighting.

A favourite blanket.

Calming music.

Family photographs.

A scented candle (used safely).

A book.

A favourite drink.

You don't need a perfect room—just somewhere that helps you feel settled.

My Personal Calm Plan

When I notice anxiety increasing, I will try:

- ☐ Slow breathing.
- ☐ Progressive muscle relaxation.
- ☐ Grounding exercises.
- ☐ Mindfulness.
- ☐ Going for a walk.
- ☐ Listening to calming music.
- ☐ Speaking to someone I trust.
- ☐ Drinking some water.
- ☐ Taking a short break from social media.

Other:

Daily Relaxation Tracker

Day	Relaxation Activity	How I Felt Afterwards (0–10)
-----	---------------------	------------------------------

Monday		
--------	--	--

Tuesday		
---------	--	--

Wednesday		
-----------	--	--

Thursday		
----------	--	--

Friday		
--------	--	--

Saturday		
----------	--	--

Sunday		
--------	--	--

Reflection

Which relaxation technique do you think would work best for you?

When could you practise it each day?

What usually helps you feel calm?

Remember

You do not need to wait until anxiety becomes overwhelming before using these techniques.

Practising them regularly—even on calm days—can help your mind and body respond more effectively when anxiety increases.

Key Message

> Relaxation, grounding, and mindfulness are practical skills that help calm your body and mind. The more often you practise them, the more confident you may become in managing anxiety when it arises. Small moments of calm, practised regularly, can make a meaningful difference over time.

Coming Next

Chapter 10 – Managing Worry, Overthinking and Uncertainty

Chapter 10 – Managing Worry, Overthinking and Uncertainty

Why Do We Worry?

Worry is something everyone experiences from time to time.

It can sometimes be helpful because it encourages us to plan, solve problems, or prepare for challenges.

However, when worry becomes constant, it can leave us feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, and trapped in a cycle of anxiety.

People who experience anxiety often describe feeling as though their mind is "always switched on."

If this sounds familiar, you're not alone.

The good news is that you can learn ways to manage worry rather than letting it manage you.

Understanding Overthinking

Overthinking happens when our minds repeatedly go over the same thoughts without finding a solution.

You may notice yourself:

Replaying conversations.

Worrying about things that haven't happened.

Imagining the worst possible outcome.

Analysing every decision.

Finding it difficult to "switch off."

Lying awake at night thinking.

Overthinking often feels productive, but it rarely solves the problem.

Instead, it usually increases anxiety.

The Difference Between Productive and Unproductive Worry

Not all worries are the same.

Productive Worry

A productive worry is something you can take action on.

For example:

"I'm worried I've forgotten to pay a bill."

You can:

Check your account.

Pay the bill.

Set a reminder for next time.

Once you've taken action, the worry has been addressed.

Unproductive Worry

An unproductive worry is something you cannot solve right now.

Examples include:

"What if something bad happens next year?"

"What if people don't like me?"

"What if I never feel better?"

These worries often have no immediate solution.

Instead of trying to answer every "what if," it can be more helpful to acknowledge the thought and gently bring your attention back to the present.

Learning to Let Thoughts Come and Go

Imagine your thoughts are like clouds passing across the sky.

Some are light.

Some are dark.

Some stay longer than others.

You don't have to chase every cloud or make it disappear.

You can simply notice it and let it pass.

The same is true for anxious thoughts.

You do not have to believe every thought or act on every worry.

Setting Aside "Worry Time"

Some people find it helpful to choose a specific time each day—perhaps 15–20 minutes—to think about their worries.

If a worry appears outside that time, gently tell yourself:

> "I'll come back to this during my worry time."

Often, by the time your worry time arrives, some worries no longer feel as important.

Bringing Yourself Back to the Present

When you notice yourself overthinking, ask yourself:

What is happening right now?

What can I see around me?

What can I hear?

What is one small thing I can do today?

Focusing on the present moment can help reduce the grip of anxious thoughts.

My Worry Worksheet

What am I worrying about?

Is this something I can control?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, what small action could I take?

If no, how can I gently let this thought go for now?

Reflection

Think about one worry you've had recently.

Was it something you could control?

If not, what would it feel like to give yourself permission to stop carrying that worry for today?

Remember

Uncertainty is a normal part of life.

None of us can predict the future with complete certainty.

Trying to prepare for every possible outcome often increases anxiety rather than reducing it.

Instead, focus on what you can control:

Your actions.

Your breathing.

Your choices.

How you care for yourself.

How you respond to challenges.

Small, positive actions taken today are often more helpful than spending hours worrying about tomorrow.

Key Message

> Worry and overthinking can make anxiety feel much bigger than it really is. Learning to recognise what you can control, letting go of what you cannot, and bringing your attention back to the present can help you break the cycle of anxiety and regain a greater sense of calm.

Coming Next

Chapter 11 – Sleep, Lifestyle and Healthy Habits: Looking After Your Mind and Body

Chapter 11 – Sleep, Lifestyle and Healthy Habits: Looking After Your Mind and Body

Looking After Your Whole Wellbeing

When anxiety is high, it is easy to focus only on anxious thoughts.

However, your physical health and emotional wellbeing are closely connected.

Simple lifestyle habits cannot "cure" anxiety, but they can make it easier for your mind and body to cope with stress.

Looking after yourself is not selfish—it is an important part of managing anxiety.

Remember:

> Small healthy habits, repeated consistently, can make a meaningful difference over time.

The Importance of Sleep

Many people with anxiety struggle to sleep.

You may find it difficult to:

Fall asleep.

Stay asleep.

Stop your mind racing at bedtime.

Feel rested in the morning.

Poor sleep can make anxiety feel stronger, while anxiety can make sleep more difficult.

This creates a cycle.

Improving your sleep routine may help reduce anxiety over time.

Tips for Better Sleep

Try to:

Go to bed and wake up at similar times each day.

Avoid large meals just before bedtime.

Reduce caffeine later in the day.

Limit alcohol before bed, as it can affect sleep quality.

Keep your bedroom quiet, dark and comfortable where possible.

Avoid scrolling on your phone or other screens just before bed.

Create a relaxing bedtime routine, such as reading, listening to calming music or practising slow breathing.

If you can't sleep, avoid putting pressure on yourself. Resting quietly is still beneficial.

Food and Anxiety

What you eat can influence how you feel.

Aim for regular, balanced meals where possible.

Try to include:

Fruit and vegetables.

Wholegrains.

Lean proteins.

Healthy fats.

Plenty of water.

Skipping meals or becoming very hungry may make some people feel more anxious or irritable.

Caffeine and Anxiety

Caffeine is found in:

Coffee.

Tea.

Energy drinks.

Some fizzy drinks.

Chocolate.

For some people, large amounts of caffeine can increase:

Racing heart.

Shaking.

Restlessness.

Feelings of anxiety.

You do not necessarily need to stop drinking caffeine, but it may help to notice whether reducing it improves your symptoms.

Physical Activity

Regular movement can support both physical and mental wellbeing.

You don't have to run a marathon.

Even gentle activities can help, such as:

Walking.

Stretching.

Gardening.

Dancing.

Cycling.

Swimming.

Yoga.

Choose activities you enjoy, as you are more likely to continue them.

Taking Breaks

Life can become busy and stressful.

Giving yourself permission to pause is important.

You might:

Sit outside for a few minutes.

Listen to music.

Read a book.

Spend time with a pet.

Enjoy a hobby.

Practise breathing exercises.

Have a warm drink.

Taking breaks is part of looking after yourself, not a sign of laziness.

My Healthy Habits Checklist

Tick the habits you would like to focus on this week.

☐ Drink more water.

☐ Eat regular meals.

☐ Reduce caffeine.

☐ Go for a walk.

☐ Stretch each day.

☐ Follow a bedtime routine.

☐ Take regular breaks.

☐ Spend time outdoors.

☐ Speak kindly to myself.

☐ Ask for help when I need it.

Other:

My Weekly Wellbeing Plan

This week I will:

Do one thing for my body:

Do one thing for my mind:

Do one thing that brings me joy:

Reflection

Which healthy habit do you think would have the biggest positive impact on your wellbeing?

What is one small change you could begin today?

Remember, you do not need to change everything at once.

Small, consistent steps often lead to lasting progress.

Key Message

> Looking after your sleep, nutrition, physical activity and daily routines gives your mind and body the best opportunity to cope with anxiety. You don't have to be perfect—every positive choice, no matter how small, is an investment in your wellbeing.

Coming Next

Chapter 12 – Creating Your Personal Anxiety Management Plan and Preventing Relapse

Chapter 12 – Creating Your Personal Anxiety Management Plan and Preventing Relapse

Your Journey Doesn't End Here

Completing this workbook is something to be proud of.

You have spent time learning about anxiety, recognising your triggers, understanding your thoughts, and practising practical coping strategies.

Recovery from anxiety is not about never feeling anxious again.

Anxiety is a normal human emotion.

The goal is to recognise anxiety earlier, respond in healthier ways, and stop it from taking over your life.

Some days will feel easier than others.

That is completely normal.

Progress is rarely a straight line.

What Is an Anxiety Management Plan?

An anxiety management plan is your personal guide for dealing with anxiety when it appears.

Having a written plan can help you remember what works, especially during stressful moments.

Think of it as your own wellbeing toolkit.

My Early Warning Signs

What signs tell you your anxiety is increasing?

Tick those that apply or add your own.

- ☐ Trouble sleeping.
- ☐ Racing thoughts.
- ☐ Feeling restless.
- ☐ Avoiding people.
- ☐ Cancelling plans.
- ☐ Tight muscles.
- ☐ Fast heartbeat.
- ☐ Feeling overwhelmed.
- ☐ Becoming irritable.
- ☐ Constant worrying.

Other:

My Anxiety Triggers

Things that commonly increase my anxiety:

What Helps Me Feel Better?

Tick the strategies that work best for you.

- ☐ Slow breathing.
- ☐ Grounding exercises.
- ☐ Going for a walk.
- ☐ Listening to music.
- ☐ Journalling.
- ☐ Speaking to someone I trust.
- ☐ Mindfulness.
- ☐ Stretching or gentle exercise.
- ☐ Spending time outdoors.
- ☐ Taking regular breaks.
- ☐ Reducing caffeine.
- ☐ Following my bedtime routine.

Other:

People I Can Contact

When I need support, I can contact:

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

My Positive Reminders

Write down statements you can read when anxiety feels overwhelming.

Examples:

"This feeling will pass."

"I have managed anxiety before."

"Thoughts are not facts."

"I can take one step at a time."

"I don't need to solve everything today."

My reminders:

What If My Anxiety Returns?

Many people worry that experiencing anxiety again means they have failed.

It does not.

Recovery often includes setbacks.

Periods of increased stress, illness, major life changes, or lack of sleep can cause anxiety to become stronger again.

Rather than seeing this as failure, try asking yourself:

What has changed recently?

Which coping strategies have I stopped using?

What helped me before?

What small step can I take today?

Every setback is an opportunity to practise the skills you have learned.

My Personal Recovery Plan

When I notice my anxiety increasing, I will:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Reflection

Looking back through this workbook:

What has been the most helpful strategy?

What is one thing you are proud of?

What would you like your future self to remember?

Remember

You are not expected to manage anxiety perfectly.

Some days will be difficult.

Some days will feel easier.

Both are part of recovery.

Keep practising.

Keep learning.

Keep being patient with yourself.

Every small step forward matters.

Key Message

> Managing anxiety is a journey, not a destination. You already have strengths, resilience, and the ability to keep learning. By recognising your triggers, using healthy coping strategies, asking for support when needed, and treating yourself with kindness, you can continue building a calmer and more confident future—one day at a time.

Coming Next

Chapter 13 – Final Reflections, Frequently Asked Questions, Further Support and Congratulations

Chapter 13 – Final Reflections, Frequently Asked Questions, Further Support and Congratulations

You Have Reached the End of This Workbook

Congratulations on completing the Understanding and Managing Anxiety Self-Help Workbook.

Whether you completed every page in order or focused on the sections that felt most helpful, you have taken an important step towards understanding and managing your anxiety.

Remember that managing anxiety is not about never feeling worried again.

It is about learning how to respond to anxiety with confidence, compassion and practical skills.

Every time you practise what you have learned, you are helping your brain build new, healthier habits.

Looking Back

Take a few moments to think about your journey through this workbook.

I have learned...

The most helpful technique for me was...

I feel more confident about...

One thing I would still like to improve is...

Frequently Asked Questions

Will my anxiety ever completely disappear?

Everyone's experience is different.

Some people find their anxiety reduces significantly, while others continue to experience anxiety from time to time.

The aim is not to eliminate anxiety completely, but to stop it from controlling your life.

Is it normal to have setbacks?

Yes.

Recovery is rarely a straight line.

Stressful events, illness, poor sleep, or major life changes can temporarily increase anxiety.

A setback does not mean you are back at the beginning.

It simply means it is time to use the skills you have learned.

Should I ask for professional help?

If anxiety is affecting your daily life, work, relationships, or wellbeing, speaking with your GP or a qualified mental health professional can be an important step.

Seeking support is a sign of strength, not weakness.

How often should I practise these techniques?

The more regularly you practise, the more natural they often become.

Even spending five to ten minutes a day using breathing exercises, grounding, mindfulness or challenging anxious thoughts can make a positive difference over time.

My Personal Commitment

Complete the sentence below.

From today, I will...

Remember These Messages

♥ Anxiety does not define who you are.

♥ Thoughts are not always facts.

♥ Progress takes time.

♥ Small steps are still progress.

♥ It is okay to ask for help.

♥ You deserve kindness, including from yourself.

♥ Recovery is possible.

Congratulations

Be proud of yourself for taking the time to learn more about anxiety and how to manage it.

The strategies in this workbook are designed to be used again and again.

Keep returning to the exercises whenever you need them.

Every small positive action you take is another step towards living the life you want.

Self-Help Statement

This workbook has been created by Safe Haven Connect CIC as an educational self-help resource.

It is designed to help adults better understand anxiety and learn practical self-help strategies that may improve wellbeing.

This workbook:

Is not therapy.

Is not counselling.

Is not a diagnosis.

Is not medical advice.

Does not replace support from a GP, psychologist, psychiatrist, or other qualified healthcare professional.

If your anxiety is becoming overwhelming, significantly affecting your daily life, or you are concerned about your mental health, seek advice from a qualified healthcare professional.

If you feel unable to keep yourself safe or are experiencing a mental health crisis, contact your local emergency services or appropriate crisis support immediately.

Disclaimer

While every effort has been made to ensure the information in this workbook is accurate and based on current understanding at the time of publication, Safe Haven Connect CIC accepts no responsibility for any loss, injury, or damage arising from the use of this workbook.

The information is intended for educational purposes only and should not be relied upon as a substitute for professional medical or mental health advice.

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Understanding and Managing Anxiety – Self-Help Workbook

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Final Thought

> Recovery doesn't happen because you never feel anxious again. Recovery happens because, even when anxiety shows up, you know you have the knowledge, skills, and strength to keep moving forward. One breath, one step, and one day at a time. 