

Explanations

Most of us feel anxious or experience irrational thoughts from time to time. Often there is a relatively simple background or explanation to why we are acting or thinking in an anxious or irrational way – this may for example be because of certain events in our childhood which make us sensitive in particular situations or it may be because of recent events, or a mixture of the two.

It can be helpful to write down in a few sentences what you believe to be the explanation for your anxieties and then conclude with a positive statement as to what you are starting to do to try to gain control or to react positively when confronted with the anxieties.

Please write down below what you see as the explanation or background to your recent anxious behaviour or thoughts, then conclude with a constructive sentence describing what you are now doing to begin to take control.

Please write your explanation in the first person – for example, you can use a format like: *'I sometimes experience exaggerated worries that... I believe this is because ... I am now learning to...'*

6. Is there a way in which you can act or say what you want to so as to achieve what you want and at the same time reduce the risk of your fear materialising even if you cannot eliminate it completely? Put down any possibilities here:

7. Given your answers to 1-6 above, how do you now intend to act? Write down what you are going to do below, expressing your intention in the first person ('*I intend to ...*') and being precise about what you intend to do and when:

Fears about Conflict

Complete the table to help you analyse a fear or worry you have about creating a conflict or upsetting someone by expressing your feelings or opinions. This exercise can be used in conjunction with the *Facing Your Fears* exercise:

What <i>exactly</i> are you afraid might happen if you express your feelings or opinions?*	How <i>serious</i> is that (If you think it is serious, then put your reasons)?	How <i>likely</i> is it to happen (allocate a percentage)?	If you <i>don't</i> express your feelings or opinions what is likely to happen & how will you feel?

***NB.** If your worry relates to a significant risk of physical, sexual or emotional violence towards yourself or someone else, then you are advised to discuss your concerns with a suitably qualified professional or other appropriate third party.

Focusing on Others

This exercise can be helpful for people who experience high degrees of self consciousness or suffer from social anxiety. It encourages you to start focusing outside yourself on others which can help to relieve your self consciousness.

What I would like you to do is to aim to start deliberately trying to focus on other people and things in your environment rather than yourself when you can. Use this form to record times when you deliberately do this, observing things about other people such as: What are they wearing? Do they look hot or cold, tired, energetic? What might they be thinking? What are they saying? - You can also focus on things in your environment – what do you notice about the objects around you: colours, smells, noises, size, appearance etc.

Sometimes this exercise is called the *Scientist Experiment* because it can help if you imagine that you are a scientist who is conducting an investigation into the different ways that people behave in situations. Try to approach the situation in as detached a way as you can, imagining that you are a curious scientist, observing people and things outside of you.

You can do this either at times when you are anxious and/or at time when you are quite relaxed. The idea is to do it as often as possible so that you get into a habit of doing it. At first it may seem strange – try to keep it up until you get used to it as something which is more natural and perhaps even enjoyable!

Date	What was the situation	What did you observe about the people and things around you?	How did you feel after you had started observing things outside of yourself & how did the situation work out?

Improving a Relationship

This exercise is for anyone who has decided to try to improve an important relationship.

A. OUTCOMES

Please list below one or more outcomes that you would like to aim to reach in respect of a particular relationship which you and the other person agree would represent an improvement in the relationship. Some examples are given below:

- For both of us to feel more relaxed in the relationship
- To be able to discuss things calmly rather than shout at each other
- More quality time together.

The Outcome or Outcomes that I would like are:

B. ONE CHANGE IN BEHAVIOUR OR THOUGHT PATTERN

Please indicate below *one* change in either the way that you often behave (or are currently behaving) or in your pattern of thinking that you feel would help you to move towards the main outcome or outcomes above:

The change in my behaviour/pattern of thinking that would be helpful towards the main outcome(s) is:

C. BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS

When people are finding it hard to make a change in a habitual behaviour or thought pattern, it is often because for them the perceived drawbacks of change are nearly as strong as the benefits they want to achieve. In some cases these drawbacks may be partly practical or financial. Often, however, the most significant drawbacks may be mental or emotional, e.g. fears or anxieties about whether you can cope with making the change, or about what it will mean to your identity or your pride to make a major change in the way you act, or about what other people will think. It usually assists in making changes to become clear about what your hesitations are and then you can decide how to deal with those hesitations and drawbacks and enable yourself to make the change if you want to.

Please complete the table below in relation to the Change you specified in B. above, listing on one side all the benefits of making that change in behaviour & on the other side all the potential drawbacks you feel there may be (even if those seem irrational):

Benefits	Drawbacks

D. DEALING WITH DRAWBACKS

Specify any things that you can do or say to yourself to help manage or deal with any of the drawbacks you listed above:

E. ACTION

Now specify what you are going to try out in the light of your previous answers to try to make an improvement in the relationship. Indicate:

- How you are going to try to act or change your approach
- When you are going to do it
- How you are going to assess whether it is working
- Whether you are going to tell the other person in the relationship beforehand what you are going to try to do
- Whether you are going to seek feedback (afterwards) from the other person in the relationship on what you try
- Any support you are going to seek (and from whom)

Job Analysis

Complete the table below to clarify what is involved in particular jobs/roles you might be interested in and to reflect on whether you could see yourself doing the role.

For a more detailed analysis – Do the exercise: *Meeting Job Requirements*

Job Title	What is involved in the Job?	Could I see myself doing it? – What are the reasons for my answer?

Leisure Activities

If one of your wishes is to create a balanced lifestyle, then it is important that you do some things every week to meet your own needs. You might choose relaxing enjoyable activities or moderate exercise or something mentally stimulating or something to help you unwind – just make sure these are things you can feel positive about!

Current Leisure Activities

Please list in the table below activities that you currently do in your spare time, who else you do them with and roughly how often/for how long you do them for.

Leisure Activity	Who I do the Activity with	Usual Frequency of The Activity

Possible Other Activities

Please list below any other activities that you *might* like to do. These might be things you have done before but have stopped for one reason or another or they might be things you have never done but might like to do.

Leisure Activity	Who would I do the Activity with?	Frequency of The Activity

Deciding what To Do

After looking at the above tables, make a list of those leisure activities you are going to try out or explore over the next couple of weeks:

What is the Leisure Activity?	When will I do it in the next couple of weeks or what action will I take to find out if it is a possibility?

Looking Outwards

Doing something for others and bringing enjoyment or appreciation into their life can be one of the most rewarding activities. Use this exercise to ask yourself what you might contribute to the lives of others even if in only a small way.

What have you got that you can give to the world?

Perhaps you have a particular skill or skills?

Perhaps you have particular personal qualities - kindness, consideration, intelligence, respect or something else?

Perhaps your experiences have given you knowledge of some aspect of life, which enables you to contribute to and understand people in similar situations?

How can you make use of these qualities to add value to the lives of others?

Write down on a piece of paper a short list of the skills, qualities, experience you have which are most important to you. This doesn't have to be the same as what you think other people might say you have - this is about what you think of yourself. It is fine if you only list 3 or 4 things and equally okay if you list 10 or 12.

How can you develop and make use of those aspects of you in a positive way?

List one or two specific things that you can do over the next week which will develop or make use of those aspects. This could be anything as long as it is a specific action and your focus at the moment is not about getting something in return, but about making use of your attributes and adding value to the lives of others. The actions you choose don't have to be major. They can be small and simple. Anything you like. For example, you might:

- Ring up a friend you haven't spoken to in a while
- Visit a relative
- Investigate a volunteering activity
- Enquire about a course that would develop some skill you already have or that you feel you would be good at
- Cook a meal for someone
- Offer help to someone who you know is struggling with a particular task where you have relevant skills or experience.

If you find that doing these small actions for one week is rewarding, then please think about how you can develop them further or make them into a regular routine in your life.

Managing Risks

If you are embarking on a significant change in your life, it is usually important to assess the risks first and decide how you are going to deal with them. Here is one form you can use:

Specify the situation you are in or the change you are thinking of embarking on which may involve risks:

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Now create a plan using the table on the next page, setting out proposals for preventing and/or addressing each risk that is involved in your situation (or in changes you are trying or planning to make). If you find it hard to create the Plan immediately, then brainstorm a list of possible options first, analyse the pros and cons of each and select which options you consider most appropriate for inclusion in your Plan:

WHAT IS THE RISK?		ADVANCE ACTIONS (Planning and preventative ideas)		RESPONSE ACTIONS (How to respond if the risk actually materialises)
<i>Identify each risk below:</i>	<i>Priority Rating*: (1 = High 2= Medium 3 = Low)</i>	<i>What can I do now to minimise the likelihood of the risk occurring?</i>	<i>What can I do now which will limit the potential extent, nature or impact of negative consequences if the risk does occur?</i>	<i>If the risk does materialise, then what positive responses might I make to it after it has happened?</i>

***Ideally, your Plan will address all the risks in the situation /project but give particular focus to those risks that you identify as being of highest priority (NB. Even if a risk is not very likely to occur, it may still be appropriate to accord it a high priority if the potential consequences should it occur are very serious).**

Meeting Job Requirements

Please fill in the table below listing the ingredients that you feel are most important for someone to become successful in a particular role or job you might like to apply for. These ingredients should include any relevant personal abilities as well as professional qualifications and skills. In the second column indicate the extent to which you feel you meet the ingredient. In the third column give examples or evidence to support the assessment of your own suitability that you have given. In the fourth column, describe what gaps (if any) there are in the extent to which you fulfil the particular ingredient and what you might do to help fill the gaps. *Use what you write in the 4th column to help you decide where you are going to focus efforts if you want to improve your chances of getting this kind of job.*

List below the different ingredients required to become successful in the job/career you are interested in	Degree to which you feel you currently fulfil each ingredient: Fully/ Mostly/ Partially/ Hardly/ Not at all	Evidence or examples to back up your assessment of the extent to which you fulfil each ingredient (you might cite these in a job interview or application)	What gaps are there in the extent to which you fulfil the ingredient? Indicate what you might do to fill those gaps.

Monitoring Your Progress

You can use the form below to monitor how well you are progressing on Actions you committed to trying out & to decide whether to continue with them or adjust them.

Action Describe in this column: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What the action was that you committed to doing &• When you committed to doing it.	Progress Report <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Rate your success in carrying out the action out of 10.2. Comment in words on how successful you were and any reasons for being successful or unsuccessful.	Update List here whether you want/need to continue with the action OR describe a different or modified version of it you want to try out. Be precise in indicating: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What the new action is• When you will do it

Motivation & Actions Checklist

Go through the questions below in relation to any proposed action if you are not entirely sure you will carry it out or if you have previously had difficulty in achieving it and want now to improve your chances of success.

1. On a score of 1-10, how likely do you think it is that you will achieve the action within the timeframe you are proposing?

2. If you have given a score of less than 8, what can you do that would increase the likelihood of implementing the action successfully to 8 or more, e.g. Consider:
 - Modifying or amending the action so that it is more enjoyable to achieve, or
 - Increasing your chances of completing the action by recording what you have to do in a systematic way, such as keeping a diary or 'To Do' list, or
 - Making the timescale easier to achieve or less daunting, say by changing the timescale or proposed frequency for completing the action or the time of day you plan to do it.

3. Will telling a friend or family member or someone else what you are going to do or asking their support increase the likelihood of success? If so, who will you tell and what support will you ask for?

4. Is there any other resource (e.g. self help book or information on the internet) that you could consult or make use of to help you carry out the action? How can you make use of that resource?

5. How can you monitor your progress in achieving the action so that you can assess how you are doing? How can you reward yourself if you achieve the action?

Now refine your proposed action and any methods for monitoring your progress in line with any suggestions arising from the above Checklist.

Myths of Change

A Myth of Change is an unfounded belief whether conscious or unconscious, which is preventing you from maximising your potential.

Examples of personal Myths of Change might be:

- I do not deserve to be happy/ successful/ in a positive relationship
- I am too old to make a major change in my life
- You need an outgoing personality to set up a business successfully and I haven't got one
- It is wrong to earn too much money
- I am not attractive enough to be in a good relationship
- I should always put other people's needs before my own

Myths of Change tend to be over-definitive statements, which say that something *must* be the case or that you *should* act in a certain way or that something is *always* or *never* the case. They are quite pernicious because once you start believing that something must be the case you rarely try to do anything to change it. Different people have different kinds of Myths of Change.

Please do the following exercise:

1. Identify your Myths of Change

Write down those statements which you say to yourself that have impeded you from taking steps to change. One way of recognising such statements is to think of the change that you would like to achieve and then see what first comes in to your head when you complete the sentence below:

'I cannot achieve [*Specify here the change you want*] because

.....'

2. Think of an Example when you allowed the Myth of Change to dominate

Think of a situation when, whether consciously or not, you allowed the thought that you have indicated in 1. above to stop you taking a positive step, even a small one, towards change.

(a) Write down what the negative consequences of not taking that positive step were:

(b) Now write down what you can say to yourself every time the thought highlighted in 1. occurs again, to encourage you to challenge its correctness or to explore alternative possibilities.

3. Try saying something different from the Myth of Change

When a similar situation to that described in 2 next occurs, try saying to yourself the statement or statements that you identified in 2 (b) and see if they help you to do something different or to feel differently about the situation.

Negative Thoughts & Alternatives

This exercise is concerned with Automatic Negative Thoughts (known as an “ANT”s) such as

- I’ve failed again’
- ‘I’m always hurting people’
- ‘I’ll never succeed’

An Automatic Thought is a thought that pops into your mind regularly, frequently or in certain types of situation. An Automatic Negative Thought is an automatic thought which involves a negative assumption or conclusion, often with a self critical element. ANTS sometimes involve exaggerations or generalisations and use of phrases such as ‘always’ or ‘never’ which may well not be justified by the actual evidence.

What are the personal ANTS which are causing you problems at the moment? Record on the next page occasions when you say something negative about yourself which you think is a fairly typical put down that you say to yourself or a negative assumption about a situation. In the right hand column, list alternative possible thoughts to try to say to yourself in the situations when you find your particular ANTS occurring.

The idea in generating alternative thoughts is to be as creative as you can – you can use humour, logic, self knowledge to brainstorm possible ideas. There is no right or wrong here, just try to create possibilities that might work for you to take the stress out of the situation and make you feel more positive. *What you are trying to achieve is a change in mood.*

Example ANT & Alternative Thoughts

What is the ANT?	When and in what situation did it Occur?	What Possible Alternative Thoughts could I say to myself in future to achieve a change in mood?
I am always a burden to everyone.	4 July – John got annoyed with me when I took a long time getting ready before we went out.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Relax – John may have had a bad day</i> • <i>Nobody’s perfect</i> • <i>Sometimes I’m slow but the end result is worth it</i>

Exercise for Automatic Negative Thoughts

Please identify any typical negative descriptions, assumptions or statements you make about yourself or your situation during the week and write them down in the left hand column. In the right hand column write down an alternative statement which balances the first statement by moderating it in a realistic manner, putting it in perspective or giving it a simple positive ending to it.

Automatic Negative Thought	Alternative Statement

Negotiation and Compromise in Relationships

This exercise can be useful if you find it difficult to get across your point of view in a personal relationship and ask someone to treat you in a different way or where you want to resolve a conflict and reach compromise with someone close to you. Sometimes the tips can also be relevant in professional or work situations, although that may depend on the nature of the situation and the degree of power or influence that you and the other party have respectively in the situation.

To prepare yourself before you enter into discussion where you want to achieve an agreement from another party to act differently or treat you differently or where you are trying to resolve a conflict, run through the following checklist of 15 points:

1. Identify for yourself what things you are prepared to compromise on and which things you are not willing to compromise on because they are too important to you.
2. In the light of your knowledge of the behaviour and personality of the person you are going to be in discussion/negotiation with, give some thought in advance to what they might ask for and how you might choose to respond.
3. Be prepared to listen to what the other person has to say but also think about how you are going to ensure that you get an opportunity to put your point of view and feelings across – in some cases it may be helpful at the outset of the discussion for you to suggest to the other person that you agree to allow each in turn to express your views without interruption.
4. Prepare for how you may try to move discussion forward once you have both expressed your views – for example, this might involve you summarising the differences and similarities in each of your views and then trying with the other person to explore (or ‘brainstorm’) what different possible solutions there might be and what the advantages and disadvantages are of each proposed solution for both of you.
5. In respect of those aspects where you might compromise, think of possible suggestions that you might make to the other party about what you would like in return from them if you compromise on those aspects.
6. In respect of those aspects where you are not willing to compromise, be clear in your own mind about what the consequences might be if the other person still refuses to meet those ‘bottom-line’ requests and what you will do.
7. In most cases you will be hoping that a productive compromise can be reached. However, if your bottom-line requests are not met then be prepared to act in the way you decided beforehand (under 6. above). If you are not prepared to carry through this commitment then you may decide that actually what you considered to be a ‘non-negotiable’ or ‘bottom-line’ request is actually just a strong preference. It is best to be clear about this in your own mind beforehand if possible.
8. In the light of your relationship with the other party and your knowledge of them, give some thought in advance to what style of approach is most likely to encourage the other party to respond positively to your request – will it help for you to be encouraging and constructive and try to engage in a joint search for solutions or will it be more likely to be productive if you

take a firm stance from the outset, indicating absolutely clearly what you want and what will be the consequences if your wishes are not met or at least are not met in full? The best style of approach may vary for different situations.

9. When, where and how do you want to approach the topic to give yourself the best chance of getting a friendly constructive or at least helpful response from the other party. In most cases if possible you may want to raise the subject at a time when both you and the other party can give full attention to the discussion without distractions and when you are not preoccupied with other matters or very tired or stressed.
10. Whilst you are looking for a good time to raise the topic, as indicated in 9. above, don't put off the moment for ever! The *perfect* time will probably never happen. If you find yourself delaying too much, then select a specific time or occasion to raise the matter and keep to your commitment.
11. Recognise that the person you are going to be talking to may say some things that you are not anticipating. If you are worried about committing yourself to something that you later regret then prepare a stock response for the unexpected which will allow you time to think further before you make a decision – e.g. something as simple as: “I need to think about that before I give you my answer”.
12. When you have considered all the above points, write down a summary of your conclusions and go through it before the meeting or discussion with the other party so that you are prepared – also write down the outline of what you intend to say using the first 3 steps of the DEAL method if you are using that (see the exercise: *Assertiveness: Using the DEAL method*).
13. When you discuss the issue with the other party, if suggestions as to how to move forward are agreed, then go over them at the end to check that you are both clear about what they are and clarify any possible points of doubt. If you think that what is agreed may be disputed later, then record the main points in writing and ask the other party to confirm that they are in agreement with your record.
14. If you can't resolve every issue, you may still agree to implement changes in respect of some issues and perhaps set a further date to talk further about any outstanding differences after you have both thought further about possible ideas for dealing with them.
15. If appropriate, decide how you both are going to keep track of whether the agreed actions have been implemented and what you would both regard as successful implementation – if appropriate set a provisional date for a further discussion to review progress and to discuss whether the agreement has worked or needs to be changed.

Positive Rehearsal

The technique below is designed to help you prepare for an event you are anxious about – for example where you are worried that a panic attack might happen. In Psychology the technical phrase “Imaginal Rehearsal” is sometimes used to describe this exercise. I prefer to use the phrase “Positive Rehearsal” because it conveys the fact that you are creating a constructive mental approach towards the potential event as you prepare yourself for it, so as to retrain your mind to think differently about the experience. The exercise is as follows:

1. Set yourself in a comfortable environment and then do a relaxation exercise to help get you into a relaxed frame of mind. If you have a familiar relaxation exercise which works for you then use that. Otherwise you can find 3 different suggestions in the article: *Relaxation Techniques for Stress and Anxiety* at www.davidbonham-carter.com/article-relaxationtechniques.html
2. Next you are going to picture yourself entering the situation that you are anxious about:
 - (a) Just before you do so, tell yourself that you are going to see the experience in a positive way – as an adventure or as an enjoyable experience.
 - (b) Now slowly start imagining yourself in the situation, bearing in mind that even if you are nervous, this is because this is a positive opportunity for you to show the capabilities that you have.
 - (c) As you go through the experience tell yourself that you are in control & remind yourself of any thoughts or statements that you can say to yourself to help you manage the situation.
 - (d) To help you know that you are in control – plan some escape routes from the situation, but remind yourself that you are only going to use them if you really need to. *If you don't think there are any practical 'escape routes' then leave this step out.*
 - (e) If you start to feel panicky then set yourself a small target to get to – for example to get through the next 10 or 15 seconds. Remind yourself that what you are experiencing is a mental/emotional reaction to the situation, that it will pass and that you can control it.
 - (f) If it helps you then focus on breathing slowly and calmly or focus specifically on the task that you have to do, concentrating on the next small step that you have to do in it, completing that first and only then moving on to the next step.
 - (g) As you get through each target you set yourself (10/15 seconds, one minute, or completion of a specific step in the task, whatever target you set) congratulate yourself that you have achieved that target.
 - (h) Once you have completed the task in your imagination then take yourself out of the situation, take a few deep calming breaths and focus on something in your immediate environment, such as a chair or the colour of the wallpaper to take you back into your real life current situation.
3. After you have completed the exercise, write down the thoughts that went through your head, those parts of the task that you managed to complete and what helped you to get as far as you did in the task. If you managed

to complete it successfully give yourself big congratulations. If you got through it partially then congratulate on getting to the stage you did get and set yourself a target slightly ahead of that stage to try to get to the next time you do the exercise.

4. Repeat this exercise on different days, as you build up to the event you are anxious about, until it becomes a routine that you are familiar with. When you come to the situation in real life, remind yourself of what you did in the exercise and aim as best you can to repeat the positive aspects of it in the real life situation.
5. If you have anxieties about doing the exercise, then you can arrange to do it when a trusted friend, relative or partner is on hand (say, in nearby room). You can tell them what you are going to do and arrange to confirm with them once it's completed. In most cases however you will not need this support, just be aware of your own limits as you go through the exercise – push yourself to go a little bit further than you might have done in the past in the real life situation but if you get to a point where you feel you really have to take a time out from the imagined situation, then do that. There is nothing wrong in taking this in stages and gradually improving your progress and confidence. Don't feel that you have to do everything in one go.