

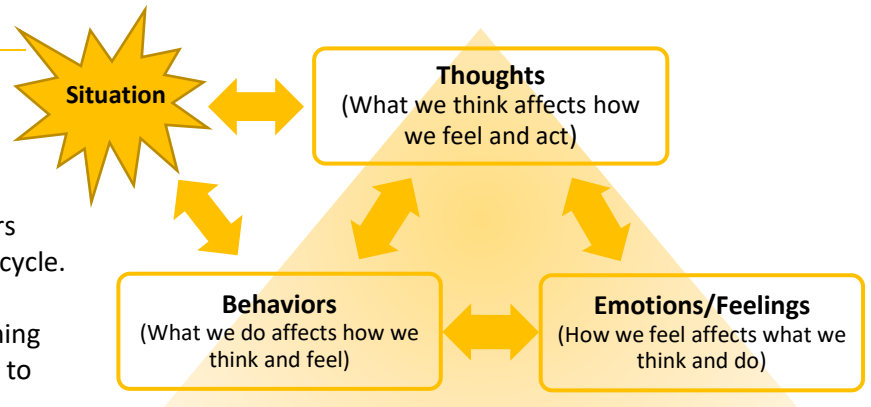
ANXIETY

AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

Our brain is constantly evaluating situations around us. When a situation is perceived as dangerous or we know something bad is going to happen, it can trigger a fight, flight, or freeze response leaving us feeling stressed, fearful, worried, or anxious. These feelings affect our body and our mind causing increased heart rate, tense muscles, warm temperature, racing thoughts, and shallow breathing. It can be difficult to feel like we have control over these experiences, which is what leads to anxiety.

COGNITIVE TRIANGLE

Here, we see how a situation affects our thoughts, emotions/feelings in our body, and behaviors. Notice how there is an additional arrow connecting behaviors back to the situation. This demonstrates how our behaviors influence new situations, which continues the cycle. In other words, when we engage in “safety” behaviors, we may overestimate how threatening something is while underestimating our ability to cope with it.



COPING WITH ANXIETY

Although it does not always feel like it, we have control over our response to anxiety. Below are some coping skills.

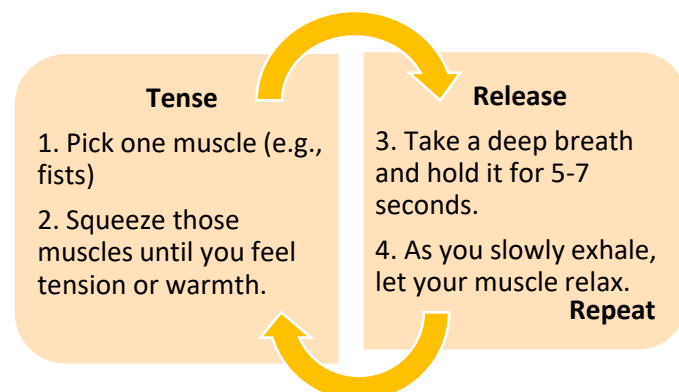
SKILLS FOR OUR BODY

CALM BREATHING

Calm breathing is a basic exercise that can help regulate your fight-flight-freeze response. When we are in a scary situation, our body gets revved up, making our breathing shallower. By slowing our breathing, we can trick our body into feeling more relaxed.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEfs5TJZ6Nk>

1. Get comfy and place your hands on your stomach.
2. Take a slow, long inhale and notice your hands move outward as you fill your stomach with air.
3. Hold your breath for three to four seconds.
4. As you slowly exhale feel your belly sink back towards your spine. Exhale completely.
5. Repeat several times.



TENSE AND RELEASE

When we hold onto stress, our muscles can get really tight and start to ache. This can lead to headaches, stomach aches, and feeling tired by the end of the day. We can help reduce our aches by engaging in a tense and release exercise.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_9VxGxfn7Lg

SKILLS FOR OUR MIND

IDENTIFY WHAT IS IN YOUR CONTROL

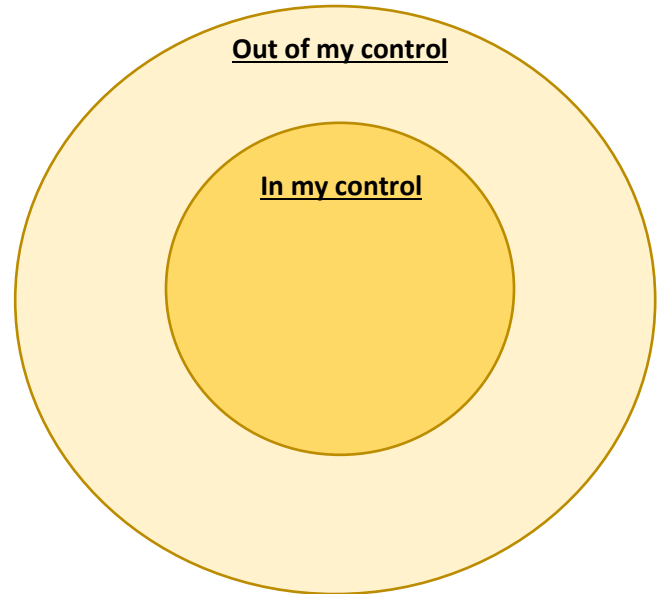
We often experience repetitive or ruminative thinking over things we cannot control. Sometimes it can be helpful to identify what is in our control and only spend our time thinking about our response.

SCHEDULING TIME

Worrying can be good for us – it helps us come up with solutions to problems and reflect on how we handle situations. However, worrying can interfere with our day and become unhelpful. We can counter unhelpful worrying is by scheduling time in our day for worrying. First, pick a time in the day to worry. Then, as worries come up, write them down and save them for the scheduled time.

USING OUR THOUGHTS

We can distract ourselves from our worries by using our thoughts. That means, engaging in an activity that is mentally challenging or distracting. We can watch television, read a book, listen to music, do something creative, or solve some puzzles. If we do not have access to distractors, we can try some of the methods below.



"I Spy"

- Look around your environment.
- Point to all the things in the room or environment and say what they are.
- For example, I may point to my pen and say, "black pen," then point to the chair and say, "blue chair."

ABC Categories

- Pick a category like "animals," "foods," "tv shows," or "musical artists."
- Now go through the alphabet and name something in that category for each letter.
- For example, A = anteater, B = bear... and keep going until you reach Z in the animal category.

Count Backwards

- Pick any number
- Start at 100 and count backwards by that number.
- For example, if I pick 3 I would say 100...97...94... and so on.

LEAVES ON A STREAM

This meditation script is used to help us defuse or separate from thoughts that we feel are controlling us.

Start by pretending you are near a stream or river. You may be sitting in a forest, a desert, or in the middle of a city.



Think about what you see, what is around you?
Listen, what do you hear?
What do you feel?



Now, focus your attention on the flowing water, notice the leaves floating by.

When you notice any thought come to mind, place it on the leaf and watch it float down the stream until it is out of sight. Sit for a few moments and watch each thought move down the stream. The thoughts can be positive, neutral, or negative. Do it for each thought. If you notice any feelings, acknowledge them and watch them float away.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1C8hwj5LXw>