

BLAST

Be Less Anxious Stressed & Tense



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2. How Stress Affects You

The way we respond to stress is very individual indeed. Not only in terms of the level of reaction we experience to individual stressors, but also in the way we react. Some people may experience more physical symptoms whilst others may experience marked changes in their behaviour and others still, will experience a change in the way they think.

Once you have identified what causes you stress (previous page) it is necessary to identify in what way they stress you. These two steps are important because we can only begin to challenge and overcome something that we understand. If we didn't understand our stress it would be like going on a journey to an unknown destination with no directions – not an easy task!

Spend a few moments to look at the list of possible symptoms in the following grid. Tick the ones that you feel are most relevant to you and enter any others in the blank spaces provided.

Physical	Emotional	Behavioural
<input type="checkbox"/> Tired all the time.	<input type="checkbox"/> Anger	<input type="checkbox"/> Smoking more
<input type="checkbox"/> Headaches	<input type="checkbox"/> Irritability	<input type="checkbox"/> Drinking more
<input type="checkbox"/> Nausea	<input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety	<input type="checkbox"/> Eating more/less
<input type="checkbox"/> Being sick	<input type="checkbox"/> Panic attacks	<input type="checkbox"/> Sleeping more/less
<input type="checkbox"/> Pounding heart	<input type="checkbox"/> Fearfulness	<input type="checkbox"/> Nail biting
<input type="checkbox"/> Sweating	<input type="checkbox"/> Feeling low	<input type="checkbox"/> Blushing
<input type="checkbox"/> Dizziness	<input type="checkbox"/> Depression	<input type="checkbox"/> Obsessiveness
<input type="checkbox"/> Erratic breathing	<input type="checkbox"/> Loss of confidence	<input type="checkbox"/> Being 'talkative'
<input type="checkbox"/> Dry mouth	<input type="checkbox"/> Low self-esteem	<input type="checkbox"/> Being shy/quiet
<input type="checkbox"/> Tense muscles	<input type="checkbox"/> Tearful	<input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding situations
<input type="checkbox"/> Back ache	<input type="checkbox"/> Indecisiveness	<input type="checkbox"/> Not wanting to go out socially
<input type="checkbox"/> Neck ache	<input type="checkbox"/> Guilt	<input type="checkbox"/> Not taking as much care with your appearance
<input type="checkbox"/> Stiff jaw	<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty concentrating	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Restlessness	<input type="checkbox"/> Confusion	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Shaking	<input type="checkbox"/> Forgetfulness	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty swallowing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7-11 Breathing

This exercise is designed to regulate your breathing if it becomes disturbed as a result of your stress levels rising quickly. It also helps relax you by stimulating your sympathetic nervous system so long as you ensure your "out" breaths are longer than your "in" breaths.

- ❖ Assume a comfortable position if possible and close your eyes if you wish.
- ❖ Count to seven in your head (over a period of about 4-5 seconds) and then count to eleven in your head (over a period of about 7-8 seconds). You do not need to be precise, this will just give you some idea of the length of your 'in' and 'out' breaths.
- ❖ Take a slow breath in to the count of 7.
- ❖ Hold for a few seconds.
- ❖ Release your breath 'out' in a controlled and slow manner to the count of 11.
- ❖ Hold for a few seconds.
- ❖ Repeat as necessary (usually it is necessary to do this at least 5-6 times in order to feel any real benefit. You may continue for as long as you feel comfortable.)

'Brown Paper Bag' Breathing (you do not need a brown paper bag!)

This breathing technique is based on the old technique of using a brown paper bag to slow down somebody's breathing and reduce the excessive amount of oxygen they may have taken into their body during a panic attack. However, as you will see, it is a little less attention provoking!

- ❖ Cover your mouth and nose by cupping your dominant hand over them as soon as you feel you are beginning to over-breathe.
- ❖ Using the 7-11 breathing technique (above) breathe in and out 3 times.
- ❖ Uncover your mouth for a few seconds.
- ❖ Recover your mouth and repeat as necessary until your breathing has returned to more normal rhythm and rate.

Body Scan

This exercise can be used as a precursor to stretching or tensing techniques, or used in its own right as a method of relaxation.

- ❖ Assume a comfortable position and close your eyes.
- ❖ Take a few long deep slow breaths.
- ❖ Focus your mind on how your body feels and scan up from your feet to your head identifying any areas that are causing you discomfort.

If using this technique to aid stretching or tensing techniques begin these exercises now. If using the body scan to relax, please continue.

- ❖ Taking each identified area of discomfort, starting with the lowest point first.
- ❖ Take a long deep breath to the count of 7.
- ❖ Focus on the area of discomfort.
- ❖ Exhale to the count of 11 in a slow and controlled manner, imagining your discomfort flowing out of your body with the exhaled air.
- ❖ Repeat for each area of discomfort as many times as necessary to feel an improvement, before moving on to the next.

Stretching

Stretching exercises keep muscles toned and supple, preventing aches and reducing tension.

- ❖ These exercises do not need any specific instructions; any muscle can be stretched in order to relieve tension.
- ❖ However, for a full body stretch many people find it useful, whilst lying down, to stretch their back as far as they can without discomfort.
- ❖ Then, keeping the back stretched, stretch their legs, feet and toes; then their arms hand and fingers; and their neck head and face until their body is at full stretch.
- ❖ Hold for the count of 5
- ❖ And relax!
- ❖ Repeat if necessary.

Progressive Muscular Relaxation

You might find it useful to conduct a body scan before this exercise.

- ❖ Assume a comfortable position and close your eyes.
- ❖ Take several deep slow breaths and let go of your inhibitions.
- ❖ Focus your mind on each of the following body parts in turn and concentrate on tensing them as hard as you can before you release. The tighter you tense, the more beneficial the relaxation will be.

- | | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| ● Feet | ● Tummy and back |
| ● Ankles | ● Chest |
| ● Lower legs | ● Shoulders |
| ● Knees | ● Upper arms |
| ● Upper legs | ● Lower arms |
| ● Bottom | ● Wrists and hands |
| ● Lower back | ● Neck |
| ● Lower abdomen | ● Head and face |
| ● Sides of torso | |

- ❖ When you have completed this technique, enjoy the feeling of relaxation that you have achieved for a few moments before bringing yourself slowly back round.

Meditative Stretching

This technique can be extremely relaxing and is particularly useful for those who have mobility problems that restrict their ability to adopt other relaxation techniques.

- ❖ Assume a comfortable position and close your eyes.
- ❖ Imagine your whole body is curled up in a ball: Your spine is curled round and contracted; your legs are bent up to your tummy; your arms are pulled in tightly towards your chest; and your head is bent right down.
- ❖ Focus on this thought for a few moments.
- ❖ Now imagine beginning to uncurl: your spine straightens and becomes longer and longer; your legs ankles and feet uncurl; then your arms wrists and hands; and your head lifts and your neck extends.
- ❖ Focus on this feeling for a few moments.
- ❖ Now imagine your body, legs, arms and neck are becoming longer and longer, flowing into the distance.
- ❖ Enjoy the feeling of relaxation you have achieved for a few moments before slowly and gently bringing yourself back round.

Guided Meditation

The purpose of this technique is to distract us from our negative thoughts and to transport us far away from them. To practice this meditation you will first need to devise your own 'guide', perhaps incorporating your favourite places, people, smells, sounds, sensations and emotions to create an 'idyllic place' for you to travel to.

- ❖ Assume a comfortable position and take a few slow deep breaths.
- ❖ Transport yourself to your 'idyllic place' (by either writing it down and reading it or recording it and listening to it).
- ❖ Experience all the smells, sounds and other sensations that are in your 'idyllic place' and try to 'lose' yourself by completely forgetting your current surroundings and distractions.
- ❖ You should aim to stay in this "place" for at least 5-10 minutes, although when you start practicing this technique it will be very hard to manage more than a few minutes or even seconds before your thoughts begin to wander. If this should happen merely try to guide your thoughts back your idyllic scene.
- ❖ Once you are able to do this you will have a very real feeling that, for a few moments, you managed to escape from all your negative emotions.

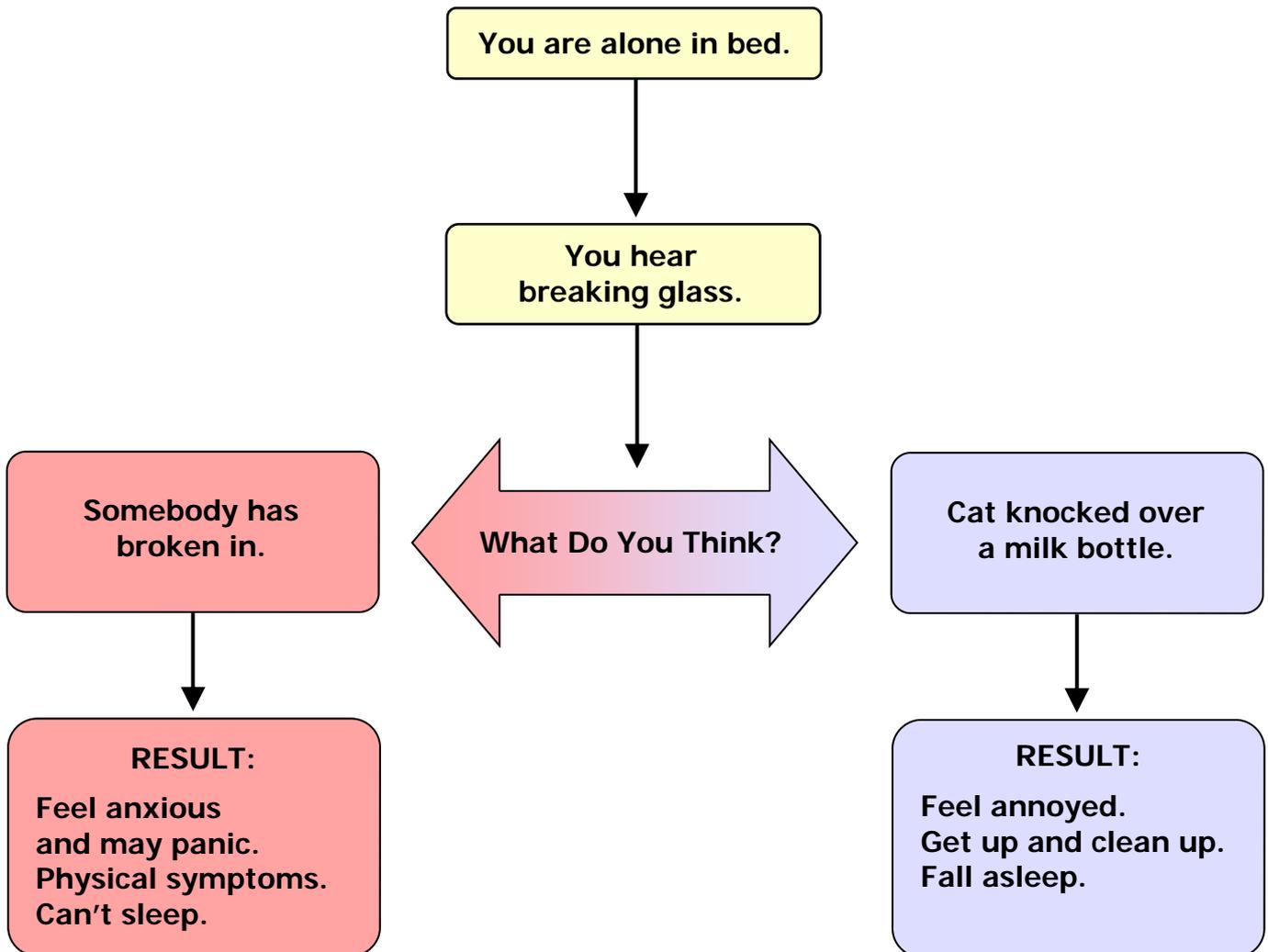


4. Thinking About Thinking

"I think therefore I am"

This quote from Descartes is saying that thought is the essence of existence. If we didn't think we wouldn't and couldn't exist. Linked to this is the notion that the nature of our thoughts relates directly to the nature of our existence: or in other words **if we think anxious thoughts, we will be anxious.**

How thoughts increase anxiety:



Whilst anxious/negative thoughts and anxiety itself can be useful at times, such as in life threatening or harmful situations, to help us deal with any threats; at other times it is not so useful.

The anxiety we feel when we are not in a physically threatening or extremely stressful situation will have the effect of making us think even more negatively. When we begin to have more negative thoughts about situations we tend to try and avoid them. Avoiding situations causes even more negative thoughts, and in turn more anxiety, and then more negative thoughts, and then more anxiety... and a vicious cycle is created.

Anxious thoughts are often called negative thoughts because:

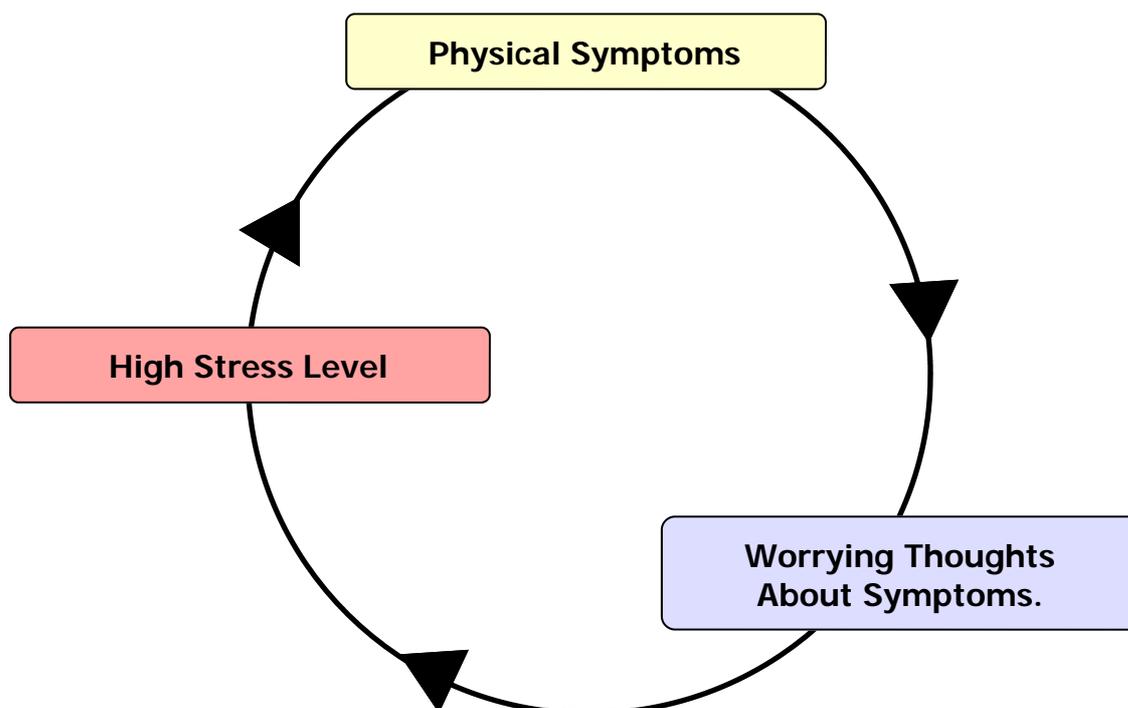
- They make us unhappy.
- They make us feel physically uncomfortable.
- They stop us doing things we want to do.

In addition to this they are also:

- Easy to believe.
- Often untrue.
- Spring to mind at inappropriate times.
- Make things worse than they need to be.
- Wrongly predict the future.
- Are unhelpful.

As a result of all the stress and worry this causes, many individuals become anxious about feeling anxious, which may bring on more physical symptoms, or the person may begin to worry more about the physical symptoms than the original stress that caused the panic or anxiety.

This cycle can very quickly escalate out of control as detailed in the diagram below:



Examples of negative thoughts:

- ❖ I am going to die.
- ❖ I am going mad.
- ❖ I am going to faint.
- ❖ I am going to look a fool.
- ❖ I am going to choke.
- ❖ I am going to have a panic attack.
- ❖ I am going to have a heart attack.
- ❖ I am not going to be able to cope.
- ❖ I can't face up to this because I am not going to be able to do it.
- ❖ I can't do this, last time it went terribly.
- ❖ I'm going to be too anxious to speak properly.
- ❖ Why do other people cope better than me.
- ❖ I am walking off balance.
- ❖ People are looking at me.
- ❖ People think I am stupid.
- ❖ I can't escape.

Can you think of any other negative thoughts you have?

- ❖
- ❖
- ❖
- ❖
- ❖
- ❖
- ❖
- ❖

There are two main ways of dealing with negative thoughts:

1. Thought Challenging/Controlling
2. Distraction

1. Thought Challenging/Controlling

There are three main things that you need to be able to do in order to challenge and therefore control your negative thoughts:

- Highlight the negative thoughts.
- Challenge the negative thoughts.
- Replace the negative thoughts.

The second and third of these steps will be dealt with shortly. First it is important that you are able to highlight some negative thoughts in order to challenge and replace them.

Many people find it useful to write down their negative thoughts at the time they are stressed so they can remember them more clearly. Others find it easier to think back to a situation in which they were stressed and recall the negative thoughts.

Either way is fine; just use the method that is easiest for you. It would be useful if you could document at least 3 or 4 negative thoughts that are relevant to you, in order to challenge them at a later date.

- ❖
- ❖
- ❖
- ❖
- ❖
- ❖

Challenging these negative thoughts is always the preferred option. However, there will be times when we are unable to do this: Maybe because something truly terrible or very stressful has occurred; or maybe because you are feeling ill or tired or cannot think clearly.

Whatever the reason, the alternative to challenging your thoughts is to distract yourself from them.

2. Distraction

There are three basic types of distraction techniques:

- Physical exercise
- Refocusing
- Mental activity

Physical Exercise:

Simply keeping active when we are stressed can distract us away from our thoughts. You could try exercising, which is particularly helpful as it uses up the adrenaline that makes you feel tense. If the physical exercise also requires mental effort, all the better, as this will make the effect of distraction all the more powerful.

Examples are:

- Jogging
- Walking the dog
- Gardening
- Swimming



Refocusing:

By concentrating on other things around us, we can refocus our minds and distract ourselves from our thoughts. Anything that engages your attention will do – it doesn't have to be sophisticated, just have a particular focus – the more detailed the better.

Examples are:

- Listening to other people's conversations.
- Counting the number of red things you can see.
- Reading the ingredients/nutritional information on food items if you are in the supermarket.
- Guessing the jobs people have.
- Listen carefully to all the noises around you – closing your eyes if you can! Try to establish what every noise is.

Mental Activity:

This means doing something that requires some creativity or mental effort to occupy your mind so your unhelpful thoughts cannot overwhelm you.

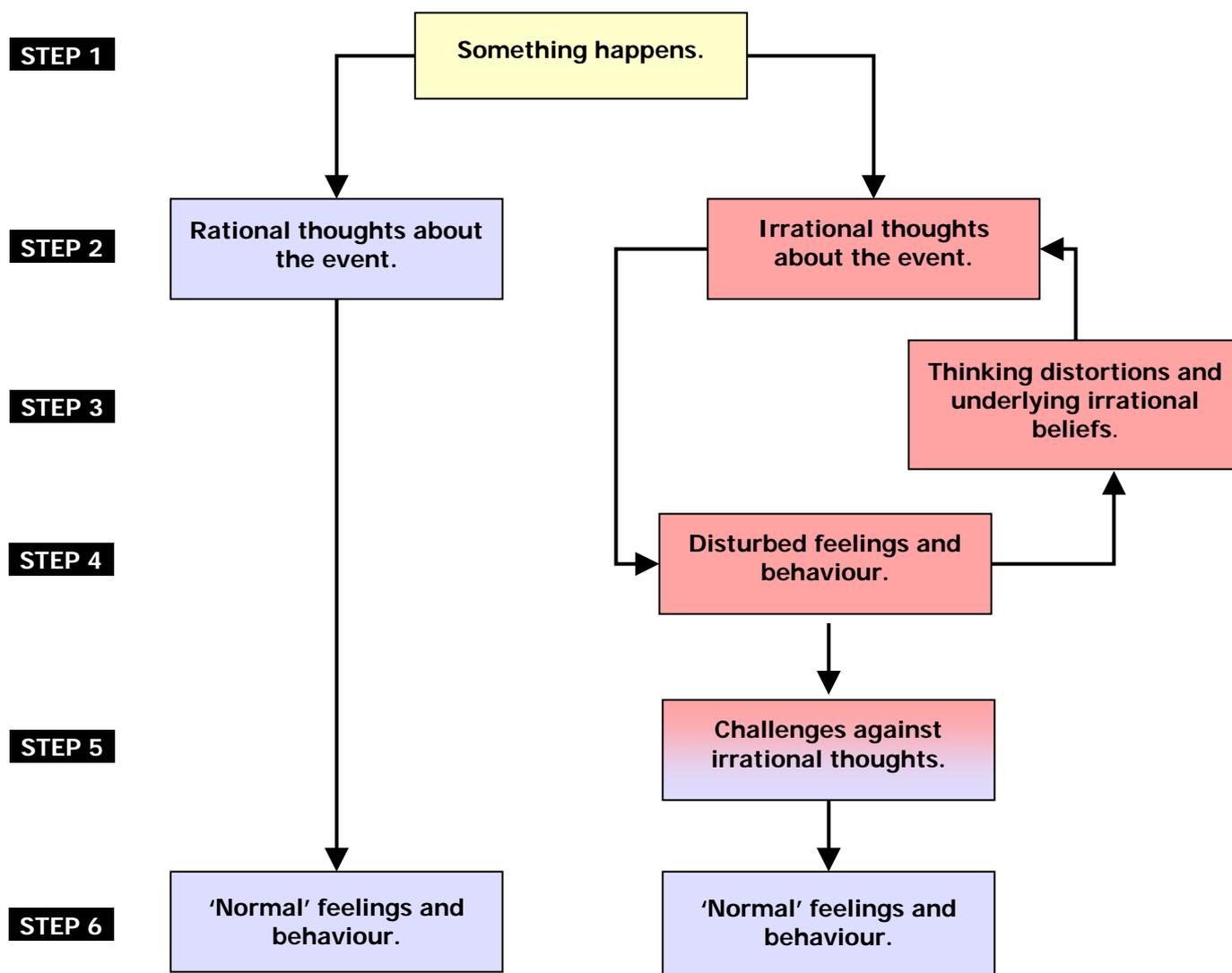
Examples include:

- Doing a crossword.
- Reciting your favourite poem.
- Calculating the price of the goods in your trolley/basket if you are shopping.
- Thought relaxation.
- Creating your own mental game
e.g. making words out of letters on car number plates
or thinking of animals beginning with every letter of the alphabet in turn.



Rational and Irrational Thinking

The following diagram explains how rational and irrational thinking can end with a similar outcome, despite the huge variance of the impact on the individual concerned.



So, firstly, how it is possible to work through step 5 in the right hand column?

By adopting the strategies detailed in the second two steps of the thought controlling technique beginning on the next page.

And secondly, how is it possible to avoid the right hand column altogether?

By practicing the strategies within the thought controlling technique your thoughts will naturally over time begin to become more rational in their nature. However, you should not expect to be able to transform your thinking overnight, or indeed expect never to have another irrational thought ever again. Even when you are feeling much better you will still have irrational thoughts from time to time.

Thought Controlling (continued...)

As detailed earlier, there are three main things that you need to be able to do in order to challenge and therefore control your negative thoughts:

- Highlight the negative thoughts.
- Challenge the negative thoughts.
- Replace the negative thoughts.

The first of these tasks was explained earlier (*see page 14*). We will now discuss the second and third steps in this process.

Transfer each of the unhelpful thoughts that you have highlighted onto the 'Thought Controlling' forms (*from page 23 – feel free to photocopy more*) and use the following questions to help you challenge and replace your unhelpful thoughts.

Questions to help you challenge your unhelpful thoughts:

- *Am I confusing thought with fact?*
- *Am I jumping to conclusions?*
- *Am I asking questions that have no answers?*
- *Am I predicting the future instead of experimenting with it?*
- *Am I over estimating the chances of disaster?*
- *Am I exaggerating the importance of events?*
- *Am I thinking in 'all or nothing' terms?*
- *Am I using 'global' (e.g. everyone/no-one, or always/never.) words in my thinking?*
- *Am I condemning myself as a person on the basis of a single event?*
- *Am I assuming I can do nothing to change my situation?*

These thoughts will hopefully allow you to weaken your unhelpful thoughts by helping you to realise that they are not as accurate or true as you currently think they are. Then you will be able to use the following questions in order to begin to replace them with more realistic and rational thoughts.

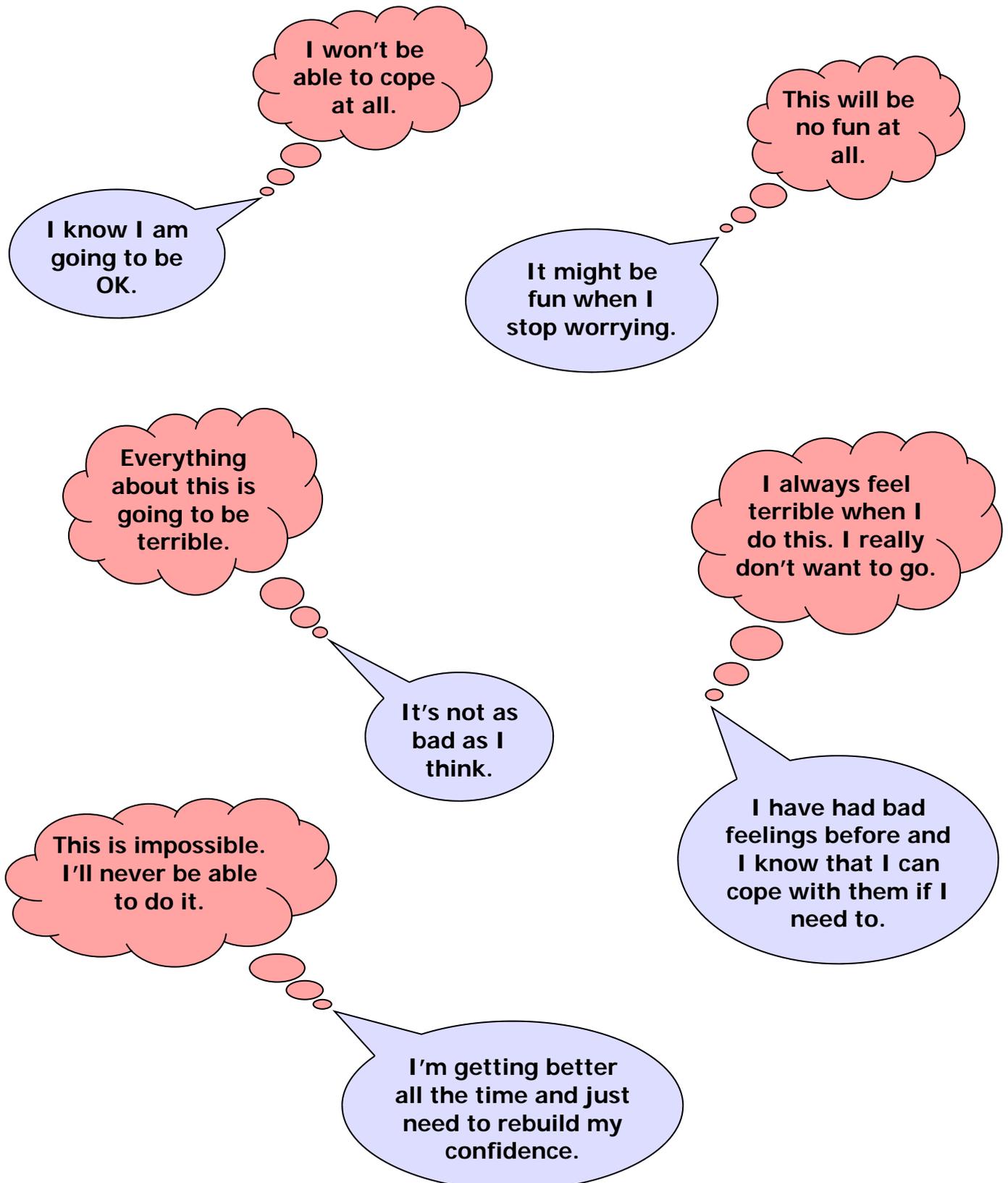
Questions to help you replace your unhelpful thoughts:

- *If I were not stressed, how might my thoughts be different?*
- *Are there any strengths or positives in the situation or myself that I am discounting?*
- *Is the situation less 'clear cut' than my original thought would suggest?*
- *What would my thoughts be if another person were in the same situation as I am now?*
- *Am I expecting myself to be perfect, even though I know I can/have achieve(d) perfectly acceptable results?*
- *What would I tell a friend in the same situation?*
- *If someone who cared about me knew I was thinking this thought, what would they say to me?*
- *What are the effects of thinking the way I do?*
- *Is there an alternative explanation?*
- *Does it really matter?*

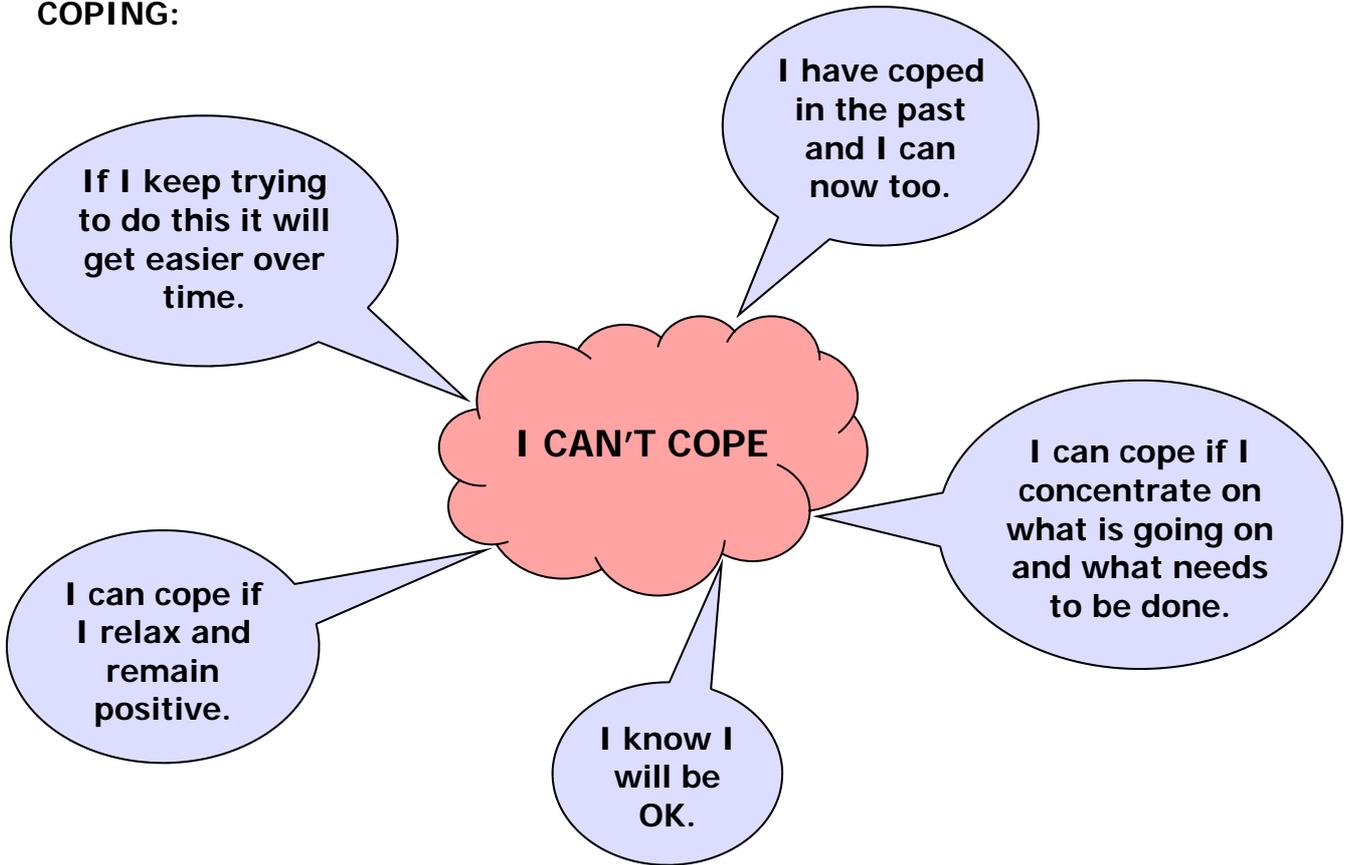
**NEGATIVE THOUGHTS and POSITIVE SELF-TALK
and
NEGATIVE THOUGHT CHALLENGING and REPLACING**

The following information may help you to more effectively control your thoughts by providing you with some ideas and alternatives to your current thoughts. The negative thoughts are in the thought bubbles and the positive self-talk is in the speech bubbles.

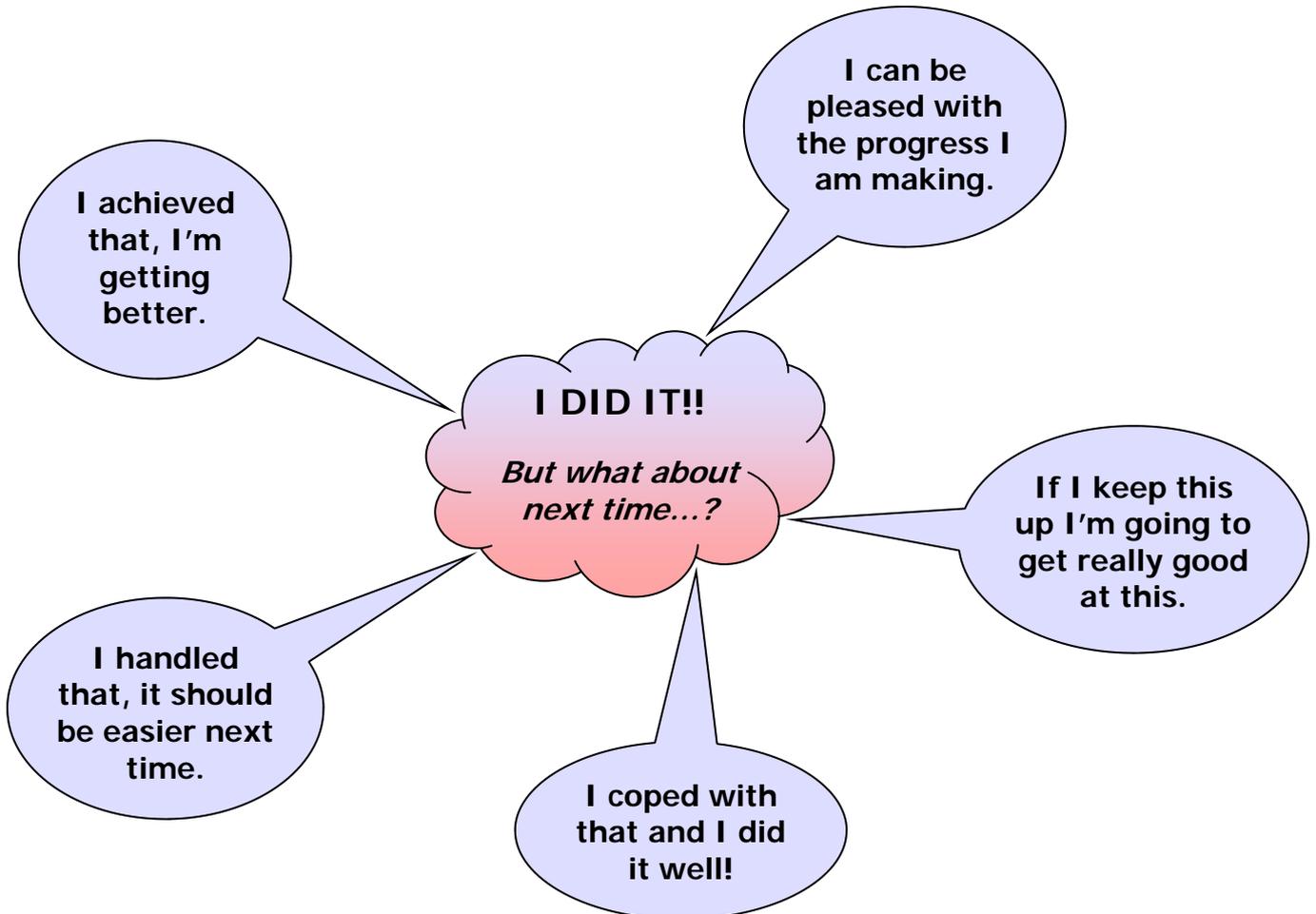
PREPARATION:



COPING:



PRAISE:



Negative Thought Challenging and Replacing

Negative Thought	Challenge
I can't stand it.	I can stand it. It is/will be difficult but I can do it. It will be good for me to go through tis and prove to myself that I CAN DO IT.
I am just not good enough.	I am not perfect. Like everybody I am good at some things and not so good at others. However, the more I try and practise, the better I will get.
What is the point in trying?	If I don't try, I won't know! Trying anything will broaden my experience and skills. Nobody is expecting me to be perfect.
What if I make a mistake? It would be awful.	Everybody make mistakes. It is good to make mistakes in order to learn how to do things properly. Nobody will think I am stupid, mistakes are an unavoidable part of life.
I have nothing to say, I'm boring.	I have opinions thoughts and feelings. I just need to practice remembering and expressing them better when I am around others. The more I practice, the better I will get.
If people really knew me, they wouldn't like me.	Everybody has more and less likeable aspects of their personality and behaviour, some people get on well together, others don't. It depends on their personality and beliefs.
Nobody likes me.	There are people who like me. I have had better relationships in the past and will do again in the future.
Everybody else has a better time than I do. They are all happy.	I don't know this for a fact. Even though people look like they are having a better time it doesn't mean that they are. People probably think I am having a better time than I am sometimes.
It would be best if I stayed away from people because I am no good at relationships.	If I stay away I don't give myself a chance. I could have a really great relationship if I found the right person. It would probably be easier to do this if I could learn to relax and 'go with the flow' a little more.
I might break down emotionally in front of people and then I would feel ridiculous.	There is nothing wrong with showing emotion and people are a lot more understanding than I am giving them credit for. Although I might feel embarrassed for a while it would soon be forgotten. It would not be the end of the world.
I'm hopeless at everything. I'll never be able to sort myself or this situation out.	I have overcome more difficult problems than this in the past. Totally condemning myself is ridiculous. I just need to take one step at a time and I will get through this eventually, no matter how difficult it is. I CAN SUCCEED.

Thought Controlling

Highlight the unhelpful thought as concisely as possible in the space below.

.....
.....
.....
.....

How strongly do you believe this thought?

Not at all It is the truth!
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Apply the questions to help you challenge your unhelpful thought. Write down some of the answers in the space below:

.....
.....
.....
.....

How strongly do you believe the thought now?

Not at all It is the truth!
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Now apply the questions to help you replace your unhelpful thought? Write down some of the answers in the space below:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Use these answers to arrive at a more rational or realistic thought. Write it down as clearly and concisely as possible in the space below:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

How do you feel after completing this task?

Worse Unimproved Slightly Better Much Better
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. Behaviour Management

There are three core parts of stress:

- Physical symptoms
- Cognitive symptoms
- Behavioural symptoms

We have already explored how to control the physical elements of stress, through relaxation, breathing and lifestyle changes; and how to deal with the cognitive elements using thought challenging and distraction. The next step to be taken is to manage the behavioural aspect – which we will begin to do in this session.

This session is directed towards two different types of unhelpful behaviour:

1. Avoidance behaviour
2. Habits

1. Avoidance Behaviour

Avoiding a situation that causes us stress is a perfectly normal and logical response; however it can also be an unhelpful form of behaviour as it can serve to strengthen our worries. This can lead to a fear of the stress response itself. The thought of facing the things that cause us stress can be very difficult and frightening. This is why we are discussing it after the information relating to the physical and cognitive aspects of stress.

When learning how to deal with these situations, it is important to take things at our own pace. This is why 'Graded Practice' is useful in assisting us to overcome our avoidance behaviour.

Graded Practice

This technique allows us to (re)learn how to deal with stressful situations in 'easy' and manageable stages.

In the chart on the next page, make a list of all the things that cause you stress and/or all things you avoid. Consider this in detail. If social situations cause you stress, be specific: is it only if you are with particular people? Or only if you are in a particular location? Make each item on the list as specific as possible; it will help you use this technique more effectively.

Things That Make Me Stressed	Rate 0 –10
Example:	
1. Talking to the utility companies on the phone.	3
2. Going for a meal at a pub with about 10 work colleagues.	7
3. Going to the pub with a couple of friends for drinks only.	4
4. Having a neighbour round my house for coffee.	1
5. Going to a neighbour's house for coffee.	2
6. Attending a meeting with a large group of people at work.	9

Thing That Make Me Stressed	Rate 0 - 10
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	
11.	
12.	
13.	
14.	
15.	
16.	
17.	
18.	
19.	
20.	

Interventions to manage unhelpful behaviours:

1. **Positive reinforcement:** As the name of this technique suggests, the emphasis is upon reinforcing positive behaviour! Divide the day up into manageable blocks, of say 4 hours, and for each block in which your behaviour matches that which is desired, reward yourself with a small treat.
2. **Stimulus control:** The aim of this technique is to control your environment in such a way that it is very difficult for the unhelpful behaviour to occur. For example, if you wish not to smoke, simply do not have any cigarettes nearby.
3. **The response cost technique:** This technique helps reduce unhelpful behaviour by recording how much it has 'cost' you:

When relating to a behaviour such as smoking this will be a financial cost and quite easy to calculate.

When relating to behaviour such as restricting your food intake there may be more of a social cost and it may be more difficult to establish.

It is then important to flip this thought process around in order to calculate how much you would gain if this unhelpful behaviour were to be eliminated.

4. **Distraction:** Every time the unhelpful behaviour begins to occur, at the earliest possible opportunity, distract yourself with something completely different, something that is very consuming, perhaps makes the unhelpful behaviour impossible, and/or requires both your physical and intellectual attention, if possible.
5. **Assertiveness:** Many unhelpful behaviours/habits occur when others around you are also engaged in similar unhelpful behaviours. If this is the case, utilise the assertiveness skills that will be learned later. You should always remember you are an individual and have the RIGHT to act as such.

Remember: breaking habits is never easy. It will take strength and perseverance.

GOOD LUCK!

Managing Unhelpful Behaviour

Problem	Start Date	End Date
1. Identification of Problem		
2. Goal Setting		
3. Establishment of Baseline		
4. Selection of Intervention		
5. Monitoring		
6. Evaluation		

6. Time Management

Your time is valuable so be clear about how you want to use it. Good time management means setting goals and planning priorities; not wasting time on low priority jobs or situations beyond your control.

The 'Five P' approach to time management:

DO Plan – Take 10 minutes per day to plan. Make a list of all the tasks (major and trivial) that you need or want to complete.

Prioritise – Now prioritise each task on this list in the following way:

A = Absolutely Essential

B = Better Done Today

C = Could Wait

D = Delegate

Pass – Now 'pass on' all the tasks that you wish to delegate and 'pass over' all those that could wait. Tackle urgent jobs first; and aim to have all those marked A or B complete before the day has 'passed'!

DO NOT Procrastinate – Do not put off problematic tasks or spend too long thinking about them. Unresolved and/or unfinished business can be a major cause of worry and stress. If you have the time and information to do a problematic task do it as soon as possible and you will then have one less source of tension.

OR BE A Perfectionist – Looking for perfection in yourself or others only invites disappointment and will increase demands on your time and cause unnecessary stress for all those concerned. Remember that you are allowed to make mistakes and that 'good enough' is GOOD ENOUGH!!

You may find the worksheet on the next page helpful in assisting you to manage your time more effectively.

Please feel free to print out as many copies of this worksheet as you wish.

7. Problem Solving

Most people have problems that they think are impossible to solve, or that they put off dealing with because they feel too difficult to cope with. In many cases however, these feelings arise from an individual feeling tired, overwhelmed and stressed AND the effect of not addressing these problems is that they make an individual feel even more stressed and so a vicious circle is created!

If you feel that this has happened to you for whatever reason, try adopting this simple step-by-step problem solving technique that should make things seem a lot clearer and more manageable.

A worksheet is provided on the next page to help you work through these steps. Please feel free to print out as many copies of this worksheet as you wish.

- STEP 1: Identify the problem and write it down as clearly and concisely as possible.
- STEP 2: Distance yourself from the problem. Try to think what you would say to a loved one if they had this problem.
- STEP 3: Write a list of every possible solution there is to your problem; even the silly or impossible options!
- STEP 4: Assess each of the solutions in turn, in terms of their good and bad points. You may wish to enlist the help of someone you trust if you get stuck at this stage.
- STEP 5: Decide upon the solution that seems the best to deal with the problem. This will usually be the easiest and simplest option.
- STEP 6: Work out in detail each of the steps that will need to be taken in order to address your problem with your preferred solution.
- STEP 7: Set yourself a realistic target date for fulfilling this chosen solution.
- STEP 8: After this date assess whether the solution has worked. Has the problem been solved? If it has, progress to step 9. If it has not, try not to worry, just return to step 5 and try again with a new solution.
- STEP 9: CONGRATULATE YOURSELF – DO SOMETHING NICE!
- STEP 10: Remember this technique has worked and that you can use it again for other problems!

Problem Solving

Step 1:

Step 2:

Step 3:

Step 4:

Solution

Good Points

Bad Points

Step 5:

Step 6:

Step 7:

Step 8:

Use the sheet on the following page to look at each area/situation in turn to identify how a passive, aggressive and assertive response might look. Please feel free to print out as many copies of this worksheet as you wish.

Use the examples given below as a guide, if you wish:

EXAMPLE 1:

Louise works in a care home until 3:00pm when she leaves to pick up her son Nathan from the local school. Louise enjoys spending the rest of the afternoon with Nathan. Lately however, her recently bereaved neighbour has begun to call round most afternoons with her daughter to ask Louise to 'mind' her for a couple of hours. Louise does not want this to go on anymore. How could she tell her neighbour?



PASSIVE: I don't mind too much but I was having fun with Nathan.

AGGRESSIVE: I want to spend time alone with Nathan. You are being selfish and unreasonable. I will not 'mind' your daughter anymore. Stop bothering us.

ASSERTIVE: It is nice to see you and your daughter, and I am glad you feel comfortable to turn to me during this difficult time and with leaving your daughter with me. I have no problems with 'minding' your daughter every now and then, but at the moment it is becoming overwhelming and I need more time to spend with Nathan alone. If you need a regular childminder I will help you find one, but I can no longer be that childminder.

EXAMPLE 2:

James has been queuing at a customer service desk for 20 minutes and is in a hurry. He is about to be dealt with when the woman behind, leans in front of him and asks, "Can I just make a quick enquiry?" How should James react?

PASSIVE: Oh go on then.

AGGRESSIVE: No, wait your turn you impatient woman.

ASSERTIVE: I've been waiting for ages and I am in a hurry. You don't have that much longer left to wait.

Passive, Aggressive, Assertive Responses

Situation:

Passive Response:

Aggressive Response:

Assertive Response:

Situation:

Passive Response:

Aggressive Response:

Assertive Response:

Putting it into Practice

Now you are able to identify what assertive behaviours and actions look like you can begin to put it into practice. The only way to learn how to be assertive is by being assertive. It takes a lot of practice and perseverance, but the more you use this skill the easier it will become. You already have lots of information, and the following tips and reminders should help you on your way!

TIPS

- If you need time to think say, "I'll get back to you" - and make sure you do.
- Use open body language to show that by being assertive and protecting your rights, you are not being hostile and dismissing theirs.
- Stay calm and relaxed: Drop your shoulders and breathe deeply. Keep your voice slow and calm.
- Ensure you understand the situation completely; ask for more information if necessary.
- Think the situation through and consider what it is you want to achieve. Don't be rushed.
- Be firm but polite.

REMINDERS

- You have the right to be assertive without feeling guilty.
- Remember other people have the right to be assertive too.
- Being unassertive will cause you more stress in the long term.
- Being unassertive will reduce your feelings of self-worth.
- Being respected and respecting yourself is more important than being liked.
- Give a reason for your assertive response if you feel it is appropriate, but never an excuse or an apology.

With practice, assertiveness will become second nature to you.

9. The Future

This BLAST package will have provided you with a good starting place from which to deal with your stress more effectively both now and in the future.

However, a large proportion of people will feel no different upon immediate completion of this guide than they have done previously (although there will occasionally be a few people who have a moment of inspiration where everything seems to just seem to 'click' for them.)

The reason most people will feel no different initially is that the techniques learned and discussed are all skills that need to be developed in order for them to be effective. As you practice these skills over the next few weeks, months, or even years you will gradually learn to control your stress more effectively and feel better in yourself.

Good Luck on this journey, you have only just begun...





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