Welcome to Week 8

Coping with panic attacks

Panic attacks are terrifying and disabling. So I am going to give you the lowdown about what they are and what you can do about them.

Understand what is happening. If you can get an idea that there is a physical reaction going on which is unpleasant but not dangerous then that can make a real difference.

If you are anxious it is very common to breathe quickly very quickly that can make you feel breathless. Then you may experience some or all of the following unpleasant symptoms

* Racing heart
* Muscle spasms
* Feeling sweaty
* Trembling
* Feeling faint

You may then begin to worry about what is causing these and that will make you feel even worse. You will become more anxious and the symptoms will get worse. So you can see how this is going. You are anxious and that gives you some horrible physical sensations, that makes you worry about what is causing the physical sensations and that makes you more anxious and the physical symptoms get worse. And you get even more worried . . .

The good news is that you can short circuit this process just by breathing in a different way. You can do this anywhere and at any time you fell yourself slipping into panic mode.

So here we go with the

Let’s Break the Anxiety Cyvcle

Let’s break the anxiety cycle Breathe Step One

Breathe out – empty your lungs

Let’s break the anxiety cycle Breathe Step Two

Shut your mouth. Breathe through your nose. This automatically slows down your breathing.

Let’s break the anxiety cycle Breathe Step Three

Involve your tummy. The deeper you breathe the better you will feel. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Breathe in through your nose. Push your tummy out. The hand on your tummy should rise gently, the hand on your chest should keep still. (This might take a bit of practise, so try it when you are not feeling anxious so you get good for when you need it).

Let’s break the anxiety cycle Breathe Step Four

Use the word relax.

Say “re” as you breathe in and “lax” as you breathe out.



Controlling your thoughts

We often assume that thoughts just happen. In fact, it’s hard to think of a time when we are not thinking isn’t it? But you can control your thoughts and this can be a comfort if you find that you dwell on bad thoughts, this makes you anxious and then you have a panic attack.

**Good thoughts to have**

You have had a panic attack before and you survived

Panic attacks do not last forever (20 minutes max and usually much shorter)

It will soon be over and you can do something nice

**How to deal with anxiety-provoking thoughts**

Is there any evidence that a bad thing will happen?

Even if it seems scary, it is not likely to happen.

Even if there is a bad scary thing in life, there is so much good going on in your life.

If you are dwelling on something which happened in the past – it’s in the past, you cannot change it.

Try to imagine intrusive thoughts being pushed to one side, and then further away, until they become small and irrelevant.

How to make more good, calming thoughts

When you are not feeling anxious take some time and imagine or remember a time when you felt very calm and happy.

Make this picture as real as you can (use all your senses so you have sound and feelings and temperature as well as pictures)

Within this imagining try to find one thing which for you sums up this calm happy state. It could be a colour, or an object (a flower in the picture for example) or a voice. Or it could be something vaguer, a pleasant feeling of warmth say.

Whatever it is focus on it and give it a name.

Now do some practise. At least once a day recreate your imagining and focus on your named thing.

This will set up a strong link between those good imagined or remembered feelings of calm and your special word.

Over time you will find that just calling to mind your special word makes you feel calm and relaxed.

It’s like you have a magic pill every time you feel a panic attack approaching.