

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service



Stress and Anxiety Management Manual

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About Anxiety

Anxiety is a common feature experienced by everyone.

Anxiety becomes a problem when we feel that it interferes with our life. When we are very anxious, we may have an additional fear that we will lose control over our own reactions, and that the fear will become uncontrollable. This in turn may lead to a panic attack. Because of the fear, we may avoid doing things or going to places that may trigger it off. This in turn, becomes a habit, thus a circle of anxiety is triggered off.

Anxiety affects us in three ways:

1. Physical feelings
2. Thinking
3. Behaviour

1. Physical feelings

When anxious, we may experience our heart beating faster, sweating, legs weakening and turning to jelly, butterflies, nausea, over breathing. We may feel faint, have a dry mouth and cold palms. Everyone when faced with a frightening experience such as a wild animal stalking towards them will experience some or all of these bodily changes. It's commonly known as the 'fight or flight' syndrome. When faced with danger, a heart beating faster pumping blood to muscles will enable us to run or fight better.

The body can accommodate such changes and return to normal afterwards. However, if we are often anxious, some changes may become chronic. This may result in any of the following:

Headaches
Aching neck and shoulder muscles
Dizziness
High blood pressure
Insomnia
Palpitations
Blurred vision
Asthma
Swallowing difficulties
Indigestion

2. Thoughts:

When anxious, we begin to think differently eg:

What will happen to me?
What will people think of me?
I'm going mad!
Will I die?
I must get out of here!

These thoughts work in maintaining our uncomfortable bodily reactions, they are automatic. If we are unaware that these thoughts are automatic, then it is natural to think we are going mad or may have a heart attack.

We may worry continuously about what people will think, or become preoccupied with losing control.

3. Behaviour

When faced with a situation that provokes anxiety, we may:

Run away
Avoid the situation
Get angry with ourselves or others
Go quiet or withdrawn
Talk more

These actions may bring some relief. We may then begin to plan our life around things that make us anxious, if we avoid them now, it is harder to face them in the future.

It is useful to remember the following:

1. Anxiety varies in intensity and we may experience just one aspect eg, physical feelings, rather than all of those described.
2. Sometimes it is difficult to say what exactly is making us anxious.
3. When we are anxious:

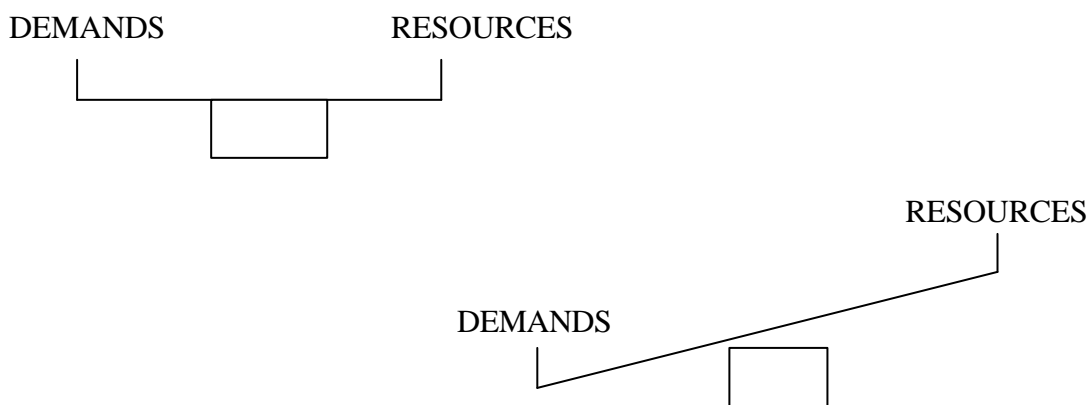
Our bodies feel different
Our thinking is different
Our behaviour is different.

3.1 Changing the pattern – understanding anxiety, how it occurs and what maintains it is an important first step in overcoming it.

- It may be useful to identify the triggers and keep a diary, noting down any situation that makes you anxious.
- Learn a relaxation technique and use it to prevent and control your bodily reactions. Muscle relaxation, deep breathing and exercise will help.
- Set yourself realistic goals. Identify what you would like to be able to achieve. Approach your goals in small steps. Only tackle something that is achievable.
- Prepare for difficult situations. Relax, think positively and rehearse what you will do and say if it involves other people.
- Share your feelings with others. You are not alone in your experience, seek comfort from others, and don't hide your anxieties.
- Do not depend on 'self medicating with drugs and alcohol'. Consider seeking support and advice from your GP
- Take care of yourself. Praise yourself for achievements, take your time. Look after your body.
- Anxiety can give rise to both physical and mental symptoms. Examples of these are indigestion, headaches, worry and depression. However, some anxiety is good for us – it helps us to perform well and be efficient.
- Anxiety can be produced by happy as well as difficult events in our lives, e.g. a family gathering.

3.2 CHANGE in our lives can contribute to feelings of anxiety. The more changes that happen in a short space of time, the more likely we are to suffer from the effects of too much anxiety.

Often there is an imbalance between the demands made upon us and our potential resources to deal with them. This can happen at various times in our life as a result, job, house, partner etc or losses.



DEMANDS are -Relationships
Money
Work and unemployment
Health
Social demands
Unforeseen circumstances and events
Expectations of self and others
Time and self management

RESOURCES are - Physical health and energy
Skills and experience
Confidence and self esteem
Knowledge
Money
Time management
Support from others
“I’ve done it before and I can do it again”

3.4 Help to restore the balance

1. Learn to say “NO” – keep demands under control.
2. Pace yourself – set goals or priorities
3. Talk problems over.
4. Eat a balanced diet
5. Do appropriate exercises to keep physically fit – (remember to choose a form of exercise that suits and benefits YOU).
6. Keep things in proportion.

4 Resources and demands

Stress often arises as a result of imbalance between the demands made on us by our environment and the resources we can mobilize to deal with these demands. Environmental demands are not only caused by external events; they include the psychological demands made upon us by our own attitudes, state of mind etc, and because of this, it is our perception of the demands and of our own resources which determine (to a great extent) how well we will be able to cope with the situations and how much stress we will experience.

The balance between our resources and the perceived demands being made upon them can be compared to a bank account. At any point, certain “standing orders” will be diminishing the account, (such as the maintenance of one’s job, relationships etc) and determine the amount we have left in the account after these extra withdrawals. In circumstances where we already have to cope with many demands (i.e., our account is already overdrawn), a sudden crisis may be the “last straw” and will result in a high level of stress.

We may think that stress only arises when our resources are less than the demands on us. But the converse can also be true. The important thing is that there is an imbalance.

Resources

- 1. life events
 - 2. physical work
 - 3. skills and experience
 - 4. social support
 - 5. self-image
 - 6. emotional
 - 7. physical
- } well-being

Demands

- A. emotional
- B. financial
- C. work
- D. social
- E. physical
- F. new and strange situations
- G. unmade situations
- H. expectations
- I. crisis
- J. importance of demands
- K. perceived size of job

5. Resources

5.1. Life events:

The events which have occurred in the previous year, and the way we see ourselves as having coped with them, will have taken their toll on our energy, and in most cases will have left a certain residue with which to deal with future demands.

5.2. Physical Health:

The state of our physical health can be contributed to our ability to deal with life events. Being generally “run down” is an obstacle to coping efficiently with even every day demands.

5.3. Skills and experiences:

When faced with a situation, the experiences we have had in dealing with similar events in the past, and the success we had in doing so, will influence how stressful it will be this time. Knowing that we are approaching a task which we know nothing about, may not be equipped to handle, or at which we failed last time, means that we see ourselves as not having the resources to deal with it.

5.4 Social support:

Isolation makes a situation more stressful. If we feel that we have the help, understanding and approval of others in dealing with our problems, we will feel more capable of handling them.

5.6 Self-image:

Another resource is self-confidence, our ability to handle situations, and the belief that we have some measure of control over external events. This is a factor in our overall perception of what resources we have; if we tell ourselves before hand that we will fail, that we can not cope, that we do not possess the natural ability, then our chances of failure is much greater.

5.7. Emotional and physical well-being:

Again, these resources are more a state of mind than objective facts. If we feel that we are in a reasonable physical and mental state, then the things that happen are likely to seem less alarming and less stressful.

5.8 Demands (withdrawal from the account)

‘A, B, C, D, E’ -- These demands are the “standing orders”, the demands of maintaining our lives from day to day. Our resources, combined with how much every day life takes out, determine how much we have left in the account to deal with the more unexpected demands.

F New and strange situations:

This is connected to the “skills and experiences resource”. The fact that we have never been asked to handle a certain situation before can make it more stressful on top of the

ordinary demands of the job itself e.g. a job interview or promotion can be quite an ordeal, but our first interview takes even more out of us as we are not sure what to expect.

G Unmade decisions:

A lot of energy can be spent either in making a decision, or trying to deny that a decision has to be made. In the interval between the choice being presented, and the decision being made (even if it is a decision to do nothing), an enormous amount of stress results.

H Expectations:

This includes our own expectations of ourselves, and also what we feel others expect of us. If, for example, a child is under great pressure from their parents to succeed academically, then an exam will cause more stress. If we approach a task feeling that we should succeed absolutely, then the task will create more stress than if we are prepared to accept an average result. High expectations can result in us “setting ourselves up to fail” by creating unrealistic targets for ourselves.

I Crisis

Having paid all the “standing orders” on the account, it can happen at times that a sudden crisis can create an “overload”. Because the ease with which we can deal with demands depends on our perceived level of resources, which may be seen as a crisis today, might be handled without difficulty tomorrow, and a crisis to one person may be an every day event to another.

J The importance of Demands:

Although each of these demands exist for most people, the importance we as individuals attribute to them can vary according to our own state of mind. It is important to look carefully at each task (e.g passing a promotion board, or sitting an exam) and to ask, “what would be the worse possible result of failing this?” Especially under stress, it is possible to see quite small demands out of perspective, and the feeling that everything hinges on our success, of course causes the task to create more stress than it has to.

K Perceived size of Job:

If a demand is seen as too large to cope with, this creates stress, and the anticipation of failure. If however, it is divided up into sections, each of which can be achieved more successfully. This not only allows us to feel satisfied as each clearly defined target is reached, but also encourages a more optimistic outlook towards the final goal. Think of each section rather like a pizza, tackle each slice one mouth full at a time!

In the ‘bank balance’ analogy, this can be seen as a hire purchase scheme, in which a large payment is divided into smaller, more manageable amounts, in recognition of the fact that our resources are rarely high enough to deal with such a large demand all at once, but can cope with regular less taxing withdrawals.

As we have seen, as long as the perceived resources are equal to, or more than the received demands, we feel that we can cope, but any time when we feel that the withdrawals from the account have begun to outnumber credits, anxiety occurs.

Recommendations:

1. Some anxiety is good for you. Learn to identify your own optimal level and do not be pressurized beyond it.
2. Learn to anticipate anxiety by balancing your demands and resources in advance.
3. Do not withdraw from social support – let people help you.
4. Think positive about your own abilities.
5. Conserve your resources by clarifying your priorities.
6. Reduce demands:
 - a) do not expect too much of yourself
 - b) do not feel you must live up to other's expectations of you
 - c) think twice about how important these tasks are – would it be the end of the world if they did not get done?
 - d) break down your goals to manageable proportions.

How our body responds to demands.

The normal functioning of the body is shut down or 'ignored' to allow it to concentrate on physical action. The blood supply is diverted to the lungs and muscles, which use up oxygen, glucose and fats.

1. Geared up for action:

	Short term advantages:	Long term disadvantages:
Brain Better blood supply	more alert thinking clearly	tension, headaches, migraine
Mood Serious	concentrate better	anxiety, loss of humour
muscles better blood supply	working better	aching and muscle spasm
heart beats strongly	blood pumping out fast	chest pains
circulation system blood pressure rises	good supply of blood to body	risk of permanently raised blood pressure
blood carries increased supply of oxygen, glucose (sugar) and fats.	provides fuel for muscles to generate a surge of energy	risk of permanently raised blood levels of sugars and fats – with possible implications of diabetes and heart disease
lungs breathing quickly	more oxygen to cool body and helps muscles work hard	unpleasant, ‘clammy’ sweating

2. Shut down for action

	Short term advantages	long term advantages
saliva dries up	there is not time for eating	dry mouth 'lump' in throat
stomach decreased blood supply more acids secreted	blood needed elsewhere reduces digestion	heartburn, indigestion and ulcers
bowels and bladder speeded up	part of emptying the bladder ready for action	frequent need to pass urine or defecate
sexual organs decreased blood supply	blood needed elsewhere	lack of sexual interest or response. menstruation disorders (women)
skin sensitive	blood needed elsewhere	itching and rashes

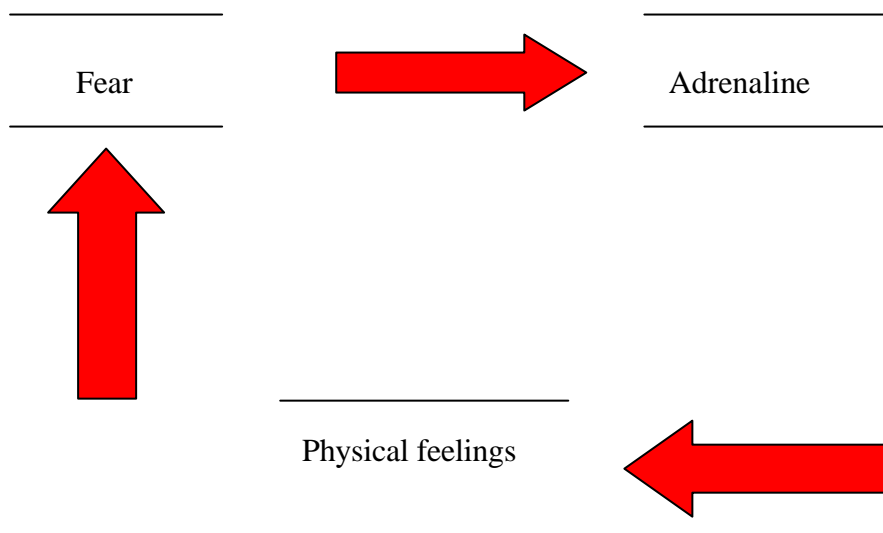
3. About panic

When the balance is wrong, feelings of panic can start.

The focus is then body centered.

It is hard to feel in control of physical sensations and thinking.

The temptation is to run away.



4. Panic develops in stages:

- Stage one - We come across a situation we fear and feel a slight surge of anxiety in our bodies and have panic thoughts.
- Stage two - We begin to feel anxious about becoming anxious.
- Stage three - We see our anxiety getting bigger and bigger and this assists it in getting worse. We are now in the panic spiral, the more panicky we get, the less chance we have of controlling it.

5. The Panic Spiral:

D behaviour

C uncomfortable feelings

B negative / irrational thought

A original fear or stimulus

Thought associated with panic.

1. Anticipation thoughts “What if...”
2. Negative coping/
 avoidance thoughts “I can’t do it!”
 “I must get away!”



Identify these thoughts and try to change your thought processes, this could prevent a full-blown panic attack.

Examples of positive thinking/coping statements:

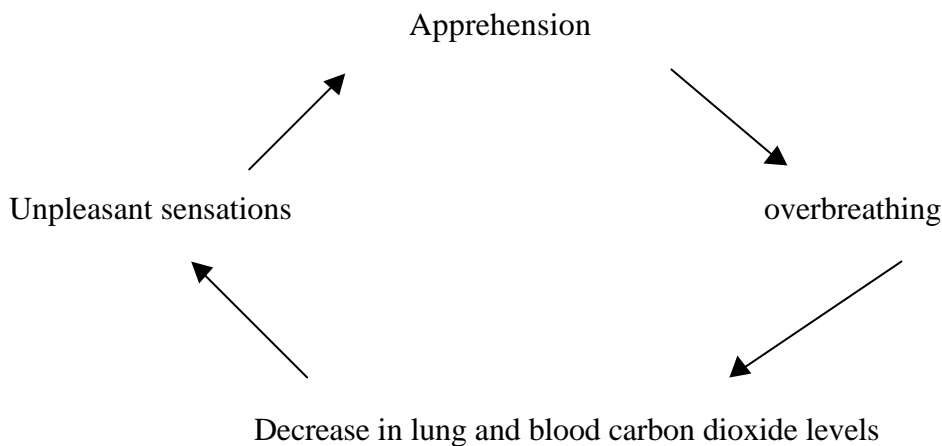
“I’ve no need to hurry, SLOW DOWN!”

“I could do it if I tried, it’s better to try and maybe feel unpleasant than to give up (it will get easier)”

Afterwards do not forget to praise or reward yourself.

6. Coping with Panic attacks

During a panic attack we are extremely likely to breath very fast and /or deeply. This will have the effect of reducing the amount of carbon dioxide we have in our lungs which in turn will create a lot of unpleasant body sensations which are likely to make us more afraid. A vicious circle of fear leading to overbreathing which leads to unpleasant body sensations, e.g fainting, dizziness, tingling, headaches, racing heart, flushes, nausea, chest pain, shakiness.



To stop this very nasty process we have to raise the amount of carbon dioxide in our lungs. We can do this two ways.

- a) If we have a paper bag handy, hold it tightly over the nose and mouth so no air can get to your lungs from outside and breathe the air in the bag for several minutes until you calm down. Cupping your hands over your mouth and nose is just as effective.
- b) If a bag is not handy or it would be embarrassing to use one, (say in public) then we should change our breathing so we breathe in less air in a given period of time. We can do this most easily by slowing down our breathing in small steps. Attempt to breathe in smoothly and slowly and to let the breath out just as slowly. As we slow our breathing down, we are bound to increase the depth of each breath somewhat. However, try to avoid a very big increase in depth because it would undo the good work done by slowing down. The idea is to aim for a smooth, slow regular and fairly shallow breathing.

To sum up, breathe in and out slowly and evenly as you can and avoid any big increase in depth as you do so.

To help ourselves slow down, we can use the following method:

- a) Count whilst breathing. To start off with you say “one thousand” while breathing in and “two thousand” whilst breathing out.

In	out	in	out
“one thousand”	“two thousand”	“one thousand”	“two thousand”

then try taking longer doing it. For example:

In
“one thousand, two thousand”

out
“three thousand, four thousand”

in
“one thousand, two thousand”

out
“three thousand, four thousand”

The feeling of being out of breathe that we sometimes get when feeling anxious is often caused by breathing too much. Taking in less air for a while will often make it go away. It is quite common for individuals to become breathless after overbreathing.

10 rules for coping with panic feelings

Remember

1. The feelings are an exaggeration of the normal reactions to anxiety.
2. They are not harmful or dangerous – just unpleasant.
3. You can stop adding to panic with frightening thoughts.
4. Do not focus on your body right now.
5. Wait, give the fear time to pass, do not fight it or run away from it. Accept it.
6. You can stop adding to the fear with frightening thoughts, and then it starts to fade away.
7. The whole point of practice is learning how to cope with fear, rather than avoiding it. This is an opportunity to make progress.
8. Think about the progress you have made, despite the difficulties, and how good it feels.
9. When you start to feel better, plan what to do next.
10. When you are ready to go on, start of slowly, there is no need to hurry.

7. Reducing demands.

Demands are increased by trying to be ‘perfect’. To reduce demands, try and be aware of your personal ‘should and oughts’. Practice being kind to yourself and nurturing ‘you’ especially on bad days.

There is nothing wrong with such ‘shoulds and oughts’ statements as “I should let them know that I appreciate the favour they did” or “I should be honest with road tax and MOT”.

In cases of being ethically responsibility or common courtesy “shoulds and oughts” can be appropriate. The difficulty arises when we use “I should” or “I must” to pressure ourselves to meet self-imposed expectations that are unreasonably high. Here are some examples:

“I should always be pleased and cheerful to others, despite how I am feeling”
“I should be totally self-reliant”
“I should never get tired or sick”
“I should never feel negative emotions like feeling angry or jealousy”
“I should never be afraid”
“I should never get emotional as this is a sign of weakness”

Such statements lower confidence and ones self esteem.

Try to determine if your “shoulds and oughts” statements are okay. Look at and use the following five criteria to determine whether or not your own “shoulds and oughts” statements are healthy.

1. Is the “**should or ought**” flexible. Does the use of “should or ought” allow for exceptions, e.g. when you have an accident/ major life event. SHOULD or OUGHT you be saying, “I should/ought do all the housework even with a broken leg or if I have just suffered a bereavement”.
2. Is the “**should/ ought**” based on you own experience or is it inherited e.g. from your parents or other family members including partners, without you having ever questioned it.
3. Is the “**should/ought**” realistic – does it take into account all the consequences it’s application might lead to e.g. “I should/ought be all the things to all people! Have you anytime to be yourself.”
4. Is the “**should/ought**” life enhancing – does it acknowledge your needs and feelings or is it life restricting ignoring our needs and feelings.
5. Is the “**should/ought**” based on your need to be liked by those around you.

Remember “**the shoulds/oughts**” is yours. IT CAN BE CHANGED!.

You need to evaluate the appropriate of you “**shoulds/oughts**” statements in the light of this criteria. It may be useful to question and examine the “**shoulds/oughts**” statements. Talking this through with yourself may help.

8. How to reduce demands.

- Don’t be too hard on yourself – try to keep things in proportion.
- Don’t “bottle things up” or sit all night brooding – think realistically about problems, and decide to take some appropriate action. If necessary, find a healthy distraction.
- Don’t regard difficulties as personal failings or failures – they are challenges to improve your ingenuity and stamina.
- Don’t be reluctant to seek medical help if you are worried about your health.

- Consider contacting the Occupational Health Nurse/s Zoe Bolt and Barbara McIvor or the Welfare Adviser Geraldine Malley. Or ring PPC that provides a confidential counselling / support service to all HFRS personnel and their immediate family members free phone 08000 282850.
- Think ahead and try to anticipate how to get round difficulties.
- Get you priorities right – sort out what really matters in your life.
- Stay sober – “drowning your sorrows” will not help you.
- Seek information, help and advice early, even though it may be hard at first.
- Give yourself treats and rewards for positive actions, attitude and thoughts.
- Share you worries with people that are prepared and able to listen, when ever possible.
- There are always people that are willing and able to help, in most situations. Don’t be unwilling to benefit from their experience.
- Remember that you are not alone in your problem – there are many people who have faced similar circumstances, and in time have dealt with them.
- Try to develop a social network or circle of friends.
- Try to become interested in a new activity – brooding on misfortune/crisis/the situation is unhealthy and not productive.

9. **Managing your time.**

1. Which of them do you already use? (please tick)
2. Which do you want to use or find out more about? Put a query (?) by these to remind yourself to follow up on.
3. Add any personal ones that come to mind as you read the list.
4. Remember this is not a test but for you to gain further insight into how you deal with various aspects of your life.

- making lists
- selecting things – prioritize
- delegating
- paying people to do things in the home
- breaking a project down into small, manageable items
- planning daily, weekly, monthly and six monthly.
- Getting up earlier in the morning.
- Remembering what you want to achieve, reviewing and goal setting.
- Folding, not ironing clothes.
- Doing a monthly big food shop
- Getting each family member to be responsible for cleaning/tidying his/her own room.
- Using convenience foods
- Being organised, a place for everything
- Building in breaks and leisure time daily, weekly, monthly yearly.
- Using new technologies
- Looking at a whole day as a series of time slot

- Draining, not drying the dishes
- Batch cooking and freezing
- Not hunting for dirty clothes, just washing that's in the basket
- Living with a dirty car.

You're own ideas:

-
-
-
-

10. Are you getting enough time for yourself?

Time is a precious commodity. Think about how you would spend your time if you had it *just for yourself*. You're not looking here at what you would do for others. (Unless, of course, this is what you would find most relaxing and do not have enough of in your life!) How could you spend your time to make your life more balanced.

1. If I had ten minutes for myself I would
2. If I had half an hour for myself I would
3. If I had one hour for myself I would
4. If I had a day for myself I would.....
5. Now think about how much time you actually have to yourself in an average day or week. Is it:
 - too much?
 - not enough?
 - just right?
6. If you have too much or not enough time for yourself, what ideas can you come up with to change?

11. Coping with the Panic spiral.



D behaviour
fidgety, avoid eye contact,
I won't say anything or
say yes to everything

C feel hot and sweaty/stammer

B everyone will be better than
me if I say something I will
look/be stupid.

A fear of being in a group

A What can you think/do at this stage? .. It's only for an hour/two hours. It is not forever. I can always leave and come back – permissions. I can be honest – share anxiety with the group. Open door/window

.....

.....

.....

B What can you say to yourself at this stage – give an example

.....

.....

C What can you do at this stage?Acknowledge it's my/adrenaline/anxiety.
Switch focus from me to external – it will pass

.....

.....

D What can you do at this stage?..... Take a deep breath. Slow down. Relieve personal pressure. Relaxation technique.....
.....

Fill this in for yourself

11.1 Coping with the panic spiral.

D behaviour

C uncomfortable feelings

B negative/irrational thought

A original fear or stimulus

A what can you think/do at this stage?



.....
.....

B what can you say to yourself at this stage – give an example

.....
.....

C what can you do at this stage?

.....
.....

D what can you do at this stage?

.....
.....

11.2 A plan for coping with anxiety

Help yourself to plan a coping strategy by filling in the following statements:

Physical

1. When you are anxious, which parts of your body seem to be affected. It is easier to remember if you work down from the top of your head to your feet.

2. What techniques are you going to use to relieve these uncomfortable feelings. Think about the techniques to use in different situations.

Behaviour

1. How do you behave when you are anxious e.g. do you avoid situations?

2. What are you doing to change this?

Mental:

1. Think of the thoughts or the ways of thinking that either occur when you are anxious or make you anxious. Write them down below:

2. Think of some thoughts you can use to counter these and write them down below:

General

1. When anxious provoking situations occur in the future, a practical way of dealing with them would be: