



An Interactive Guide for  
**MANAGING STRESS  
AND ANXIETY**



Welcome to the Psych for Life®  
**ANXIETY MODULE**

Throughout the course of the module, you will watch videos on your own and follow along on this interactive guide to learn how to manage anxiety, with science-based activities and tips.

*Developed by Psych for Life® within the ASU Department of Psychology.*

**Anxiety is a normal emotion** that everyone experiences. Sometimes, anxiety can become *intense, painful and distracting*. It's important to manage it, so we can live fully and with confidence.

While you answer questions about your experience with anxiety, remember:

**You are not alone and anxiety doesn't last forever.**



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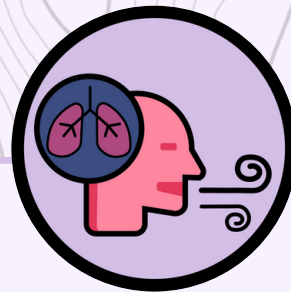
## **TOOLBOX 1:** CALMING THE BODY AND MIND

Being able to control our reactions when we are experiencing anxiety is a powerful tool to managing anxiety.

***In this toolbox, we will learn how:***



Grounding brings us back to the present moment.



Breathing techniques calm our body and mind.

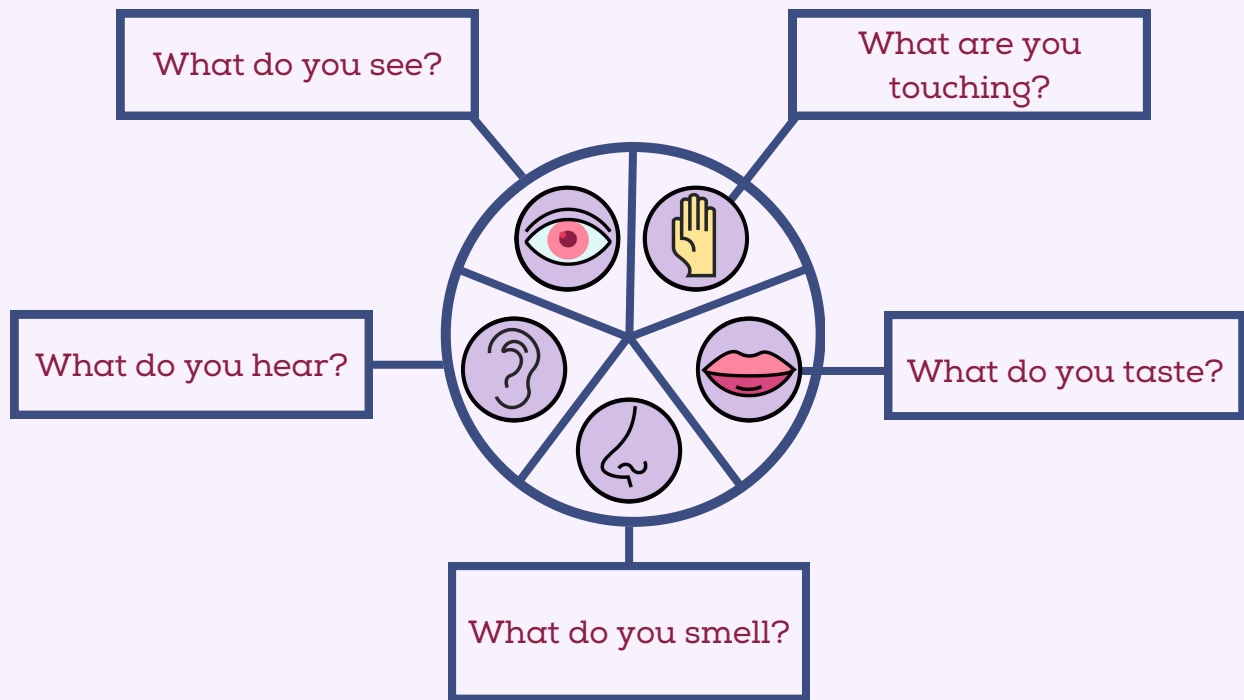




**Mindfulness** can bring us back to the present moment and helps us work with our thoughts, emotions and actions.

### The Five Senses Activity

One way to practice mindfulness is paying attention to the world around you by using all 5 of your senses. Think of your own examples for each of the five senses in the boxes then describe your experience.



**Describe your experience below.**

A large, horizontal, rounded purple bar intended for writing a description of the experience.





## Box Breathing Activity

Use your finger or a pen to trace the box below, starting to breathe in and out to the count of four.



**Mindfulness meditation** helps us focus on how we breathe natural without changing anything.

Notice your breath as you inhale and exhale.



Acknowledge sounds, sensations and thoughts that distract you then return your attention to your breath.



Experiencing intrusive thoughts during meditation is normal. If you have a thought, notice it, then release it by returning your attention to your breath.



**Diaphragmatic breathing** calms our body down.  
We inhale through the nose, hold the air in our belly, and exhale out through the mouth.





## Great work!

Practicing the tools in this toolbox, even when we're not anxious, can really help us regulate our emotions in situations out of our control.

## Key Takeaways:

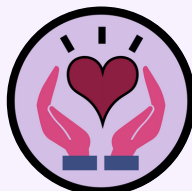


**Change the way breathe** using diaphragmatic breathing. This can help calm our physical reactions.

**Go into situations mindfully.** This can help us manage the situation wisely.



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Please contact us at [hello@psych4life.net](mailto:hello@psych4life.net) with any questions or comments you may have.





## **TOOLBOX 2:** ORGANIZING OUR THOUGHTS

When we are anxious, we have a lot of thoughts going through our head - some are useful, others only make things worse!

***In this toolbox, we will learn how to:***



Write down our thoughts and emotions.

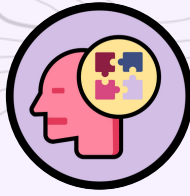


Decide which thoughts need to be dealt with now.



Replace unhelpful thoughts with better options.





Write out your thoughts and emotions.



**1. Describe the situation you are most worried about.**

I feel most anxious about:

Large purple rounded rectangular box for writing the answer to question 1.



**2. How does this situation make you feel?**

- Embarrassed
- Overwhelmed
- On edge
- Worried
- Afraid
- Irritated
- Other:



**3. What thoughts are going through your head?**

Write these all out, so we can address them one at a time.

For example, if you are nervous about a big presentation, you may be thinking:  
*"What if I miss the event? What if I forget the slides? What if I lose my job!"*

Large purple rounded rectangular box for writing the answer to question 3.





Which thoughts do you need to address right now?

Looking at your worries above, are there any that **don't** need to be dealt with right now? **Write those below:**

A large, empty, rounded purple rectangular box for writing.

If a situation doesn't need immediate attention, **having a designated time** to revisit these thoughts can give us a sense of control.

**Pick a time and place to revisit less-urgent thoughts.**



Time

*Ex: After Dinner*

An empty, rounded light green rectangular box for writing a time.



Place

*Ex: The Kitchen Table*

An empty, rounded light green rectangular box for writing a place.

Once you know which thoughts you should deal with now, use the four questions on the next page to challenge the "thought chain."





## Challenge the thought chain.

The thoughts running through our heads may be different worries, all competing for our attention, or they more form a connected “thought change.”



**Separate worries** compete for our attention. We’ll address these one at a time.



In “**thought chain**,” one worry leads to another. For these, we’ll look at each “link” in the chain.

These four questions will help us “break the thought chain:”



### How likely is it?

We often worry about things that may never happen!



### Are there alternative outcomes?

This reminds us no one outcome is inevitable.



### How have I dealt with this in the past?

This reminds us that we have survived similar situations!



### In the worst case, what will I do?

This reminds us that we will still have some control.

On the next page, we’ll show you how to use each question!







Example:

<b>First, write each link in the chain.</b>	<b>For each link, ask: How likely is this?</b>	<b>Are there alternatives?</b>	<b>How have I dealt with this in the past?</b>
What if I miss my presentation?	<input type="checkbox"/> Very likely. <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat likely. <input type="checkbox"/> Not very likely.	I will probably get there early, and things will go fine.	Last time I gave a presentation, I was on time.
↓ And then I get fired?!?	<input type="checkbox"/> Very likely. <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat likely. <input type="checkbox"/> Not very likely.	If I miss the presentation, my coworker could present my slides.	Last time I made a mistake at work, my team worked together to improve.
↓ If I get fired, I can look for a new job.		If the worst case happens, what then?"	



Now you try it!

<b>First, write each link in the chain.</b>	<b>For each link, ask: How likely is this?</b>	<b>Are there alternatives?</b>	<b>How have I dealt with this in the past?</b>
	<input type="checkbox"/> Very likely. <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat likely. <input type="checkbox"/> Not very likely.		
↓	<input type="checkbox"/> Very likely. <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat likely. <input type="checkbox"/> Not very likely.		
↓	<input type="checkbox"/> Very likely. <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat likely. <input type="checkbox"/> Not very likely.		
↓		If the worst case happens, what then?"	





## Great work!

Changing the way we think about anxious situations can take some time to master. Stay consistent as possible when practicing this toolbox!

## Key Takeaways:



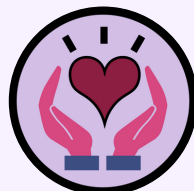
**Write down your thoughts** to sort them out.

Decide which thoughts can be dealt with at a designated worry time, and which to deal with now.



**Ask:** Is it likely? Are there alternatives? What have I done in the past? How will I handle the worst case?

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## **TOOLBOX 3:** BREAKING PATTERNS OF AVOIDANCE

Instead of escaping uncomfortable feelings, we need to build up our ability to face our fears by taking manageable but still challenging steps.

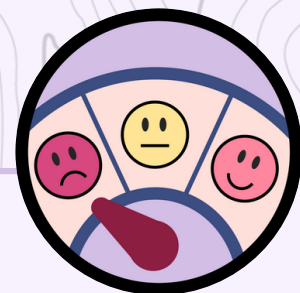
***In this toolbox, we will learn how to:***



Break down anxiety-provoking situations.



Practice being in anxiety provoking situations.



Monitor our progress.





## Breaking down anxiety-provoking situations using the rating scale.

### Example:

Giving a public speech.

10

**Your own anxiety-provoking situation:**

Unbearable

Giving a speech to 6-7 co-workers in a formal setting.

9

**Two manageable versions to practice:**

Manageable

8

Giving a speech to 1-3 co-workers in a private setting.

7

6

5

Giving the speech to 1 close friend in the living room.

4

**Two easy versions to get you started:**

Peaceful

3

2

Rehearsing the speech in the mirror.

1

0





Practice being in anxiety provoking situations.

**Pick one situation you broke down from the previous page and answer the following questions.**

**1. Pick a time, place and a companion with whom you will approach this situation.**



**Time**



**Place**



**Company**

**2. Rate your anxiety to monitor your progress with how anxious you are feeling.**

	Peaceful			Uncomfortable but manageable					Unbearable		
<b>Rate your anxiety:</b>	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Before the situation:</b>	<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"/>
<b>After the situation:</b>	<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"/>

If you rated your anxiety higher (2+) than you started, remember your emotions may be heightened after a distressing activity. You can try to:

- Keep approaching the situation, if you can manage your emotions.
- Break down the situation even more!
  - Understanding what you can manage is important to develop and adjust your plan of action





## Great work!

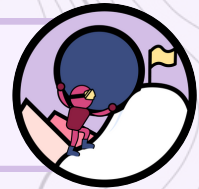
Facing your fears is very challenging. And the more you do it, you will have more courage to face it again.

## Key Takeaways:



Exposure is one of the most powerful tools that helps us gradually overcome our intense anxious feelings.

What we resist persists!



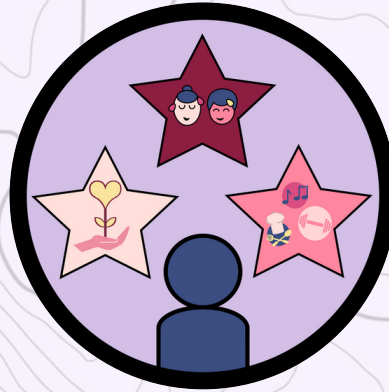
Praise even the smallest steps you are taking.

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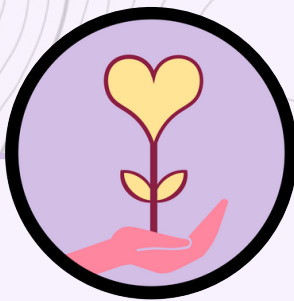




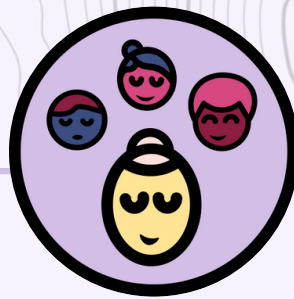
## TOOLBOX 4: BUILDING POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

When we build positive experiences into our lives, we create resources that keep us grounded in our beliefs and interests.

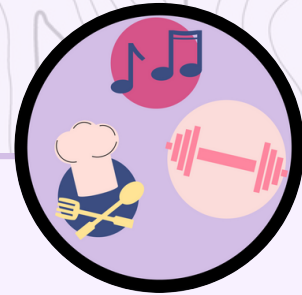
### ***Resources in this toolbox:***



Creating habits  
from our values



Having social  
Connections



Planning pleasant  
events



Setting your **intention journal** can help us stay consistent with our values which gives us a sense of meaning and purpose.

Feel free to use this page template as a journal!



Example

Day:	When you wake up: Write down your intentions for today.	Before bed: Describe ways you followed your intentions and values.
Monday, Jan. 1	I'm worried about money, so I'm only going to buy things I really need.	I bought a shirt I might not need, but I also stopped myself from buying a hat.

Now you try it!





**Connecting with people** we trust and care about to share our experiences can go along way.



**1. List a few people you feel comfortable talking with.**

*Doing an anxiety-provoking task with someone you know and talking about it afterwards with each other is also a great way to release persistent feelings!*



Planning pleasant events give us something **to look forward to** and help us stay in the present moment **while** we engage in those events.

**1. Select the activities you find enjoyable and calming:**

Read

Play video games

Go on a walk

Watch movies or shows

Create art and crafts

Cook or bake

Play music

Exercise

Travel

Other:

**2. Pick one of the above activities to do for today's pleasant event:**





**3. Pick a time and place for your pleasant event, and who you are going with if you invite friends and/or family.**



**Time**



**Place**



**Company**

Another way to utilize comforting activities is to **pair it** with an anxiety provoking situation *if appropriate*.

**1. Write down an anxiety-provoking situation.**

*This can be from what you prioritized from the assessment workbook, toolbox 3 workbook or a different situation.*

**2. Pick a comforting activity to do while doing the situation.**



Listen to music.

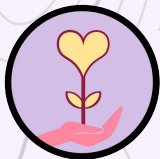


Practice grounding techniques.



Talk to someone on the phone.

Other:



Creating habits that **practice your values** brings back a sense of purpose and control into our lives.

**1. Pick a value to focus on.**

Practicing self-care

Being creative

Spirituality

Helping Society

Spending time with friends and family.

Other:

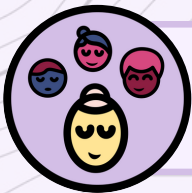




## Great work!

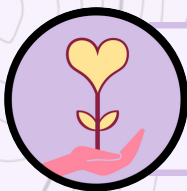
Remember these resources when you are feeling anxious, especially when you are anxious about something that doesn't need your attention yet.

## Key Takeaways:



Have a list of people you can talk to when you are anxious about a current or future situation.

Planning a fun activity or pairing it with an anxiety-provoking situation can help you build positive experiences.



Acting on your values is a great way to focus on what's truly important to you.

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## Having an anxious moment?

Use this worksheet to assess and relieve anxious feelings.

### 1. Rate your current level of anxiety.

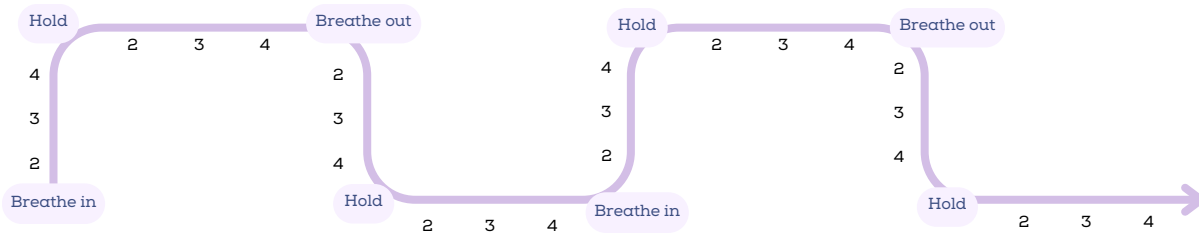
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

The first step to managing anxiety is being able to recognize it!

### 2. Take a deep breath

Use your finger or a pen to trace the line below while breathing in and out to the count of four.



### 3. Write one thing you can:

See

Hear

Touch

Smell

Taste

### 4. Does the situation have to be dealt with right now?

Yes

- Do (more) deep breathing
- Chat with a friend
- Drink cold water

No

Set aside time to worry about this situation. See page X for ideas!

### 5. What's one step you could take to help yourself navigate this moment?

Reframe negative thoughts

Page X

Pair a pleasant activity with the stressful situation

Page X

Break down the situation into something more manageable

Page X

Focus on value that's important to you

Page X

Plan a pleasant activity

Page X

Connect with someone you trust and care about

Page X