

Introduction to Anxiety

Anxiety is the body's response to situations that are interpreted as threatening. Without any anxiety, you would probably make bad decisions, such as driving too fast on the highway, or not paying your bills. However, too much anxiety can lead to avoidance or unpleasant physical, emotional, and cognitive symptoms.

What are three things that trigger your anxiety?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are three physical symptoms that you experience when you feel anxious?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are three thoughts you tend to have when you feel anxious?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are three things you do to cope when you are anxious?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Challenging Anxious Thoughts

Anxiety can be a healthy emotion—it forces us to focus on our problems, and work hard to solve them. But sometimes, anxiety grows out of control, and does just the opposite. It *cripples* our ability to solve problems. When this happens, **irrational thoughts** often play a role.

In this exercise, we will practice catching our irrational thoughts, and replacing them with rational alternatives. With enough practice, this will become a natural process that can help you manage anxiety.

Describe a common situation that triggers your anxiety:

example: "giving a speech in front of a crowd" or "driving in rush hour traffic"

Anxiety distorts our thinking by causing us to **overestimate the likelihood of something going wrong**, and **imagine the potential consequences as worse than they really are**. Sometimes, just taking a moment to think about these facts can help us recognize our irrational thoughts.

Imagine you are faced with the anxiety-producing situation from above. Describe the...

Worst outcome:
Best outcome:
Likely outcome:

Imagine the worst outcome comes true. Would it still matter...

1 week from now:
1 month from now:
1 year from now:

Usually, anxious thoughts focus on the worst possible outcomes, even when they aren't likely. For example, a person who is nervous about giving a speech might think: *"I am going to forget everything and embarrass myself, and I'll never live it down"*.

As an outside observer, we know that an alternate, more rational thought might be: *"My speech might only be OK, but if I do mess up, everyone will forget about it soon enough"*.

Using your own "worst outcome" and "likely outcome" from above, describe your...

Irrational thought:
Rational thought:

Countering Anxiety

Come up with a rational counterstatement for each of the following thoughts:

Anxiety-Producing Thought	Rational Counterstatement
I can't go to the mall with my hair like this—everyone will notice me.	Example: My hair looks a little messy, but everyone will be too occupied with other things to notice. Even if they do notice, I doubt they would care.
I know I won't be able to finish my work on time.	
I can't face my boss. She's going to yell at me.	

Next, think of three examples of anxiety-producing thoughts and rational counterstatements from your own life:

Anxiety-Producing Thought	Rational Counterstatement

WHAT HAVE I GIVEN UP FOR ANXIETY THIS WEEK?

Life Enhancement Exercise Record Form

The purpose of completing this exercise and record form is to let you examine on a daily basis how costly managing your anxiety is for you. What are you giving up in order to manage, reduce, and avoid anxiety? What opportunities to do things that you like or that matter to you are you trading in to control and manage anxiety? What are you missing out on?

In the first (left) column, record the situation or event that triggered your anxiety, concerns, or worries. In the second column, write down your anxiety, bodily sensations, thoughts, concerns, or worries. In the third column, record what you actually ended up doing to manage your anxiety. In the fourth column, record what effect your efforts to control or reduce your anxiety had on you. For instance, how did you feel afterward? In the fifth (right) column, write down the consequences and costs associated with your efforts to manage your anxiety. What did you give up or miss out on?

Situation/Event	Anxiety/Concern	Anxiety Control Behavior	Effect on You	Costs
Example: was invited to go out with some friends	Example: was afraid of having a panic attack	Example: stayed at home and watched TV	Example: felt lonely, sad, and angry with myself for being so weak	Example: lost out on a good time with my friends; missed an opportunity to deepen friendships