Anxiety and Stress

NCGE / NEPS

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Acmhainní don Iar-Bhunscoil
Resources for Post Primary

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Introduction

Anxiety is a **normal and healthy reaction** to a stressful situation.
All teenagers experience some amount of anxiety at times and it is a **very common** presenting issue among students in school.

Stress **affects everyone in different ways**.
Some stress can be **positive as** it makes students **more alert** and helps them to **perform better**. It can also help them **deal with tense or challenging situations** like starting post primary education, taking examinations, competing in sporting events, public speaking, going on a date etc.

However, **stress becomes distress** when it is **not short lived** and when the young person is **worried and anxious a lot of the time**.
It is also a problem when there is **no obvious reason** for them to feel anxious or stressed.

The most **important messages** that guidance counsellors and teachers can give to students is that:

- it is **ok and normal** to feel anxious and stressed
- this is something they **can cope with**
- it **helps to talk** about how they are feeling
- there are **many techniques** to deal with anxiety and stress
- there is always **additional support** available

Causes of Anxiety

There are many things that **cause anxiety. Anxiety is individual** i.e. what causes one-person anxiety may not affect another.

You should be concerned when the anxiety that a student is experiencing is **impacting significantly** on their day to day functioning or if they are school refusing or experiencing **Panic Attacks**.
Panic Attacks can be very frightening for students and also for teachers who are with the student when they occur. Additional seperate resources on Panic Attacks can be accessed via the 'further resources' link below.

*The **School Refusal Good Practice Guide for Schools** is also a useful resource if a student is school refusing.*

Symptoms of Anxiety

Anxiety **affects people in different ways**. It can affect the way people **feel** (physical symptoms), **think** (mental symptoms) and **behave** (behavioural symptoms).
See Anxiety resources at the end of this page for further details. Being familiar with these symptoms is important, as it is key for identifying anxious students and aiding them to reduce symptoms.

How to Help a Student to Reduce their Anxious Feelings

There is **no single technique** to manage anxiety. However, there are several techniques that when used together will reduce anxiety and its symptoms. **See the Anxiety resources below (again) for further details.**

Practicing relaxation creates the opposite effects to stress and anxiety. There are many **relaxation techniques** and different things work for different people. Teachers can introduce relaxation practices into their classes and encourage the students to continue to practise these at home. The resource Relaxation Techniques available at the link below provides several different practices that can be distributed to all staff. There are lots of free downloadable Mindfulness and Relaxation apps which can be highlighted and used by teachers. They can also be highlighted on the school website, school newsletter, noticeboards, at parent evenings etc.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is very effective in helping people manage anxiety. (More information on CBT can be found from a number of websites, including the HSE HERE)

Schools can contact www.HealthPromotion.ie for printed poster and postcard packs advertising the Little Things campaign, which was designed to remind us of the little things that make a big difference to how we feel.

Individual Support

Students experiencing anxiety or stress should be encouraged to talk to the **Guidance Counsellor** for **short term extra support**.

If they are reluctant to do this or if they need input from a more specialised service, encourage them to **visit their GP** who can refer them to CAMHS or another relevant service.

Anxiety and Stress - Information for Teachers/Guidance Counsellors

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a normal and healthy reaction to a stressful situation. Feeling anxious is **very common**. All teenagers experience some amount of anxiety at times.

Some anxiety or stress **can be positive** as it makes us more alert and helps us perform better. It can help us **deal with tense or challenging situations.** Young people often feel anxious when they are starting a new school, sitting an exam, competing in sporting events, public speaking, meeting new people, going on a date etc.

Remember. It is okay if your students experience some anxiety. You can reassure them that **anxiety is normal** and something they can cope with. Let them know that what they are feeling is okay and it is helpful to talk about how they are feeling.

Anxiety is **only healthy and helpful** if it is **short lived**. It is a problem when the young person is worried and anxious a lot of the time. It is also a **problem** when there is **no obvious reason** for them to feel anxious or stressed.

Symptoms of Anxiety

Anxiety **affects people in different ways**. It can affect the way people feel (Physical Symptoms), think (Mental Symptoms) and behave (Behavioural Symptoms).

You should be concerned when the anxiety that a student is experiencing is **impacting significantly** on their day to day functioning as follows:

- Abseentism
- Incomplete homework and deterioration in schoolwork
- Tiredness and low energy
- Demotivated and negative
- Avoiding tasks
- Withdraw from friends, school, work, sports or other things that they usually enjoy
- Constantly seeking reassurance but coaxing or reassurance having no effect
- Keyed up, over-sensitive and irritable
- They have unexplained outbursts
- Frequent trips to the toilet

- Restless and difficulty concentrating in class
- Difficulty making decisions
- Forgetfulness
- Excessive worrying or anxiety about insignificant situations
- Lack of care about their personal appearance

In these instances, anxiety is **not protecting them**, but rather **preventing them** from fully participating in typical activities of daily life-school, friendships, academic performance.

An anxious student may complain about the following:

- Racing heart
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Tingling sensation, pins and needs (particularly in hands)
- Blurred vision
- Sound distortion
- Feeling nauseous
- Dry mouth, difficulty swallowing
- Sweating or trembling
- Headaches
- Skin rashes or flare ups
- Butterflies in stomach
- Chest/stomach pains
- Loss of appetite

Causes of Anxiety

There are many things that **cause anxiety. Anxiety is individual** i.e. what causes one-person anxiety may not affect another.

How to Help a Student to Reduce their Anxious Feelings

There is **no single technique** to manage anxiety. However, there are several techniques that when used together will reduce anxiety. Remember change takes time. Be prepared for ups and downs.

Remember the Basics!

- Encourage the student to talk to friends, family, the Guidance Counsellor, or teachers about how they are feeling.
- Encourage them to get enough sleep by leaving their phone/laptop outside their bedroom; avoiding caffeine and sugar before sleeping; avoiding long weekend lie-ins. A minimum of 8 to 9 hours sleep on school nights is recommended for teens
- Explain to them that what they eat or drink can impact on how they feel. Avoid caffeine and energy drinks as they can increase anxious feelings. Avoid high sugar content foods as they may experience a sugar crash
- Remind them that exercising will help them to release tension. It also causes the brain to release serotonin which is a hormone that can improve your mood. It also will help them to sleep better
- Explain to them that smoking, drinking, or taking drugs are often used as a coping mechanism for anxiety but they in fact can make it worse.

Identify the Triggers

Try to encourage them to identify the triggers for their anxiety. By keeping a log of the following:

- *When and where do they feel anxious?*
- *What makes the feelings worse?*
- *What helps reduce the feelings?*

Positive Self-Talk

As we go about our day, we say things to ourselves in our heads about the things that we or others do. This is called self-talk. We choose what we say to ourselves. It is likely that he/she is engaging in **negative self-talk**. When we are anxious, we engage in faulty and irrational thinking which affects the way we feel and behave.

Writing down their thoughts can be a starting point in identifying the negative thoughts. The next step is to **challenge these negative thoughts** by asking **"Is this really true?"** and the last step is to **replace these negative thoughts with positive, more reassuring ones.**

Examples of Positive Thoughts are:

- I am unique, I can be myself

- I can try harder instead of giving up
- I do not have to be perfect. I can just try my best
- I have done this before; I know I can do it again
- I am not a fortune teller; I do not know what they are thinking

In class you can encouarge the student to use this phrase **"Is this really true?"** to challenge their negative thinking. You can then encourage them to replace it with a more **realistic or positive** thought. You can encourage them to start using the 'Thoughts Log' available later in this resource.

Practicing relaxation

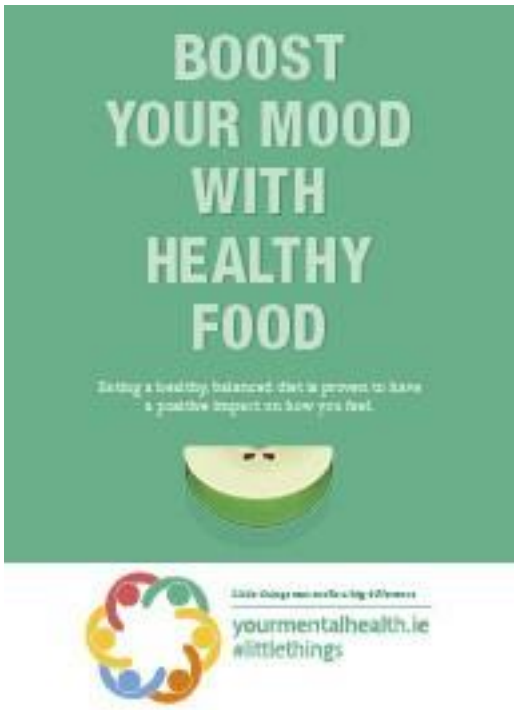
Practicing relaxation creates the opposite effects to stress and anxiety. It lowers the heart rate, reduces blood pressure and the sweat gland and lowers arousal. There are many **relaxation techniques** and different things work for different people. You can introduce some of these practices in your classes, for example starting each class with a 5-minute relaxation, mindfulness exercise etc. Then encouraging the students to continue to practise these at home. Remind them that there are lots of free downloadable Mindfulness and Relaxation apps) and there are lots of classes running in local communities.

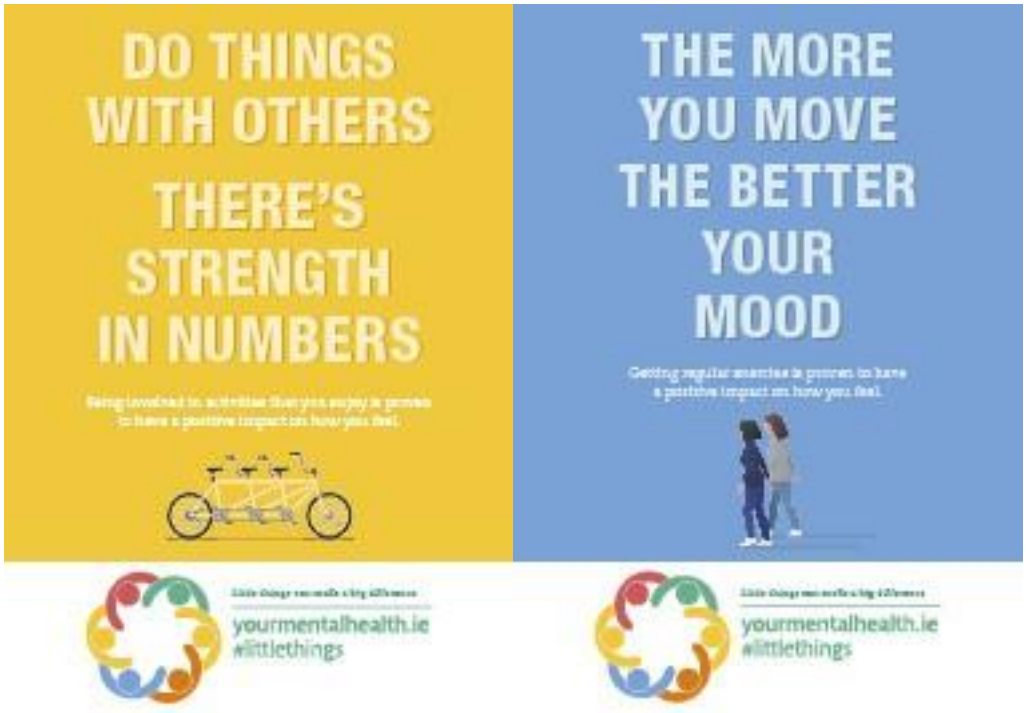
- Yoga
- Pilates
- Meditation
- Mindfulness
- Muscular relaxation
- Visualization
- Body Focus
- Deep Breathing Exercises

Remember the Little Things

Highlight the Little Things campaign to your classes. This was designed to remind us of the little things that make a big difference to how we feel. It is the little things that can help lift your mood. See below as well as www.HealthPromotion.ie for printed poster and postcard packs that you can display in your classroom.


8 HOURS
SLEEP
MAKE
THE OTHER
16 EASIER
yourmentalhealth.ie
#littlethings
PROBLEMS
FEEL
SMALLER
WHEN YOU
SHARE
THEM
yourmentalhealth.ie
#littlethings


BOOST
YOUR MOOD
WITH
HEALTHY
FOOD
yourmentalhealth.ie
#littlethings



Additional Support

Encourage them to talk to the **Guidance Counsellor** for **short term extra support**.

If they are reluctant to do this, encourage them to **visit their GP** who can support them or refer them on. **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)** is very effective in helping people manage anxiety.

See also NEPS Handout - **Understanding and Coping with Anxiety- Strategies for Students and Teachers**

Anxiety and Stress - Information for Parents

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a normal and healthy reaction to a stressful situation. Feeling anxious is **very common**. All teenagers experience some amount of anxiety at times.

Some anxiety or stress **can be positive** as it makes us more alert and helps us perform better. It can help us **deal with tense or challenging situations.** Young people often feel anxious when they are starting a new school, sitting an exam, competing in sporting events, public speaking, meeting new people, going on a date etc.

Remember. It is okay if your son/daughter experiences some anxiety. You can reassure them that **anxiety is normal** and something they can cope with. Let them know that what they are feeling is okay and it is helpful to talk about how they are feeling.

Anxiety is **only healthy and helpful** if it is **short lived**. It is a problem when your son/daughter is worried and anxious a lot of the time. It is also a **problem** when there is **no obvious reason** for them to feel anxious or stressed.

You should be concerned when the anxiety that your son/daughter is experiencing is **impacting significantly** on their day to day functioning as follows:

- they are too worried or anxious about **insignificant situations**
- they are feeling constantly **keyed up**
- when your coaxing or reassurance have no effect
- they are over-sensitive and irritable
- they have unexplained outbursts
- they are restless and cannot concentrate
- they are preoccupied and obsessed about a particular issue
- they withdraw from friends, family, school, work, sports or other things that they usually enjoy
- their sleep is disturbed sleep – either not getting enough or sleeping too much
- they are eating less than normal or overeating
- they do not care about their personal appearance or personal responsibilities
- their schoolwork has deteriorated

In these instances, anxiety is **not protecting them**, but rather **preventing them** from fully participating in typical activities of daily life-school, friendships, academic performance.

Causes of Anxiety

There are many things that **cause anxiety. Anxiety is individual** i.e. what causes one-person anxiety may not affect another.

Symptoms of Anxiety

Anxiety **affects people in different ways**. It can affect the way people feel (Physical Symptoms), think (Mental Symptoms) and behave (Behavioural Symptoms).

The Physical Symptoms of anxiety **can be very frightening**. People often worry that there is something physically wrong with them.

This worry increases the anxiety and causes symptoms like the following to worsen:

Physical Symptoms

- Racing heart
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Tingling sensation, pins and needs (particularly in hands)
- Blurred vision
- Sound distortion
- Nausea
- Dry mouth, difficulty swallowing
- Sweating or trembling
- Headaches
- Diarrhoea
- Skin rashes or flare ups
- Butterflies in stomach
- Chest/stomach pains
- Loss of appetite

Behavioural Symptoms

- Avoiding places
- Avoiding people and social situations
- Constantly seeking reassurance
- Excessive drinking/smoking/eating
- Difficulty sleeping/nightmares
- Increased irritability

Mental Symptoms

- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty making decisions
- Forgetfulness
- Distorted or irrational thoughts
- Excessive worrying
- Thinking negatively

If your son/daughter experiences some of the above for a couple of weeks or longer, it is important that you act. Although it will not happen overnight, your son/daughter can learn to manage and reduce their anxiety.

How to Help Someone to Reduce their Anxious Feelings

There is **no single technique** to manage anxiety. However, there are several techniques that when used together will reduce anxiety. Remember change takes time. Be prepared for ups and downs.

Remember the Basics!

- Encourage your son/daughter to talk to friends, family, the Guidance Counsellor, or teachers about how they are feeling
- Encourage them to get enough sleep by leaving their phone/laptop outside their bedroom; avoiding caffeine and sugar before sleeping; avoiding long weekend lie-ins. A minimum of 8 to 9 hours sleep on school nights is recommended for teens
- Explain to them that what they eat or drink can impact on how they feel. Avoid caffeine and energy drinks as they can increase anxious feelings. Avoid high sugar content foods as they may experience a sugar crash
- Remind them that exercising will help them to release tension. It also causes the brain to release serotonin which is a hormone that can improve mood. It also will help them to sleep better
- Explain to them that smoking, drinking, or taking drugs are often used as a coping mechanism for anxiety but they in fact can make it worse.

Identify the Triggers

Try to encourage them to identify the triggers for their anxiety. By keeping a log of the following:

- *When and where do you feel anxious?*
- *What makes the feelings worse?*
- *What helps reduce the feelings?*

Positive Self-Talk

As we go about our day, we say things to ourselves in our heads about the things that we or others do. This is called self-talk. We choose what we say to ourselves. It is likely that he/she is engaging in **negative self-talk**. When we are anxious, we engage in faulty and irrational thinking which affects the way we feel and behave.

Writing down their thoughts can be a starting point in identifying the negative thoughts. The next step is to **challenge these negative thoughts** by asking **"Is this really true?"** and the last step is to **replace these negative thoughts with positive, more reassuring ones.**

Examples of positive thoughts are:

- I am unique, I can be myself
- I can try harder instead of giving up
- I do not have to be perfect. I can just try my best
- I have done this before; I know I can do it again
- I am not a fortune teller; I do not know what they are thinking

You can also encourage them to start using the 'Thoughts Log'.

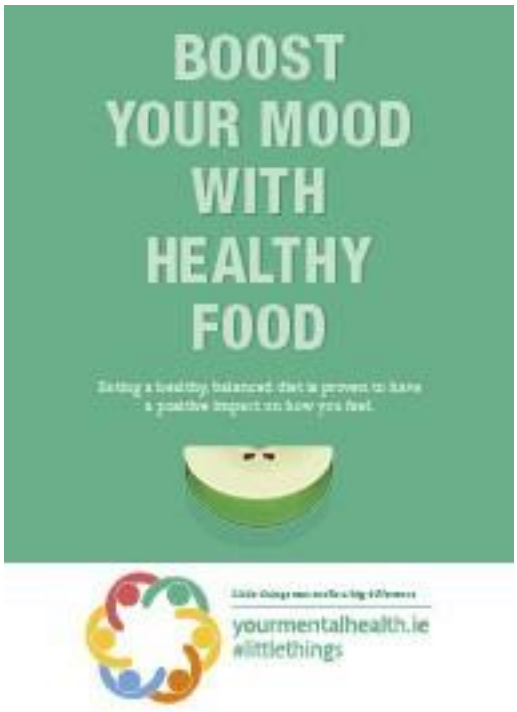
Practicing Relaxation

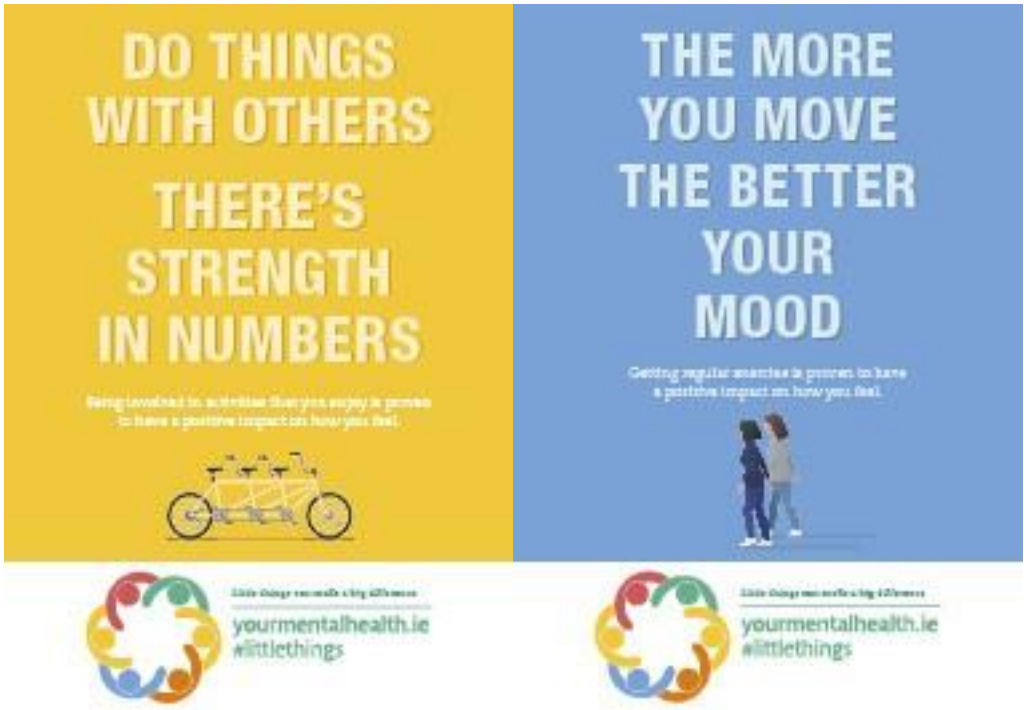
Practicing relaxation creates the opposite effects to stress and anxiety. It lowers the heart rate, reduces blood pressure and the sweat gland and lowers arousal. There are many **relaxation techniques** and different things work for different people. By trying some of the following at home (there are lots of free downloadable Mindfulness and Relaxation apps) or attending a local class, your son/daughter can find out what works for them.

- Yoga
- Pilates
- Meditation
- Mindfulness
- Muscular relaxation
- Visualization
- Body Focus
- Deep Breathing Exercises

Remember the Little Things

The Little Things campaign was designed to remind us of the little things that make a big difference to how we feel. It is the little things that can help lift your mood. See below as well as www.HealthPromotion.ie for printed poster and postcard packs.





Seek Help

If anxiety is impacting on your son/daughter's day-to-day life, they may need **short term extra support.**

- Encourage them to talk to the **Guidance Counsellor** at school.
- Encourage them to **visit their GP** who can support them or refer them on.
- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)** is very effective in helping people manage anxiety.

Anxiety and Stress - Information for Students

What is Anxiety?

Feeling anxious is a **very common** feeling that everyone experiences.

It is a **normal and healthy response** to a stressful situation, a danger or a threat.

Some anxiety or stress **can be positive** as it makes us more alert and helps us perform better. It can help us **deal with tense or challenging situations** like starting at post primary, sitting an exam, competing in sporting events, public speaking, meeting new people, going on a date etc. However, it is only healthy and helpful if it is **short lived.**

Anxiety **becomes a problem** when there is **no obvious reason** why you feel anxious or stressed. It is also a problem if you are worried and anxious a lot of the time.

Causes of Anxiety

Anxiety is individual i.e. what causes you to be anxious may not affect your friends or members of your family in the same way or at all.

Symptoms of Anxiety

Anxiety **affects people in different ways**. It can affect the way you feel (Physical Symptoms), the way you think (Mental Symptoms) and the way you behave (Behavioural Symptoms).

The Physical Symptoms of anxiety **can be very frightening**. People often worry that they are ill or that there is something physically wrong with them. This worry increases the anxiety and causes symptoms like the following to worsen:

Physical Symptoms

- Racing heart
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Tingling sensation, pins and needs (particularly in hands)
- Blurred vision
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- Nausea
- Dry mouth, difficulty swallowing
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- Loss of appetite

Behavioural Symptoms

- Avoiding places
- Avoiding people and social situations
- Constantly seeking reassurance
- Excessive drinking/smoking/eating
- Difficulty sleeping/nightmares
- Increased irritability

Mental Symptoms

- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty making decisions
- Forgetfulness
- Distorted or irrational thoughts
- Excessive worrying
- Thinking negatively

If you experience some of the above for **a couple of weeks or longer** it is important that you act. You do not have to feel like this. Remember **anxiety is very common** and can be reduced. Although it will not happen overnight, you can learn to manage and reduce your anxiety.

Making Anxiety Grow – The Anxiety Monster!

Anxiety is like a hungry monster, the more you feed it, the more it grows! Anxiety can make you avoid doing things that you are afraid of or worried about. When you avoid something, you will feel an immediate sense of relief but the next time you will find it even scarier.
Avoiding things feeds anxiety and lowers your confidence because we build our confidence by seeing ourselves cope with and manage things. The key is to **Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway.**

How to Reduce Anxious Feelings

There is **no single technique** to manage anxiety. However, there are several things that you can do to reduce your anxiety. Remember change takes time. Be prepared for ups and downs.

Remember the Basics!

- **Talk** to friends, family, the Guidance Counsellor, or teachers about how you are feeling
- **Get enough sleep**. Leave your phone/laptop outside the bedroom; avoid caffeine and sugar before sleeping; avoid long weekend lie-ins. A minimum of 8 to 9 hours sleep on school nights is recommended for teens
- **Have a healthy diet**. What you eat or drink can impact on how you feel. Avoid caffeine and energy drinks as they can make you feel more anxious. Avoid high sugar content foods as you may experience a sugar crash
- **Keep active**. Exercising will help you to release tension. It also causes the brain to release serotonin which is a hormone that can improve your mood. It also will help you sleep better
- **Avoid smoking, drinking, or taking drugs.** These are often used as a coping mechanism for anxiety but they in fact can make it worse.

Identify the Triggers

Try to identify the triggers for your anxiety and then try to identify what helps with the feelings. Keep a log of the following:

- *When and where do you feel anxious?*
- *What makes the feelings worse?*
- *What helps reduce the feelings?*

Positive Self-Talk

As we go about our day, we say things to ourselves in our heads about the things that we or others do. This is called self-talk. We choose what we say to ourselves. It is likely that you are engaging

in **negative self-talk**. When we are anxious, we engage in faulty and irrational thinking which affects the way we feel and behave.

Writing down your thoughts can be a starting point in identifying your negative thoughts. The next step is to **challenge these negative thoughts** by asking **"Is this really true?"** and the last step is to **replace these negative thoughts with positive, more reassuring ones.** See Thoughts Log.

Examples of positive thoughts:

- I am unique, I can be myself
- I can try harder instead of giving up
- I do not have to be perfect. I can just try my best
- I have done this before; I know I can do it again
- I am not a fortune teller; I do not know what they are thinking

Relaxation Techniques

There are many **relaxation techniques** and different things work for different people. **Practicing relaxation** creates the opposite effects to stress and anxiety. It lowers the heart rate, reduces blood pressure and the sweat gland and lowers arousal. There are many **relaxation techniques** and different things work for different people. By trying some of the following at home (there are lots of free downloadable Mindfulness and Relaxation apps) or attending a local class, you can find what works for you.

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Remember the Little Things

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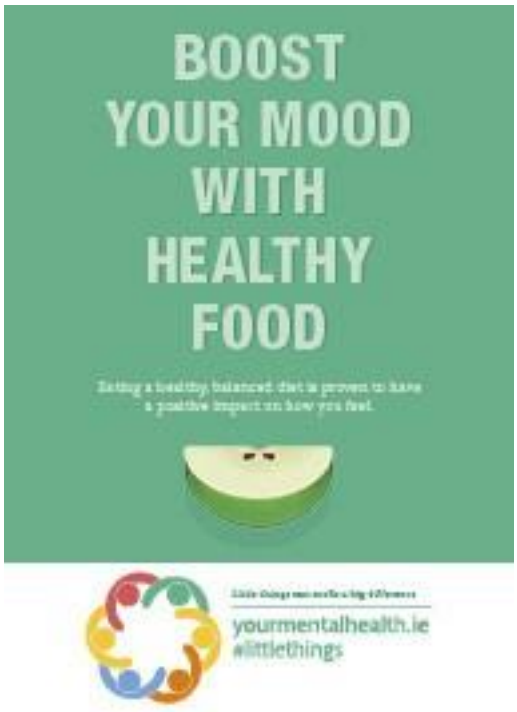

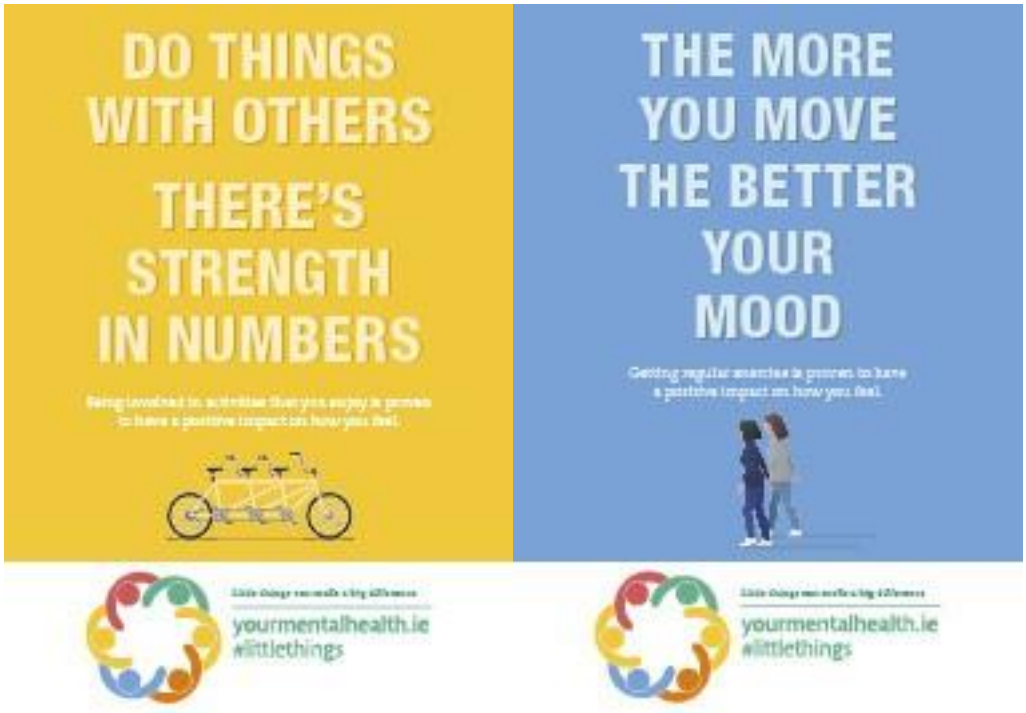

Distraction

It may help to **stop thinking** about how you are feeling and distract yourself. **Focus on what is going on around you** – for example if you are in a car, walking etc. and feeling anxious **count** how many blue cars, you see or how many people wearing red etc.

Keep active - Go for walks, do sports, cycle.

Engage the mind in **mental games** e.g. spell words, count backwards, say the words of a song.

Take Control of your Worries

Remind yourself that although worrying is normal, it is pointless. Instead of wasting your time worrying, **take 10 minutes to write** down everything you are worried about. Your worries will seem less scary when they are written down and you will not have to think about them for a while. If you start worrying again, check if what you are worrying about is already written down. If it is not, jot it down. Alternatively, if a worry comes into your mind, do not fight it, rather **Notice it, Name it** ("I am worrying about X") and **Let it go**. By doing this you are refusing to give power to your worries. You will need to practice this.

Problem-Solving

This can help to reduce worries and alleviate stress.

1. Write down what the problem is
2. Think of all the possible solutions to the problem
3. Look at the pros and cons of each solution
4. Pick the solution that is best and try it
5. After implementing it, ask yourself *Did it work*?
6. If it did not move on to the next solution.

Where Can You Get Support

If anxiety is impacting on your day-to-day life, you may need **short term extra support.**

- Talk to your friends and family

And/Or

- Talk to the **Guidance Counsellor** at school

And/Or

- Talk to **your GP** who can support you or refer you on for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) which is very effective in helping people manage anxiety

And/Or

- See: www.spunout.ie; www.youth.ie; www.reachout.com.au

And/Or

- Download a Mindfulness and/or Relaxation App.

Understanding and Coping with Anxiety:
Strategies for Students and Teachers

The following information from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) has been developed by educational psychologists and is based on current knowledge in this area. It is intended as a guide only. Not all the advice here may apply to any one student or situation. Teachers and parents may wish to identify the strategies that will work best for them.

General tips for teachers to support the student

• Promote self-esteem by offering praise for small accomplishments and rewarding participation even if the student gives a wrong answer.

• In your interactions with the student, speak softly and calmly.

• Help the student confront feared situations with gentle encouragement.

• Make the child's world as reliable and predictable as possible. "Flagging" events in advance can help minimise any anxieties or worries a child might have. Try to give detail about what to expect before events e.g. a trip to the dentist, a visit to a relative, a test/exam, an excursion, etc.

• Create an atmosphere where the child/young person can talk, ask questions and express feelings. The child/young person may ask the same question on several occasions in their struggle to make sense of a situation. Insofar as possible, try to keep your wording as similar as possible on each occasion and try to use examples from the child's/young person's own experience for illustrative examples to explain the current situation, feeling etc.

• Be as consistent as you possible can. Where children/young people tend towards anxiety, the consistency of routines becomes particularly important. Try to stick to any agreements made with the child/young person. Where agreements cannot be followed through on, try to give the child/young person advance warning. Avoid situations where the child/young person is left uncertain about what will happen.

• Provide activities which promote social and emotional competence and coping skills e.g. giving appropriate responsibility, listening actively (eyecontact, paraphrasing), eliciting and respecting their opinion, acknowledging feelings such as those of anxiety and working together towards solutions to decrease stress and worry (what would help?).

• Avoid describing the child/young person as "anxious" or a "worrier" to others when he"/she is around as this may contribute to this being incorporated into the self-concept. Focus instead on successes.

• Set reasonable expectations that are manageable for the child/young person according to his/ her abilities. Be specific in your praise, constructive and supportive in your suggestions for the future.

Anxiety Management Strategies

Overview

There are times when we all feel worried, anxious, uptight or stressed. Often there is a reason. Usually you feel better once you have faced the worry. At other times, these uncomfortable feelings seem very strong, come often and seem to last a long time. You may not be able to find a clear reason so it may seem hard to know what is making you feel anxious. At these times it may be useful to learn how you can **beat your anxiety**. There is **no one way** of controlling your anxious feelings. **Different methods** may be useful at different times. It is important to find **what works for you.**

1. Positive Self-talk

As we go about our day at school or home, we say things to ourselves in our heads about the things that we or others do. This is called self-talk. You can choose what you say to yourself. You can give yourself positive or reassuring messages to replace any unhelpful ones.

Examples of positive self-talk:

- I can try my best.
- I am unique, I can be myself.
- I can try harder instead of giving up.
- Thoughts come and go. If they are unhelpful, I can choose to let them go.
- I do not have to be perfect. I can just try my best.
- I can smile and look happy. It‟s easy.
- I have done this before; I know I can do it again.

2. Physical Relaxation Exercises

a. Body focus:

Take a deep breath and close your eyes for a few moments. Sense where your body is contacting the environment around you (chair, floor etc.). Sense where your weight is resting. Now take another deep breath and move your body in some way to get more comfortable and relaxed. Are there any parts of your body that feel very tense or sore? If you find one, take a deep breath and try to imagine that place loosening up. Then gently and slowly move that part of the body just a little bit to let it loosen and relax.

b. Deep breathing

Take a slow deep breath in through the nose and out through the mouth. (Make sure the belly goes out as you inhale). Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth to the following count, 1-2-3-4, 1-2-3-4, 1-2-3-4. Inhale, hold, exhale. Pause before the next breath. Continue this 5-10 times.

c. Apple picker stretch

Imagine you are under the branches of an apple tree. Standing with both arms up in the air and gently bouncing on tip toes, reach up as high as you can and grab at the imaginary apples with one hand then the other. Then gently drop your hands and bend over towards the floor as far as you can with knees slightly bent. Then sway gently from side to side for a few moments before slowly rising, one vertebra at a time, with the neck and head coming up very last. (Remember to keep breathing).

d. Progressive Relaxation

Starting with your feet and moving slowly and methodically up through your body until you finally get to your neck and head, make all the muscles in your body tense and hard. Count of 10 each time so that at 1 your muscles are a little bit tense, and at 10 you are as tense as you can get. Shake your legs slowly. Shake your arms. Slowly move your head from one side to the other. Feel the tension leave your body.

3. Visualisation

This activity requires the children to close their eyes and use their imagination as you read them the following script to them:

Now that you are beginning to relax, I want to invite you to imagine that you are walking down a soft wide path through a beautiful tropical forest towards the ocean. You can see big bright flowers underneath the trees. The trees are high and green and when you look up you can just see a wonderful blue-sky peeking through the leaves. As you walk you feel calm and safe – breathing in and out – calmly and deepl

PAUSE

Although you can't see the ocean yet you can hear the waves up ahead – rolling onto the beach – you can smell the ocean spray – the air is moist and warm and you can feel a beautiful cooling breeze on your face. As you continue along the path - breathing in and out – slowly and deeply – you come closer to the sea and you can feel the sand beneath your feet – it is soft and warm. As you step out of the forest the sun is shining and the sea is blue and glistening. The sound of the waves rolling onto the beach feels comforting and relaxing. And as you look out at the sea you can match your breathing to the pattern of the waves – slowly in and deeply out – languid and calm – relaxed and happy

PAUSE

You can feel the sun's warmth filling the whole of your body as you gaze towards the water which is bright and blue and green. The beach is golden, long and wide and there is no-one here but you. This is your beach – your place – your time.

PAUSE

Breathing in filling your body with warmth and relaxation and breathing out – letting go of any stress. As you continue to breathe slowly and deeply, lower yourself onto the sand. Sitting here quietly you can watch the waves lapping onto the beach – the water is clear and bright and as you watch you continue to feel the warm relaxing feeling flowing over you – and you feel safe and happy and content.

PAUSE

There is no-one here but you – this is your beach – this is your place – this is your time.

PAUSE

Sitting here in the warm, soft sand, soaking up the sunshine you feel strong and calm and you feel ready to return. Breathing in and out …… slowly and deeply. So now - as you stand up to leave the beach take a long, last look at the ocean – feeling happy and relaxed – knowing you can come back here whenever you want.

Panic Attacks can be very frightening for students and for teachers who are with the student when they occur. The following NEPS resources on Panic Attacks developed for teachers and for students respectively may offer support.

4. Problem Solving

Six-Block Problem-Solving Plan

This helps us cope with difficult situations as it shows us what things we can do to manage the situation calmly.

1. What‟s the problem? Understanding exactly what we must do.

2. What could I do? Think of lots of possible different ideas.

3. List what might happen for each of the ideas listed in 2.

4. Pick the best solution- based on the consequences you looked at in 3.

5. Do it! Put your plan into action.

6. Did it work? Think about what went well and what you could do differently next time.

1. What is the problem?

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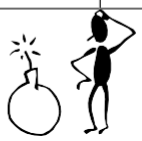
2. What could I do?

Think of lots of possible different ideas.

2. List what might happen for each of these ideas.



or

4. Pick the best solution…

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5. Do it! Put your plan into action!

6. Did it work? Think about what went well and what you could do differently next time

or

→ →

→ →

Panic Attacks - Information for Teachers & Parents

What is a Panic Attack?

Panic attacks are sudden feelings of intense fear or anxiety. What causes Panic Attacks? They can be triggered by a major life event but at times there is no obvious reason why they start. They may be a sign that the student has underlying issues that need to be addressed.

An event or **negative thought** causes an **increase in adrenalin** which is pumped around the body. We are prewired to respond to danger to protect ourselves. In prehistoric times this was to help you run away or deal with a dangerous situation. It is called the *fight or flight response*. A panic attack happens when, although there is no threat or danger the body responds as if there is.

What are the Symptoms of a Panic Attack?

The symptoms of a panic attack are listed below and can often be very frightening. The student may feel that others will notice that they are anxious, or they might be worried that they will lose control, faint, run out of the room, start screaming. They may feel that are going mad, going deaf, going blind, cannot breathe, having a heart attack etc. This all exacerbates the panic.

Physical Symptoms

- Racing heart
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Tingling sensation, pins and needs (particularly in hands)
- Blurred vision
- Sound distortion
- Nausea
- Dry mouth, difficulty swallowing
- Sweating or trembling
- Headaches
- Diarrhoea
- Skin rashes or flare ups
- Butterflies in stomach
- Chest/stomach pains
- Loss of appetite

Behavioural Symptoms

- Avoiding places
- Avoiding people and social situations
- Constantly seeking reassurance
- Excessive drinking/smoking/eating
- Difficulty sleeping/nightmares
- Increased irritability

Mental Symptoms

- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty making decisions
- Forgetfulness
- Distorted or irrational thoughts
- Excessive worrying
- Thinking negatively

How to Respond if a Student is having a Panic Attack:

Reassure them that:

A PANIC ATTACK CANNOT HARM YOU

A PANIC ATTACK IS NOT LIFE THREATENING

THE PANIC WILL PASS

(Panic attacks can last from a few seconds to 10 minutes).

Intervening during a Panic Attack

- They may want to run out of the room/building to escape the situation, but it is important that they stay with the panic
- Get them to acknowledge what is happening, name it **"I am having a panic attack"**
- Repeat calming and supportive statements – *This will pass; It is only anxiety; You are not going to faint, stop breathing, choke etc.* Encourage them to say these statements aloud
- Encourage them to say STOP to their thoughts – take a deep breath and say STOP, repeat several times
- Encourage them to engage in relaxation techniques
- Abdominal breathing - Breathe in slowly, count to three and breathe out slowly. Do this with them until they start to calm down
- Muscle Relaxation – Encourage them to tense and relax different muscle groups in your body. Do this with them to engage them
- Get them to do something that requires focused attention like a simple repetitive activity e.g. counting backwards; saying the words of a song; naming as many animals as they can beginning with the letter *d*
- Encourage them to imagine a calming place - Visualisation

Encourage the student to engage in some of the following general preventative strategies longer term:

- Practice relaxation techniques
- Exercise regularly
- Make an appointment with the Guidance Counsellor
- Learn about the causes of panic attacks
- Learn about the effects of panic attacks

Panic Attacks - A resource for Students

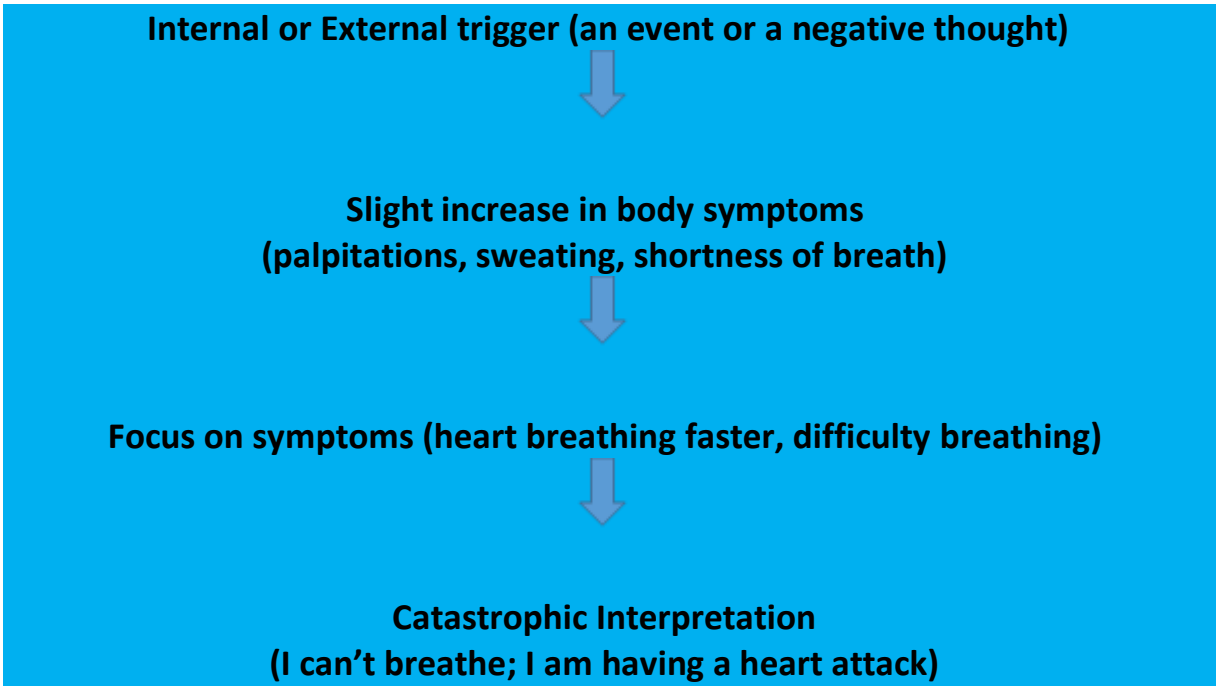
What is a Panic Attack?

Panic attacks are sudden feelings of intense fear or anxiety. Panic attacks are common.

What causes Panic Attacks?

They can be triggered by a major life event but at times there is no obvious reason why they start. They may be a sign that there are underlying issues that need to be addressed.

They develop as follows:



An event or **negative thought** causes an **increase in adrenalin** which is pumped around your body. We are prewired to respond to danger to protect ourselves. In prehistoric times this was to help you run away or deal with a dangerous situation. It is called *the fight or flight response*. A panic attack happens when, although there is no threat or danger your body is responding as if there is.

What are the Symptoms of a Panic Attack?

The symptoms of a panic attack can often be frightening and are listed below:

Physical Symptoms

- Racing heart
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- Sweating or trembling
- Headaches
- Diarrhoea
- Skin rashes or flare ups
- Butterflies in stomach
- Chest/stomach pains
- Loss of appetite

Behavioural Symptoms

- Avoiding places
- Avoiding people and social situations
- Constantly seeking reassurance
- Excessive drinking/smoking/eating
- Difficulty sleeping/nightmares
- Increased irritability

Mental Symptoms

- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty making decisions
- Forgetfulness
- Distorted or irrational thoughts
- Excessive worrying
- Thinking negatively

Panic attacks can last from a **few seconds to 10 minutes**.
When you are in the midst of panic you may feel that you **are going mad, going deaf, going blind, can't breathe, having a heart attack** etc. You may be afraid that **others will notice** that you are anxious or that you might **lose control** and **faint or start running or screaming** etc. This all makes the panic worse.

REMEMBER:
A PANIC ATTACK CANNOT HARM YOU.
THEY ARE NOT LIFE THREATHENING AND IT WILL PASS. THE KEY IS TO STAY CALM AND BREATHE.

How to Deal with Panic Attacks?

General Preventative Strategies

- Practice relaxation techniques
- Exercise regularly
- Avoid stimulants, sugar, caffeine, alcohol, drugs
- Learn about the causes of panic attacks
- Learn about the effects of panic attacks
- Try to figure out what triggers a panic attack
- Try to identify and challenge your negative thoughts by using the Thoughts Log

Intervening during a Panic Attack

- When you feel panic building do not try to escape the situation
- Acknowledge to yourself what is happening, name it *"I am having a panic attack"*
- Repeat calming and supportive statements – "*This will pass; It's only anxiety; I am not going to faint, stop breathing, choke" etc.*
- Practice Thought Stopping – take a deep breath and say STOP to your thoughts, repeat several times
- Practice abdominal breathing or muscle relaxation. Breathe in slowly, count to three and breathe out slowly. Do this until you start to calm down
- Do something that requires focused attention like a simple repetitive activity (counting backwards), counting red cars
- Distract from the panic by moving around or doing something physical e.g. walking
- Imagine a calming place - Visualisation
- Remember this takes practice. Stick with it
- If your panic attacks continue, visit your GP for additional ways to manage them. Ask your GP about Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT).
- See www.spunout.ie; www.youth.ie; www.reachout.com.au

Relaxation Techniques

Practicing relaxation creates the opposite effects to stress and anxiety. There are many **relaxation techniques** and different things work for different people. Teachers can introduce relaxation practices into their classes and encourage the students to continue to practise these at home. The NEPS Relaxation Techniques resource provides a variety of exercises that may prove useful and can be distributed to all members of staff.

Relaxation Techniques

Mindfulness Exercise

Mindfulness is the process of bringing one's attention to the present moment. This is a simple mindfulness technique.

- Choose an object (it can be anything) from your immediate environment
- Focus on watching it for a minute or two
- Don't do anything except notice the thing you are looking at
- Simply relax into a harmony for as long as your concentration allows
- Look at it as if you are seeing it for the first time
- Visually explore every aspect of its shape
- Allow yourself to connect with its energy and its role and purpose

Muscular Relaxation

Tense and relax different muscle groups in your body. As your body relaxes, so will your mind. You can combine deep breathing with progressive muscle relaxation for an additional level of stress relief.

Tense-Hold-Relax

- Right foot, then left foot
- Right calf, then left calf
- Right thigh, then left thigh
- Hips and buttocks
- Stomach
- Chest
- Back
- Right arm and hand, then left arm and hand
- Neck and shoulders
- Face

Deep Breathing Exercises

Breathing exercises help reduce feelings of arousal and physical tension. The key to deep breathing is to breathe deeply from the abdomen, getting as much fresh air as possible into your lungs. When you take deep breaths from the abdomen, rather than shallow breaths from your upper chest, you inhale more oxygen. The more oxygen you get, the less tense, short of breath, and anxious you feel.

Example 1:

- Sit in a comfortable position with your arms and legs uncrossed
- Inhale slowly through your nose or mouth (one-thousand one, one thousand, two, one-thousand three), and fill your lungs
- Silently and gently say to yourself, *"I'm filling my body with calm"*
- Exhale slowly through your mouth (one-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three), and comfortably empty your lungs
- Silently and gently say to yourself, *"I'm letting the tension drain away"*
- Repeat five times slowly

Example 2:

- Sit comfortably with your back straight. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach
- Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should move very little
- Exhale through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can while contracting your abdominal muscles.
- The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale, but your other hand should move very little
- Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Try to inhale enough so that your lower abdomen rises and falls. Count slowly as you exhale

Visualisation

Close your eyes and use your imagination to imagine that you are walking down a soft wide path towards the ocean. As you walk you feel calm and safe – breathing in and out – calmly and deeply.

You can hear the waves rolling onto the beach. You can smell the ocean. You can feel a beautiful cooling breeze on your face. As you continue along the path - breathing in and out – slowly and deeply –you feel the sand beneath your feet – it is soft and warm. The sun is shining, and the sea is blue and glistening. The sound of the waves rolling onto the beach feels comforting and relaxing.

And as you look out at the sea you can match your breathing to the pattern of the waves – slowly in and deeply out– relaxed and happy.

You can feel the sun's warmth filling the whole of your body as you gaze towards the water which is bright and blue and green. The beach is golden, long and wide and there is no-one here but you. This is your beach – your place – your time.

Breathing in, filling your body with warmth and relaxation and breathing out – letting go of any stress. As you continue to breathe slowly and deeply, lower yourself onto the sand. Sitting here quietly you can watch the waves lapping onto the beach – the water is clear and bright and as you watch you continue to feel the warm relaxing feeling flowing over you – and you feel safe and happy and content.

There is no-one here but you – this is your beach – this is your place – this is your time.

Sitting here in the warm, soft sand, soaking up the sunshine you feel strong and calm and you feel ready to return. Breathing in and out …… slowly and deeply.

Body focus

Take a deep breath and close your eyes for a few moments. Sense where your body is in contact with the environment around you (chair, floor etc.). Sense where your weight is resting. Now take another deep breath and move your body in some way to get more comfortable and relaxed. Are there any parts of your body that feel very tense or sore? If you find one, take a deep breath and try to imagine that place loosening up. Then gently and slowly move that part of the body just a little bit to let it loosen and relax.

Apple picker stretch

Imagine you are under the branches of an apple tree. Standing with both arms up in the air and gently bouncing on tip toes, reach up as high as you can and grab at the imaginary apples with one hand then the other. Then gently drop your hands and bend over towards the floor as far as you can with knees slightly bent. Then sway gently from side to side for a few moments before slowly rising, one vertebra at a time, with the neck and head coming up very last. (Remember to keep breathing).

As we go about our day, we say things to ourselves in our heads about the things that we or others do. This is called self-talk. We choose what we say to ourselves. It is likely that he/she is engaging in **negative self-talk**. When we are anxious, we engage in faulty and irrational thinking which affects the way we feel and behave.

Writing down their thoughts can be a starting point in identifying the negative thoughts. The next step is to **challenge these negative thoughts** by asking **"Is this really true?"** and the last step is to **replace these negative thoughts with positive, more reassuring ones.**

Examples of positive thoughts are:

- I am unique, I can be myself

- I can try harder instead of giving up
- I do not have to be perfect. I can just try my best
- I have done this before; I know I can do it again
- I am not a fortune teller; I do not know what they are thinking

The NEPS 'Thoughts Log' Resource may prove useful for students in identifying negative thoughts and replacing them with more positive ones.

Thoughts Log

When we are anxious, we engage in faulty and irrational thinking which affects the way we feel and behave. **Writing down** your thoughts can be a starting point in identifying your negative thoughts. The next step is to **challenge these negative thoughts** by asking **"Is this really true?"** and the last step is to **replace these negative thoughts with positive, more reassuring ones.**

NEGATIVE THOUGHT	POSITIVE THOUGHT

Thoughts Log cont.

NEGATIVE THOUGHT	POSITIVE THOUGHT

HSE Info

In November 2018 HSE launched a new mental health campaign specifically targeted at young people. The '**Mind Monster**' campaign was developed to raise awareness among adolescents and young adults of ways to look after their mental health. Focussing on things that are known to cause stress and anxiety the campaign highlights the benefits that getting enough sleep, taking regular study breaks, spending less time on devices and sharing a problem with someone you trust can have on your mental health.

The HSE website **YourMentalHealth.ie** may be relevant to young people who access information online every day. They will be able to find personalised support options through a search tool that generates information on online resources, telephone and face-to-face services relevant to a wide range of mental health issues including depression, anxiety and stress.