

# Anxiety Resource Booklet

**Durham**  
County Council



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***MY GUIDE TO  
ANXIETY***

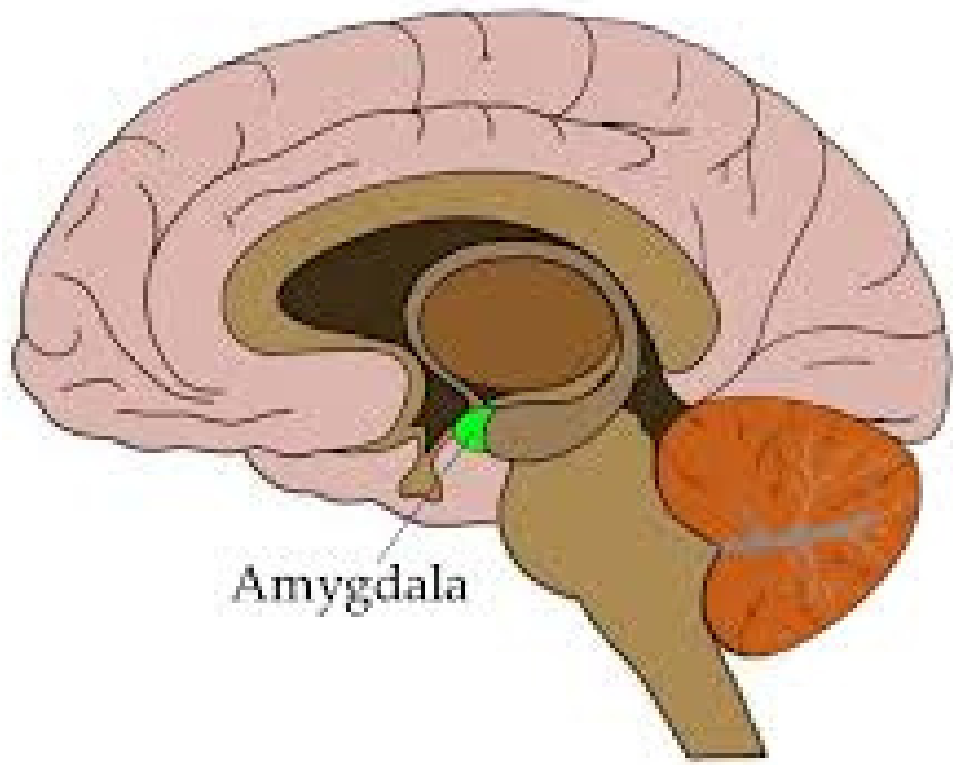
# MANY YEARS AGO.....



Our bodies have a built-in survival instinct from over 50,000 years ago. In those days our lives were endangered by wild animals and other threats.

What might feel like a threat to you now?


# Your Alarm System



Your brain has an alarm system called the "amygdala". This puts your body into "fight, flight or freeze" mode, helping you to deal with any potential threats.

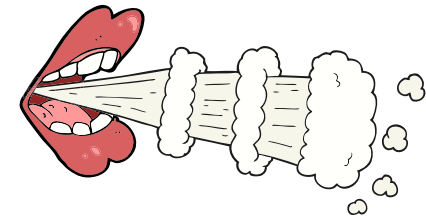
How might this affect your body?



heart



muscles



breathing

# A Sensitive Alarm



Sometimes your amygdala can get "switched on" even when there isn't an immediate threat. This is like your smoke alarm sounding every time someone cooks at home. There is no fire- it is being over cautious.



The amygdala can be over cautious too!

Why do you think the amygdala might be over cautious? What could be the benefit to us?

# This creates a cycle.....

Your fight or flight response creates physical changes in your body. This changes the way you think - e.g. you will think more negatively about a situation such as "I can't handle this!". This will then affect your behaviour, as you may be more likely to avoid a situation or react aggressively.

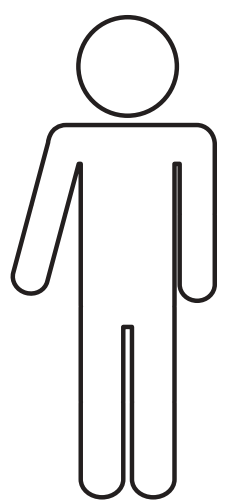
All of this together creates a cycle.



Think of a time when you have felt  
anxious.....



What did you think?



What did you do?

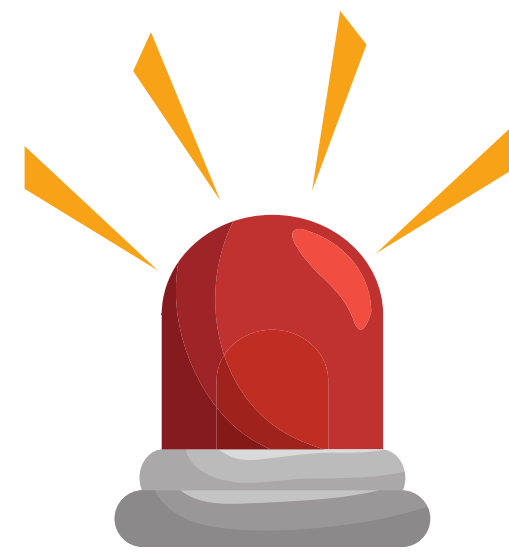


How did you feel?



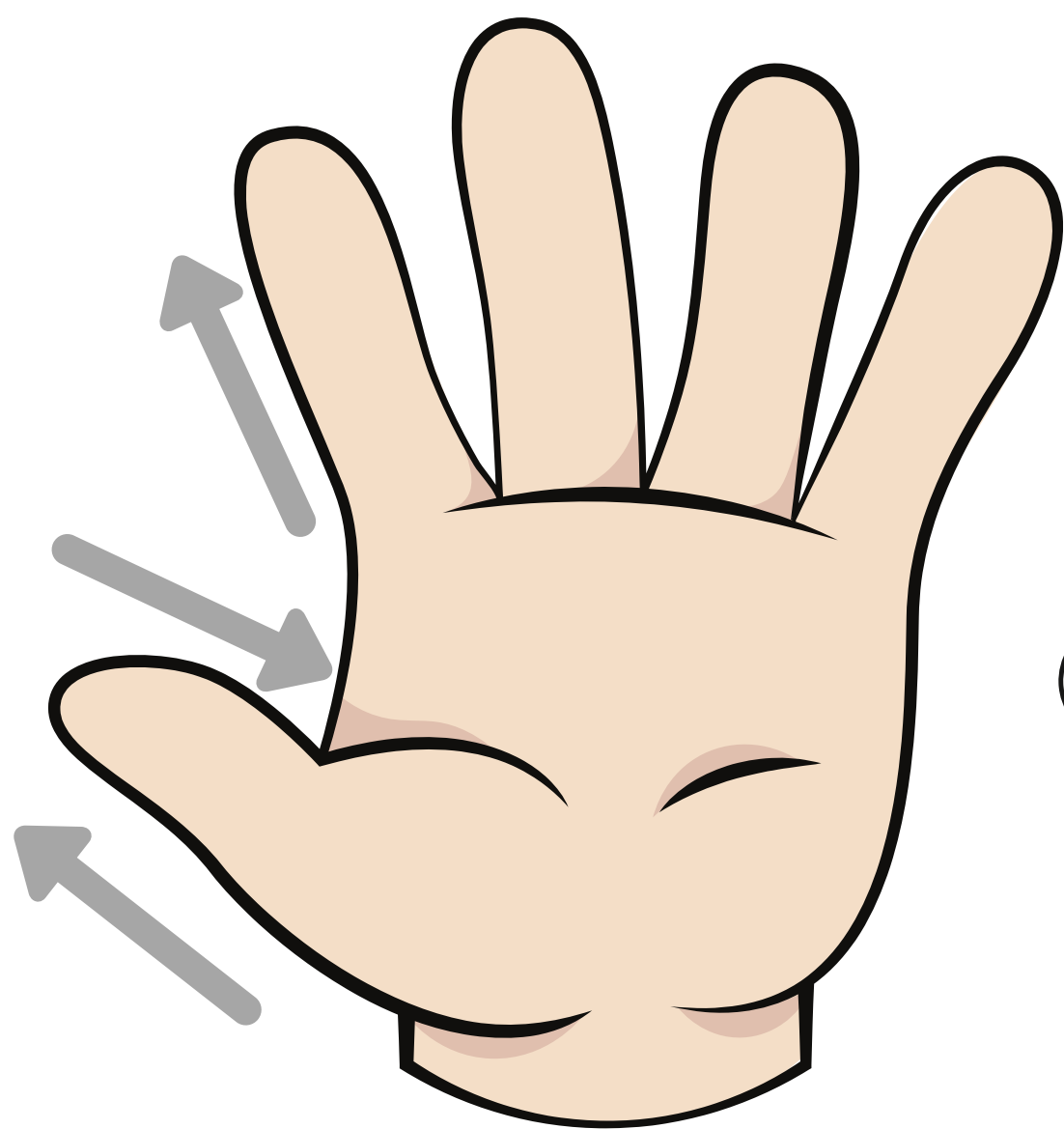
# Time to re-set the alarm

The good news is that your brain can be trained! You can learn ways to take control and stop the alarm from sounding.



## Try it now:

Trace one hand with a finger from your other hand. Inhale as you go up the finger, exhale as you go down



The easiest way to do this is to breathe slowly. This sounds so simple - and it is! Once you slow your breathing you send the message back to your brain that everything is OK again.

You can do this anywhere!

# Introducing Mindfulness



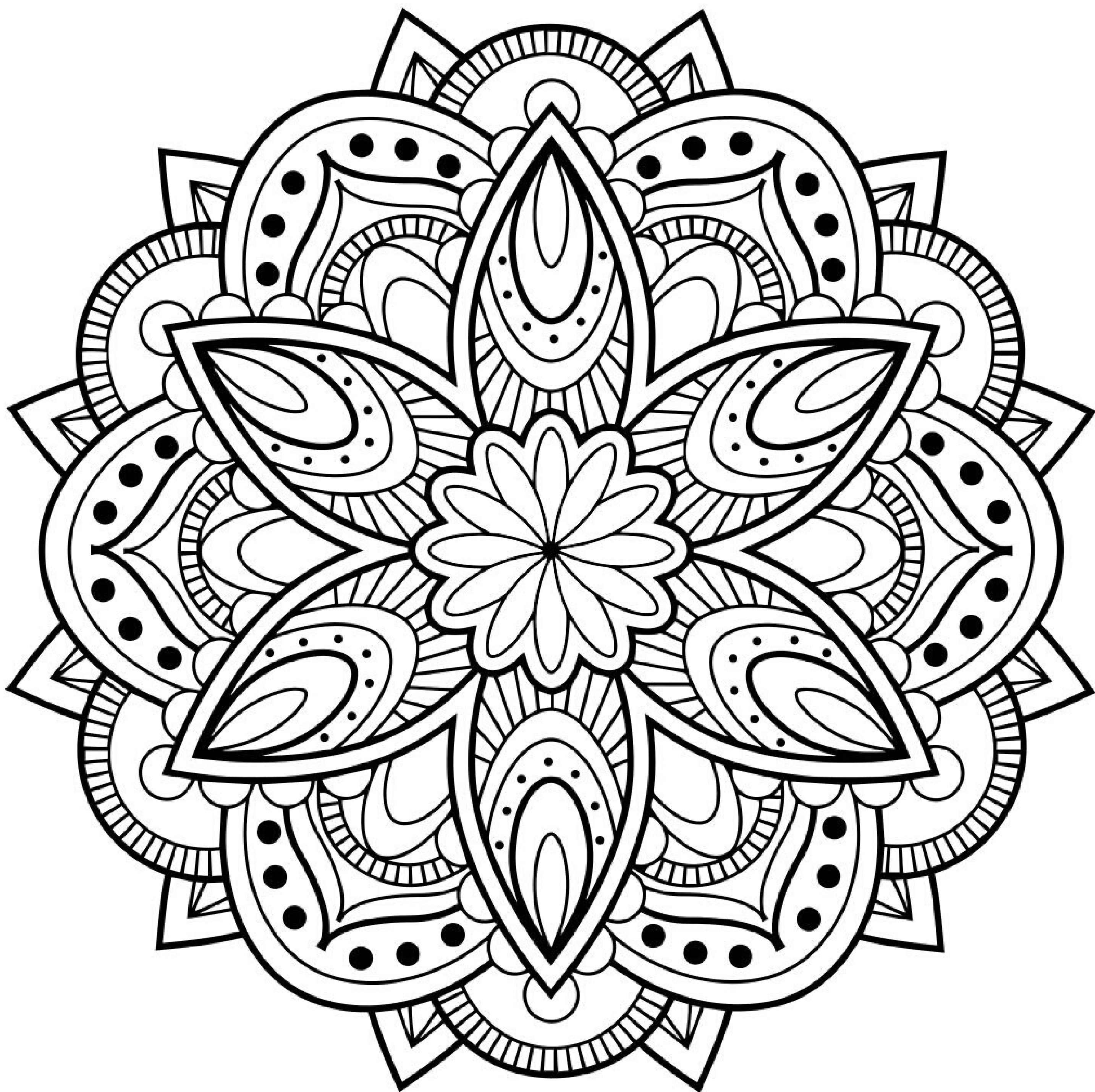
The 5,4,3,2,1 technique can help to "ground" you and bring you back into the present.

You can do this any time you feel overwhelmed or anxious.

- 1) Name 5 things that you can see around you.
- 2) Name 4 things that you can feel (e.g. your feet on the floor, your clothes).
- 3) Name 3 things you can hear (e.g. traffic, other people).
- 4) Name 2 things you can smell (or 2 things you like to smell).
- 5) Say 1 good thing about yourself.

Just remember 5,4,3,2,1 and it is a technique you can do any time, anywhere!

Colouring can be mindful too.....



Try to keep your mind on what you are doing.  
This will stop worries popping into your head.

# Understanding your thoughts

The way you think is an important part of what keeps anxiety going. Most of the time our negative thoughts aren't true, our mind can play tricks on us!

Think about a thought you have had recently and try to re-frame it positively.

E.g. "I'm going to fail my test" could become "I can practise daily and do my best".

Negative thought

Alternative thought

# You control your actions too!

Your behaviour is an important part of the anxiety cycle. It's easy to avoid situations that make you anxious - but that just reinforces the problem.

Instead of avoiding them, try and face your fears.

You can start small and work your way up.

Example: Going swimming makes me anxious

Step 1: Go with a friend and sit at the side.

Step 2: Get in the water but stay at the side.

Step 3: Gradually move away from the sides using a float.

Step 4: Swim away from the side, staying with your friend.

Step 5: Swim a width of the pool alone.



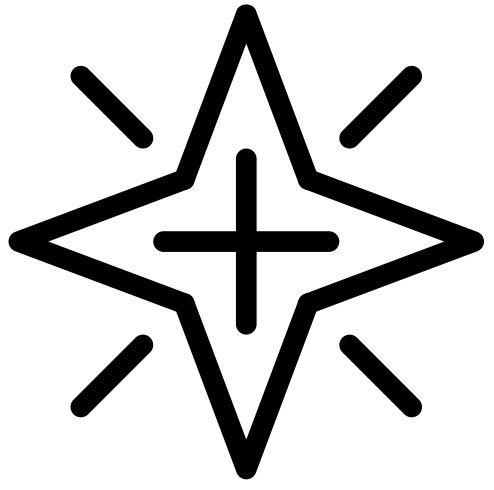
\_\_\_\_\_ 's Plan

Now you  
try one!

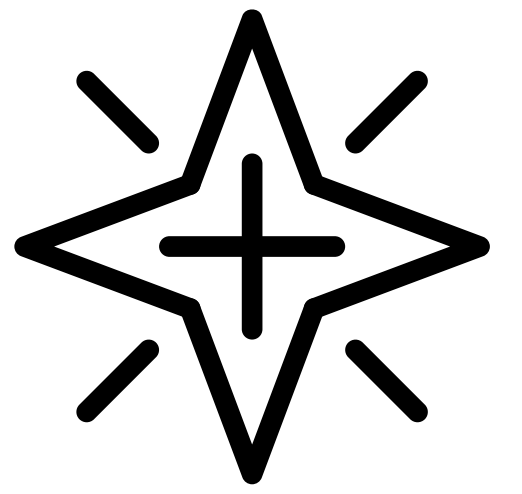
Blank writing area consisting of six horizontal, rounded rectangular boxes stacked vertically, intended for writing a plan.

Remember to reward yourself at the  
end





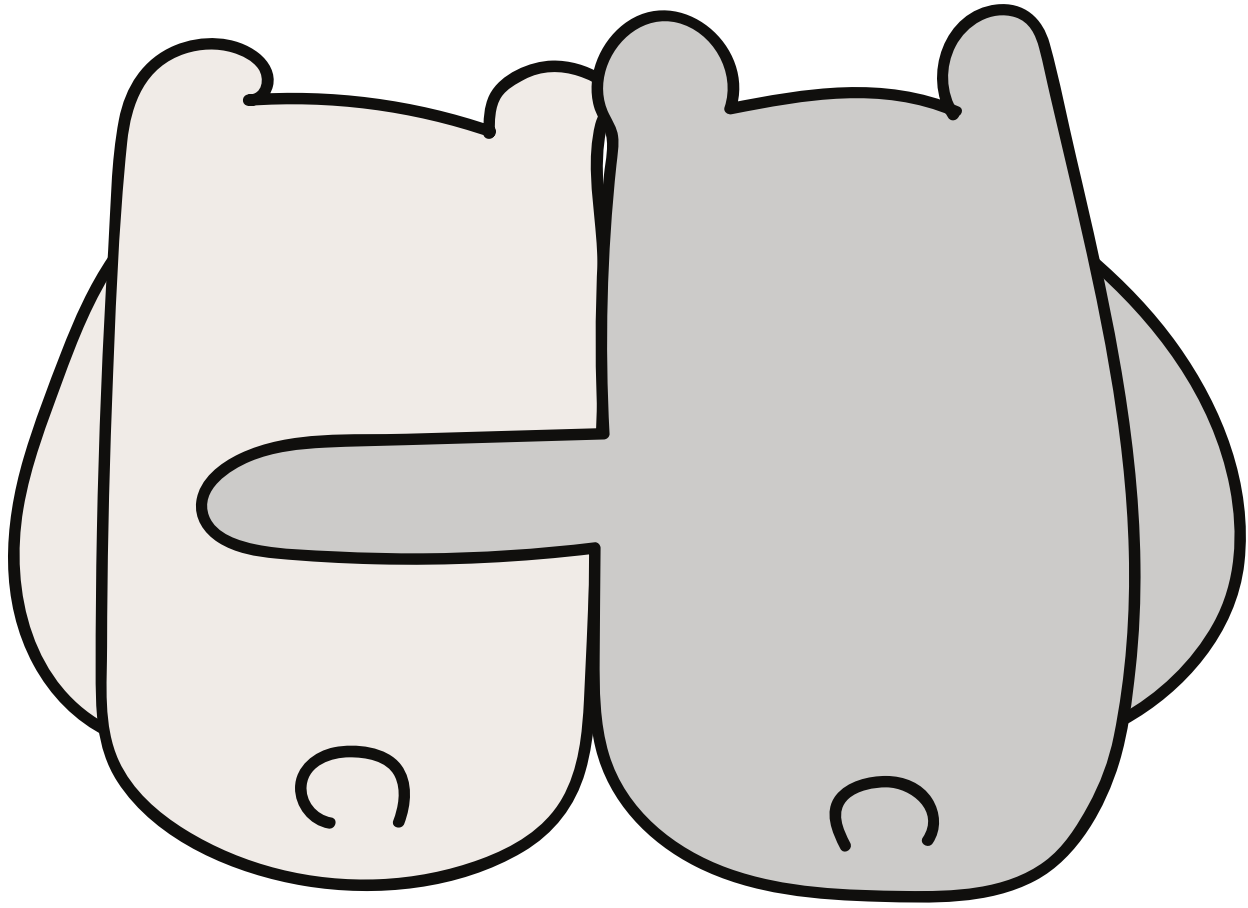
Try to Feel Positive!



Think of 5 good things about yourself or  
your situation



# You're not alone



Make a list of  
people who can help  
you:

Anxiety is felt by 1 in 8  
young people- so  
roughly 3 people in  
each classroom!



# Worry Monster

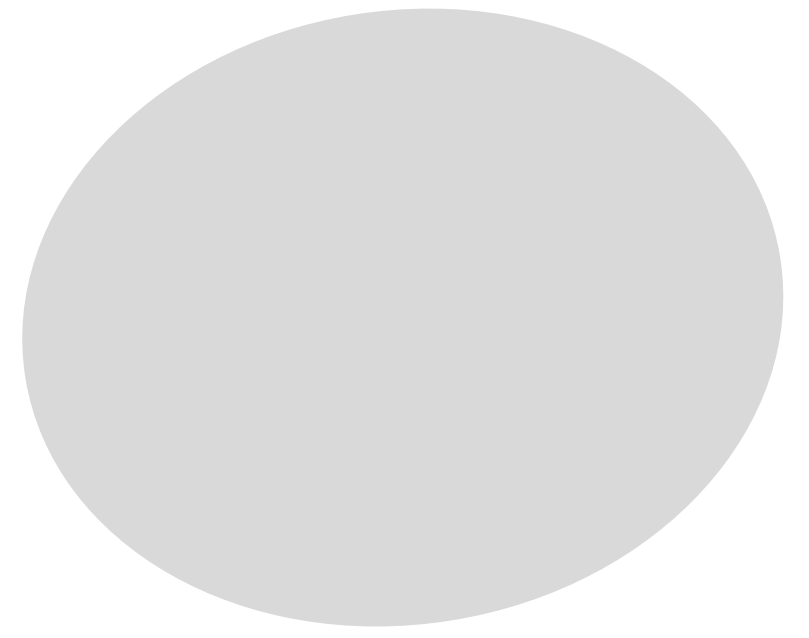
Draw or write whatever is worrying you inside the monster



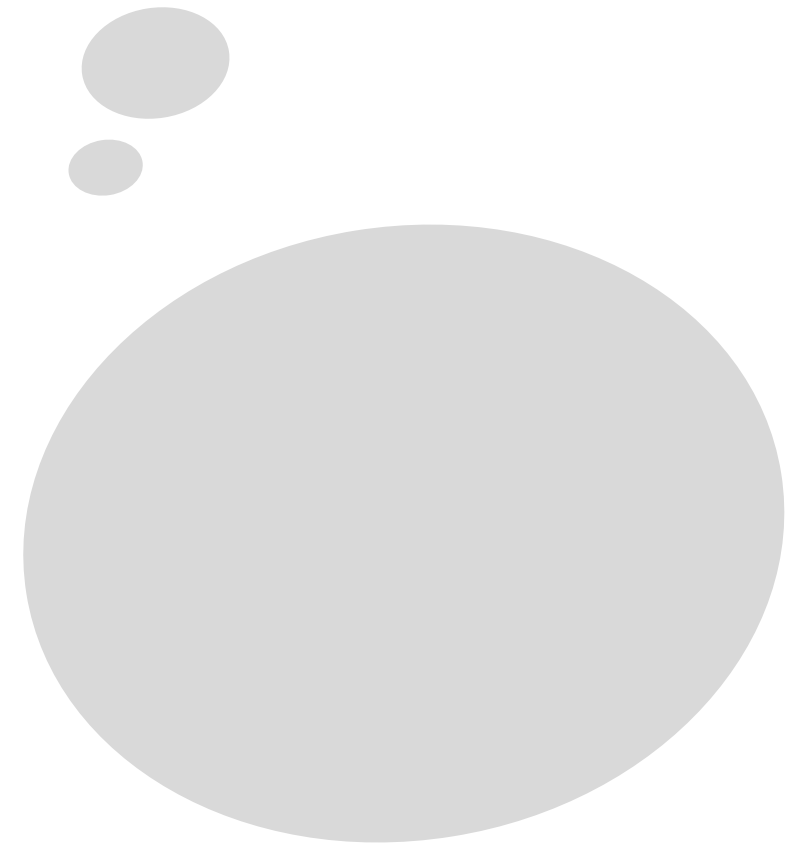
Now your monster will do your worrying for you! You can now let the thought go.

# My Step Plan

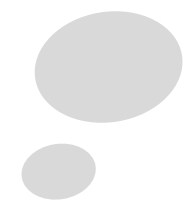
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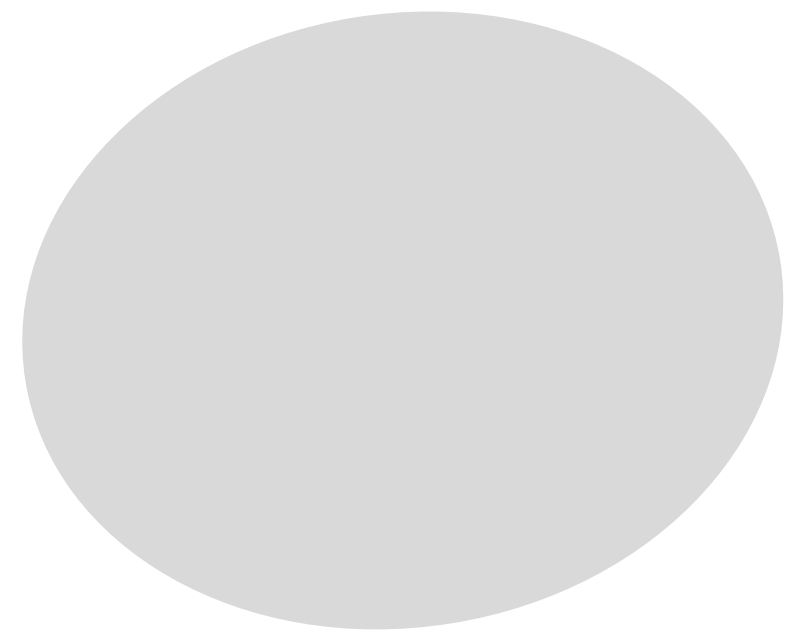
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3



4



5



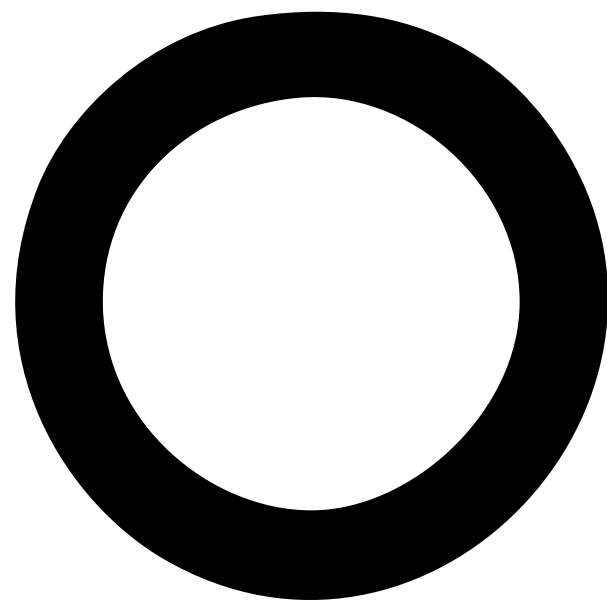
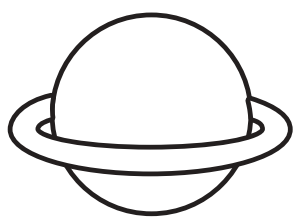
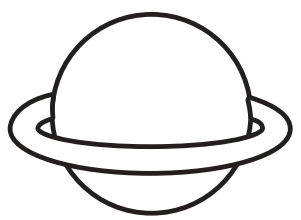
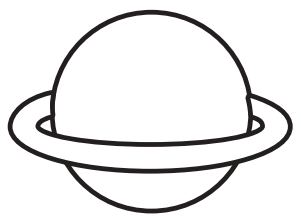
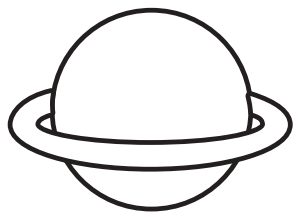
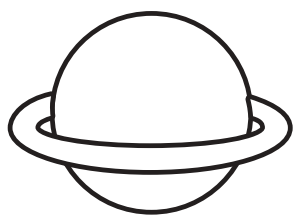
Final Goal

# \_\_\_\_\_ 's Step Plan

Helpful  
Thoughts

Goal

Rewards



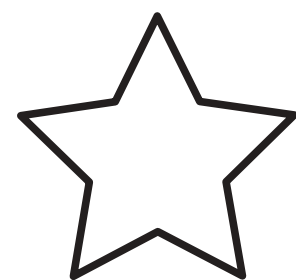
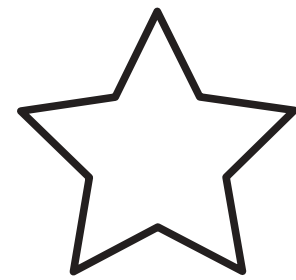
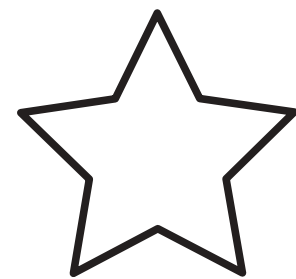
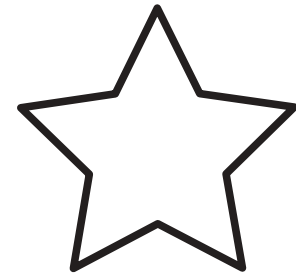
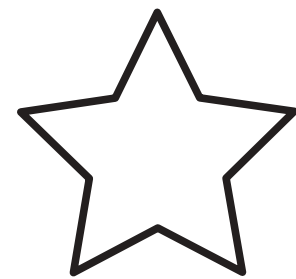
**5)**

**4)**

**3)**

**2)**

**1)**





# Thought Challenging

Just because you think something, doesn't make it true. When you are anxious your thoughts can be quite scary, but remember- you are stronger than your worry!



Is this thought a fact or opinion?

You can **"Take your Thought to Court"**



The thought:

Evidence **FOR** the thought:

Evidence **AGAINST** the thought:

The Verdict:



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The thought:

Evidence **FOR** the thought:

Evidence **AGAINST** the thought:










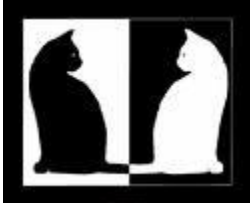


The Verdict:

## Finding Alternative Thoughts

Unhelpful Thinking Habit	Alternative more balanced thought
Mental Filter 	<i>Am I only noticing the bad stuff? Am I filtering out the positives? Am I wearing those 'gloomy specs'? What would be more realistic?</i>
 Mind-Reading	<i>Am I assuming I know what others are thinking? What's the evidence? Those are my own thoughts, not theirs. Is there another, more balanced way of looking at it?</i>
Prediction 	<i>Am I thinking that I can predict the future? How likely is it that that might really happen?</i>
 Compare & despair	<i>Am I doing that 'compare and despair' thing? What would be a more balanced and helpful way of looking at it?</i>
Critical self 	<i>There I go, that internal bully's at it again. Would most people who really know me say that about me? Is this something that I am totally responsible for?</i>
 Shoulds and musts	<i>Am I putting more pressure on myself, setting up expectations of myself that are almost impossible? What would be more realistic?</i>
Judgements 	<i>I'm making an evaluation about the situation or person. It's how I make sense of the world, but that doesn't mean my judgements are always right or helpful. Is there another perspective?</i>
 Emotional Reasoning	<i>Just because it feels bad, doesn't necessary mean it is bad. My feelings are just a reaction to my thoughts – and thoughts are just automatic brain reflexes</i>
Mountains and molehills 	<i>Am I exaggerating the risk of danger? Or am I exaggerating the negative and minimising the positives? How would someone else see it? What's the bigger picture?</i>
 Catastrophising	<i>OK, thinking that the worst possible thing will definitely happen isn't really helpful right now. What's most likely to happen?</i>
Black and white thinking 	<i>Things aren't either totally white or totally black – there are shades of grey. Where is this on the spectrum?</i>
 Memories	<i>This is just a reminder of the past. That was then, and this is now. Even though this memory makes me <u>feel</u> upset, it's not <u>actually</u> happening again right now.</i>

## Unhelpful Thinking Habits

Over the years, we tend to get into unhelpful thinking habits such as those described below. We might favour some over others, and there might be some that seem far too familiar. Once you can identify your unhelpful thinking styles, you can start to notice them – they very often occur just before and during distressing situations. Once you can notice them, then that can help you to challenge or distance yourself from those thoughts, and see the situation in a different and more helpful way.

 <p><b>Mental Filter</b> When we notice only what the filter wants or allows us to notice, and we dismiss anything that doesn't 'fit'. Like looking through dark blinkers or 'gloomy specs', or only catching the negative stuff in our 'kitchen strainers' whilst anything more positive or realistic is dismissed</p>	 <p><b>Judgements</b> Making evaluations or judgements about events, ourselves, others, or the world, rather than describing what we actually see and have evidence for</p>
<p><b>Mind-Reading</b> Assuming we know what others are thinking (usually about us)</p> 	<p><b>Emotional Reasoning</b> I feel bad so it must be bad! I feel anxious, so I must be in danger</p> 
 <p><b>Prediction</b> Believing we know what's going to happen in the future</p>	 <p><b>Mountains and Molehills</b> Exaggerating the risk of danger, or the negatives. Minimising the odds of how things are most likely to turn out, or minimising positives</p>
<p><b>Compare and despair</b> Seeing only the good and positive aspects in others, and comparing ourselves negatively against them</p> 	<p><b>Catastrophising</b> Imagining and believing that the worst possible thing will happen</p> 
 <p><b>Critical self</b> Putting ourselves down, self-criticism, blaming ourselves for events or situations that are not (totally) our responsibility</p>	 <p><b>Black and white thinking</b> Believing that something or someone can be only good or bad, right or wrong, rather than anything in-between or 'shades of grey'</p>
<p><b>Shoulds and musts</b> Thinking or saying 'I should' (or shouldn't) and 'I must' puts pressure on ourselves, and sets up unrealistic expectations</p> 	<p><b>Memories</b> Current situations and events can trigger upsetting memories, leading us to believe that the danger is here and now, rather than in the past, causing us distress right now</p> 

# Worry Diary

Situation	Worry	How worried I feel 0-100	Hypothetical or Practical Worry?



# Worry Tree

