

QUICK THERAPY SOLUTIONS PROVIDED BY COUNSELLING IN FRANCE

ANXIETY MANAGEMENT

Challenging unhelpful thoughts

The way that we think about things has an impact on our anxiety levels. Many of these thoughts occur outside of our control, and can be negative or unhelpful. It is therefore important to remember that they are just thoughts, without any real basis, and are not necessarily facts. Even though we may believe a lot of our unhelpful thoughts when we are anxious, it is good to remember that they should be questioned as they are often based on wrong assumptions.

You might have unhelpful thoughts about all kinds of things. Here are some examples:

Being judged negatively by others:

- They will think I'm not good at doing anything or not very nice
- They won't like me and will judge me badly

Being unable to cope:

- I'll make a fool of myself
- I'm too anxious to manage doing what I've been asked to do
- I'll have a panic attack or feel like I'm going to faint

Something terrible happening:

- What if I have an accident or make a terrible mistake?
- What if I do something stupid and show myself up?

It is clear to see how this kind of thinking might make us anxious. You might find it difficult to identify an unhelpful thought. Try thinking about a time when you were feeling anxious. Consider what was running through your mind at that time.

Patterns of unhelpful thinking

First you need to be able to recognise an unhelpful thought, then you can challenge it. Being aware of the common patterns that unhelpful thoughts follow can help you to recognise when you have them. Here are some of the common patterns that our unhelpful thoughts follow:

Predicting the Future:

When we are feeling anxious, it is common for us to spend a lot of time thinking about the future and predicting what could go wrong, rather than just letting things be. In the end most of our predictions don't happen and we have wasted time and energy being worried and upset about them. For example:

- Assuming you will let everyone down in some way
- Thinking you might disappoint people by not being good enough
- Spending time worrying about something that might happen
- Worrying about getting ill or not being able to cope with things

Mind Reading:

This means that you make assumptions about others' beliefs without having any real evidence to support them. For example:

- My neighbour thinks I'm stupid
- People think I'm odd or don't seem to like me
- People are nice to my face but think I'm not worth anything behind my back

Such ways of thinking naturally make us apprehensive.

Catastrophising:

People commonly 'catastrophise' when they are anxious, which basically means that they often blow things out of proportion. For example:

- They assume that something that has happened is far worse than it really is
- They may think that something terrible is going to happen in the future, when, in reality, there is very little evidence to support it
- They get obsessed with the negative and what might go wrong

Focusing on the Negatives:

Anxious people often have a tendency to focus on the negatives which keeps their anxiety going. For example:

- They focus on the one person who doesn't like them, ignoring that they are very popular with the rest of their friends
- Feelings of anxiety can make us forget when things went right for us

Should Statements:

People often imagine how they would like things to be or how they 'should be' rather than accepting how things really are. For example:

- I should have done that better
- I should never be anxious, I'm useless and worthless

Unfortunately when we do this, we are simply applying extra pressure to ourselves that can result in anxiety. Instead it can sometimes help to accept that things can't always be perfect.

What If Statements:

Have you ever wondered "what if" something bad happens? For example:

- What if I have a panic attack in the street?
- What if I don't make friends when I socialise with new people?

This type of thought can often make us avoid going places or doing the things that we would like.

We can learn techniques to challenge these unhelpful thoughts. This can help to reduce your anxiety levels.

REFRAMING THOUGHTS – keep a note of situations as they happen over the course of the anxiety management group meetings and bring at the end to share.

Where were you at the time?	Immediate emotion or feeling	Automatic negative thought	Evidence supporting that thought	Are you imagining the thought to be true?	Alternative thought you could have?	Emotion or feeling you have now
Who were you with? What were you doing at the time?	Describe emotions with one word and rate 0-10	What thoughts were going through your mind? Any images or memories in your mind?	What facts support the truth of this emotion or feeling? Is there a history?	Be honest with yourself, do you really have evidence to support this negative thought or is it imagined?	Write a new positive thought that is more realistic and true if you think about it	Write down your feeling now and rate it 0-10

Statements to use when preparing for a stressful situation:

- I've done this before so I know I can do it again
- When this is over, I'll be glad that I did it
- The feeling I have about this event doesn't make much sense
- This may seem hard now, but it will become easier and easier over time
- I think I have more control over these thoughts and feelings than I once imagined
- I am very gently going to turn away from my old feelings and move in a new direction

Statements to use when I feel overwhelmed:

- I can be anxious and still focus on the task at hand

- As I focus on the task, my anxiety will go down
- Anxiety is an old habit pattern that my body responds to.
- I am going to change this old habit
- I feel a little bit of peace despite my anxiety, and this peace is going to grow and grow. As my peace and security grow, then anxiety will have no choice but to shrink
- At first, anxiety was powerful and scary, but now it doesn't have the hold on me that it once had
- I am moving forward gently and definitely
- I don't need to fight my feelings. I realise that these feelings won't be allowed to stay around very much longer and I accept my new feelings of peace, contentment, and calmness
- All these things that are happening to me seem overwhelming. But I'm going to talk slowly to myself, focus away from my problem and continue with what I have to do. In this way, my anxiety will have to shrink up and disappear

<p style="text-align: center;">NORMAL WORRY <i>Situation-specific, resolves with resolution of the situation</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">GENERALIZED ANXIETY WORRY <i>Excessive time consumed, resolved worries are quickly replaced with new worries</i></p>
I am worried about my daughter being safe on a mountain-climbing expedition.	Every time my daughter leaves the house, I worry that she won't return safely.
I worry about the safety of driving in bad weather, and am very cautious on the road.	I feel intensely worried about the weather and will not drive if rain is predicted.
I worry about how I will pay a bill that is unexpected, and I try to figure it out.	I worry every day about how I would manage financially if I lost my job.
When my kids have a physical symptom like a fever, I worry about whether it will get too high and I watch them carefully.	I feel frantic with worry whenever my children have a fever or other physical symptom and am afraid they will die.
I am worried before I take a test about how hard it will be and if I will get a passing grade.	I worry about not being smart enough and am constantly comparing my grades to those of my friends.
I worry about my spouse's drug relapse damaging our relationship permanently.	Whenever I am in a relationship I worry about when it will end.
I want my children to be safe, so I research whether chemicals I use around the house could be toxic if they are ingested.	I am constantly worried about whether my children will be harmed by environmental toxins and I am always online searching for hazards I may not be aware of.
I sometimes worry if I have an unusual physical symptom, and I check it out with a doctor if the symptom does not go away in a reasonable time.	I research all my symptoms online, no matter how minor they are, to be sure I don't have a serious disease.

WAYS OF THINKING THAT CAN GENERATE ANXIETY

All or nothing thinking



Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'

If I'm not perfect I have failed

Either I do it right or not at all

Over-generalising



Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw

Mental filter



Only paying attention to certain types of evidence.

Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes

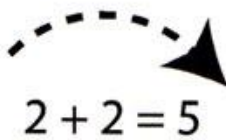
Disqualifying the positive



Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another

That doesn't count

Jumping to conclusions



There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:

- **Mind reading** (imagining we know what others are thinking)
- **Fortune telling** (predicting the future)

Magnification (catastrophising) & minimisation



Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophising), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important

Emotional reasoning



Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true.

I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot

should must

Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed

If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration

Labelling



Assigning labels to ourselves or other people

I'm a loser
I'm completely useless
They're such an idiot

Personalisation

"this is my fault"

Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault. Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault.