SELF-HELP STOP WORRY: A Tool for Older Veterans

Self-Help Workbook
Calming Tools to Manage Anxiety

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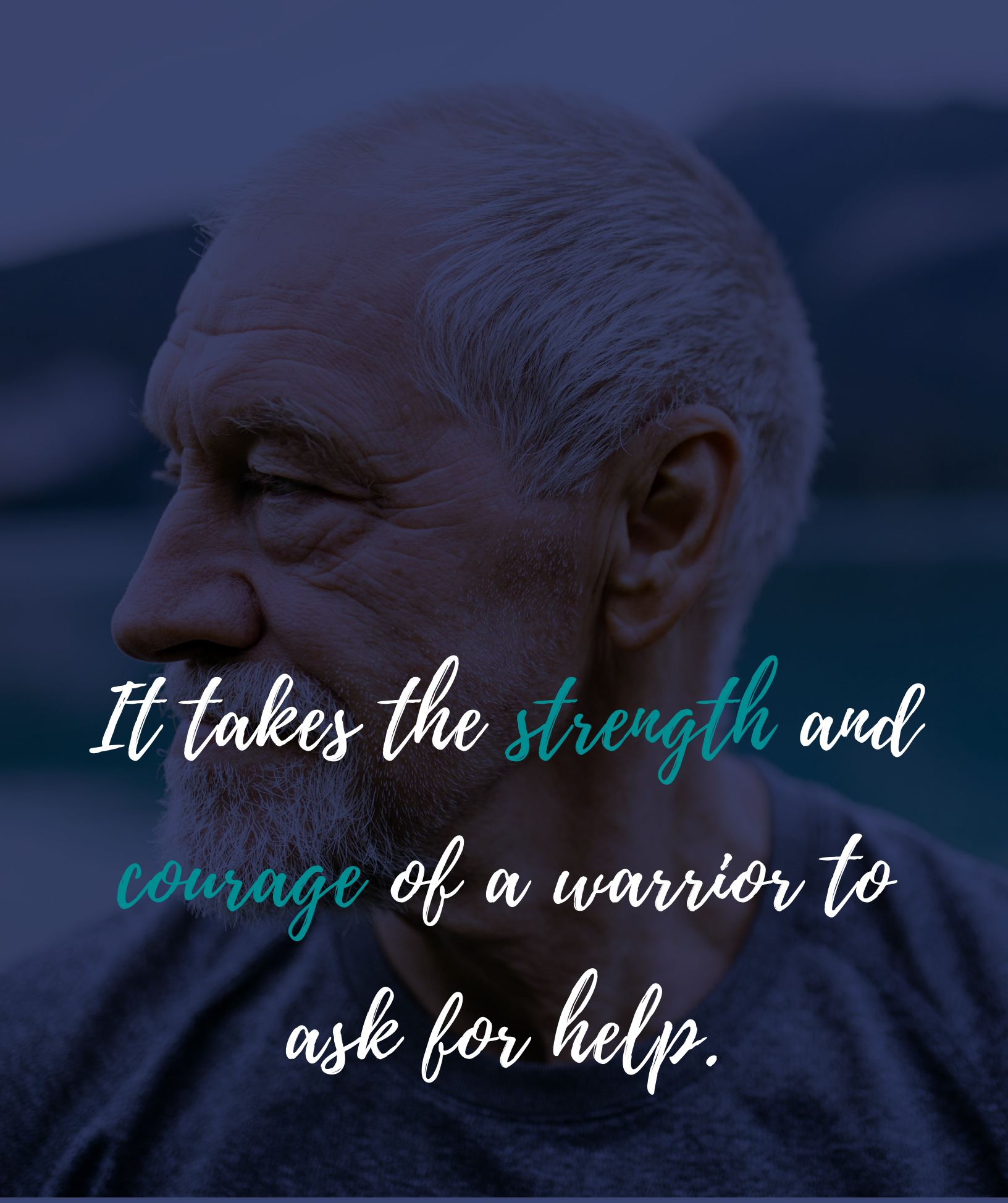
It takes the strength and
courage of a warrior to
ask for help.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The information presented in this document has been adapted manuals from the Peaceful Living and Stop Worry studies (Stanley et al., 2009; Stanley, NIMH Grant # MH 53932). We wish to acknowledge the contribution of all the authors of earlier versions of the treatment program, Drs. Diefenbach, Hopko, Quijano, Calleo and Wetherell.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a natural human emotion. Have you ever felt startled when someone sneaked up behind you? Did you feel anxious when you went for your last doctor's visit? In these situations, feeling anxious is very normal. In both situations, some level of anxiety might even be helpful in protecting yourself or preparing to ask the doctor questions related to your health. Anxiety can help us adapt to events, because it can help us become aware of danger and take appropriate steps to prepare for safety. For example, almost stepping on a poisonous snake can cause an anxiety response, which can help us either fight or fee for safety. However, anxiety can be a problem when one experiences it:

- too frequently; OR
- too intensely;

OR when it:

- lasts a long time, even afer the event that caused the anxiety is gone;
- feels uncontrollable; and
- keeps us from doing things that we enjoy or want to accomplish.

Mr. G. is a 62-year-old African American male. He has been married for 40 years to his wife, who was diagnosed with dementia a few years ago. Mr. G. retired last year to take care of his wife and he has struggled with anxiety since the retirement. He has a difficult time concentrating on small tasks. He worries about getting small projects completed around the house. He spends time everyday concerned about his wife's health and the health of his two daughters and their children. He often wakes up at night and frets about finances even though his financial situation is stable. Mr. G. used to pride himself for being a good problem solver but nowadays he has difficulty making even small decisions.

What is Generalized Anxiety Disorder?

Individuals can experience anxiety in many different ways. When it gets in the way of things we want to accomplish, we sometimes say that an "anxiety disorder" is present. Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is a type of anxiety common among older adults that can have serious effects. Individuals who have GAD tend to worry too much or get concerned about many different areas of their lives. They sometimes feel overwhelmed by their worries/concerns and have difficulty controlling them. Some people with GAD might be called "worriers" by their friends and family members. People with GAD report feeling nervous, even when everything is going well, because they are convinced that bad things are bound to happen, sooner or later. In other words, they have a tendency to worry/be concerned, even when there is no reason to do so. Life stresses can cause or make anxiety worse. When individuals experience a negative life event, it is natural to worry or feel nervous. However, if the worry and anxiety last more than six months and negatively affect work, personal relationships, and/or physical or mental health, learning coping skills can be helpful.

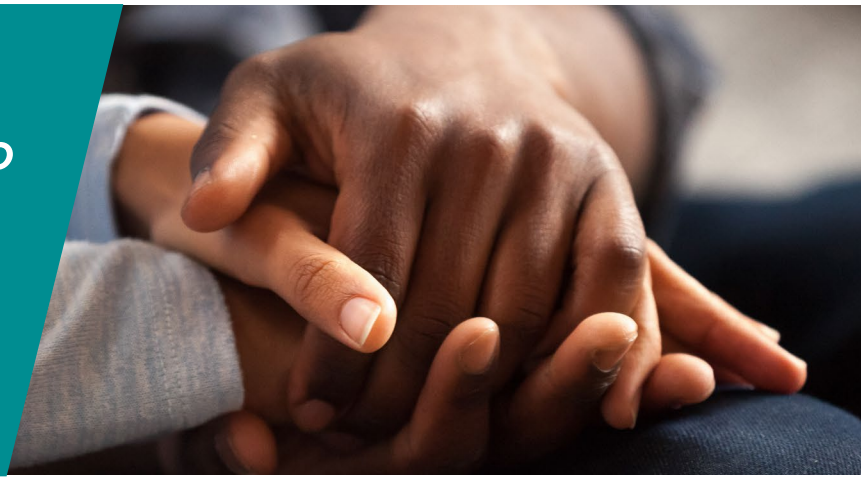
Will this workbook be useful for you?

If you think you may have symptoms of GAD, or if a doctor or other healthcare professional has said that you do, this workbook may be helpful to you. Even if you have "normal" levels of anxiety or have some concerns in your life, the skills here may be helpful.

How can you use this workbook?

This workbook is based on a program of skills that Practice is the key to how were helpful for reducing worry and related symptoms much you will get out of in a recent research study (Stanley et al., 2009). Each chapter in this workbook starts with an overview of a skill and ends with practice exercises that will help you use the skills in everyday life. Practice is key to how much you will get out of using the coping skills.

Practice is the key to how much you will get out of using the coping skills.



It is recommended that you start with reviewing Chapter 2 which covers anxiety education and awareness skill. For the rest of the workbook, it is not important to learn the skills in the order they are presented. In fact, you don't even need to learn all the skills covered in this workbook. Some might be more helpful for your unique needs, while others might be less helpful. For example, many older adults with GAD experience muscle tension. For these individuals, reading and practicing the skills in the chapter on Progressive Muscle Relaxation will be helpful. However, if you do not experience muscle tension as a symptom of anxiety, then you might not need to spend a lot of time on that chapter.

This workbook is accompanied by a compact disc (CD) with audio instructions for Chapters 3 and 4. Use of the CD is highly recommended while you are learning and practicing the skills outlined in those chapters. You may choose to follow the workbook chapters on your own or with a trained mental health professional.

Sometimes feelings of anxiety, worry and concern can occur along with feelings of depression, which sometimes cause a person to think of harming himself or someone else. If you are having such thoughts, please call 911 or the Suicide Prevention Hotline number (1-800-273-8255) or go immediately to the nearest emergency room.

Good and Bad Things About Change

Hopefully, as you move through the workbook, you will experience many good things related to your ability to cope with anxiety symptoms. However, change is not easy. Even when working toward positive change, many people experience not-so-positive things that may seem to hold them back. In this section, we will review both the pros (good things) and cons (bad things) of learning new coping skills to manage anxiety.

Pros of Change

- Better general functioning – living a more fulfilled life
- Easier coping with symptoms of anxiety and facing your fears
- Less frequency and intensity of other negative emotions, such as anger and depression
- Physical health benefits that may result from decreased stress
- Improved sleep
- More effective coping and problem solving

Cons of Change

- The time it takes to read over material to learn new skills
- The effort and time required to practice the skills
- Difficulty remembering to use/practice the skills
- Temporary increases in anxiety and depressive symptoms that result from increased awareness of these emotions

What are some benefits you expect to experience from trying these new skills?

_____

_____

_____

Are there barriers that might get in the way of learning and practicing these new skills?

_____

_____

_____

There are many steps you can take to overcome the things making it difficult to make positive change happen. Scheduling a time to practice that is convenient and when you are not tired can help. Also, penciling these times into your daily schedule often helps, as do reminder notes that you can place around the house (kitchen refrigerator, bathroom mirror, near your bed or any other place you go often during the day). Learning and practicing skills take time and energy. If you start to lose interest in taking part in the program, try thinking about the good things you can achieve by looking again at the pros and cons worksheet you completed in this chapter. All change takes effort. Only you can decide if the benefits are worth your time and effort. The skills described in this workbook are designed to help you manage symptoms of anxiety and things that cause anxiety or make it worse. With continued practice, you will become more proficient in the skills and gain more from them.

CHAPTER 2

ANXIETY Awareness

There are two main steps in learning to manage anxiety.

STEP 1	STEP 2
Become Aware of Your Anxiety – Learn to identify the situations and symptoms associated with your anxiety. Once you are able to recognize it early on, you will be better able to manage anxiety.	Learn and Practice New Coping Skills – This workbook includes a number of different tools you can use to cope with anxiety.

Become aware of your anxiety.
There are three main categories of anxiety symptoms:

- Physical Signs
- Thoughts
- Behaviors

Physical Signs

- Muscle Tension
- Rapid Pulse
- Shortness of Breath
- Butterflies in the Stomach
- Shaking/Trembling
- Sweating

When we face anxiety-producing situations, our bodies respond in a particular way so that we have physical symptoms, for example, muscle tension, rapid pulse, shortness of breath, sweating and "butterflies"in the stomach. Which of these do you have when you are anxious?

Thoughts

- Health (Own and Others')
- Finances
- Issues Related to Aging
- Family/Friends
- Daily Events
- Work/Volunteer Activities

Anxious individuals tend to worry about many different areas of their lives. They may be concerned that bad things may happen in the future or worry about things that have happened in the past. People may worry about their health or the health of people important to them, such as family members, and friends, finances, important relationships, daily events work/volunteer activities or issues related to aging. Do you worry about any of these things in your life?

Behaviors

When faced with situations that cause anxiety, people often do one of two things to make themselves feel less anxious. They either 1) avoid whatever is causing anxiety (for example, they don't balance their checkbook when they are worried about money; they don't go to the doctor when they are worried about health); OR 2) they do the same thing over and over again (for example, they check their bank balance over and over; they call the doctor's office several times while waiting for a test result).

Doing these things can reduce anxiety for a little while, but usually they end up making it worse because they prevent people from learning new ways to cope and build confidence that they can manage anxiety symptoms. Can you identify things you do or do not do to manage anxiety symptoms? This workbook covers skills that target each of the three types of anxiety symptoms. You may choose to spend more time on certain skills that may help with the types of symptoms you experience.

You must PRACTICE the skill for it to help you. As with learning any new skill, practice of the skill is key. Practice will help you learn the skills well and use them when you most need them in real-life situations that make you feel stressed or anxious. The more you practice, the more you will gain from the skills you will learn from this workbook.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRACTICE EXERCISES

Anxiety Awareness

Remember: Complete a practice exercise at least once a day. The more you practice, the better you'll get at reducing/managing your anxiety.

Practice Times – Choose a regular time (10 to 15 minutes) once a day to complete the practice exercise form. When could your practice time be? _____

Think of something that recently made you anxious, and use the practice form to write about it and any associated feelings, physical signs, thoughts and behaviors.

Practice Exercises

ANXIETY AWARENESS

Date _____ Day _____ Time _____am/pm

What caused you stress today? What were you doing?

_____

Where were you? Who were you with?

_____

What feelings did you have?

- ☐ anxiety
- ☐ frustration
- ☐ worry, nervousness
- ☐ embarrassment
- ☐ other:_____
- ☐ fear
- ☐ anger
- ☐ sadness

What physical signs did you have?

- ☐ muscle tension
- ☐ shaking/trembling
- ☐ shortness of breath
- ☐ other:_____
- ☐ sweating
- ☐ rapid pulse
- ☐ butterflies in stomach

What thoughts/worries did you have?

_____

_____

What did you DO or NOT DO to reduce anxiety?

_____

_____

CHAPTER 3

DEEP BREATHING

In the last chapter, you learned to identify things that cause anxiety and symptoms you have when you feel anxious or worried. To begin to learn how to reduce anxiety, in this chapter you will learn an easy breathing technique you can use anywhere.
When we get anxious, our breathing becomes rapid and shallow. One of the easiest ways to calm our body is to change the way we breathe. By paying attention to your breathing and changing the rate and way you breathe, you can make your entire body more "relaxed."

These are key things you need to do:

1. Take long, slow, deep breaths.
2. Make sure you breathe from your diaphragm (the muscle and tissue that separates your chest and abdomen) and not from your lungs. Place your hand on your diaphragm (an inch above your navel).
3. Make sure your stomach goes in and out when you breathe (it should expand when you breathe in and should fatten when you breathe out).
4. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth (as you breathe out, purse your lips as if you are blowing into a hot cup of soup).
5. Slow your breathing by breathing in to the count of five and out to the count of five – inhale ...two ...three ...four ...five, then exhale ...two ...three ...four ...five. If the length of time is too long, reduce the count to inhale ...two ...three ...four, exhale ...two ...three ...four.
6. As soon as you finish breathing in, begin to breathe out – do not pause between breathing in and breathing out.

Follow the audio instruction on the CD accompanying this workbook for more detailed instruction on deep breathing.

Instructions For Practice Exercises

Deep Breathing

Remember: The more you practice, the better you'll get at reducing/managing your anxiety.

Awareness Training – Think of something that recently made you anxious, and use the practice form to write it down, along with any feelings, physical signs, thoughts, and behaviors you experienced.

Practice Times – Choose a regular time (10 to 15 minutes) once a day to practice deep breathing. Pick a quiet, non-distracting place to practice deep breathing. When could your practice time be? _____

Relaxation Training – Practice deep breathing daily. Practice your breathing skill in stressful situations as they happen. Note whether the deep breathing was helpful in reducing stress.

Practice Exercises

DEEP BREATHING

Date _____ Day _____ Time _____am/pm

What caused you stress today? What were you doing?

_____

Where were you? Who were you with?

_____

What feelings did you have?

- ☐ anxiety
- ☐ frustration
- ☐ worry, nervousness
- ☐ embarrassment
- ☐ other:_____
- ☐ fear
- ☐ anger
- ☐ sadness

What physical signs did you have?

- ☐ muscle tension
- ☐ shaking/trembling
- ☐ shortness of breath
- ☐ other:_____
- ☐ sweating
- ☐ rapid pulse
- ☐ butterflies in stomach

What thoughts/worries did you have?

_____

_____

What did you DO or NOT DO to reduce anxiety?

_____

_____

Deep Breathing Practice

Did you practice deep breathing today? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Did you use deep breathing in a real-life situation today? ☐ YES ☐ NO

If yes, did it help you to relax? ☐ YES ☐ NO

CHAPTER 4

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

In this chapter, you will learn another skill to help you cope with the physical feelings that go along with anxiety. Individuals who get anxious may have muscle tension, especially around their neck and shoulder areas. Due to the muscle tension, some may even have headaches when they are stressed. The skill of progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) covered in this chapter will help you reduce the muscle tension that often goes along with anxiety. Te skill involves tensing and relaxing different muscle groups in sequence to help you relax.

Sometimes tension builds gradually without our being aware of it. Learning to detect the early signs of building tension will put you in a better position to use relaxation early on instead of waiting for it to reach a very high level. Using the tension-relaxation procedure will help you learn to recognize and pinpoint tension in your body and to reduce it. The tensing portion of the exercise is not supposed to cause or make pain worse. So, if you feel pain when you are at rest or when practicing muscle relaxation, avoid tensing muscles in that area. Just focus on relaxing that muscle group.

Throughout the tension-relaxation cycle, it's important to concentrate on the sensations produced by the different exercises. Other thoughts may wander into your mind, particularly worrisome thoughts. In these times, when you get distracted, just refocus your attention back to your muscles. Two good things come from directing your attention to the physical sensations you're feeling. First, you will learn a way to distract yourself to cope with negative thoughts. Second, you will learn what it feels like to be deeply relaxed. With continued practice, this skill will help you recall what relaxation feels like; and you will be able to create that sensation again when you are stressed. Over time, you might be able to feel the relaxation sensation without tensing the muscles. But this will take time and practice.

The tensing and relaxing of all seven muscle groups will take about 20 minutes. Use the audio instructions included in the CD to practice the skill.

The goal is to relax all the muscles in your body – just let them become more and more relaxed. Focus on learning how to differentiate between the feelings you have when your muscles are tense and when they are relaxed. Learning this skill will help you become more efficient at noticing tension during the day and will teach you how to relax tense muscles.

Instructions For Practice Exercises

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Continue Awareness Training – Continue to identify things that make you anxious and write down the feelings, physical signs, thoughts, and behaviors associated with those situations.

Practice PMR - Set aside one practice time each day for approximately 20 minutes. Use the relaxation CD that accompanies this workbook to make practice easier.

Practice in a place that will not distract you from concentrating on your exercises. It is helpful to use a high-backed chair to support your neck; but lying on a bed is okay, as long as you don't fall asleep. Loosen tight clothing, remove shoes, belts, and glasses, and do not cross your arms or legs.

To tense the seven muscle groups:

1. **Right arm:** Make a fist and tense your bicep (the large muscle at the front of your upper arm); pull your wrist upward while pushing your elbows down against the chair or bed.
2. **Left arm:** Same as for right arm.
3. **Face:** Lift your eyebrows as high as possible, clench your jaws, and pull the corners of your mouth back tightly.
4. **Neck and throat:** Pull your chin down toward your chest – at the same time, try to prevent it from actually touching your chest – almost like a hand is pushing it up.
5. **Torso:** Take a deep breath, hold it, and at the same time, pull your shoulder blades together, trying to make them touch, and make your stomach hard, as if you were getting ready for someone to hit you.
6. **Right leg: Lift your foot off the floor,** and push down on a chair with your thigh.
7. **Left leg:** Same as for right leg.

Practice Exercises

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

Date _____ Day _____ Time _____am/pm

What caused you stress today? What were you doing?

_____

Where were you? Who were you with?

_____

What feelings did you have?

- ☐ anxiety
- ☐ frustration
- ☐ worry, nervousness
- ☐ embarrassment
- ☐ other:_____
- ☐ fear
- ☐ anger
- ☐ sadness

What physical signs did you have?

- ☐ muscle tension
- ☐ shaking/trembling
- ☐ shortness of breath
- ☐ other:_____
- ☐ sweating
- ☐ rapid pulse
- ☐ butterflies in stomach

What thoughts/worries did you have?

_____

_____

What did you DO or NOT DO to reduce anxiety?

_____

_____

PMR Practice

Did you practice muscle relaxation today?	☐ YES	☐ NO
Did you use muscle relaxation in a real-life situation today?	☐ YES	☐ NO
If yes, did it help you to relax?	☐ YES	☐ NO

CHAPTER 5

CHANGING THOUGHTS – PART I

Anxious thoughts or worries afect how we feel and act. Many times the way we think about things, or the way we interpret things, infuences the way we feel. For example, when we hear a noise in the house, whether or not we feel anxious will depend on what we think the noise means – the refrigerator coming on, a branch blowing against the roof, or an intruder trying to enter the house. Depending on our thought process, we might decide to do nothing, look out the window to see how bad the wind is blowing, or reach for the phone to dial 911.

Similarly, when another person is "short" with you, you may interpret their behavior in many ways. You may think the behavior is a sign that you did something wrong, or the person doesn't like you, or that they are having a bad day. On the basis of your interpretation, you might feel bad and say you're sorry, feel angry and get defensive, or not respond emotionally and not take any action.

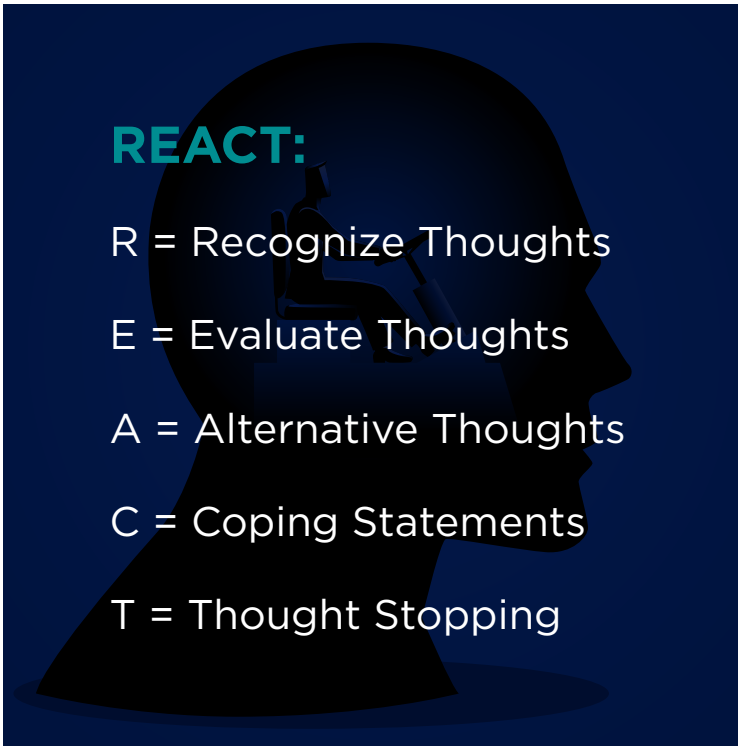
The example shows how our thoughts affect how we feel emotionally and what we do. In Chapters 5 and 6, you will learn ways to evaluate whether the thoughts you have are adding to your anxiety and to identify different ways to change those thoughts to reduce anxiety. An easy way to remember the steps to change thoughts is REACT.

Step One:
R = Recognize Thoughts (Chapter 5)

Step Two:
E = Evaluate Thoughts (Chapter 5)

Step Tree: Choose any of the following three options:
A = Alternative Thoughts (Chapter 5)
C = Coping Statements (Chapter 6)
T = Thought Stopping (Chapter 6)

In this chapter, you will learn to Recognize Thoughts, Evaluate Thoughts and find realistic Alternative Thoughts. In Chapter 6, we will cover Coping Statements and Thought Stopping.



R = Recognize Thoughts

The first step in changing thoughts is identifying what thoughts are causing or adding to your anxiety. Ask yourself:

- What worries or concerns do I have?
- What bad thing am I expecting might happen?

E = Evaluate Thoughts

Usually we tend to think that the first thought to enter our mind is the "truth." For example, if you tend to worry about the health of one of your family members, you may immediately think that something is wrong every time the phone rings. These thoughts that enter our mind immediately following a stressful situation are called automatic thoughts, as they do not require any effort on our part. Sometimes the automatic thoughts may be realistic, and other times they may not be. When the automatic thoughts are unrealistic, they may actually cause you to feel more anxious.

The second step in changing thoughts is to objectively EVALUATE whether the thoughts are realistic. Consider your initial thoughts as guesses instead of facts. For example, a family member might be calling just to say hello OR they might be calling to invite you to a family function. Sometimes our thoughts are realistic, but sometimes they are not. If the thoughts are unrealistic, then the next step is to come up with a more realistic thought.

You can begin to do this by asking yourself some simple questions:

- Am I thinking in an all-or-none way?
- Does my thought include the word "should"?
- Do I believe "for sure" that something bad will happen?
- Do I believe that things are my fault when they are really out of my control?
- Am I making a big deal out of something that isn't a big deal?

A = Identify an Alternative Thought

If your answer to any of the questions above is yes, then you may benefit from identifying realistic alternative thoughts. Simply put, this step involves another way of thinking about

The thoughts that enter our mind immediately following a stressful situation are called automatic thoughts...

the situation that is more realistic. This is not just positive thinking; instead, it's more realistic thinking. We will take one type of unrealistic category at a time and provide examples of how to come up with an alternative thought. All-or-None Thinking – If you look only at the extremes of a situation, you are using all-or-none thinking. In other words, things are either all good or all bad; you are either a complete success or a total failure. You may be making this error in logic if you find yourself saying "either...or..." or "if not X, then Y." Thinking like this causes stress because you fail to see the middle ground and leave no room for yourself to make mistakes, as all humans do.

Examples of all-or-none thinking:

- "I need to complete this project perfectly, OR I am a failure."
- "If I do not loan my son the money he needs, he might get more depressed."

Look out for these KEY WORDS - either X or Y; if not X, then Y.

When you recognize that you have used all-or-none thinking, try to think of an alternative thought that looks at the middle ground.

Examples of alternative thoughts:

- "It is okay to be good at some activities but not others."
- "Unfortunately, I cannot help my son financially; but I can support him emotionally."

Shoulds – Using the word "should" is another thinking error that may create stress, because should sets up inflexible rules about how you or other people "should" behave or about the way that things "should" turnout. Sometimes the shoulds we say are not realistic and can't be applied to every situation. In these cases, those thoughts can create anxiety. Other words that indicate this type of thinking are "must" and "ought."

Examples of should statements:

- "I should be able to help my son financially."
- "I should not make mistakes."

Look out for these KEY WORDS - should, ought, must.

Try asking yourself if your expectation is realistic. For example, is it realistic that you help your adult son with money when he has a full-time job and you are on a budget?

Examples of alternative thoughts:

- "It would be nice if I could help my son financially, but right now I cannot."
- "When I make a mistake, it is an opportunity for me to learn."

For Sures – People who are anxious also tend to overestimate the probability something bad will happen. Anxiety can help us cope with actual threats or risky events, but if you believe something bad will happen when it probably won't, you create unnecessary anxiety for yourself.

Examples of for sure thinking:

- "I will definitely lose my legal case. Therefore, there is no point preparing for the court appointment."
- "If I am having trouble remembering things now, I am sure I have Alzheimer's."

Look out for these KEY WORDS - definite, sure, absolutely, going to, will.

Try to think more realistically about the likelihood the bad thing will occur. For example, chances are there are alternative events that are less stressful and more likely to occur.

Examples of alternative thoughts:

- "The likelihood of losing my case in court is 50%. Therefore, I will prepare to make the strongest case possible."
- "There is very little chance that the occasional memory lapses are an indication of Alzheimer's."

My Faults – People who are anxious also tend to take on responsibility for events that are actually out of their control.

Examples of my fault thoughts:

- "It is my fault my daughter is having trouble in her marriage. If only I had been a more attentive parent."
- "I need to settle the feud between my children."

Look out for these KEY WORDS - if only I hadn't, if only I had If you are accepting too much responsibility for past events or future events that are out of your control, try blaming yourself less and identify other factors that may be contributing to the situation.

Examples of alternative thoughts:

- "I did my best to raise my children. My daughter's relationship problems are not my fault."
- "My children are grown-up adults now, and they are responsible for the relationships they have."

Big Deals – Sometimes people will become very anxious over things that are not a big deal. For example, someone may become very anxious when they are running late for an appointment. If you are "making mountains out of molehills" when you worry, you are probably worrying more than you need to.

Examples of big deals thoughts:

- "It is terrible that I didn't mail out the Christmas cards on time."
- "It is terrible that I forgot to thank my employer after he arranged a birthday celebration for me at work."

Look out for these KEY WORDS - terrible, awful, horrible.

Try asking yourself, "What's the worst thing that could happen?" Many times you'll find that even the worst thing that could happen is something you can cope with. For example, if you are late for an appointment, the worst outcome may be you need to reschedule the appointment. Tat may be frustrating, but you can cope with it.

Examples of alternative thoughts:

- "It is not the end of the world that I forgot to mail out the Christmas cards on time. I will see most of my family soon and can wish them a happy holiday in person."
- "I can always express my gratitude in person when I get back to the office on Monday."

Instructions For Practice Exercises

Changing Thoughts – Part I

Continue Awareness Training – Continue to identify situations that cause you to be anxious; and write down the associated feelings, physical signs, thoughts and behaviors associated with those situations.

Practice Changing Thoughts With REACT – Try to change the anxious thoughts you identify in the awareness training by practicing each of the following skills: notice whether you are using all-or-none thinking, shoulds, for sures, my faults, or big deals by checking each logical error that applies. Then identify an alternative thought and write it on your form.

Practice Exercises

CHANGING THOUGHTS – PART I

Date _____ Day _____ Time _____am/pm

What made you to feel stressed today? What were you doing?

_____

Where were you? Who were you with?

_____

What feelings did you have?

- ☐ anxiety
- ☐ frustration
- ☐ worry, nervousness
- ☐ embarrassment
- ☐ other:_____
- ☐ fear
- ☐ anger
- ☐ sadness

What physical signs did you have?

- ☐ muscle tension
- ☐ shaking/trembling
- ☐ shortness of breath
- ☐ other:_____
- ☐ sweating
- ☐ rapid pulse
- ☐ butterflies in stomach

What thoughts/worries did you have?

_____

What did you DO or NOT DO to reduce anxiety?

_____

Changing thoughts with REACT:

Check all errors that apply to the thoughts listed above:

All-or-none thinking _____ Shoulds _____ For Sures _____

My Faults _____ Big Deals _____

List Alternative Thoughts:

_____

CHAPTER 6

CHANGING THOUGHTS - PART II

In Chapter 5, we covered the first three steps in REACT: i) Recognize anxiety-producing thoughts, ii) Evaluate thoughts and iii) generate a realistic Alternative thought. In this chapter, we will discuss two additional ways you can change your thoughts to help reduce anxiety symptoms.

C = Coping Statements

Coping statements are instructions you give yourself to help decrease your anxiety about certain situations. These self-instructions will help you to look at a situation from a different perspective. At times when you feel unable to control anxiety or are feeling overwhelmed, coping statements will remind you that you are in control and will help you manage the situation.

As we mentioned in Chapter 5, changing thoughts is not just about positive thinking. Therefore, the goals of coping statements are not just to "look on the bright side of things," but to help you be more realistic and perceive some situations aren't as bad as you expect them to be.

Here is a list of coping statements you can use to manage anxiety. You can also come up with a new self-statement that works for your specific situation.

Coping Self-Statements

- I can develop a plan to deal with this situation.
- Don't worry – worry won't help anything.
- Even if I make mistakes, it will be ok.
- This is an opportunity to cope with my anxiety.
- My anxiety won't hurt me.

Preparing for a stressor

- I can do what I need to do.
- I can develop a plan to deal with this situation.
- I can manage this situation.
- It will be ok once I get started.
- Don't worry – worry won't help anything.

Confronting and handling the stressor

- If I take it one step at a time, I can meet this challenge.
- Don't think about fear, just about what I have to do.
- Stay relevant.
- Even if I make mistakes, it will be ok.
- Keep the focus on the present. What is it I have to do?

Feeling overwhelmed	• When the anxiety comes, take a step back and think. • Let me monitor my anxiety from 1 to 5, and watch it change. • It's not the worst thing in the world. • Don't avoid. • This is an opportunity to cope with my anxiety. • I can do what I have to do in spite of my anxiety. • My anxiety won't hurt me. • Relax; take a deep breath.

Write down a few coping statements that you are most likely to use:

_____

_____

_____

T = Thought Stopping

The basic idea in Thought Stopping is to stop dwelling on anxiety-provoking thoughts or images. You can use repetitive worry thoughts or images as cues to stop thinking and redirect your attention to ongoing activities that you need to think about. The idea here is that, since the anxiety-related thoughts are not productive, one way to help reduce feelings of anxiety is to just STOP the thoughts when they are interfering with your life.

You can use an image of a big red stop sign as a cue to stop dwelling on anxiety-producing thoughts/images.

As soon as you become aware of thoughts that you cannot get out of your head that make you anxious, disrupt them by telling yourself loudly "stop" and picturing a big red stop sign. Then direct your attention to other things going on around you. For example, look around the room – notice the color of the walls, pictures on the walls, details of the pictures, the number of windows in the room, number and color of furniture in the room, etc. You can also focus on an object of particular interest to you – think about what makes it interesting and its history. Also, you can direct your attention to doing various activities. As you attend to things around you, the worrisome thoughts will often disappear.

The goal is to distract your mind from thoughts that keep coming back that cause you to feel anxious.

Instructions For Practice Exercises

Changing Thoughts – Part II

Continue Awareness Training – Continue to identify things that make you anxious; and write down the associated feelings, physical signs, thoughts and behaviors associated with those situations.

Practice Changing Thoughts With REACT – Try to change the thoughts you identify in the awareness training that make you anxious by practicing each of the following skills:

- Notice whether you are using all-or-none thinking, shoulds, for sures, or my faults, or making a big deal of things by checking each logical error that applies. Then identify another thought, and write this on your form.

- Select a self-statement that could be helpful in managing stress, and write it on the form. You may want to refer to the list of self-statements provided in the chapter.

- Practice thought-stopping if you find that you can't stop the thoughts that make you feel anxious. Tell yourself to "stop" and picture a big red stop sign, and then redirect your attention onto other activities – Notice who is around you and what they are saying or doing, or pay attention to small details of objects around you. Check on the form whether you used this skill and whether it was helpful.

Practice Exercises

CHANGING THOUGHTS – PART II

Date _____ Day _____ Time _____am/pm

What situation created stress today? What were you doing?

_____

Where were you? Who were you with?

_____

What feelings did you have?

- ☐ anxiety
- ☐ fear
- ☐ frustration
- ☐ anger
- ☐ worry, nervousness
- ☐ sadness
- ☐ embarrassment
- ☐ other:_____

What physical signs did you have?

- ☐ muscle tension
- ☐ sweating
- ☐ shaking/trembling
- ☐ rapid pulse
- ☐ shortness of breath
- ☐ butterflies in stomach
- ☐ other:_____

What thoughts/worries did you have?

_____

What did you DO or NOT DO to reduce anxiety?

_____

Changing thoughts with REACT:

Check all errors that apply to the thoughts listed above:

All-or-none thinking _____ Shoulds _____ For Sures _____

My Faults _____ Big Deals _____

Now List Alternative Thoughts:

_____

List Coping Statements:

_____

Thought Stopping: Check if used _____ Check if helpful _____

CHAPTER 7

PROBLEM SOLVING

Anxiety can affect our ability to look for solutions to even simple problems we encounter every day. Many people who are anxious believe worry helps to identify or solve problems. Others believe worrying about problems will help them control what might happen or help them avoid a potential problem. However, identifying and thinking about possible problems is not the same as identifying solutions and taking appropriate steps to resolve problems. Therefore, worry can be a barrier to effective problem solving. Sometimes people get stuck in a rut of thinking the same things over and over. Or, at times when they feel overwhelmed with anxiety, they think nothing can be done when possible solutions actually do exist. Even when people have good ideas about how to solve problems, anxiety sometimes keeps them from being able to take steps to make it happen. In this chapter, we will describe a simple strategy you can use to find solutions to your problems. When you want to tackle a problem in your life, you can probably find a solution by going through the following steps:

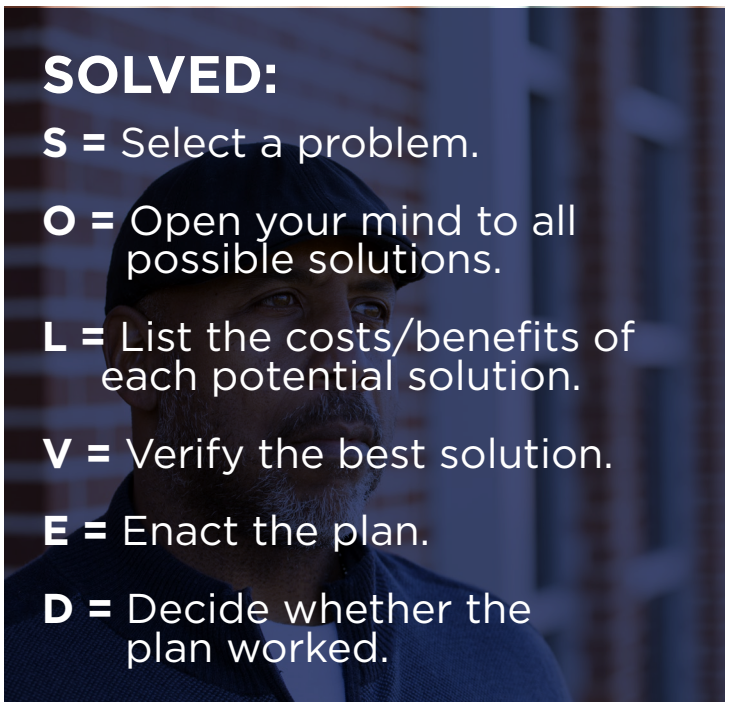
1. S = Select a Problem

The first step in solving a problem is to select the problem. It is important to be specific and identify a problem that is reasonable and solvable. If a problem is too big, it is important to break it down and tackle it one step at a time.

2. O = Open Your Mind to All Possible Solutions

"Brainstorm" as many possible solutions as you can, without considering the consequences. Do not disregard a potential solution because of a negative outcome in this step. You will be able to evaluate the solution in the next step. Keep an open mind, and be broad in selecting potential solutions.

Consider advice you would give to someone else, or consider how you or others have handled similar situations in the past. Consult a close friend or relative who you think might be able to offer a potential solution.



3. L = List The Costs/Benefits Of Each Potential Solution.

List consequences for each potential solution you identified. Every potential solution will have costs and benefits. List each of these potential positive and negative consequences.

4. V = Verify the best solution.

Based on your cost-benefit analysis, identify the best solution – the one with the biggest benefit and lowest cost.

5. E = Enact the plan.

Now that you have picked a solution, identify the number of steps needed to put the plan into action. Make each step small so that you are easily able to achieve your goal. Next, carry out the plan.

6. D = Decide whether the plan worked.

After you put your plan into action, you can decide how well your solution worked. If your goal was achieved, congratulate yourself!

If your plan was not effective, go back to step **S** and select a new problem, OR move to **L** to identify other potential solutions for the same problem.

The following is an example of how to use the SOLVED method to do effective problem solving:

Mrs. R. is a 67-year-old Hispanic woman. She recently moved to a senior housing apartment complex to be close to her family. She has one son who lives with his wife and children about 30 minutes away from her housing complex. Mrs. R. used to be active in her old neighborhood, and she loved going to the local mall with her old friends on a weekly basis. Since her move, Mrs. R. has made a few new friends but has not had any opportunities for social outings with them. Mrs. R. cannot drive on her own, after she began having vision problems last year. Therefore, since the move, Mrs. R. spends most days in her apartment. She is concerned that the lack of activity will make her high blood pressure and cholesterol level worse. Mrs. R. used the SOLVED strategy to find an effective solution.

Select a Specific Problem:

Few social/physical activities

Open Your Mind To All Possible Solutions

1. Look for social activities to do in the local church, such as bingo, or dancing.

List the Pros:

- Many of her neighbors attend these events.
- She may be able to get a ride from one of her neighbors and won't have to ask her son for help.
- She may meet new friends.

List the Cons:

- She is not a good dancer.
- She does not like the activities offered in the church as much as she likes shopping in a mall.

2. Ask some of her new friends to accompany her to the local mall.

List the Pros:

- The friends may say yes.
- Their friendship will become stronger.
- She may be able to include shopping trips to the housing complex's routine activities.
- Walking around in the mall will be good for her physical health.

List the Cons:

- The friends may not be interested.
- She may experience some anxiety about arranging a new activity.

3. Take a local bus to the mall.

List the Pros:

- She will not have to depend on anyone.
- She will not have to match her schedule with someone else's.
- Walking around in the mall will be beneficial for her physical health.

List the Cons:

- She will have to spend some time learning about the bus schedule.
- The bus fare will need to be added to her tight budget.
- The bus might not run on time.
- During winter, she may not be able to wait for the bus in the cold.

4. Ask her son for a ride every week.

List the Pros:

- She will be able to see her son every week.
- She enjoys spending time with her son.
- He may even bring her granddaughter with him once in a while.
- Walking around in the mall will be good exercise.

List the Cons:

- Her son has a demanding job and a family to take care of – he may not have time.
- If her son spends too much time with her, his wife might object.
- In the past, her son has not been able to take her to appointments, despite best intentions.

5. She will try to walk to the mall, a three-mile hike from her housing complex.

List the Pros:

- The walk will help with her physical health.
- She will be able to do this on her own.

List the Cons:

- The distance is too long. She may not have the energy.
- It may not be safe – some section of the road does not have a sidewalk.
- She will not be able to meet new people.
- Her son may get mad at her for being reckless.
- After a long walk, she may not have energy to shop.

Verify the best solution:

Add the solution you think will work best here: **Ask some of her new friends to accompany her to the local mall.**

Enact the Plan (List the steps below).

1. Ask her three new friends if they are interested in going to the mall with her this coming weekend.
2. Depending on who wants to join her, the group will need to decide who will drive.
3. _____
4. _____

Decide whether Your Solution Worked: ☐ YES ☐ NO

She will evaluate on Monday of next week, whether the first potential solution worked or not.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRACTICE EXERCISES

Problem Solving

Continue Awareness Training – Continue to identify situations that make you feel anxious, along with associated physical signs, thoughts, and behaviors.

Practice Problem Solving by Using SOLVED – Select a problem to be solved, and use the SOLVED strategy to try out a solution.

Practice Exercises

PROBLEM SOLVING

Date _____ Day _____ Time _____am/pm

Awareness training:

Situation: _____

Feelings: _____

Physical Signs: _____

Thoughts/Worries: _____

Anxiety-related Behaviors: _____

Select a Specific Problem: _____

OPEN your MIND to ALL possible SOLUTIONS	List the PROS	List the CONS
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Verify the Best Solution: Add the solution you think will work best here.

_____

Enact the Plan (List the steps below)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Time frame for completion: _____

Decide whether your solution worked: ☐ YES ☐ NO

CHAPTER 8

CHANGING BEHAVIOR

Generally, anxiety affects our behavior in two ways: procrastination (putting something of) or avoidance and checking or repetitive behavior.

Procrastination or Avoidance – When there is an activity you think will make you anxious, you may put it of and procrastinate. For example, if you are worried about money, you might put of paying your bills, or avoid social gatherings if being around a group of people is anxiety-provoking.

If you tend to put things of and/or avoid activities or events that cause you to feel anxious, the goal is to start doing the activities and participate in the events. For example, if you have avoided going to the doctor for fear they might find out you have an illness; the goal is to meet with the doctor for a check-up. You might experience physical symptoms of anxiety, such as rapid pulse, muscle tension or shaking and trembling. You may think about what the doctor might find wrong with you or how you might pay for care. You might be tempted to reschedule the appointment (procrastination) or cancel (avoid) it. Instead, to learn that you can manage anxiety, you need to keep the appointment and practice deep breathing, coping statements or changing thoughts to cope with and reduce physical symptoms and worries associated with anxiety.

Write down situations you have put of or avoided.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Checking or Repetitive Behavior – Sometimes anxiety is associated with checking things to reassure ourselves that everything is ok. Other repetitive behaviors associated with anxiety may serve no clear purpose, like snacking or smoking.

If you are feeling anxious about going to the doctor, when you reach the doctor's office and, while you wait for the doctor, you might pace back and forth or flip through magazines over and over or even walk up to the receptionist several times to ask if the doctor is ready to see you. These repetitive behaviors are also related to anxiety. Write down repetitive behaviors you want to stop.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

These anxiety-related behaviors help to reduce anxiety for a little while. For example, putting something of and avoiding something keep you from facing something that might cause anxiety so you do not have to experience anxiety symptoms. However, in the long run, behaviors that keep you from facing situations that make you anxious do not allow you to learn how to cope with them. Anxiety-related behaviors help maintain and sometimes increase anxiety. By facing anxiety-related situations, you can learn to cope with anxiety symptoms by using the coping skills you have learned in this workbook. The goal is learning to face your fears!

The goal here is to stop engaging in these repetitive behaviors and use other calming skills to help you cope with the physical symptoms and worries associated with anxiety. When you try to change behaviors related to anxiety, you will start to feel anxious. You will need to use additional coping skills to manage anxiety, like, deep breathing, calming statement and other coping skills listed in the workbook.

List coping skills you can use to help you face your fears.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRACTICE EXERCISES

Continue Awareness Training – Continue to identify situations that cause you to feel anxious, along with associated feelings, physical signs, thoughts and behaviors.

Practice Changing Anxiety-Related Behavior – Practice the changing behavior skill by doing activities that cause anxiety by i) doing things you have avoided or put of, ii) cutting back on behaviors you repeat over and over again.

Practice Exercises

CHANGING ANXIETY-RELATED BEHAVIOR

Date _____ Day _____ Time _____am/pm

What caused you to feel stress today? What were you doing?

_____

Where were you? Who were you with?

_____

What feelings did you have?

- ☐ anxiety
- ☐ frustration
- ☐ worry, nervousness
- ☐ embarrassment
- ☐ other:_____
- ☐ fear
- ☐ anger
- ☐ sadness

What physical signs did you have?

- ☐ muscle tension
- ☐ shaking/trembling
- ☐ shortness of breath
- ☐ other:_____
- ☐ sweating
- ☐ rapid pulse
- ☐ butterflies in stomach

What thoughts/worries did you have?

_____

What did you DO or NOT DO to reduce anxiety?

_____

Changing anxiety-related behavior

What behavior did you start doing that you otherwise would put of or avoid?

_____

What behavior did you cut back on that you otherwise would repeatedly do?

_____

CHAPTER 9

SLEEP SKILLS

Anxiety can disrupt sleep. For example, worrying about what happened during the day can make it difficult to fall asleep or stay asleep. Also, whether you get enough good-quality sleep affects how rested you feel during the day.

Here, we can easily remember SLEEP rules.

S = Set a Regular Bedtime

It is important to go to bed at approximately the same time every day.

L = Limit Use of the Bedroom

Use the bedroom only to sleep or be intimate with your partner. Tat way your bed is no longer associated with behaviors that disrupt sleep, like reading, watching TV eating, working, etc.

E = Exit the Bedroom If You Aren't Asleep In 15-20 Minutes

If you don't fall asleep within 15-20 minutes, you need to get up and practice calming skills until you are sleepy. Again, this helps to associate your bedroom only with sleeping and not tossing and turning.

E = Eliminate Naps

Naps can disrupt nighttime sleeping. If you feel you must nap in the day, limit the nap to 1 hour, and do not take naps after 3:00 pm.

P = Put Your Feet on the Floor at the Same Time Every Morning

It is important to wake at the same time every morning, give or take 30 minutes. Sleeping late in the morning can create problems for you at night when it is time to sleep again.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRACTICE EXERCISES

Sleep Skills

Continue Awareness Training – Continue to identify situations that make you feel anxious, along with feelings, physical signs, thoughts, and behaviors that accompany the anxiety.

Use SLEEP Rules – Please indicate on the form whether or not you followed the SLEEP rules, and write any comments you have about the SLEEP rules on the monitoring form.

Practice Exercises

SLEEP SKILLS

Date _____ Day _____ Time _____am/pm

What caused you to feel stress today? What were you doing?

_____

Where were you? Who were you with?

_____

What feelings did you have?

- ☐ anxiety
- ☐ frustration
- ☐ worry, nervousness
- ☐ embarrassment
- ☐ other:_____
- ☐ fear
- ☐ anger
- ☐ sadness

What physical signs did you have?

- ☐ muscle tension
- ☐ shaking/trembling
- ☐ shortness of breath
- ☐ other:_____
- ☐ sweating
- ☐ rapid pulse
- ☐ butterflies in stomach

What thoughts/worries did you have?

_____

What did you DO or NOT DO to reduce anxiety?

_____

Which of the SLEEP strategies did you use?

_____

Was it helpful?

☐ YES ☐ NO

CHAPTER 10

Review

Planning for the future

You have come to the end of the program of learning new skills to help decrease anxiety. Now you will need to continue to practice your skills and integrate them into your everyday life. It may be good to develop a plan to help you do this. For example, you may want to set aside a time each week to review skills you have found helpful. Or you may try keeping notecards with you that provide cues to use skills, like cards with the words REACT or SOLVED on them, or cards with helpful coping statements. The important thing is for you to come up with a plan that will suit you and help you to maintain the gains you have made during the program.

You can think of this workbook as a toolbox of skills – each skill is a tool you can use to help cope with anxiety. You will probably find some skills become your favorites, and you will use them frequently. You may also find some skills work best for some situations, while others work best in other situations. Your job now is to continue practicing the skills and incorporate them into your daily life.

Learning to manage anxiety is not a one-time activity. It is a process that takes time and energy. If you find your interest in using the skills is declining, review the pros and cons of change in the introductory chapter to decide whether continuing to use the skills will be helpful for you. There will be times when you will face a new situation that increases your anxiety level — these anxiety-provoking situations are a great opportunity to practice the coping skills. If you want to seek mental health care within the VA, talk to your primary care doctor for a referral.

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