



NHS

**Birmingham and Solihull
Mental Health**
NHS Foundation Trust

Steps to Recovery Service

Stay home self-help pack



The information in relation to Covid-19 in this document is accurate at the time of publication, please see Government and NHS sources for up-to-date guidelines.

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This pack was developed by Dr Sundeep Kaur Sandhu, Clinical Psychologist, and designed by Dóra Francis, Graphic Designer, at Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust.

Thank you to Carol Vivyan, of Get Self Help, for her kind permission to use her resources and to adapt them to the current circumstances and our service.

8 June 2020

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Unless otherwise stated, adapted from www.getselfhelp.co.uk by Carol Vivyan with permission, or written by Dr Sundeep Kaur Sandhu.

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Foreword

This pack gives different strategies on what to do for different situations. I think it's good to read the whole pack so that you can decide what's most helpful.

I could relate to a lot of the things written in the pack. Some of the things written in the pack were things I am already doing and some of them were new for me to try and test out.

I would advise this pack to everyone who is suffering from some type of mental health problem.

NM

Introduction

While some anxiety is entirely normal under the current circumstances, at times this anxiety may feel overwhelming, or you might notice other difficult feelings like low mood, anger and loneliness. **This pack has been collated as a resource to draw on at times you may feel this way,** to support you.

The pack includes techniques mainly from cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). CBT is a model of therapy **which looks at the relationships between our thoughts (cognitions), our feelings and what we do (our behaviour).** There is a lot of evidence that this model of therapy can help people with a range of mental health problems.

It will be helpful for everyone to read the first section: 'maintaining mental health and wellbeing in the coronavirus pandemic', 'ten things you can do' and 'five ways to wellbeing' (pages 6-8).

There is no particular order or way to use this pack. However, for the 'managing anxiety and worry' (pages 12-17) and 'managing your thoughts' (pages 23-28) sections, it would be helpful to read the first two pages before moving onto other pages in those sections.

If you need any further copies of particular pages, please speak to a member of staff. **If you need any support** or have any questions on how **to use the resources in this pack, please speak to a staff member** who will either discuss this with you or put you in touch with the team psychologist.

Stay safe and take care of yourself.

Maintaining mental health and wellbeing in the coronavirus pandemic

- We can control some aspects of our lives, but many things are outside of our control, such as the coronavirus crisis of 2020.
- We cannot control the virus itself but **we can take steps to reduce our risk.**
- We cannot control the media or the amount of coverage given to the pandemic but **we can control how much we watch or pay attention to.**

There is still much we can do to help maintain and improve our own mental health and wellbeing.

Wash your hands often for 20 seconds in soap and warm water. Use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available.

Wash your hands as soon as you get home.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

Catch coughs and sneezes in a tissue or the bend of your elbow. Throw the tissue in the bin immediately and then wash your hands.

Keep a distance of at least two metres (three steps) away, from anyone you do not live with, when outside your home.

Please refer to current government advice: www.gov.uk/coronavirus.



Ten things you can do

- 1. Look after your body:** exercise daily, eat healthily and drink plenty of water.
- 2. Maintain a routine:** e.g. get up and go to bed at the same time every day.
- 3. Write down the activities which energise you and those which calm and relax you. Do at least one each day.**
- 4. Plan fun and enjoyment:** reading, listening to music, watching films, playing games on your phone, playing board games, doing jigsaw puzzles, or learn to play an instrument.
- 5. Do something you've been meaning to do:** e.g. declutter your room.
- 6. Be creative:** paint, colour, draw, write, or build things.
- 7. Connect with others:** phone or use video call to keep in touch with family, friends or neighbours.
- 8. Limit news and social media:** only watch or read the news up to twice a day. Only use reliable sources, e.g. the Government, the NHS, or the World Health Organisation.
- 9. Ask for help:** please speak to any member of the staff team if you have questions, are concerned or need any help or support.
- 10. Coping with anxiety:** It is entirely normal to be somewhat anxious or worried about Covid-19. Use this pack to help you and speak to a staff member to let them know you are feeling this way.



Five ways to wellbeing: CLEAN

Connect

Make time to connect with family, friends and neighbours. Use the telephone or video chat apps like Skype, FaceTime, Zoom or WhatsApp.



Learn

Try something new or take up a new (or old) hobby: Learn to play an instrument, a new language or skill, learn about healthy eating, dancing, to paint, to draw, to write, to apply make up or do hair styles. Be creative! There are many free online courses.



Exercise

Get some physical exercise: walk, run, cycle, skip, work out, do yoga, tai chi or dance. Watch Joe Wicks' daily fitness classes or try other online classes.



Acts of kindness in giving

Do something nice for a friend, family member, or a stranger. **Say thank you or just smile at others.** Ask how others are and listen.



Notice

This is about **being in the present moment**, by being mindful and curious. What's happening right now? What do you see right now? This may mean noticing your thoughts and feelings and just letting them be.



Relaxation and mindfulness

Mindful breathing

The goal of mindful breathing is a calm, non-judging awareness, allowing thoughts and feelings to come and go without getting caught up in them.

- **Start by getting comfortable**, with your **eyes closed** and your spine reasonably straight.
- **Bring your attention to your breathing.**
- **Imagine that you have a balloon in your tummy. Every time you breathe in, the balloon inflates. Each time you breathe out, the balloon deflates.** Notice the sensations in your abdomen as this happens.
- **Thoughts will come into your mind and that's okay, because that's just what the human mind does. Simply notice any thoughts, then bring your attention back to your breathing.**
- Likewise, **you may notice sounds, physical feelings and emotions, and again, just bring your attention back to your breathing.**
- You don't have to follow those thoughts or feelings, **don't judge yourself** for having them, or analyse them in any way. Just notice when this happens, bringing your attention back to your breathing.
- No matter how many times it happens, **whenever you notice that your attention has drifted off, simply note that the attention has drifted and then gently bring the attention back to your breathing.**





Guided imagery

Start by getting comfortable in a quiet place where you won't be disturbed, close your eyes (or keep your gaze focused somewhere in the room) and take a few minutes to focus on your breathing.

Imagine a place where you can feel calm, peaceful and relaxed.

It may be a place you've been to before, somewhere you've dreamed about going to, somewhere you've seen a picture of, or just a peaceful place you can create in your mind's eye.

- **Look around you** in that place, notice the colours and shapes. What else do you notice?
- Now **notice the sounds that are around you**, or perhaps the silence. Sounds that are more noticeable and those that are more subtle.
- Think about **any smells you notice there**.
- Then **focus on any skin sensations** – the temperature, any movement of air and anything else you can touch.
- **Notice the pleasant physical sensations in your body** whilst you enjoy this safe place.
- If you notice your mind wandering, just gently bring your attention back to the image.
- You can choose to linger there a while, just enjoying the peacefulness and serenity. **You can leave whenever you want to, just by opening your eyes and bringing yourself back to alertness in the here and now.**

Progressive muscle relaxation

- This involves progressively tensing and then relaxing muscles in the body.
- **Tense the muscle for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds.**
- You may find it helpful to **say the word 'relax' or 'calm' as you relax your muscles.**
- Do not apply this exercise to any part of your body where you have an injury or a history of physical problems, without speaking to a doctor first.

Forehead

- Raise your eyebrows as far as they can go for 5 seconds.
- Release your eyebrows for 10 seconds.

Eyes and cheeks

- Tense your eyes by squeezing your eyes shut for 5 seconds.
- Open your eyes for 10 seconds.

Shoulder blades and back

- Push your shoulder blades back so that your chest is pushed forward for 5 seconds.
- Relax your shoulder blades for 10 seconds.

Lower arms and hands (complete first with left and then right arms and hands)

- Clench your fist for 5 seconds.
- Release your hand for 10 seconds.

Upper arms (complete first with left and then right arm)

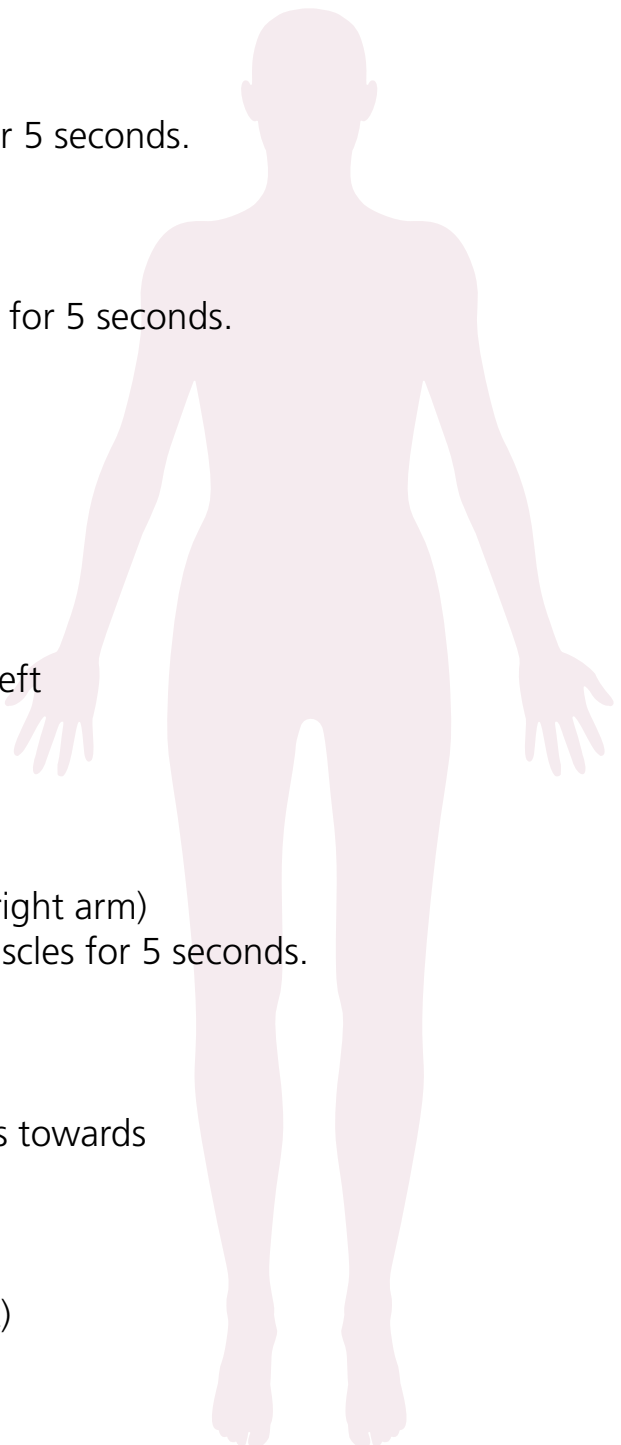
- Lift your arm up like you are flexing your muscles for 5 seconds.
- Let your arm go for 10 seconds.

Legs (complete first with left and then right leg)

- Tighten your thigh muscle and pull your toes towards you for 5 seconds.
- Release your leg for 10 seconds.

Feet (complete first with left and then right foot)

- Curl your toes downwards for 5 seconds.
- Release your toes for 10 seconds.



Managing anxiety and worry

Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal response to being or feeling in danger.

It is a biological response to threat or danger that helps humans to survive by preparing us to run away, fight, or freeze.

When faced with danger our body's alarm system may respond with the following **physical sensations**: heart racing, breathing faster, shaking, dizziness, tense muscles, feeling hot, sweating, nausea, dry mouth, butterflies in our stomach, difficulties concentrating, racing thoughts, urge to use the bathroom, aches and pains.

Our body has the same response to real danger (e.g. an animal that is about to attack us) **and to thoughts of danger in our mind** (e.g. worries about bills).

We wouldn't want to stop anxiety completely. A small amount of anxiety is helpful e.g. a small amount of worry about our bills, will motivate us to act to ensure we keep on top of them.

We can manage anxiety by:

- **breathing, mindfulness and relaxation techniques** (pages 9-11) using the advice from this pack or from using the **apps listed in this pack** (page 37)
- **distraction** to help us refocus our attention on something we enjoy (e.g. reading a book) or on something we have to do (e.g. make our lunch)
- **talking to someone**, this might be staff, a friend, or a family member
- **challenging our thoughts** using the '**managing your thoughts**' (pages 23-28) section in this pack
- **eating well, sleeping well** and **exercising regularly**.



Anxiety and the 'detective mode'

Anxiety is a normal response to being or feeling in danger.

When faced with danger, our body's alarm system may respond with a number of **physical sensations**, e.g. heart racing, breathing faster, feeling light-headed, racing thoughts, aches and pains.

Sometimes our body has learnt a clever way of keeping us safe, by going into 'detective mode', where we become super alert to any signs of danger. This is so that we can quickly respond to any signs of danger.

Going into 'detective mode' can sometimes be unhelpful, as we may misinterpret things as being more threatening than they are.

For example someone might experience a slight pain and think that they are seriously ill. This may then make them anxious and the body's alarm system responds by triggering anxiety symptoms. Experiencing these symptoms, we may then think that this is proof that there is something seriously wrong with us.

We can learn to notice when we get into 'detective mode', and turn the sensitivity dial down.

- **Notice the 'detective mode':** "That's me being supersensitive again!"
- **Readjust the sensitivity dial:** "Okay, I am noticing... (physical sensations). I'm thinking the worst about that, but it's probably just a normal body sensation. The other symptoms are due to anxiety."
- There's no need to fight the thoughts, you can **notice the thoughts and let them pass.**
- **Change your focus of attention:** move on, do or think about something else.



The worry tree



Worry: setting times for not worrying

It can be helpful to **have a set time to not worry**.

There may already be times when you do not seem to worry much. This might be at a particular time of day, certain places or when doing certain activities. **Agree that these will be 'worry free zones'.**

Agree new 'worry free zones'. Think about where you will be, what you will be doing and how long to do this for. **Consider activities that need more concentration or are more relaxing e.g. mindful colouring books.**

At these new 'worry free zones', **when a worrying thought comes to mind, notice this and tell yourself "I don't need to worry about this now, because I can worry about it later".**

Over time you will be able to have longer 'worry free zones' and more times that you can do this.



Worry: setting times for worrying

This is when we postpone worry, **setting a time to worry**, later in the day.

Agree the worry time: time, length of time (e.g. 15 minutes) and place. Don't have worry time late in the evening, 6pm is good for many people.

We want to make worrying unattractive. Consider having to sit upright in a chair during 'worry time' rather than a comfortable sofa.

If you notice worrying thoughts during the day, then tell yourself "I'm not going to worry about that now, as I can worry about it later", then return your focus of attention to what you were doing, or do or think of something else.

You may want to carry a note book and **write down each worry as it happens**, or make a note on your phone. **Look at these notes only during 'worry time'.**

To postpone worry it can be helpful to **refocus your mind on a positive memory**. Try to imagine yourself really back there, thinking about what you were doing at that time, how you were feeling, what you could see, hear and smell.

You will find this easier over time. Many people find using worry time helpful.



Problem-solving

One way of managing our worries is to problem-solve using these steps:



1. Define the problem.

E.g. I miss my friend and I can not see her currently.

2. Brainstorm some possible solutions to the problem (think creatively).

E.g. ring her, send her a text message, write her a letter, etc.

3. Choose your top three solutions and think of the advantages or disadvantages.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
E.g. text her	I can do this every day.	I can't hear her voice.
1.		
2.		
3.		

4. Choose one idea and consider what you need to do this.

E.g. text her – I need to have my phone charged and credit on it.

5. Evaluate the outcome – what went well, what didn't go so well, did it solve the problem?

E.g. it's an easy way for me to stay in contact with her but not very personable.

6. If necessary, try a different solution from step 3 and work your way through steps 4 to 5 again.

Lifting your mood

Keeping active

When we feel low, it is common for us to stop doing things, but this can actually make us feel even worse.

Write down some of the activities you used to do, but have been avoiding recently.

Routine activities, e.g. shower, cleaning the kitchen, shopping.

Pleasurable activities, e.g. speaking to friends or family, walking.

Necessary activities, e.g. sorting out the post.

Then place these activities into the boxes below, into order of difficulty.

The easiest

Medium difficulty

The most difficult

Use the BACE weekly activity diary (next page) to plan to do some of the activities you have been avoiding.

Start with the easiest, before you move on to tackling more difficult activities. Ensure you include a mixture of routine, pleasurable and necessary activities every day.



Weekly activity diary: BACE

Record or plan daily activities that include caring for your **body**, a sense of **achievement**, connecting with others and **enjoyment**.

Activity	Day	Example: Mon 8 June							
Body care Exercise Healthy eating Treating illness Rest and sleep		8am – get up 9am – meds 2pm – walk 12pm – eat salad 10pm – sleep							
Achievement Work Chores Study		11am – use new avocado salad recipe							
Connect with others Friends Family Community		10am – call my sister 6pm – have video chat with my friend							
Enjoyment Play Fun Pleasure		4pm – do some mindful colouring 7pm – watch a movie							



Notice the positives using SHARP specs

When we feel low, we tend to focus on the negatives. It's like wearing 'gloomy specs', we see things in a distorted way.

It can help to change our focus by noticing the positives with SHARP specs, which can help us to see things clearly and improve how we feel.



Set time

Set some time aside each day to notice the positives, perhaps at the same time of day, or set a reminder alarm.



Hunt

Hunt down those times that things went well, when you said or did something positive, or when something positive happened or was said to you.



Acknowledge

Acknowledge when some things don't go so well.

It's normal to feel sad or disappointed, but sometimes things don't go as well as we hope! Ask yourself: What was ok about the situation? What can I learn from this?



Record

Every day, write down at least one positive thing that happened that day, use a positive data log (next page), jar, notebook, journal or app.



Plan

Plan ahead for positive things, use the BACE weekly activity diary (page 19) as a guide. Plan to collect souvenirs or photos to create a positives album or box.

Positive data log



Every day, write down at least one positive thing that happened that day. It might be something that went well, when you said or did something positive, or when something positive happened or was said to you.

[illegible]

Compassionate kit bag or box

A compassionate kit bag or box is a place to put reminders for your compassionate self. You can use any bag, box or other container and decorate it as you wish.

Collect together items that are meaningful, helpful or those that make you feel good about yourself. You might find these items inspiring, empowering, calming, soothing, motivating, bringing confidence, strength and wisdom.

Some items you might wish to add may have some sadness attached to it, by their association with an event or person. Ideally, do not include these items.

If you physically cannot put the item in the bag or box, then perhaps use a reminder of the item, for example, a picture of an iPod, mp3 player.

You can add items gradually over time if you prefer.

Consider:

- **music playlist**
- **photographs and pictures**
- **smells**, e.g. favourite perfume
- **positive or coping statements**
- **books, poems, quotes**
- **letter from your compassionate self**
- **objects with meaning**
- **reminders of your strengths**
- **hobbies or activities**, e.g. adult colouring book, arts and crafts
- **grounding or soothing objects**, e.g. crystals
- **tactile objects**, e.g. hand lotion.

Keep your compassionate kit bag or box nearby, maybe next to your bed to remind yourself every day.



Managing your thoughts

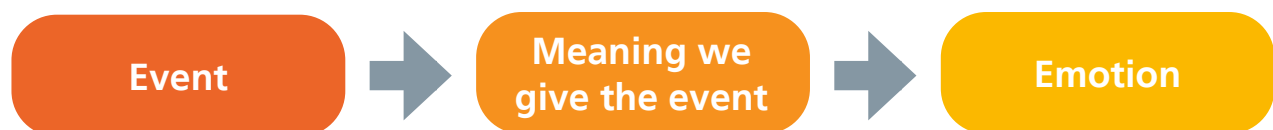
About automatic thoughts

We have thousands of **thoughts** every day, which **help us to interpret and make sense of our experiences**.

Thoughts **can be words, images, or memories**. They are **automatic** and pop into our head without our control.

Thoughts are not statements of fact, but they tend to be so believable, that we do not stop to question them.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) says that **it is not the event which causes our emotional and behavioural reactions, but the meaning we give to that event, what we think about that event**.



An event might be that I am walking down the road and wave to someone I know, but they don't wave back.

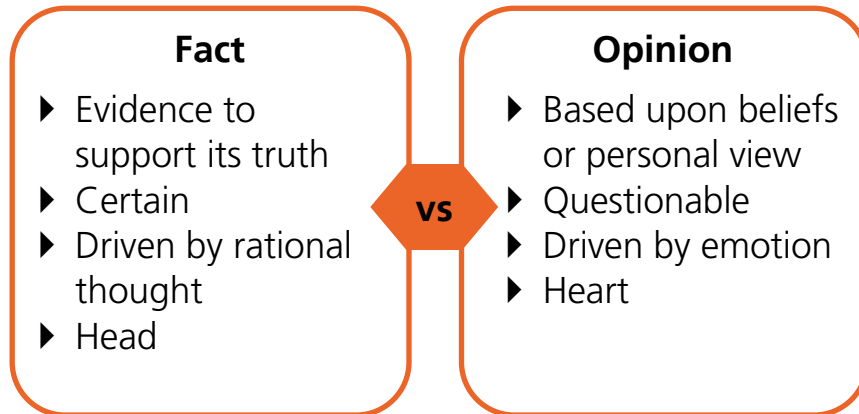
One meaning I could give to this situation is that they deliberately ignored me (thought), which might make me feel angry (emotion) and I may stop speaking to them (behaviour).

Another meaning I could give to the event is that they didn't see me (thought), which might make me sad (emotion) so I might call them later to discuss this (behaviour), they apologise, we catch up with one another and I feel happy (emotion).

Because of our previous experiences, upbringing, environment, culture, knowledge and values, we may well make very different meanings of the same situation, than someone else.

Some thoughts are not in line with our upbringing, culture and values, and that can make them seem all the more distressing, because we add some meaning about why we had them (e.g. I must be a bad person!). It is normal to have intrusive or unwanted thoughts like this.

Fact or opinion



At stressful times, we tend to be driven by our emotions and opinions.

Realising that **many thoughts are opinion rather than fact** can help us make more wise and calm decisions.

It is helpful to ask ourselves whether our thoughts are fact or opinion.

- If **opinion**, then we can look at the facts – what we do know about the situation.
- If **fact**, then we can make choices about the best thing to do.

Consider the example on the previous page, where I wave at a friend and they don't wave back. I could think that they "they didn't want to talk to me because they don't like me" or **"they deliberately ignored me" (opinion). I might feel upset or angry (emotion) and react in an unhelpful way (behaviour).**

The only fact is that the person did not wave at me; anything else is an opinion – our own personal interpretation of the event. **The reality was that they just didn't see me.**

Get into the habit of asking yourself: **Is this a fact or opinion?**

Positive affirmations

Over the years, we tend to get into unhelpful thinking habits and think negatively about ourselves and situations. **Using positive statements can help us develop a new attitude to ourselves and our situations.**

Choose a statement from those below, adapt the ones below, or make one that means more to you.

Use a statement that starts with “I” and use the present tense.

Make it something broadly realistic, even if you don’t believe it right now.

Repeat, repeat, repeat throughout the day, every day, of every week, of every month.

You might want to make or **print out a card with your affirmation** and carry it with you.

For the positive affirmations to work, **you must use it whenever you notice you have that negative thought** – immediately turn it around by using your affirmation.

- I am strong.
- I am determined.
- I am a good and worthwhile person.
- I have inner strength and resources.
- I am confident and capable.
- People like me – I am a likeable person and I like myself.
- I care about others, I am needed and worthwhile.
- I have a lot to be proud of.
- I have all that I need.
- I am in control of my life.
- I can achieve anything I want to achieve.
- My life has meaning and purpose.
- I am calm and relaxed.





Positive self-talk or coping statements

Positive statements encourage us and help us cope through distressing times. Examples of coping thoughts might be:

- **Stop and breathe, I can do this.**
- **This will pass.**
- **I can use my coping skills and get through this.**
- **It's okay to feel this way, it's a normal reaction.**
- **I have done this before and I can do it again.**
- **I feel this way because of my past experiences, but I am safe right now.**
- **Thoughts are just thoughts – they're not necessarily true or factual.**
- **This is tough, but so am I.**
- **I can learn from this and it will be easier next time.**
- **Keep calm and carry on.**

Write down a coping thought or positive statement for each difficult or distressing situation – something you can tell yourself that will help you get through it.

Difficult or distressing situation	Coping thought or positive statement
E.g. going shopping	I have done this before and I can do it again.

Write them down on a piece of card and carry it in your pocket or bag to help remind you.

A mindful response to thoughts: APPLE

Acknowledge

Notice and acknowledge the thought as it comes to mind.

Pause

Don't react as you normally do. Just pause and breathe.

Pull back

Tell yourself this is just the anxiety, anger or depression talking and this thought or feeling is only a thought or feeling.
Don't believe everything you think!
Thoughts are not statements of fact.

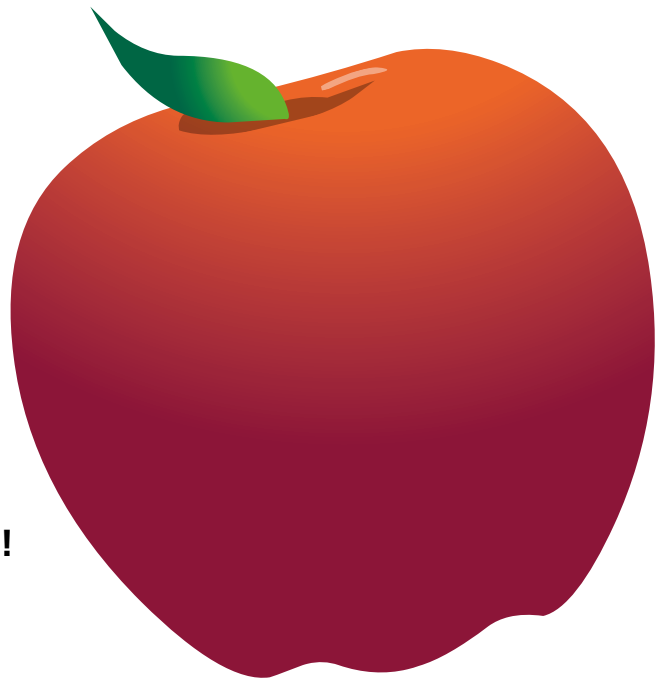
Let go or let it be

It will pass. **You don't have to respond to the thoughts or feelings.** You might **imagine them floating away in a bubble or cloud.**

Explore

Explore the present moment, because right now, in this moment, all is well. **Notice your breathing** and the sensations of breathing. **Notice the ground beneath you.** Look around and notice **what you see, what you hear, what you can touch, what you can smell.** Right **now.**

Then, **shift your focus of attention to something else:** on what you need to do, on what you were doing before you noticed the worry, or do something else mindfully, with your full attention.



Change, accept or let go?

When struggling with difficult emotions, we can explore our thoughts further, to help us to choose the most helpful course of action.

What am I reacting to?

- ▶ **What's happening with me: thoughts, emotions, physical sensations.**
- ▶ What meaning am I giving it?

Questions I can ask myself:

- ▶ Is this fact or opinion?
- ▶ How important is it?
- ▶ How important will it be in six months' time or in a year?
- ▶ **What would someone else make of this?**
- ▶ **What would I say to a friend?**
- ▶ What's the bigger picture?

What are my options?

Change

- ▶ **What can I change?**
 - » **Environment**
 - » **Situation**
 - » **My reaction**
- ▶ How can I make the changes?
- ▶ What resources do I need?
- ▶ When can I do it?

Accept

- ▶ **It is as it is.**
- ▶ I don't have to agree with it.
- ▶ I don't have to judge it as good or bad.
- ▶ I don't have to fight it, or try to stop it.
- ▶ It will pass.

Let go

- ▶ Is it worth it?
- ▶ **Is this something I can leave or let go of and move on from?**

What can I do that will best help me, others or the situation right now?

Coping with trauma

Relaxing 'safe place' imagery

If you notice any negative links or images entering your imagery, then think of something else. Avoid using your home (or bed) as a 'safe place'.

Start by getting comfortable in a quiet place where you won't be disturbed, close your eyes (or keep your gaze focused somewhere in the room) **and take a few minutes to focus on your breathing.**

Imagine a place where you can feel calm, peaceful and safe.

It may be a place you've been to before, somewhere you've dreamed about going to, somewhere you've seen a picture of, or just a peaceful place you can create in your mind's eye.

- **Look around you** in that place, notice the colours and shapes. What else do you notice?
- Now **notice the sounds that are around you**, or perhaps the silence. Sounds that are more noticeable and those that are more subtle.
- Think about **any smells you notice there.**
- Then **focus on any skin sensations** – the temperature, any movement of air and anything else you can touch.
- **Notice the pleasant physical sensations in your body** whilst you enjoy this safe place.
- You can choose to linger there a while, just enjoying the peacefulness and serenity. **You can leave whenever you want to, just by opening your eyes and bringing yourself back to alertness in the here and now.**



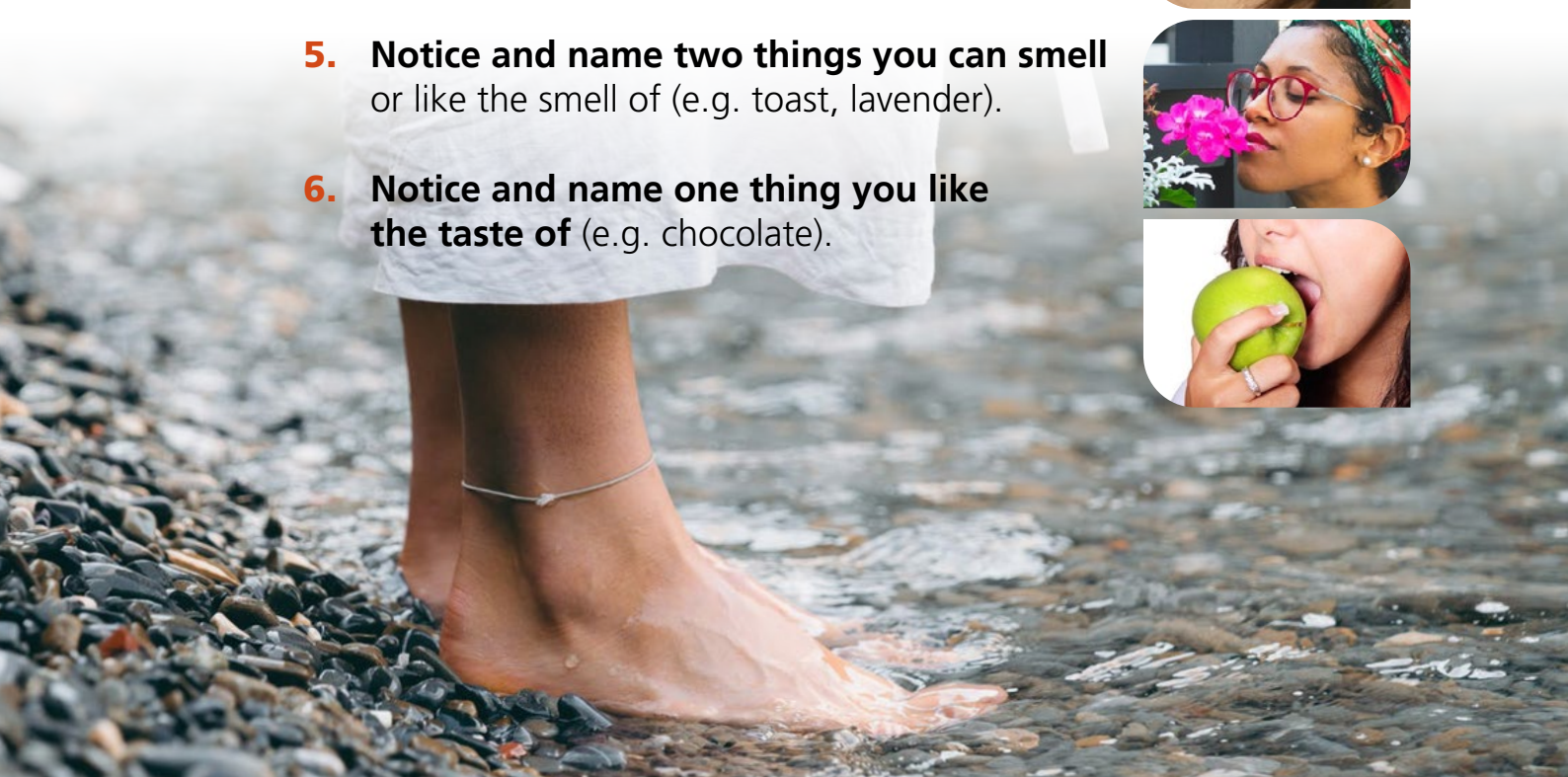
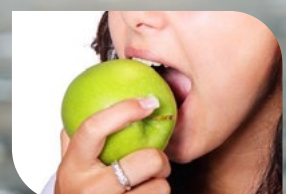
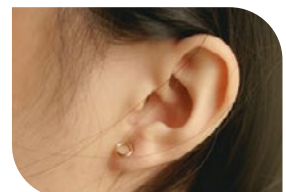
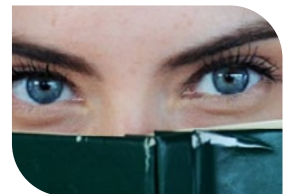
Coping with flashbacks using a sensory grounding technique

Experiencing flashbacks can be scary and it can feel like you are back there, at the time of the trauma.

This is one technique to help you bring yourself back to the safety of the present moment.

Five, four, three, two, one

1. Place your feet firmly on the ground.
2. **Look around you and notice and name (in your mind or out aloud) five things that you can see** (e.g. TV, clock, book, sofa, sky through the window).
3. **Notice and name four things you can feel** (e.g. trousers against my leg, the chair against my back, the socks on my feet, the wind against my cheeks).
4. **Notice and name three things you can hear** (e.g. the birds singing, the clock, the radio).
5. **Notice and name two things you can smell** or like the smell of (e.g. toast, lavender).
6. **Notice and name one thing you like the taste of** (e.g. chocolate).



Coping with flashbacks using sensory grounding objects

Create a soothing bag or simply **have items available that can soothe each of your senses when you experience a flashback.**

Ideally use an item that contrasts with the flashback, e.g. if after a car accident you have flashbacks of feeling hot, your grounding technique might be to drink a cold glass of water with ice.

Here are some examples of items:



Touch

Cold or hot compresses, stress balls, bracelets, bubble wrap, crinkle paper, elastic bands on wrist, interesting textures, e.g. play dough, silly putty, marbles, velvet, feathers or Mohdoh.



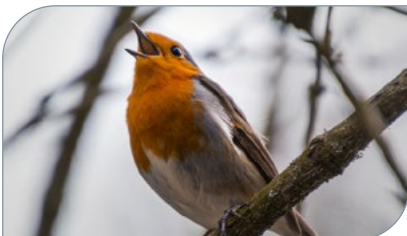
Smell

Peppermint, decongestant sprays or sticks, essential oils or Olbas oil on a handkerchief or pillowcases, air fresheners, citrus fruits or baking smells.



Sight

Posters stating where you are and what year it is, e.g. it is June 2020, you are safe, it is over, calming pictures or nightlights if you have flashbacks at night.



Hear

White noise, wave sounds, bird song, forest or nature sounds, loud ticking clock or recordings on phone saying "I am safe, it is over".



Taste

Peppermint and ginger, strong mints, chilli gum, cough sweets or breath sweets.

Coping with voices

Coping strategies

Here is a list of strategies that have helped other people cope with voices:

Distraction

- Relaxation: breathing, imagery techniques or relaxation music.
- Doing something you enjoy: watching TV, listening to music, reading or doing puzzles.
- Being physically active or keeping occupied, e.g. playing sport, walking, shopping.
- Being around others or speaking to someone.



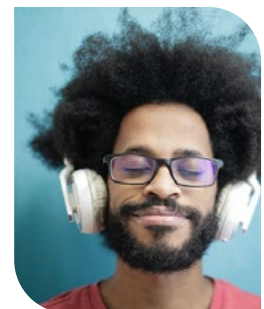
Soothing yourself

- Having a shower or bath.
- Doing your hair, make-up, or nails.
- Eating something nice.
- Looking at beautiful art or scenery.
- Applying and smelling your favourite lotion, perfume or aftershave.



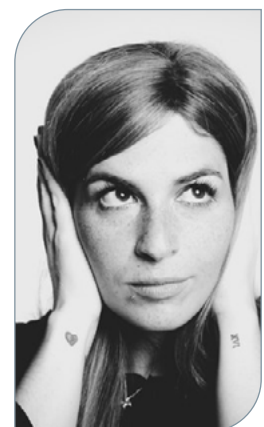
Blocking the voices out

- Humming or singing.
- Counting under your breath.
- Wearing ear plugs (in one ear or both).
- Listening to music, audiobooks or radio with headphones.



Setting boundaries or changing your relationship with the voices

- Talking back to the voices.
- Setting aside time to listen to the voices, e.g. tell them that you are busy and to come back later.
- Focusing on the pitch or tone of the voice.
- Generating the voice and removing it by thinking of something else.
- Ignoring the voices.
- Questioning whether what the voices say is true.

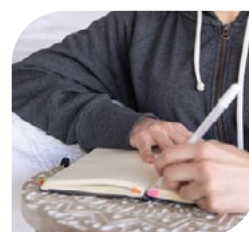
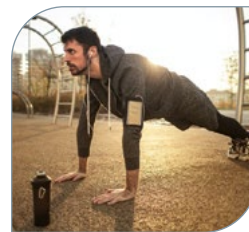


Sleep

Managing sleep

Poor sleep can impact on our mental health and vice versa. The following are strategies that can help with sleep difficulties:

- **Try to go to sleep and wake up the same time every day.**
- **Avoid having naps** (especially after 3pm).
- **Get some exercise daily** (but not during the 4 hours before bedtime).
- **Avoid eating dinner late in the evening.**
Have a light snack in the evening if you find you wake up feeling hungry.
- **Avoid caffeine, nicotine and alcohol 4-6 hours before bedtime, have a milky drink or herbal tea, like chamomile tea, instead.**
- **Ensure the bedroom is quiet, the curtains can block the light out and it's not too cold or hot.**
- **Have a warm bath or shower 1-2 hours before bedtime.**
- **Have a nighttime routine** where you change into your pyjamas, wash your face and brush your teeth etc.
- **Use relaxation techniques before going to bed** (see pages 9-11).
- **Don't clock watch.**
- **If you can't get to sleep after 20-30 minutes, get out of bed, do something boring or relaxing until you feel sleepy and try again.**
- **If something is on your mind, write it down and say you will deal with it tomorrow.**



Writing as therapy

There are **many benefits to writing**, including 'getting it out of our head', seeing things from another perspective, or perhaps even just putting words on paper (or on a computer) seems to really help.

You might choose to set a time limit for doing this.

Rainy day or compassionate letter to self

It can be helpful, **when you're feeling well**, to **write a letter to yourself to offer guidance and support. This is for you to read when you're not feeling so good**, or are struggling to cope.

If you don't feel you're ever in a good enough place to write a letter in this way, you could try imagining that you are feeling well, strong and able to cope. Alternatively, you can imagine that you are older and wiser, and write a letter from the future, to your present more vulnerable self.

In your letter, include:

- **what helps you feel better** at those times
- **what** you've found that **helped in the past**
- **guidance on what you need to do** (e.g. talk to someone, do something, be with others, use breathing technique, go for a walk, etc.)
- advice on **what not to do**, e.g. drink alcohol
- **your personal strengths and resources**, e.g. being a caring person
- **what you need to know at that time or coping statements**, e.g. 'I care', 'others care – even though it might feel like they don't', 'you can get through this', 'you've done it before', 'it will pass'.

In your letter **be compassionate**, caring, supportive, understanding and **encouraging** to your vulnerable self.

Your story

It can often be helpful to write down what's happened to you, either over your lifespan, or perhaps a particular distressing memory.

Take some time, when you won't be disturbed and write down everything you can remember about that time. Get it all on paper.

You might choose to **write it as a story, or in note form**, using bullet points with a brief description.

Once it's there, **you might choose to rearrange it so that it reads like a chronological story**, as it happened.

The more you can write, the better. You can build it up over time.

Describe the circumstances, the ages and size of people involved.

Perhaps consider the bigger picture – what was going on for you and the others involved at that time.

Describe what you felt, thought and did at that time. This helps to put the story together (it's often fragmented or patchy in our memories) and often enables us to see a different perspective on what happened.

If possible, it can be helpful to **add important information about what you know now, that you didn't know then.** E.g. If during a car accident you thought 'I am going to be seriously hurt' you can add 'I was not seriously hurt'.

Once it's on paper, you can **read it through as often as you need to, in order to put the memory in its proper place** – as a story, a memory, from the past, that belongs **in the past**.

If you notice that doing this makes you feel distressed, speak to a staff member and use self-help techniques from the '**relaxation and mindfulness**' section and the '**coping with trauma**' (pages 29-31) section.



Keeping a journal

When writing a journal, you can **write whatever you want to write**, every day, or whenever you need to. You might write **what happened, your thoughts, feelings and actions**.

You might choose to set a time limit for doing this.

These can be intensely private, what you might not want to share with anyone else.

Write at times when you feel just okay, when you feel great and times when you're really distressed or struggling to cope.

You can look back on it at another time if that would be helpful – to see how you coped, that things can and will be better, that this will pass.

Other sources of help

Apps for mental wellbeing



Calm harm

Help to resist or manage the urge to **self-harm**.



Mindfulness coach

Audio exercises and self-guided training programme for **mindfulness** practice.



PTSD coach

Self-help tools for help with **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**. Although designed for veterans, the techniques in this app are useful for anyone experiencing PTSD.



Stress and anxiety companion

Tools and guides to help manage **stress** and **anxiety**.



WorryTree

This app aims to help you take control of **worry** wherever you are.

Disclaimer: These apps are not owned or endorsed by Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust but simply a recommendation of some apps available, that people may find helpful.

Please note that the **Mindfulness coach** and the **PTSD coach** apps are **American apps** and therefore the links and numbers for further support are not accessible. **Please use the helplines** (next page) **in this pack if necessary, or speak to a member of staff.**

Helplines

Birmingham and Solihull urgent mental health helpline

Support in a crisis.

Phone: **0121 262 3555** (open 24 hours, 7 days a week)

Birmingham and Solihull mental health support during Covid-19

Covid-19 related emotional support, guidance and reassurance.

Phone: **0121 262 3555** (9am to 11pm)

Alcoholics Anonymous

Help for people with a drinking problem.

Freephone: **0800 917 7650** (24-hour helpline)



FRANK

Friendly and confidential facts, support and advice on drugs and alcohol.

Phone: **0300 123 6600** (24-hour helpline)



Mind

Infoline that provides an information and signposting service.

Phone: **0300 123 3393**

(Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm)



NHS Direct

Help if you have an urgent medical problem.

Freephone: **111** (24-hour helpline)



Rethink Mental Illness

Advice and information service.

Phone: **0300 5000 927** (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4pm)



Samaritans

Confidential support for people experiencing feelings of distress, despair or suicide.

Freephone: **116 123** (24-hour helpline)



SANE

Emotional support, information and guidance for people affected by mental illness, their families and carers.

Phone: 0300 304 7000 (4.30pm to 10.30pm daily).

Current number is 07984 967 708, leave a message with your name and number and receive a call back.



Notes



Website: www.bsmhft.nhs.uk

Main switchboard number: 0121 301 0000

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