

Perception

**Welcome back to
CALM**

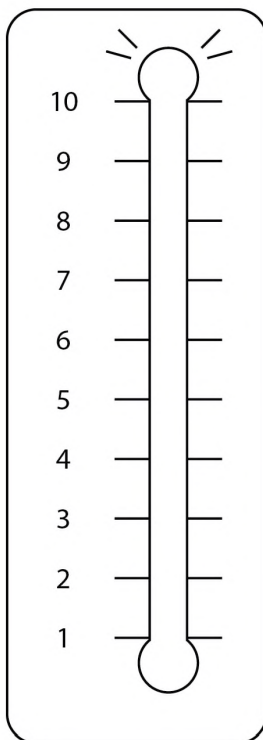
**Calming
Anxiety
Living
Mindfully**

Chapter 2

My Anxiety Meter

It can be helpful to monitor and track changes in your anxiety over time. This can assist you with identifying factors playing a role in your anxiety and potential benefits of using your new skills.

Each week, we'll take a moment to check-in and rate our anxiety levels. Below is a version of a SUD's scale, meaning "subjective units of distress." This allows you to rate how much anxiety is limiting and distressing you. Please reflect on how much anxiety has been affecting you and rate this using the scale below.



- 10 - Highest anxiety/distress you have ever felt, unable to function
- 9 - Extremely anxious/distressed, highly affecting performance
- 8 - Very anxious/distressed, significantly impacting performance
- 7 - Quite anxious/distressed, moderately impacting performance
- 6 - Elevated anxiety/distress, some impact with performance
- 5 - Moderate anxiety/distress, uncomfortable, can still perform well
- 4 - Mild/moderate anxiety/distress, hard to ignore, fairly uncomfortable
- 3 - Mild anxiety/distress, no interference with performance
- 2 - Minimal anxiety/distress
- 1 - Alert and awake, concentrating well
- 0 - Totally relaxed

Check-in:

How was your experience in CALM last week?

How was practicing diaphragmatic breathing and one-minute mindfulness exercises this week?

The Power of Perception

Should I change my thoughts, accept them as “just thoughts,” or both?

Cognitive Model: From this perspective, difficulties with anxiety come from unhelpful thoughts and beliefs. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a form of counseling that focuses on learning more realistic and adaptive ways of thinking about yourself, others, and the world. It also promotes helpful changes in our behavior and actions (like reducing avoidance or increasing exercise).

Acceptance Model: From this perspective, a lack of acceptance around “negative” thoughts and “negative” emotions is fueling your anxiety and suffering. Through acceptance, you also learn to relate to your emotions in a healthier way.

How can Challenging Thoughts Help?

One example of this approach is called “the double standard technique,” and involves talking to yourself as you would a very good friend (Burns, 2006). This can help change negative thinking patterns since we are often more fair, rational, and compassionate toward people we care about than ourselves.

Discussion Question:

What would happen if you talked to your friends just like you talk to yourself?

How can Practicing Acceptance Help?

By seeing that your thoughts are not facts, and honoring your emotions without being hijacked by them, you can reduce suffering from anxiety. This can also enhance meaning and joy in your life.

Whatever your approach, success hinges on awareness of what is happening in the moment. This awareness is foundational to be able to question, challenge, or accept thoughts as “just thoughts,” and not facts.

Remember, don't believe everything you think!

Mindfulness is the opposite of “autopilot,” which is also called mindlessness. Autopilot happens when we are out of touch and checked out from what is actually happening in this moment.

What are Automatic Thoughts?

“Automatic thoughts” includes the thoughts and images that automatically pop up, often in reaction to what’s happening.

We can’t control our automatic thoughts, that is, what we first think when something happens. However, we can decide what to do with them!

*“Don’t believe everything you think.
Thoughts are just that - thoughts.”*

- Allan Lokos

We can choose to accept negative automatic thoughts as “just thoughts” rather than facts, or challenge unhelpful thoughts with more fair and honest ones.

We can’t control what thoughts pop up, but we can choose what to do with them!

Discussion:

“Do you plan to accept thoughts as thoughts, challenge them, or a little of both?”

What is self-talk?

“Self-talk” includes all the ways we think and “talk” to ourselves. We are constantly narrating and “talking to ourself” all day, which includes evaluating how things went.

What is “Storytelling?”

Storytelling is a term created in CALM to mean playing out upsetting scenarios, stories, and “videos” in your mind that will likely never occur. It helps to catch yourself when this is happening and label it as storytelling. Also, you can remind yourself “I’m having the image ____” or “I just imagined ____” when this happens to identify this isn’t helpful, and as a cue to proceed mindfully.

Adapted from Russ Harris, “The Happiness Trap,” 2008 & R.I.O., 2017

Discussion: Let’s talk about self-talk

What patterns have you started to notice in your own self-talk?
What changes do you hope to make with how you talk to yourself?

“When we imagine suffering, we suffer. When we imagine joy, we rejoice. Imagination is the superpower of the human species. Use your powers for good.”

-Martha Beck

Now, let’s increase our awareness by practicing a Body Scan Meditation!

Discussion: What was your experience like?”

Next, please select a mindful daily activity you’re willing to practice each day over the next week...

Mindful Daily Activity

Tips:

Find a daily activity that you might normally do on “autopilot”

Describe rather than judge:

“This tea is bitter and cold” (describing) rather than “This tea is awful” (judging).

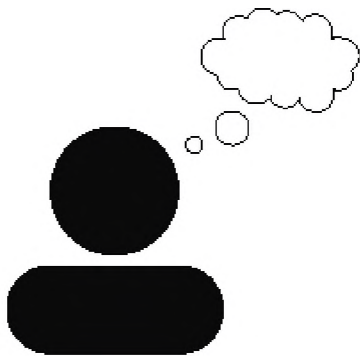
Or,

“These apples are crisp and sweet” rather than “this apple is good.”

Try approaching this mindful activity with curiosity, as though you’ve never tried it before.

Practice returning your attention to the activity, over and over again, noticing where your mind went when you drifted away from the present moment.

Just a few ideas: mindfully walking to class, taking a shower, cooking, listening to music, washing the dishes, yoga...



My Mindful Daily Activity: _____

What are Cognitive Distortions?

Cognitive distortions alter our perception, much like wearing glasses with misshaped lenses. These are **automatic thinking patterns that distort reality** and contribute to increased anxiety, hopelessness, and suffering. They're also called *Thinking Errors or Thought Distortions*.

Please check the distortions that affect your anxiety the most

- Catastrophizing** (“The snowball effect”): Imagining what has happened, or will happen, will be so awful you’ll be completely unable to handle it. Expecting worst-case scenarios.
Example: *“I bet I’ll mess up this job interview just like the last one. I’ll never get a good job, and I’ll end up all alone and living on the street!”*
- Fortune Telling**: A pattern of consistently making negative predictions.
Example: *Even though I studied hard, I know I’ll fail.*
- Mind reading**: A pattern of assuming you know exactly what other people are thinking. It involves consistently predicting the worst, without strong evidence it’s true.
Example: *“Everyone probably thinks I’m a loser after that presentation.”*
- Emotional Reasoning**: Allowing your mood to bias your interpretation.
Example: *“I feel nervous, so it must be unsafe in this elevator.”*
- Negative Filtering** (discounting the positives): Focusing almost entirely on the negatives and dismissing the positives.
Example: *Doing really well on an exam but only focusing on a question you missed.*
- Overgeneralizing**: Overestimating a pattern based on insufficient evidence.
Example: *“Everyone in California drives recklessly.”*
- Perfectionism**: Unfair and very rigid demands and expectations for yourself.
Examples: *“I can’t make any mistakes” or “This presentation must go perfectly.”*
- All-or-Nothing Thinking**: Seeing situations and people in all-or-nothing extremes.
Examples: *“I am a total failure,” “I always have bad luck!,” or “No one cares about me.”*

Based on: Leahy, 2003 & Burns, 2006

Discussion: Which distortions are impacting your anxiety the most?

Perception & Panic

Common misperceptions when having a panic attack include believing you are about to: die, have a heart attack, go “crazy,” faint, or become unable to breathe. Having these concerns and fears is understandable given the powerful symptoms stress hormones can temporarily create.

The American Psychiatric Association defines a panic attack as, “*an abrupt surge of intense fear or intense discomfort that reaches a peak within minutes*, and during which 4 (or more) of the following symptoms occur:”

- Accelerated heart rate
- Sweating, Shaking
- Feeling short of breath or choking
- Chest pain or pressure
- Nausea or stomach distress
- Feeling dizzy, faint or light-headed
- Chills or hot sensations
- Numbness or tingling
- Derealization (feeling unreality)
- Depersonalization (feeling detached from yourself)
- Fear of losing control or “going crazy”
- & Fear of dying.

Understanding panic empowers you to catch misinterpretations and cognitive distortions, and see what is actually happening more clearly.

Despite being very scary and uncomfortable, panic is not a threat to your life or sanity. If you’ve been experiencing panic attacks, we recommend a medical evaluation to ensure there are no related medical conditions, and so you can be confident your heart is healthy.

Please review *Panic: Medical Realities VS. Common Fears* in the appendix for facts on any related concerns you may have.

Discussion: What changes have you noticed when you’ve experienced panic?

Hyperventilation Syndrome

When breathing becomes very imbalanced, people often feel anxious and have symptoms similar to a panic attack, such as: *rapid heart rate, shortness of breath, trembling, tingling or numbness, and lightheadedness* (to name a few).

This isn't a medical problem; it's a breathing problem called hyperventilation syndrome. The problem with hyperventilation is that *it feels like your body is not getting enough oxygen when it actually has too much!* Hyperventilation causes an imbalance of carbon dioxide in the blood that can create symptoms similar to panic.

There are easy and effective tools for coping with over-breathing, such as diaphragmatic breathing and helpful self-talk. When you start to over-breathe...

~Remind yourself, "I have plenty of air"

~Slow down your in-breath

~Fully exhale your out-breath

* Try breathing in for 4 seconds and breathing out for 8 seconds*

Breathing through pursed lips can help slow down your in and out-breaths

Let's practice diaphragmatic breathing again!

Let's practice breathing-out longer than we breathe in (for example, breath in 4 seconds, pause in between breaths, and breath out for 8 seconds).

Weekly Mindful Exercises

Thank you for joining us today! To get the most out of this experience, please practice these exercises throughout the next week:

1. Practice your mindful daily activity each day.
2. Practice mindfulness of your thoughts with curiosity. When you notice a judgmental thought, repeat it, but this time, say to yourself "I'm having the thought..."

Example: Imagine you catch yourself thinking "I'm going to fail this exam."

Now, add "I'm having the thought I'm going to fail the exam."

or

"I just had the thought I'm going to fail the exam."

Adapted from Russ Harris, "The Happiness Trap," 2008 & R.I.O., 2017