

Module 8:

How feelings can change in psychosis



This module will explain:

- what anxiety is and how you can start managing it
- self-esteem and how it develops as you develop coping skills

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Plan for today's session

How was your week?

What would you like to talk about today?

Evaluating today's session

Summary of what we talked about today

What will I do during the week?

How was today for me?

Name: _____ Date: _____



What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of fear or nervousness about something you are not certain about. It really means that you are feeling afraid.

When is anxiety helpful?

Feeling afraid is very much a part of being human. When we are afraid in a situation that is actually dangerous, fear helps us survive. It is part of our emergency response system.

What would you do if you saw a bear in the street? You would be afraid and do something to protect yourself. In fact, you would do one of these three things.

- Fight – try to kill or contain the bear
- Flight – run from the bear
- Freeze – stay still and hope the bear would ignore you

When we are afraid, our brain sends a message to our body to pump more adrenalin into the blood. Adrenalin is a hormone that makes our heart beat faster and start the 'fight, flight or freeze' response.

When adrenalin is in our blood, our body works harder and needs more fuel. We need to breathe more oxygen in, so our breathing rate increases. To cool ourselves down, we sweat and our small blood vessels (capillaries) open closer to the surface of our skin.

When adrenalin is in our blood, we are likely to fight or run. And when we face a bear, fear or anxiety help us survive – it's like an ancient alarm system.

Small amounts of anxiety actually improve your performance and help you achieve more.

When is anxiety unhelpful?

Anxiety becomes a problem when it interferes with our everyday lives. It is very frightening when we have symptoms of anxiety such as a fast heart beat and racing thoughts in normal situations such as pushing a trolley down the aisle of a supermarket

When this happens, we need to learn how to manage our anxiety. Remember that anxiety is a normal reaction. You cannot get rid of it completely, but you can learn to manage it.

How does anxiety affect us?

Anxiety can affect us in different situations.

Body

Our body prepares for fight or flight, so we breathe differently, have stomach pains, sweat, tremble and our heart races.

Thoughts

People can often think themselves into anxiety. For example, have you ever worried about having a panic attack in an uncomfortable situation? Worrying about it can actually increase the chances that you will have a panic attack. When this happens, our bodies respond as if there is a real danger such as a bear in the street.

Behaviour

The three behaviours we use when we are anxious and afraid are fight, flight or freeze.

We can also develop safety behaviours to help us manage our anxiety. For example, if you are afraid of talking to the neighbours, you might stop going out of your house.

Feelings

Even if there is nothing real to fear, anxiety gives people real feelings of fear, terror and unease.

What are safety behaviours?

Safety behaviours are things we do to help ourselves cope in the short-term. In the long term, these behaviours make anxiety worse.

The most common safety behaviour is avoiding a situation. For example, if we are afraid of strangers, we might not go to parties or the shops.

If we cannot avoid a situation, we might use subtle avoidance. This means we might do something like go to a party but stand near the door and leave after 20 minutes.

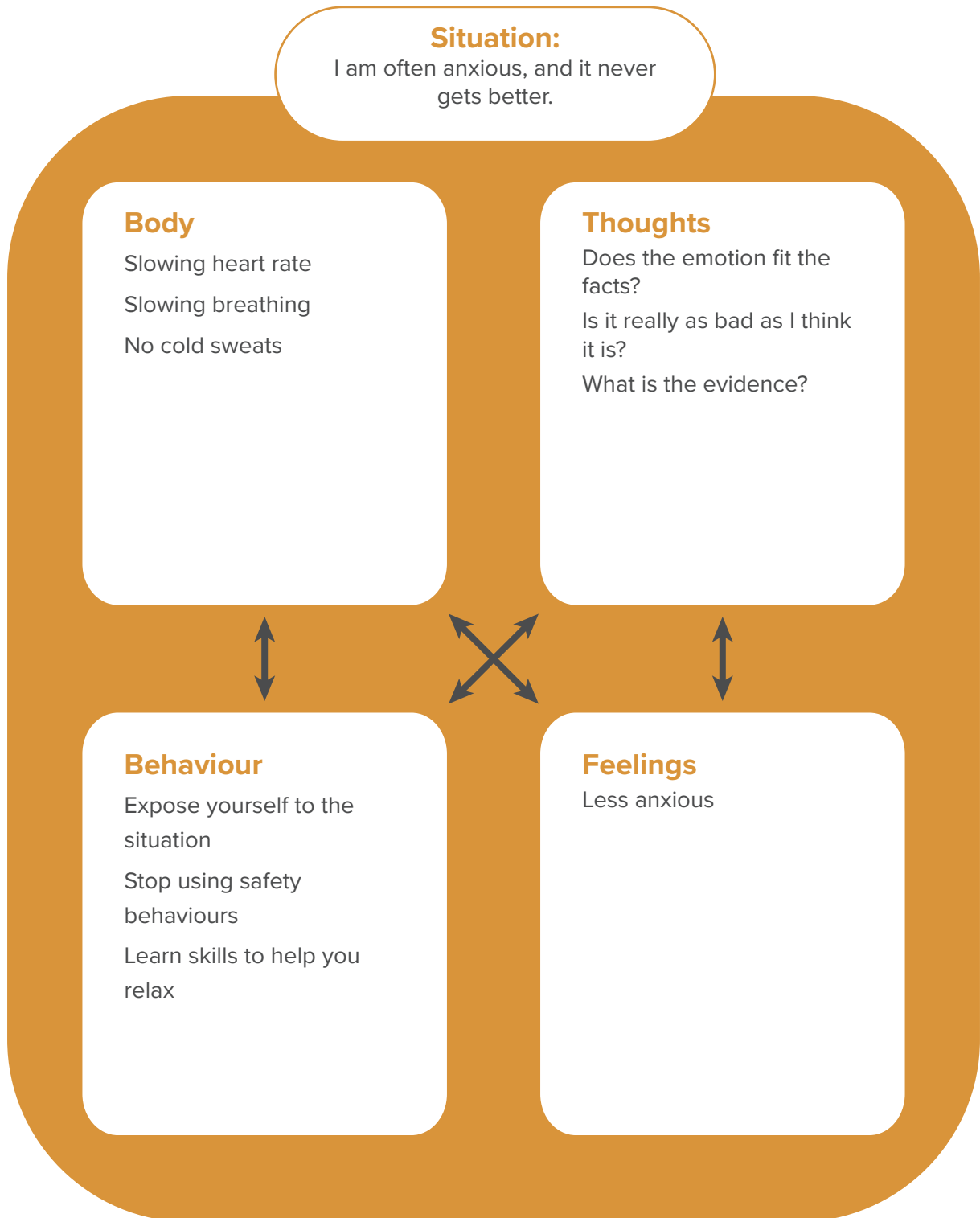
Sometimes we use medicine to avoid our anxieties.

A hot cross bun for anxiety

We can put anxiety symptoms into a hot cross bun to help us understand how we can create a cycle of anxiety.



A hot cross bun for stopping the cycle of anxiety



Using graded exposure to deal with anxiety

If you feel anxious, you might feel that you need to avoid the experience that is making you anxious. You might also develop behaviours that make your anxiety worse.

Example: If you don't like talking to your boss about a problem, then you may avoid doing this. However, the longer you avoid this, the worse the problem could get.

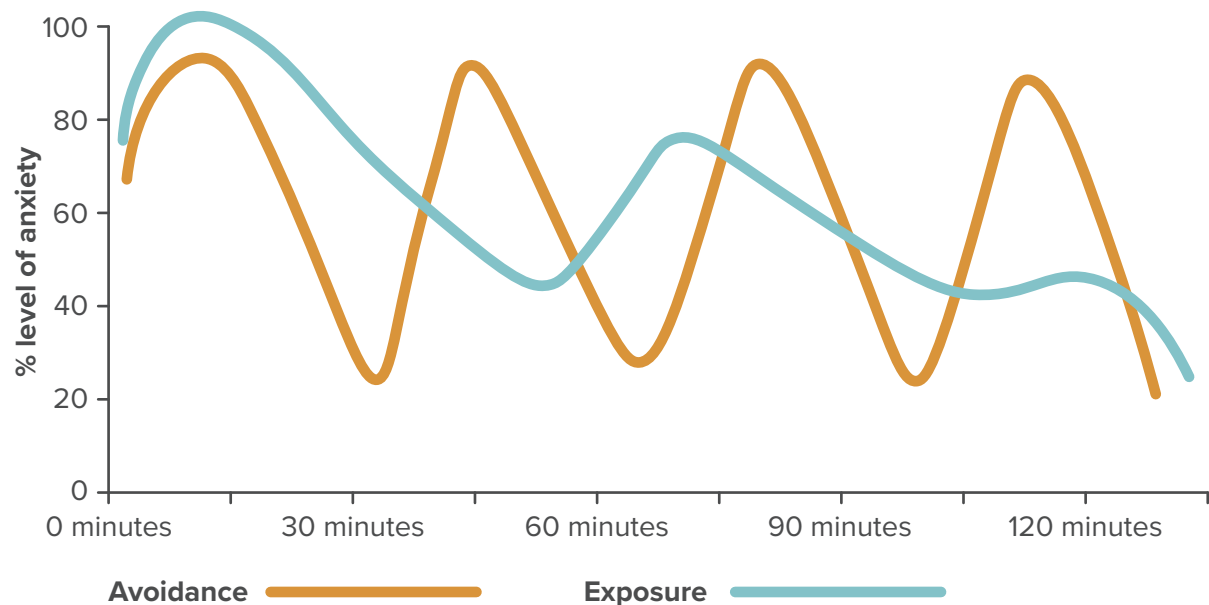
If I avoid or escape a situation, will it help with anxiety?

Yes, but only in the short term. You will feel better for a short while, but, in the long term, avoiding an experience reinforces your anxiety. Avoiding the situation encourages you to be afraid of it. And fear increases anxiety – it does not reduce it.

The graph below shows how avoiding a situation helps only in the short term, but tackling avoidance (this is called “exposure”) helps in the long term.

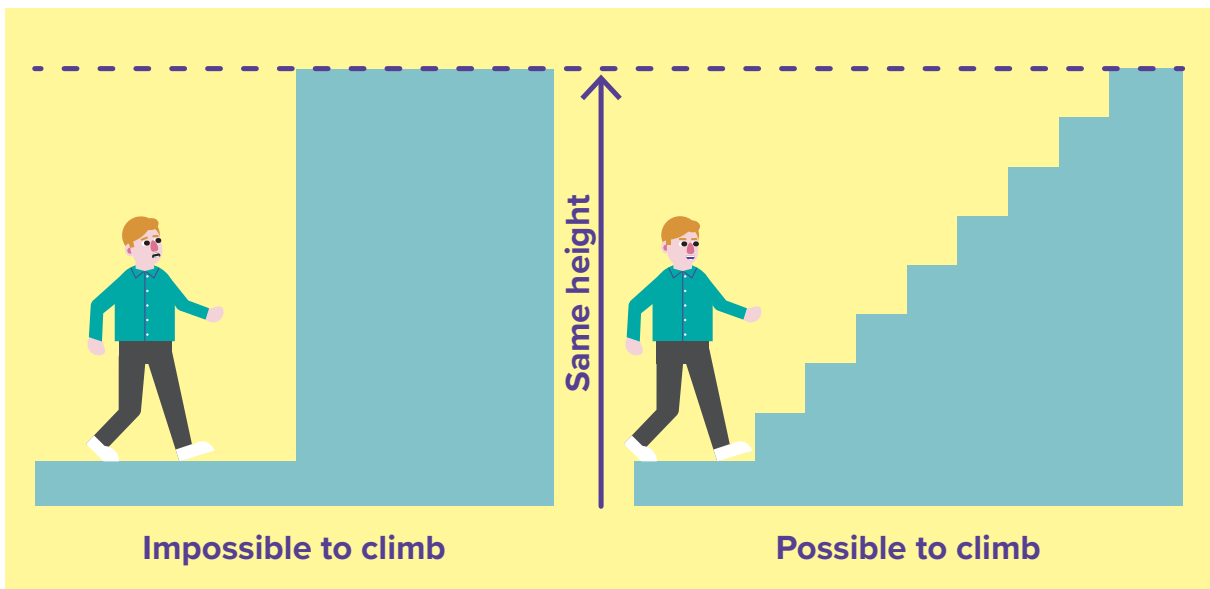
The orange line in the graph is what happens with avoidance. You can see that anxiety initially decreases when you avoid the situation, but when you are in that situation again the anxiety returns. In effect, you are in a repeated cycle of anxiety.

The grey line in the graph is what happens during exposure – by staying in the situation. You can see that at first the anxiety is a little worse than it would be if you avoided the situation. But over time the anxiety levels go down. So the best thing to do is try to stay in a situation that causes anxiety and learn to deal with it.



How does graded exposure work?

To start, you must stay in situations that cause you some anxiety. You have to feel the fear and do it anyway. At first, you will need to put yourself in a situation that causes you mild anxiety. Different situations cause different levels of anxiety. If you choose a situation that causes just mild anxiety as your first step, you will find that testing yourself out in that situation a few times allows the anxiety to go away. You will then be ready for your next step. Tackling anxiety, step by step, makes what seems impossible right now, possible for you.



Source: <https://midlandsphysicaltherapy.ie/graded-exposure/>

After your anxiety levels improve in the first situation, you move up to the next step of your **anxiety stairs** to the situation that causes you a little more anxiety. Slowly, step by step, you will be able to reach the top of your anxiety stairs and you will be able to stay in some of the situations that now cause you the most anxiety.

To use this step-by-step approach, you need to write down a list of all the situations that you avoid because they trigger anxiety. Then give each situation a score for the severity of the anxiety.

Example: Try using a scale of one to ten where grade 10 is very anxious, and 0 is no anxiety at all. You might find that your anxiety levels might be at 3 when your phone rings or someone knock the door. You might be relaxed at home and your anxiety score is 1, but it might reach 6 going out for a meal with your family and higher if a new person was there. Your anxiety score could then be 8 or 9. We are all different in the levels of anxiety we experience in different situations.

An anxiety baseline is simply what your anxiety levels are now. You need to know what your baseline is and can use the worksheet *My Anxiety Baseline: What Triggers My Anxiety and What I Do* to list the things that make you anxious.

My Anxiety Baseline: What triggers my Anxiety and what I do

Worksheet

What triggers my anxiety?	Do I face it or avoid it?	What do I do to keep myself safe? (Safety behaviours)	How do I rate my anxiety on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is the most anxious?
Walking to the shop alone	Avoid as much as I can	Keep my head down	8 (when on my own)
		Don't look around	5 (if someone with me)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Developing your exposure plan

Making an exposure plan will help you work through your anxieties, so you can try to overcome them.

1. Look at your anxiety baseline worksheet.
2. Write an exposure plan for one situation that causes anxiety.
3. Expose yourself to the anxiety and write down how it makes you feel.

When you finish working with your exposure plan for a particular anxiety:

- your anxiety should be less than it was when you started your work and
- your new anxiety level should be one you can cope with.

Use the worksheet **My Exposure Plan** to identify tasks you can do to expose yourself to your anxiety. The first time you make an exposure plan, choose an anxiety that is not too stressful. Look at your anxiety baseline worksheet and choose an anxiety that you rated between 1 and 4 out of 10.

You should also choose something that you really want to change, such as something that will:

- be very positive to change, such as a fear of attending your son's football matches because you are afraid of crowds

or

- help you avoid unpleasant consequences of not changing, such as not being able to deal with difficulties in your relationship with your partner

In your exposure plan, write down:

- the anxiety you have chosen
- the level of anxiety it causes you
- your goal – what you want to achieve by exposing yourself to this anxiety; and tasks you can do to expose yourself to this anxiety
- Rate these tasks from 0 to 10 where 0 is no stress and 10 is lots of stress

You are now ready to expose yourself to the anxiety and record how it makes you feel. Pick a task that you will do to expose yourself to the anxiety.

My Exposure Plan²²

Worksheet

What is my anxiety causing situation?

What rating did I give this anxiety? (score out of 10)

What is my goal?

How will I reach my goal?

My tasks	The level of distress the step causes 0= no stress, 10 = lots of stress

Name: _____ Date: _____



²² This worksheet has been adapted from **The Mental Health Handbook, A Cognitive Behavioural Approach**.

Use **My Record of My Graded Exposure Task** to keep track of how you feel before, during and after your exposure.

It is also important to write down how long you exposed yourself to the anxiety. To succeed in changing your anxiety through exposure, you need to expose yourself to your anxiety a number of times. You also need to increase the length of time you are exposed each time you practice.

Why can't I just use my safety behaviours?

Often, we develop behaviours and attitudes that help us feel safe when we are faced with anxiety.

Safety behaviours seem like a good idea, and they can help in the short term. But they do not help us deal with the anxiety. Instead, they hinder us by making us not deal with our anxiety.

If you use safety behaviours, include them in **My Anxiety Baseline**. When you make your exposure plan, you will be able to work on changing your safety behaviours also.

Why can't I just avoid things that make me anxious?

Avoiding or escaping from situations that makes you anxious are safety behaviours. They don't help you reduce your anxiety. If you would like to learn new ways of managing your anxiety, you need to include avoiding or escaping in your exposure plan.

Why can't I just distract myself to keep myself from being anxious?

Distracting yourself can help in the short term. But it does not help you deal with your anxiety in the long term.

Distracting ourselves can help us manage our anxieties. But if you are working with **an exposure plan**, you will get better results if you stop distracting yourself.

My record of my graded exposure task

Worksheet

My task:

Date: _____ Start time: _____ End time: _____

How did I feel?

Before

During

After

Other
comments

My task:

Date: _____ Start time: _____ End time: _____

How did I feel?

Before

During

After

Other
comments

Name: _____ Date: _____

What is self-esteem?

Self-esteem is a confidence in your own worth or abilities. It is about how you value yourself. When your life is balanced, your self-esteem improves. High self-esteem means that we love and accept ourselves.

What are the signs of low self-esteem?

Everyone is different. The signs of low self-esteem are different for different people too. Here are a few signs of low self-esteem.

- Not feeling good enough compared to others
- Thinking you are unlikeable
- Feeling unsuccessful
- Feeling anxious, tense or unhappy
- Feeling powerless
- Needing lots of reassurance
- Being easily influenced by others
- Being over-sensitive
- Withdrawing from others or not communicating
- Blaming others for your own problems or failures

Is low self-esteem a mental health problem?

Having low self-esteem isn't a mental health problem in itself, but they are closely linked. If lots of things affect your self-esteem for a long time, this might lead to mental health problems (for example depression or anxiety).

Some of the experiences of low self-esteem can be signs that you're experiencing a mental health problem, particularly if they last for a long time or affect your day-to-day life. For example:

- feeling hopeless or worthless
 - blaming yourself unfairly
 - hating yourself
 - worrying about being unable to do things
-

Having a mental health problem can also cause you to have low self-esteem, and it might feel harder to cope or take steps to improve your self-esteem.

How can I improve my self-esteem?

There are many things you can do to improve your self esteem. Many of these are also coping skills.

- Practise positive thinking, especially when you don't feel good enough.
- Develop your sense of humour.
- Get involved in an activity that distracts you from yourself.
- Learn how to set and reach goals.
- Exercise, eat and rest in ways that are good for you.
- Talk to people who want to support you.
- When you notice you are criticising yourself, stop the thought.
- Every day, identify one thing about yourself that you feel good about.
- Use affirmations every day. Affirmations are spoken words you say regularly to yourself (ideally out loud) to change how you think. An example of an affirmation is when you say statements that will help you aloud like: I trust myself; I may not understand the good in this situation but it is there.