

OVERRIDING ANXIETY

We appreciate that anxiety is important to our survival. It can also help us to understand ourselves and our relationships. So, to regulate the intensity of anxiety when it is limiting your quality of life, we apply these ideas:

- We are working not to get rid of it, but to manage its symptoms.
- We understand that a degree of anxiety may be appropriate and normal depending on a situation and how it might be affecting us. *How much of anxiety is appropriate* is one of the key questions we clarify in therapy to understand what's contributing to the excess.
- We look at the benefits of anxiety, as it can signal less obvious issues in ourselves and relationships, such as anger, guilt, worthlessness, loneliness, pressure, duress etc.
- Differently from worry, when we feel tense or anxious, we may feel unable to postpone our thinking like *I'll worry about it later*, think clearly and rationally. Our focus is on calming down, relaxing (noticing senses, observing breathing, doing one thing at time, sighing, visualising) or a positive distraction.
- We learn to notice symptoms of anxiety by observing our internal experience i.e. *What's happening for me right now:*
 1. Sensations in the body,
 2. Intensity in thinking: Are my thoughts absolute, fixed, strong, serious, increasing in pace, potentially leading to overwhelm?
 3. Intensity in feelings: Do I feel out of control, unable to distract myself or question my ideas in the moment, feeling engulfed as if I'm in real danger or about to die?
 4. Urgency: Do I feel the urge to act on my anxious thoughts? We may notice an impulse to seek reassurance from other people, as if somebody must fix this, make the feeling go away, make it better. But whatever we hear is not good enough or is making it worse, thoughts looping endlessly – the mind is on a highway with no exit.
- The key question to monitor anxiety rising is: ***Are my thoughts:***
 - A) ***true and I am in real danger; or***
 - B) ***the problem - irrational and causing my symptoms of anxiety?***

The sooner we ask this question and choose B, the easier it is to get the symptoms under control. It is important to practice it as often as we can remember.

- Anxiety may start to run our life: our habits, choices, letting our interactions be based on what anxiety dictates or allows us to do. We feel fearful, on edge, having paranoid thoughts, feeling mentally exhausted – every day seeming like a battle, the world feels hostile and dangerous. An overbearing amount of activity in our mind - living in our head. It is inevitable that we re-evaluate some things in life and ourselves whilst reconnecting with our body.
- We also work to clarify what anxiety might be preventing or replacing in our life for better or worse. Our personal relationship with anxiety may need to shift from hatred or shame to a healthier and more compassionate way of integrating it.
- In therapy, we focus on what we want vs what we don't want. Our direction in therapy is a fulfilling life with a balanced mind and body awareness. This focus on a bigger picture and the forward-focus is to override anxiety.