

Practical Strategies for Anxiety

Focus on the Body

1. Breathing

What: Working on your breath

Why: Learning to monitor breath helps to settle the anxious body

1. Help the person served to notice their breathing rhythm (Shallow, gulping, even, smooth, deep)
2. Support them to change the rhythm of their breath
3. Encourage practice throughout the day

Teaching:

- Do it together - Model slowing down and lengthening the rhythm of your breath
- Count it out - Count at a regular pace to keep your breaths long and even
- Imagery breathing - Use a visual to map out your breathing (lazy 8)
- Use an object - Hold out a flower or other scented object and take a big smell (inhale through the nose)
- Exhale through the mouth and blow an object such as a windmill, feather, or balloon

2. Sensory Tools

What: Explore different body sensations

Why: Sensory items can shift tension and anxiety (gives the person something to hold onto and focus their attention)

How: Gather items that appeal to different senses and experiment and put together a box of soothing sensory items

3. Body Movement:

What: Engage in movement to help relax muscles

Why: Stress and fear send messages to the body to tense and be ready. This leads to signals of pain and increased anxiety

How: Give the person something to do with the tenseness and practice the release

Different Types:

- Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)
 - Sit in a relaxing position
 - Tighten and hold different muscle groups for 1-3 seconds
 - Release and breathe fully
 - Relax without tensing
- Stretching Exercises
 - Moving and stretching muscles helps to release built-up stress hormones and increases flexibility
 - Release your head forward and do small gentle neck rolls from side to side
 - Shoulder and arm circles – go from big to small
 - Finger push-ups: place fingertips together then slowly and firmly push palms together and then away
 - Try taking a yoga class or following along to an instructional video
- Rhythmic Movement
 - Activities with consistent physical rhythms soothe the lower brain and help with regulation
 - Examples: Walking, dancing, swinging
 - Combine movement with other senses such as saying phrases while walking (“breathe and step”), drumming, or clapping rhythms

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Focus on the Mind and Body Connections

1. Guided Imagery and Relaxing Music

What: Practice taking a mental vacation and go to a place that is soothing and comforting

Why: Imagery stimulates the limbic and emotional regions of the brain and helps expand awareness, possibilities and choices

How:

- Look up and follow along to guided imagery and relaxing music/videos on YouTube or Calm.com
- Create a scrapbook or motivation board with pictures that make you feel calm and joyful
- Put together a playlist of calming music

2. Body Scan

What: Guided mindful activity to help shift attention to different parts of the body

Why: Develops the ability to attune and be aware, letting go of trying to change anything. Helps to alleviate the struggle against tension and anxiety

How:

- Lie down or sit comfortably in a chair
- Start at your head or feet and pause at each body part, noticing any sensations (e.g., tingling, warmth, tension, pulsating, tightness)
- Move on to the next body part

3. Redirection to Something Positive

What: Refocus the mind and body to something productive and/or positive

Why: This helps to interrupt the anxiety loop and focus attention onto something else

How:

- Contain the worry or anxiety by drawing or writing it out and physically putting it away
- Shift focus onto something else that requires your full attention

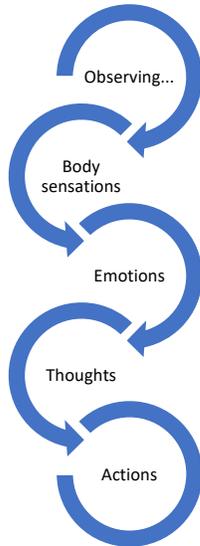
Examples of Redirection:

- ✓ Turn on music
- ✓ Go for a walk
- ✓ Do some laundry
- ✓ Watch TV
- ✓ Play video games
- ✓ Sing or talk it loudly
- ✓ Change location
- ✓ Focus on a positive picture
- ✓ Do a crossword, puzzle, or easy math problems
- ✓ Draw or colour a picture
- ✓ Read or listen to a book
- ✓ Play cards or a board game
- ✓ Physical activity such as dance, running aerobic exercise, or sports

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Focus on the Thinking Mind

1. Developing Observer Ability



- What feeling tone do you attach to this experience?
- What is happening to your body right now?
- What thoughts, beliefs, or mind-talk is happening?
- What is happening in your behaviour?
- What urges do you have to act or not?

2. Red and Green Thoughts

What: Learning to pay attention to self-talk statements and evaluate how realistic they are

Why: Purposefully repeating more helpful and comforting things will help to decrease anxious thoughts

How:

- Start by categorizing red and green self-talk statements
- When you hear a red thought encourage the person to turn it into a green thought

Examples:

- **Red thoughts** are worrisome, pessimistic, negative, and unhelpful
 - “I can’t”
 - “This is going to be a disaster”
 - “Nobody likes me”
- **Green thoughts** are helpful, positive, optimistic, and powerful
 - “I will try my best”
 - “I can handle this”
 - “I’m stronger than I think”

3. Problem Solving Web

What: Develop a plan for facing excessive worrying

Why: Identifying options and coming up with a plan of action helps to decrease obsessive thoughts and worrying

How:

- Define the problem
- Brainstorm potential options and questions that need to be asked/considered to arrive at the most applicable solution

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4. 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Activity

What: Quick mindful activity that forces a spinning, anxious mind to re-orient to the present moment

Why: Grounding skills help to manage overwhelming or intense emotions

How:

- Direct the person to notice and name what they are currently sensing in the moment using a calm, slow, encouraging tone of voice

Example:

- ✓ Name 5 things you see
- ✓ Name 4 things you can touch or feel
- ✓ Name 3 things you hear
- ✓ Name 2 things you smell or taste
- ✓ Take 1 mindful breath

5. Realistic Thinking Form

What: Cognition exercise that allows person served to discern between realistic and unrealistic thought patterns

Why: Thinking and acting as if there is danger when there is *no real* danger causes person to feel unnecessarily anxious. Therefore, we can help this by replacing negative thinking with realistic thinking

How:

- Pay attention self-talk
- Identify thoughts that lead to feelings of anxiety
- Challenge your anxious thinking

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Focus on Social Skills

1. Getting Connection

Spending time with caring individuals we have a connection with widens a person's ability to manage emotions and be more open

- Teach life skills of building relationships
- Look for gaps or potential connections to strengthen
- Spiritual/cultural involvement deepens a sense of connection
- Quality in relationships matters

2. Role Play and Video Model

What: Use role playing and video models to teach social skills

Why: Provides opportunities for individuals to practice specific social skills and receive feedback

How:

- Focus on one skill at a time (E.g., Introducing yourself to a new person)
- Provide verbal instructions
- Either role play or use a video to model the skill
- Provide the individual an opportunity to practice
- Give feedback

Resource: Check out PEERS video models online, or through the Friend Maker App!

3. Social Behaviour Mapping

What: A way to look at how your problems and reactions affect others and yourself

Why: Our behaviour impacts how people react and respond to us, which affects how we feel about ourselves

How:

- Identify a social situation
- Outline expected and unexpected behaviours
- Describe how both behaviours affect other people's thoughts, feelings, and reactions
- Describe how other people's reactions and consequences affect your own emotions