

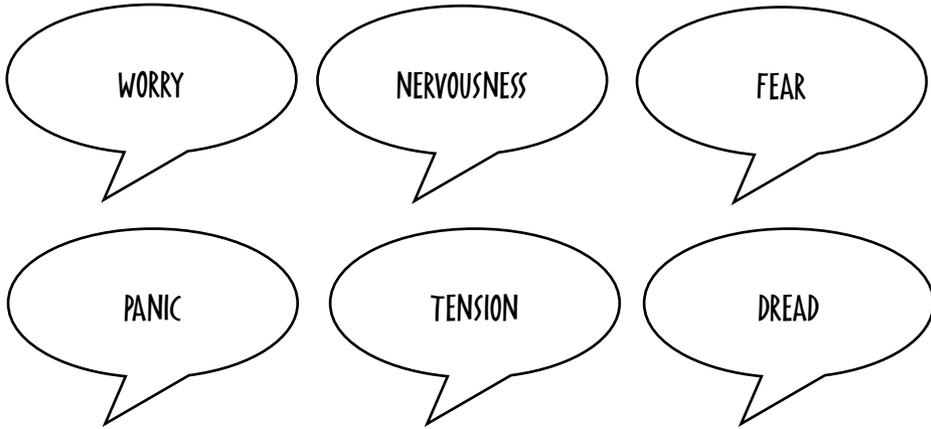
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What is Anxiety?

Step 1 of managing anxiety is to understand what anxiety is.

ANXIETY is an EMOTION.

When people describe anxiety, they tend to use words like:



ANXIETY WORD SEARCH

See if you can find the six words above in the word search below. The answers to this word search are in the Appendix at the back of this workbook.

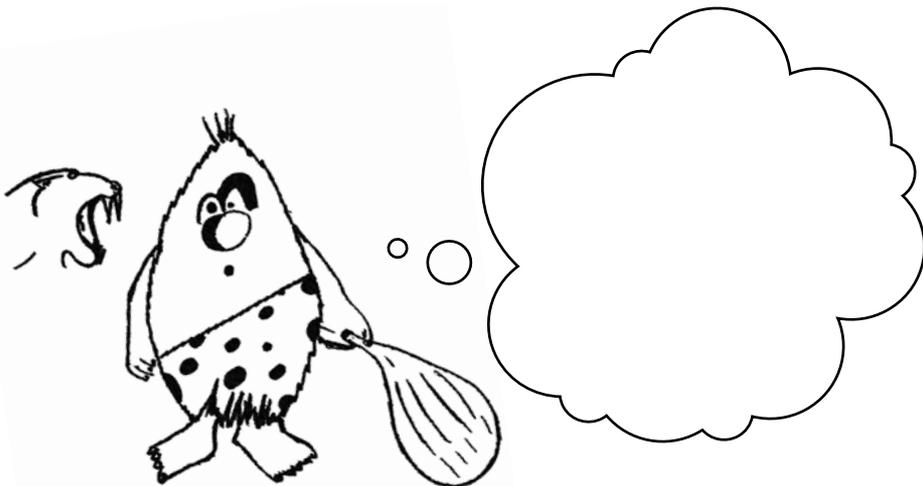
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You will see these words used throughout this workbook as they are all things that make up anxiety and they can all be normal and healthy to feel at certain times in life. For example, most people will feel *nervous* at some point in their lives, such as when taking an exam, starting a new school, performing in a school play or going on a first date. It is normal to experience nerves in situations that are new to us or that mean a lot to us. It is also normal for us to *worry* about certain things at times, such as if a loved one is ill. And it is normal to experience *fear* when faced with a dangerous or life-threatening situation. In fact, fear is important when we face dangerous situations because fear triggers a series of temporary physical changes in our bodies to help us deal with the danger ahead.

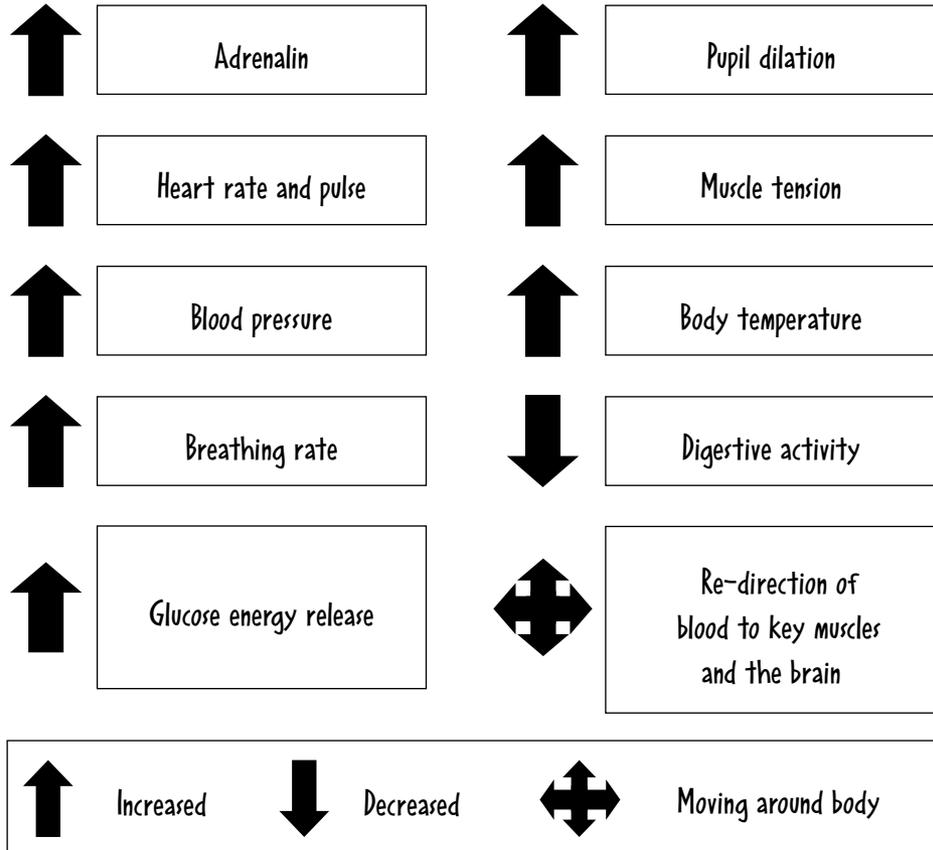
Let's get in a time machine and travel back in time to see what I mean by this...

You've stepped out of your time machine into a world where humans live in caves and sabre-tooth tigers roam the Earth. It's one million years ago. It's the Stone Age. Not too far away from you and your time machine, there's a caveman doing his normal caveman-type things, such as searching for berries to go in a caveman-sized pie for dinner! Suddenly you realise a very vicious-looking creature is stalking the caveman, preparing to pounce. Before you can shout 'It's behind you!' in true pantomime style, the caveman turns around and comes nose to nose with a sabre-tooth tiger.

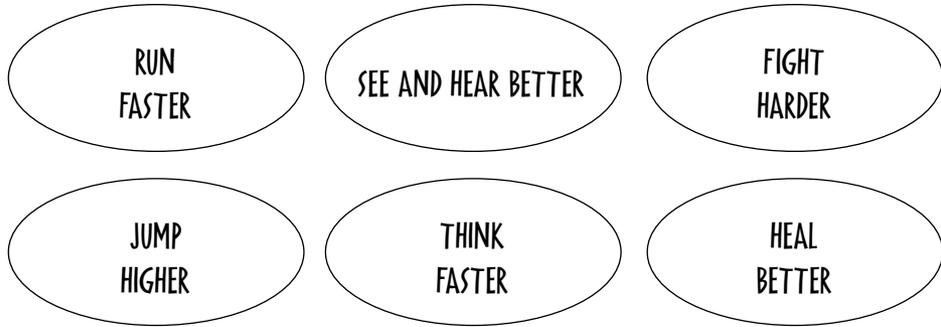
What do you think the caveman is thinking right at this point? Write an example in the thought bubble coming out of the caveman's head below.



Louise, aged 13 years, wrote ‘Oh nooooooooooo!!’ when she did this task. Carter, aged 14 years, wrote ‘Run! Quick!’ I’m sure you will also have written something that shows the caveman realising ‘Oh no! I’m in danger. I need to survive!’ Because of this thought the following things will be happening inside the caveman’s body.



This is his body’s way of preparing him to survive the life-threatening encounter with the sabre-tooth tiger or any other *real* danger that he might face in his caveman life. By making all those physical changes, his body is helping him to:



OK, maybe not to the extent of your average superhero, but enough to help him have a chance of surviving that head-to-head with the tiger by either:

- defending himself through fighting back (*fight*)
- defending himself through running away to safety (*flight*)
- defending himself by playing dead so the tiger leaves him alone (*freeze*).

That is what is known as the *fight, flight or freeze response*.

So let's now whizz forward to the present day in your time machine. Let's pretend you are a scuba diver having a relaxing afternoon dive in the ocean when you suddenly realise there's a shark behind you. Write in the thought bubble below what you might be thinking.



Again, the thought will be one that highlights that you are in danger and you need to survive. It is a *real* danger and your body will trigger the very useful physical changes involved in the fight, flight or freeze response to help you deal with this emergency.

So the fight, flight or freeze response is a fantastic thing. But only if the fearful thought that triggers it is based on a *real* danger and only if this reaction calms down after the danger has passed. Thankfully, in life, real dangers very rarely occur. So these normal, occasional responses don't interfere with everyday life.

But what does this all have to do with anxiety?

Imagine you have a party to go to. Sounds simple enough, hey? But what if you start to think about all the bad things that might happen if you go to the party? What if you then start thinking that some of these bad things are really likely to happen?

Q. Are you viewing the party as safe or dangerous?

A. Dangerous, and the result is likely to be fear. Therefore your body is likely to trigger the physical changes that prepare us for a fight, flight or freeze response.

Q. But is a party a *real* danger?

A. Probably not, and if not, we are putting our body through a fight, flight or freeze false alarm and physical changes that it doesn't actually need.

If we frequently view situations or things as more dangerous than they actually are, we will keep experiencing fight, flight or freeze false alarms, just like a burglar alarm that keeps going off in response to things it shouldn't, such as thunderstorms or a passing cat! As a result, our bodies can get stuck in this fight, flight or freeze response – as though our fight, flight or freeze switch has been flicked into a permanent 'on' position.



And this state is what we call ANXIETY!

And because our bodies weren't designed to go through frequent fight, flight or freeze false alarms, this state of anxiety brings a range of negative symptoms with it. Examples can include:

COGNITIVE

Memory problems, concentration problems, obsessive thoughts, negative thoughts about yourself, unrealistic expectations of yourself, worst case scenario thoughts, 'what if?' thoughts, self-harm/suicidal thoughts, comparing self negatively to others, mind-reading thoughts, thoughts about bad things happening, blowing things out of proportion, jumping to conclusions thoughts, unrealistic thoughts about situations, 'I can't' thoughts, thoughts that focus on negatives about situations, thoughts that things are worse than they actually are, thoughts that exaggerate likelihood of danger, self-doubting thoughts, self-blaming thoughts.

PHYSICAL

Sweating, headaches, hair loss, dizziness, nausea, choking sensation, ringing in ears, red face, dry mouth, lump in throat, feeling hot, feeling cold, shortness of breath, can't catch breath, rapid breathing, heart racing, heart palpitations, chest tightness, chest pain, tingling of lips, grinding teeth, weight loss or gain, bowel problems, stomach ache or butterflies, skin problems and rashes, lack of appetite, shaking, tremors, numbness or tingling in limbs, jelly legs, fainting, tiredness, twitches or tics, muscle aches, pains and tension, frequent urination, sleep disturbance.

EMOTIONAL

Worry, feeling on edge, panic, nervousness, fear, dread, restlessness, tension, distress, upset, agitation, feeling worthless, low mood, low in confidence, low in self-esteem, feeling under pressure, feeling overwhelmed, anger, loneliness, guilt, irritability, insecurity, confusion, feeling trapped, feeling out of control, unhappiness, loss of motivation or pleasure or interest, hopelessness, numbness, hyper-sensitivity to things, self-criticism, self-doubt, defensiveness, suspiciousness, frustration.

BEHAVIOURAL

Avoidance, following rituals or routines, putting off doing things, doing things to get people's attention, seeking reassurance, checking for signs of danger, planning escape routes, binge eating, skipping meals, making yourself sick after eating, making mistakes, acting irritably, acting aggressively, sleeping more or less than usual, hiding away from people, drinking, taking drugs, self-harming, skipping school/college, ignoring problems, getting annoyed with self, getting other people to do things for you, taking out your feelings on others, bottling your anxiety up, stuttering or stammering, talking more or less or quickly, pacing, being unable to sit still, not finishing things, crying, smoking.

So now we understand what anxiety is, let's look at the different types of anxiety that can occur.