



Greater Manchester
Resilience Hub

A Guide to Managing Anxiety in Uncertain and Challenging Times



Challenging and uncertain times

There are times when everyone's life is challenging and uncertain. This might be because of a range of things, such as; a pandemic, flood warning, illness, exams or choosing a university. Everything may feel uncertain and it can be hard to manage not knowing what is going to happen next. People often find their own ways of coping, but this can lead to worry, stress and anxiety; especially if the situation is ongoing.

It is common to feel unsettled at these times. There is no right or wrong way to think and feel. You might feel better or worse in different situations, or different from day to day. You might notice that others in a similar situation are feeling like this too, however, everyone's reactions are unique.



Ways to look after yourself

- Stick to a routine – get up, showered and dressed at a reasonable time and go to bed at a time that means you can get up again the next day.
- Eat well and healthily, drink fluids often and chose foods and drinks you enjoy.
- Get out of the house and exercise (even a small amount is helpful).
- Keep good sleep habits – limit caffeine and sugar from late afternoon, minimise use of electronics in the run up to bedtime, keep the room dark and don't exercise late on.
- Remind yourself of good times - put a picture on your phone of something you have enjoyed, something you are looking forward to or an inspirational quote.
- Make plans for the future – like the places you want to travel to.
- Be flexible about plans, things do change.
- Limit the amount of time you spend on media or social media.
- Stay in touch with family and friends or those whose company you enjoy (including pets).
- Support others but look after yourself too. Reach out for help if you need it.

Stress and Anxiety

Feeling stressed is a common response when life is challenging. When this becomes more intense it is often described as anxiety. Anxiety is a natural response to threat and is often experienced as a build-up of physical sensations and an increase in worries.

People expect to feel threatened in dangerous situations, but this can also happen in situations that make you worried — you can easily convince your body you are in potential danger just by thinking bad things might happen. Your body is programmed to keep you safe from danger, so when it thinks it might be under threat it gets ready to react, causing automatic changes that are designed to help us run away or defeat the danger. This is called the *Fight and Flight* response.

The thing is, if the danger is not immediate or is only *imagined* you will not actually need to respond. But your body will still react and you might notice changes such as, increased heart rate, breathlessness, nausea, muscle tension, racing thoughts, feeling dizzy, finding it hard to concentrate, feeling unable to settle, needing the toilet and feeling scared. Although these changes might feel horrible they can't hurt you, they are in fact designed to help you and if left alone they will go away on their own. However, sometimes having these feelings can be confusing and they can stick with us longer than we want. If this happens there are some strategies that can be helpful:

- Do something physical – shake off the stress, bounce on a trampoline, go for a quick run (exercise releases positive chemicals and burns off the stress ones).
 - Get out into nature or look at the sky – this will sooth your senses and help give you a sense of perspective.
 - Hug someone or stroke a pet.
 - Do something that makes you laugh.
 - Give yourself a different sensation to focus on – roll a spikey ball in your palm, ping a hair bobble round your wrist.
 - Get out of your head and connect your body with the world around you – put your hand on a cold or rough surface, drink a cold or fizzy drink, eat a sour sweet, take your socks off and feel the floor.
 - Use your breathing to calm your body, remember breathing out is as important as breathing in. Follow the outline of something rectangular with your finger - breathe in on the short side and out on the long side. Slow this down and continue until you feel calm.
 - Try a mindfulness or relaxation app.
 - Use your 5 senses to sooth yourself – write a list of relaxing smells, sights, sounds, textures and tastes that you can use when you are feeling stressed.
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Worry

Everyone worries at times, it is part of being human and can help us develop ideas and solve problems. A little bit of worry is helpful – it might make you put more effort into your work or prepare for an interview well. But sometimes worries become too frequent and noisy and we can get stuck in them, which can be distressing and gets in the way of life.

The more you think about worries and the more important they feel, the bigger they can get. Anxiety being around at the same time can make us more likely to believe that our worries will come true and this can keep them going. This is a tricky cycle to get stuck in and it can take time and effort to learn to manage worries and keep them in check. Some things you can try are:

- Work out which worries are on your control and can be sorted - make a plan and action them.
- Identify other worries that are not in your control or are unhelpful to keep thinking about - practice letting them go. If this is hard write them down and set aside 20 minutes each day to allow yourself to worry about them.
- Practice turning your attention to something you would rather be doing.
- Occupy your mind to give it a break; play a game on your phone, draw/doodle, listen to music, watch a good TV programme etc.
- Ask yourself what might realistically happen and what might actually go well; instead of focusing on what might go wrong.
- Get out of your head and connect your body with the world around you – put your hand on a cold or rough surface, drink a cold or fizzy drink, eat a sour sweet, take your socks off and feel the floor.

Remember:

- There is no right or wrong way to think or feel.
- Everyone feels anxious sometimes, it's part of being human.
- Anxiety can feel horrible but it can't hurt you, it can even be helpful at times.
- Worries can also be helpful in small doses but getting caught up in them can make you feel worse – act on the ones that can be sorted and let the rest go.
- There are things you can do to help yourself manage even if the situation itself can't be changed.

Getting support

If things are difficult you don't have to manage on your own. It can often feel hard to ask for support, but it can make all the difference. Talk to your friends and family, text them or snapchat them – you might find they are feeling the same way or that they have good ideas to help you feel a bit better.

If you are feeling like you need more help then let somebody know like; your form tutor or pastoral lead or your GP; as they can support you to get the help you need. There also services out there that can help you such as the ones listed below, your college wellbeing service or your local IAPT service (who provide psychological therapy).

- Kooth: Free online counselling service for young people.
<https://www.kooth.com>
 - Samaritans: Ring 116 123
 - Papyrus – Hopeline for young people. Ring 0800 0684141, email pat@papyrus-uk.org, text 07860 039967, <https://papyrus-uk.org>
 - Young minds crisis messenger service: Text 85258
 - Silver Cloud: App for managing anxiety and low mood – free to all GM residents. Sign up via <https://GM.silvercloudhealth.com/signup>.
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