

The Stress and Anxiety Solution Toolkit

A Free Resource Created by

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Is there Such a Thing as Life after Anxiety?

If you are living with high levels of stress and anxiety, the answer to this question is not so clear.

If you are like most people I meet in my work, you are a busy person.

- You have a lot going on: in your relationships; in your career; at home; and in your community.
- You would like to be more productive in all these areas.
- You would like to enjoy all these things more.
- You would like to live each day in a way that reflects your values and goals.

But it's not so simple.

High levels of stress and anxiety interfere with your ability to enjoy life and get things done. They undermine your ability to function and cope and just enjoy things.

The purpose of this toolkit is to help you see that there is a different way to live – and it is within your reach.

Let's begin by getting a deeper understanding of the causes of your stress and anxiety:

The Purpose of Anxiety

It is important to understand that anxiety is an in-built human function and can be useful at times.

This can be illustrated by the following example:

A man is having his morning swim at the beach and suddenly, some distance away he spots a fin moving above the water. The man identifies it as a shark, realises the danger and responds with fear. This helps him understand the urgency of getting out of the water immediately. This is appropriate and functional.

This fear response is also called the “**fight or flight response**”. It occurs when a person is in danger. It is adaptive in circumstances such as the one above because it helps the man to swim away quickly or to fight the danger, thereby saving his life.

We often activate the “flight or flight response” when there is no real danger but *we believe* we are in danger and so we become anxious.

When a person's fight/flight response is activated - three major types of responses occur:

1. Thinking Responses or Cognitions
2. Action Responses or Behaviours
3. Physiological responses

In this tool kit, we will only address one type of thinking response, which happens to be very common in people who suffer from anxiety. It is called catastrophic thinking and it tends to:

- Cause worry or anxiety
- Perpetuate the fight/flight response:

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For example –if somebody notices a freckle on their arm and immediately believes it is a cancerous tumour – that is called catastrophic thinking. It will cause and maintain anxiety.

Another example of this thinking style in a work context is “If I present my information badly, all my colleagues will think I am stupid, I will lose my job and never be respected again”. This is a catastrophic way of thinking that serves to promote anxiety.

A third example of catastrophic thinking is when you tell yourself: “I am going to have a nervous breakdown” any time that you are busy. This belief will cause anxiety and maintain it.

The CBT Approach to Treating Anxiety

I head a psychology practice called [Anxiety Solutions CBT](http://AnxietySolutionsCBT.com), where we specialize in treating people with anxiety. Every year we help hundreds of people overcome their anxiety, in our offices and via Skype. We use a unique method based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. This is what CBT stands for.

CBT is an evidence-based scientific theory in psychology that has been proven to work for many decades.

Research has shown that it is your beliefs, and principally your beliefs, that influence your feelings and behaviour. **Simply put, it is what you tell yourself in a particular situation that sets off your emotions and behavioural responses.**

So if you tell yourself that you have cancer, you will feel anxious. If you tell yourself it is a freckle and until a doctor gives a definitive diagnosis you have nothing to worry about, you will be calm.

The word “catastrophise” refers to the process of taking an everyday event and turning it into a major catastrophe. This process may be conscious and deliberate, or unconscious.

Either way, catastrophising serves to get one’s fight-flight responses going, which is not healthy. On top of this, the catastrophic fears may feel real but, until they are confirmed by reality, they are simply that – fears.

One tool that can help you immediately is the cognitive tool we call: PERSPECTIVE.

When you tell yourself: “

“I CHOOSE TO PUT THIS INCIDENT IN PERSPECTIVE”

“This event is not A CATASTROPHE”

You will feel calm.

Many people, however, need help to gain perspective. Everything feels real so if it feels like a catastrophe it is.

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To help you gain Perspective, we created a special tool, which we call **The Ruler**. We have used The Ruler for years with most of our clients. Nearly all have reported that it has been extremely helpful to them in calming their catastrophic thinking.

The Ruler is a useful tool that I am sharing with you that can help you to gain a realistic perspective of events.

The Ruler: An Effective Tool for Gaining Perspective

The following is a description of “The Ruler Method”. It is a most useful and practical tool. The Ruler itself is printed at the end of this booklet. Print it and cut it out so that you can carry it with you wherever you go.

On one end of the ruler is the number 1, which is the number referring to a situation that is not at all **life-threatening**, at the other end of the ruler is number 10, referring to situations which are **life-threatening**.

Whenever a situation arises and you feel that you are becoming panicky, as if you are in mortal danger, use this tool. Imagine the ruler in your minds-eye and ask yourself: “On a scale from 1 to 10, how does this incident rate?”

Now life threatening means just that: for example, a car accident, your house burning down, a diagnosis of cancer. What you will find is that very few situations in fact are life-threatening. What you will also find is that most people only experience one or two life threatening events in a lifetime.

So it is unlikely the event you score is in fact life threatening and you will probably score it lower down the ruler. As you “score” your event lower down on the scale, you will immediately feel your stress levels drop.

The Ruler enables you to “test out” whether or not your body is responding realistically. This is the essence of Perspective. The gift of Perspective allows you to regain control of your anxious reactions to life events.

Just because an event is not life threatening, it does not mean that it is not important or that your worried feelings are not valid. The Ruler is just a way of forcing you to view the event in terms of a more realistic perspective and help you become aware that, in the broader scheme of things, most issues that worry you are relatively trivial.

Example:

Mary is irritated by the fact that a new employee starts talking loudly on the phone at the desk near hers. She finds herself getting worked up about it and believing it will be impossible to concentrate due to the distracting noise. “I’ll never get any work done. I’ll probably have to quit my job because I can’t stand this horrible noise. I remember how awful it was to be unemployed.” She finds herself cursing the man behind his back, as her stress levels peak.

Then the phone rings. Mary answers. Over the line, someone announces to Mary that a member of her family is dying. Suddenly the irritation about her loud-mouth co-worker is of

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no significance. Her thoughts are totally consumed by the devastating news. The genuine tragedy brought home to Mary that in the broader scheme of things, the irritation with her co-worker was a triviality.

The purpose of this example is not to say that you have to put up with more regular irritations, such as a new co-worker's noisiness. We do not suggest that you deny your irritation or avoid seeking a solution to any annoying problem.

It just means that you do not need to react as if you are about to die. Rather, you handle it as a problem that needs to be dealt with rationally, without all the emotionality.

Using The Ruler, Mary understands that her co-worker's behaviour warrants a 2-3 on The Ruler. This enables her to talk to him calmly work out an amicable solution.

If you use The Ruler regularly, you will train your mind to automatically rate stressful situations with more perspective. Knowing about The Ruler is not enough to change your habitual tendency of thinking catastrophic thoughts. However, when you utilise The Ruler regularly, thinking in a calm manner will become your default mode.

Exercise: Practice Using the Ruler on Past Stressful Events

Think back to recent events in your life that have evoked catastrophic conclusions and major stress reactions. Then, using The Ruler, fill out the Table below. You will be surprised at the rapid shift in Perspective you will gain.

- In Column 1, list events in your life that have evoked catastrophic conclusions and major stress reactions.
- In Column 2, rate each incident on the point using the Ruler, based on how you felt about those incidents *at the time*.
- In column 3, write down how you would rate those same events on The Ruler, *at present*.
- In column 4, describe the alternative things you could say to yourself in that situation that are less based on fear and more on the facts in the moment (calming thoughts).

Incident	Previous Score	Current Score	Calming thoughts

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Tips for Using the Ruler Effectively

- When you are in the midst of your catastrophising, you may not be able to utilise The Ruler method. However, once you have calmed down somewhat, it is still beneficial to use this tool as it will place the situation into perspective for you. This in turn will have a preventative effect in the future.
- This tool is only effective if the event is not really life-threatening. If an event is truly life-threatening, do not try and minimise it. Instead, look for the necessary help for yourself or your loved one.
- If you notice that you are regularly reacting at a rate of above 5 to daily events, it is recommended that you seek professional help. A qualified anxiety specialist can help you reduce your anxiety levels in a relatively short period. Contact [Anxiety Solutions CBT](#) for more information.

Relaxation for Non-Relaxed People

People who suffer from anxiety are often advised to “just relax.” Doctors, counsellors, hypnotherapists, yoga instructors and well-meaning friends may tell you that relaxation and breathing with help reduce the anxiety. And they are right.

However, at Anxiety Solutions CBT we have found that most people who are anxious find it excruciatingly difficult to do traditional relaxation exercises, such as sitting or lying still for up to 20 minutes. They find it even more difficult to focus on one thought for more than a few seconds.

That is why we teach a short relaxation method which is comprised of 5 breaths. This means that it can be done quickly, any time or any place. This method has all the benefits of longer methods and is easy and effective.

At Anxiety Solutions CBT, we call it “5 Breaths to Calm.”

As part of this toolkit, we have included a 4-minute recording, including a short introduction explaining the method followed by a demonstration. You should be able to use it immediately.

You can download the recording to your phone or mp3 player and use it to help you relax, wherever you may be.

[Click here to listen to “5 Breaths to Calm.”](#)

Is there Such a Thing as Life after Anxiety?

Yes. It is possible to overcome your stress and anxiety and live a more focused, enjoyable life. I have been privileged to help countless people do just that through my psychology practice.

If you think you are ready to take a serious step towards freeing yourself from stress and anxiety, I urge you to [contact us](#). We can schedule an initial appointment, so that you can see just how effective and rapid our program is in relieving the symptoms of this problem. We offer in-person treatments in our offices, or remote treatments via phone/skype.

If you would like to know more about Anxiety Solutions CBT's unique treatment method or if you have any questions, visit our [Questions and Answers page](#).

Contact Us Now

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On behalf of the Anxiety Solutions CBT team, I wish you a calm, productive and enjoyable day,

Renee Mill

Principal Psychologist

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Appendix: Printable Ruler

