



Birchall

Coping With Anxiety

Self Care Booklet

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Who are Birchall?

Sexual abuse and rape inflict deep trauma - the effects of which can last a lifetime if left untreated. Birchall understand complex trauma, we have specialist training on how the body and brain responds when someone feels like they're under significant threat. We understand the impact that sexual violence has on everyone who experiences it, be that as a one-off incident or years of grooming and abuse.

We offer advice and information, practical support to deal with things such as; flashbacks, sleep patterns, improving mental wellbeing. In the longer-term we offer counselling and play therapy where we start to really help people recover from their trauma and to put their emotional and psychological safety as a key priority.

Sharing our Vision

Here at Birchall we believe that we should be able to live in a society that is free of sexual abuse, rape, exploitation and sexualised violence.

On a Mission

We empower people affected by these issues to recover from trauma so they can lead safe and fulfilling lives. As soon as someone contacts us, we ensure they know they have been heard and believed and that we can support them in their next steps, whatever they are.



What is Anxiety

Anxiety is our minds and body's reaction to stressful, dangerous, or unfamiliar experiences and situations. It gives us the feeling of uneasiness, distress, or dread and it often appears before specific events or situations.

Some anxiety is healthy and productive however when our anxiety becomes out of control it can progress into an anxiety related disorder. Anxiety helps us stay alert and aware and years ago was essential for human survival, but for those suffering from an anxiety disorder, it feels far from normal - it can be completely debilitating, and it can take control over your life.

Anxiety isn't just present in our minds, we can feel it in our tummies, our fingers, our face – it feels different to each person.

Uncontrolled anxiety can affect our physical health as much as it can affect our emotional and mental wellbeing and so it is important for us to keep our anxiety to a healthy level

The 5 F's

A lot of people are familiar with the term "fight or flight". The following responses are all crucial for our survival – for example, if you were to cross a road and a car quickly came hurtling towards you, you should experience one of the 5 F's (hopefully the right one!)

All of the following responses are normal responses to experiences we face, we can sometimes however use the wrong response or exaggerate these responses when we feel anxious – for example, if you became anxious about a situation, you may go in to "flight" mode even when the light is red and the traffic has stopped.

Anxiety is needed for us to survive but it is important for us to keep our anxieties under some control because, if we don't our anxieties can begin to affect our health and lifestyle.

FIGHT - This is where we put up a fight and challenge the situation in front of us

FLIGHT - This is where we move quickly to escape the threat or the potential threat

FREEZE - This is where we freeze, hoping the problem or person will go away

FLOP - This is almost like "playing dead", again hoping the problem or person will go away

FRIEND - This is where we befriend the problem or person and try to keep them happy



Anxiety Coping Skills

Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is a simple technique that's excellent for managing emotions. Not only is deep breathing effective, it is also discreet and easy to use at any time or place.

Sit comfortably and place one hand on your abdomen. Breathe in through your nose, deeply enough that the hand on your abdomen rises. Hold the air in your lungs, and then exhale slowly through your mouth, with your lips puckered as if you were blowing through a straw. The secret is to go slow: Time the inhalation (4s), pause (4s), and exhalation (6s). Practice for 3 to 5 minutes.

4s
Inhale



4s
Hold



6s
Exhale



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

By tensing and relaxing the muscles throughout your body, you can achieve a powerful feeling of relaxation. Additionally, progressive muscle relaxation will help you spot anxiety by teaching you to recognise feeling of muscle tension.

Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position. For each area of the body listed below you will tense your muscles tightly, but not to the point of strain. Hold the tension for 10 seconds and pay close attention to how it feels. Then, release the tension, and notice how the feeling of relaxation differs from the feeling of tension.

- Feet** Curl your toes tightly into your feet, then release them.
- Calves** Point or flex your feet, then let them relax.
- Thighs** Squeeze your thighs together tightly, then let them relax.
- Torso** Suck in your abdomen, then release the tension and let it fall.
- Back** Squeeze your shoulder blades together, then release them.
- Arms** Make fists and squeeze them towards your shoulders towards your ears, then let them drop.
- Hands** Make a fist by curling your fingers into your palm, then relax your fingers.
- Face** Scrunch your facial features to the center of your face, then relax.
- Full Body** Squeeze all muscles together, then release all tension.

Challenging Irrational Thoughts

Anxiety can be magnified by irrational thoughts. For example, the thoughts that "something bad will happen" or "I will make a mistake" might lack evidence, but still have an impact on how you feel. By examining the evidence and challenging these thoughts, you can reduce anxiety.

Put thoughts on trial. Choose a thought that has contributed to your anxiety. Gather evidence in support of your thought (verifiable facts only), and against your thought. Compare the evidence and determine whether your thoughts are accurate or not.

Use Socratic Questioning. Question the thoughts that contribute to your anxiety. Ask yourself:

"Is my thought based on facts or feelings?"

"How would my best friend see this situation?"

"How likely is it that my fear will come true?"

"What is most likely to happen?"

"If my fear comes true, will this matter in a week? A month? A year?"

Imagery

Your thoughts have the power to change how you feel. If you think of something sad, it's likely you'll start to feel sad. The opposite is also true: When you think of something positive and calming, you feel relaxed. The imagery technique harnesses this power to reduce anxiety.

Think of a place that you find comforting. It could be a secluded beach, your bedroom, a quiet mountaintop, or even a loud concert. For 5 to 10 minutes, use all your senses to imagine this setting in great detail. Don't just think fleetingly about this place - really imagine it.



What do you see around you? What do you notice in the distance?

Look all around to take in all your surroundings. Look for small details you would usually miss.



What sounds can you hear? Are they soft or loud? Listen closely to everything around you. Keep listening to see if you notice any distant sounds.



Are you eating or drinking something enjoyable? What is the flavour like? How does it taste? Savour all the tastes of the food or drink.



What can you feel? What is the temperature like? Think of how the air feels on your skin, and how your clothes feel on your body. Soak in all these sensations.



What scents are present? Are they strong or faint? What does the air smell like? Take some time to appreciate the scents.

"The Birchall Trust has a knack of hearing the silence, always challenging and developing me in an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance"



Anxiety Bag

Tic-tacs/mints - Strong flavours can distract us from the thing(s) we are anxious about, some people also grind their teeth when anxious or distressed. But having a mint will help prevent dental damage



Perfume/Lavender oil or a scent you find relaxing -

Lavender oil is known for its relaxing and calming effects; some people find comfort in certain scents, and this can help us relax and feel safe

Something soft or something to squeeze - holding something soft or warm can also help us feel safe. We can also use the item to squeeze if our anxiety becomes tense. A stress ball would be good for this. And, you can make your own with rice and a balloon!



A fidget spinner (of some sort) e.g. elastic band - You don't have to buy a fidget spinner as there are some amazing designs out there. You can make your own out of elastic bands or by using a ball of elastic bands to shuffle/twang

Music/headphones, ear defenders or earmuffs - Whether you want to cancel out noise or submerge in it, carrying headphones/music or ear defenders/muffs can help with unwanted or wanted noise. It can help prevent over stimuli and the ability to cope in certain settings



A notepad, pens/colouring pencils - This can be useful for relaxing but can also be used as a tool to record anxieties and how we managed them for the future

Contact us

Our office hours are Monday-Friday, 9:00am-5:00pm. We do offer some evening appointments, please contact our office for more information.

Please contact us by whatever means is most convenient for you. All contact with our office is treated with kindness, respect and in confidence.

We welcome contact by telephone, text and email.

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