

### Ways through anxiety group outline

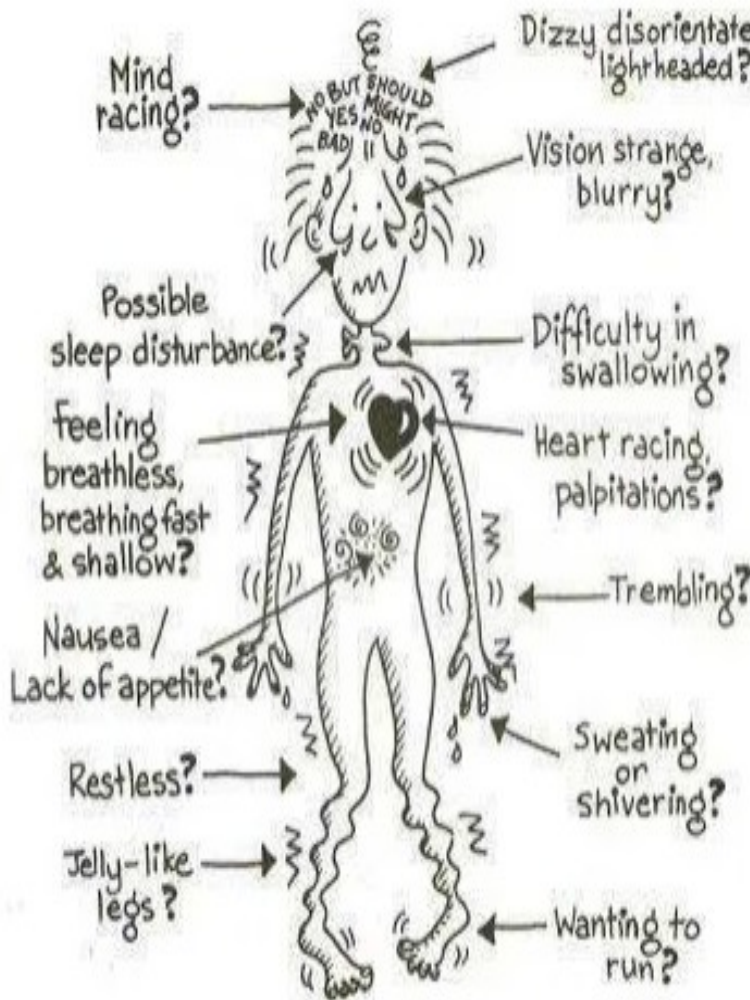
Introduction	Boundaries and safety chat.	5 mins
	SOBER Breathing space	
	What is/isn't mindfulness? Why do it for addiction?	
Suggested Practice	Seeing (you could take in flowers or other visual stimuli).	15 mins
Inquiry	Inquire about today's practice; then include home practice too	10 mins
<i>Halfway point – gauge energy in room and move/ground as required</i>		
Exercise	<p>Explain the fight/flight response's evolutionary use, and then how we trigger it through thoughts/worries.</p> <p>Elicit thoughts, body sensations, feelings, actions, to flipchart and discuss.</p> <p>Teaching points –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evolutionary development, to keep us safe from threats – fight/flight. Adrenaline.</li> <li>• We can spot anxiety by learning our individual anxiety signature. When we've noticed it we can choose how to deal with it.</li> </ul> <p>How to deal with it when you notice it? First thing – SOBER breathing space to help respond wisely:</p> <p>Go through exercises from handout on flipchart demonstrating and encouraging them to do them along with you (you can even do the iced water one if you want to).</p> <p>When showing the breathing ones, can be helpful to briefly teach (or revise) the polyvagal nerve: poly = more than one (branch of nerve); vagal = from same linguistic route as vagrant &amp; vagabond = wandering (round the body). This nerve goes from the lungs to the part of the brain that deals with anxiety, and when the breathing is deliberately slowed it tells this part of the brain to relax. So this causes a calming feedback loop. You could mention that paramedics teach box breathing to patients having panic attacks.</p> <p>Give out handouts and discuss teaching points.</p>	20 mins
Closing	Set intention for practice over coming days/week – inc home practice.	10 mins
	Go round and say one thing learned/struggled with today	
	Breathing space and thank you	



## Ways through anxiety handout

The stress reaction is important, and needed, when we're faced with threats - the release of adrenaline causes our bodies to change so that we are on high alert, ready to act quickly. If we're being chased by a tiger adrenaline kicks in and sends all our energy to our muscles, so we can deal with it. **We really need this 'fight or flight' mechanism to kick in in emergencies!**

However, we have evolved complex, ingenious brains, that allow us to plan for the future, and learn from our mistakes from the past so we don't make them again. So we don't just calm down when a threat has gone away - instead our clever brains imagine our own threats in our minds - fearing what's going to happen in the future, and worrying about what's happened in the past.



**Our bodies respond to our thoughts in just the same way as they would a physical threat.**

And when we get 'stuck' in this state, worrying about things we can't fight or run away from, it stops being useful, and starts causing problems (see the picture).

Then it can be tempting to use or drink to make yourself feel different - which might work for a bit - but when this has worn off you discover it's still there, worse than before. So you end up in a cycle, desperately trying to escape the feelings and making them worse.

**Telling yourself to "calm down" really doesn't work. And substances make it worse in the long run. So we need a different approach.**

If you practise mindfulness when things are OK, you get to know your own personal anxiety reaction, noticing what is happening in your body and mind, and allowing this. As you explore sensations with a gentle curiosity, you can start the process of calming, by stopping the fight against your experience. Then you can decide what to do next - see over for some ideas to play with:

*(unknown artist - please get in touch if it's yours!)*

# Anxiety Tips

## First of all – SOBER breathing space:

Stop

Observe your thoughts, feelings, and body

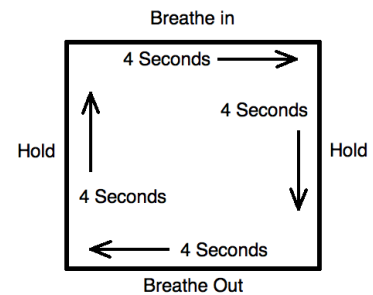
Breathe a couple of breaths (take a deep one to start if you like)

Expand the awareness to the whole body again

Respond differently:

## Box breathing

Picturing a square, and perhaps tracing the shape as you breathe, counting in your mind – to four as you breath in – hold for four – breathe out for four – hold for four. Repeat.



## Making the out-breath longer than the in-breath

This tells the brain that there is no threat, and in turn tells the body to calm. So breathing out to the count of 7, then breathing in to the count of 4, and repeating.

## 5-4-3-2-1 exercise

Taking time to notice 5 things you can see, then 4 things you can hear, then 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.

## Moving

Moving the body can work off adrenaline, cycling, running, yoga, stretching, etc. Shaking out any tension.

## Counting

How many red things can you see? How many leaves on a tree? How many tiles on the wall? etc. Distracting yourself by forcing concentration onto something else.

## Cold water

Dipping the face into cold water (even better – with ice cubes in!) can ‘reset’ the anxiety reaction.

## Using peripheral vision

Looking ahead and trying to name objects in the corners of the vision can help to reduce the stress reaction.

## Be a friend to yourself

You’re feeling threatened. So acknowledge this, and soothe yourself. What do you really need? Hug yourself/rub your arms/hold your hands (no-one will notice!) and tell yourself you’ll be ok.

## Find a calm place to sit

Sitting, breathing, and bringing the attention back to sounds or sights or sensations.