



anxiety
SOLUTIONS



50
WAYS
TO CALM YOUR
MIND
& SOOTHE YOUR
BODY

Innovative
Resources

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St Luke's Innovative Resources acknowledges the Jaara people of Dja Dja Wurrung country, the traditional custodians of the land upon which our premises are located and where our resources are developed and published. We pay our respects to the elders—past, present and future—for they hold the memories, traditions, cultures and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and other First Nations peoples. We must remember that underneath this earth, upon which we so firmly stand, this is, was and always will be, the traditional land of First Nations peoples.

CONTENTS

The Anatomy of Anxiety	4
Applications: What can I use the cards for?	12
Practice Base: Where do the anxiety strategies come from?	16
All Fifty Cards: Practice base and possible uses for each card	18
Taking Care: What should I consider before I begin?	43
More Ideas for Using the Cards	44
Deliberate selection	44
Random choice	45
Ideas for individuals and groups in professional or private settings	45
Ideas for senior students	48
About the Creators	50
Author	50
Design team	51
Publisher	51
References, Further Reading and Research Links	51
Mental Health Support (in Australia)	52

THE ANATOMY OF ANXIETY

For many of us, anxiety sucks. It feels unpleasant, it's uneasy, uncomfortable and sometimes scary. It comes in so many different forms and no two people will experience it in the same way. Sometimes, it comes in different forms, at different times, and in different situations, for the same person! It's unpredictable. It can arise when we are stressed or relaxed. It can arise out of the blue. It can be rational or irrational. Sometimes, we are anxious about little things while being fine with genuinely scary things.

There's no real logic to anxiety or worry except that it's a part of the human experience and we all go through it at various frequencies and intensities. It's not just you. Do you know the super-high percentage of people who experience anxiety? According to the *National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing* conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (*Summary of Results, 2007, 4326.0, Canberra*) anxiety is the most common mental health condition in Australia. It is estimated that on average, one in four people will experience anxiety at some stage in their life and in any twelve-month period, over two million Australians will experience anxiety. But it may be many more than that. The thing with anxiety is that it's generally invisible. We may know somebody very well and yet their anxiety remains hidden, private and even shameful.

A positive reframe for anxiety

Anxiety is a form of energy that needs a different outlet, a new narrative, a positive reframe. Anxiety can be seen as a sign of strength—of wanting to feel good, of gearing up to do something. The more comfortable you become with anxious thoughts and feelings, the better you feel. And conversely, the more time you spend avoiding anxiety, the greater chance there is of setting up dysfunctional habits in order to avoid feeling it. For example, many people fall into the habit of trying to manage the discomfort of long-term stress and anxiety with alcohol.

How the brain and body respond

Yes, there is always a physiological aspect to anxiety. Certain parts of the brain (such as the amygdala) spring into action, releasing a chain of chemicals commonly known as the ‘fight, flight, freeze’ response. More recently, ‘flop’ and ‘(be)friend’ have been added to this list. All of these are felt as some kind of stress.

Like a faulty alarm system on a car, sometimes these fear signals trigger in humans for no reason at all. When the car alarm goes off randomly, it’s important to remain calm, know that there is no actual threat, and do what we need to do to stop the alarm sound. Similarly, if you feel your brain hitting the panic button for no good reason, use the same process. Remain calm. Remind yourself that there is no actual threat; it’s just a feeling or thought or both. It’s ok. It passes. Talk to yourself calmly, breathe slowly through your nose, and find a pleasant, distracting activity as soon as you can. Focus on the outside world—for example, things you can see, or count, or list, colours you can name—rather than on the internal state. Remain calm and nonchalant until the wave passes. It will.

With strategies like these, you activate other parts of the brain, such as the hippocampus, that moderate the effects of the stress response by providing a soothing or reassuring antidote.

The purpose of this card set

The aim of this card set is to provide you with many ‘antidotes’ to the stress response, using a range of creative, cognitive and physical strategies. Some of these will appeal to your brain more than others, and that is fine. Your anxiety or stress pattern is personal to you, and so too are your solutions.



The most effective techniques retrain the brain away from its habitual pattern by using changes in both physiology and focus. That's what these cards are all about. Give your mind a new task that will either alter physiology or focus (or both!) so that you can access a different state, even if it's just a slight change or improvement.

Fear often stops us thinking that strategies will help us, even though we may acknowledge that they work in theory, or that they work for others. For example, many people see the logic in questioning the validity of their internal story or 'self-talk', and yet they feel like it's too hard, it won't work, it's too simple, or whatever.

The techniques probably will work for you

Try on the idea that even though a technique or strategy may need to be personalised or tailored to your needs, it probably WILL work for you to some extent. All tiny improvements are valid and can add up over time to greater progress. Have a look at all the cards and ask yourself, 'What have I dismissed that I could perhaps re-investigate or attempt for the first time?'

You're not an imposter and you don't have a defect

Sometimes our inner feelings of fear or vulnerability trigger a sense of not being who people think we are, or who we think we should be. Now you can know that most humans feel this way due to differences between their inner and outer selves. You are not an imposter—you are as authentic as every other human on the planet.

We may feel weird or different at times. We may think that other people don't experience the feelings we do, and that somehow we have a defect. Most humans feel this at some point. And that's the point; it's not personal. Having these feelings from time to time is part of the human condition. It's not about you, it's not your fault and it's ok.

‘What if?’ thinking

Anxiety is promoted and accelerated by certain thought patterns. One key anxiety pattern is ‘What if?’ thinking. ‘What if I always feel like this?’ ‘What if it gets worse?’ ‘What if I can’t control it?’ The antidote to ‘What if?’ thoughts is to come back to now. Look around the room or wherever you happen to be at the time. Say out loud, ‘Right now, I can see ... (name things you can see).’ Or you can say, ‘Right now, I focus on my in-breath and my out-breath.’ Or, ‘Right now, I choose peace.’

Social anxiety, mind reading and fortune telling

Many of us feel social anxiety, especially before we go out or see people. Much of this is due to ‘What if?’ thoughts about what other people might think, how they might see us, what they might say about us. We are doing a version of mind reading (and we’re wrong most of the time) as well as looking into our crystal ball and predicting a future which is very unlikely to occur. Stick to the present moment. Stick to now. Refuse to attempt mind reading or fortune telling. Most things turn out way better than we expect.

It’s also important to remember that when we compare ourselves to others, we generally compare our inner feelings and perception of inadequacies to their public social persona. No wonder it looks like other people have more, feel better, and are happier or more successful than we are. But we can never really know the whole truth of another person’s life. We never know how others might be suffering or the difficulties they might be facing privately, or whether our assumptions about them and their circumstances are correct.

Social comparison is a waste of our time and energy as well as almost invariably leading to unpleasant feelings. Decide to stick to being you. Personal best is your only focus, and you can only do the best you can for TODAY. Don’t even compare yourself to how you were in the past. Just do the best you can today.

Silencing thoughts

It's great to practise silencing the thoughts in our minds. One of the ways to do this is to replace the internal chatter with other input. You can do this with sounds you might find such as bird or beach noises. You can listen to music on headphones, play an audiobook, use smartphone apps that have guided meditations or stories, or try listening to other random noises such as clicks or buzzes and see how they feel. Tune in to what you are listening to. If an anxious thought arises, just let it pass and tune back in to your distraction sounds.

Fill up your tool box

The truth is, the more tools we have available the more in control we often feel. So, this card set is about giving lots of different approaches towards breaking the loop of anxiety or worry or stress or whatever we decide to call it. It's all some kind of fear, and fear, while life-saving in the right place at the right time, is no fun at all when it isn't warranted or required. So, let's think about how fear operates in the human system.

Breaking the loop of anxiety

Like everything else, anxiety has a structure. This structure becomes a physiological habit within our system and forms a loop that can be hard to exit. The structure is based on two aspects: bodily feelings generated within the nervous system as well as fear-based thoughts generated within the mind.

Remember this formula: Anxiety = feeling + thought. It's a complex equation involving some sort of unpleasant feeling plus worried thought either about the feeling or about the situation. Anxiety feelings or 'body signals' might include racing heart, nausea, involuntary crying, tight chest or throat, visual or auditory changes, dissociation and other physical sensations of unease. Fear thoughts might be about these physical sensations (freaking out about them) or they might be thoughts about other worries and concerns.

Breaking an anxiety loop usually involves teaching the brain how to change both the physiology (bodily aspects) and the mental focus of those phases; in other words, doing something different with both body and/or mind.

The mind needs a positive distraction or neutral acceptance in order to change the loop. The body can respond to many changes, including movement, stillness, breathing, different nutrition or supplements, hormone management, gut programs to treat bacteria, and nervous system methods (used by psychologists) such as hypnosis and Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing known as EMDR. (This is a recent form of psychotherapy, originally developed for treating post-traumatic stress disorder).

The most important thing to know is that anxiety is a neural pattern and that any pattern can be altered and improved over time. Change the physiology and change the focus and you have a different pattern already. The predisposition might remain but the response can be one of optimism.

Myth 1: Worry helps

Meta-cognitive theory (thinking about how we think) has also shown us some important patterns in those who experience unwanted anxiety. It seems that at some level, people who worry or stress out a lot have a conscious or subconscious belief that worry will help, and that if they keep going over and over the issue, they will solve the problem mentally. Turns out, of course, that this isn't the case.

Most solutions come to us (assuming there is a 'solution' as such) when we are calm and relaxed and not even thinking about something as a problem. So, it seems that worry is actually not useful. Perhaps we could think of it as wasted mental energy that would be best used in another way.

Myth 2: People have no control over thoughts and feelings

Another key belief that was identified in worried or anxious types is their belief that thoughts and feelings can't be helped. They may say, 'They just come by themselves and no matter what I do, they won't stop.' Again, this is not true, nor is it helpful. We just need to find a few ways to break our particular loop and then we can know that there are possibilities, that we can feel better, that there's stuff we can do to help ourselves.

In truth, forms of mental or physical distraction and delay (i.e. putting off thinking about something until later) are useful devices for many people. Others find that challenging their fear-based thoughts works a percentage of the time but may or may not interrupt spontaneous or free-floating feelings of anxiety. Different tools for different feelings.

What's in a name?

How we label feelings is important too, and can affect how much we accelerate the sensations. I worked with a young guy who had symptoms that many of us would label 'panic attacks'. But he did not actually name it, and was not concerned. He got shaky, his heart started to pound, and everything around him looked and sounded a bit weird. He told me this as a side note; it wasn't what he came to talk about and it wasn't really a problem he cared about enough to try and solve. Other people with the same symptoms can get quite freaked out by them, which can sometimes add to the stress of it all.

It's not a problem unless we think it's a problem.

Interpreting body signals and sensations

'Interoception' is the term used for our perception of signals and sensations from our body—hunger, pain, hot, cold, and so on (Mahler 2016. See reference list on our website.) It's been established that many people bothered by anxiety possess a pattern of high interoceptive awareness and sensitivity. This means that many anxious people are hyper-aware of any unpleasant sensations and begin to think concerned thoughts about those sensations. Again, these cards aim to redirect the focus in order to help re-establish equilibrium.

Building tolerance and optimism

Anxiety- or worry-prone people need methods that alter or reduce the unwanted feelings just enough so that they can tolerate the anxiety. It's not about 'trying to get rid of it', which many people aim for. Yes, often anxiety patterns do heal themselves and it may be just a phase. Like chronic pain, for some it can be cured, and for others it must be managed.

The aim of having cards with anxiety loop-breaking tools is to generate optimism. Optimism is a mix of being aware of possibilities and being able to take action. From a different state of feeling, we have many more options about what we do next.

The power of your attention

An important aspect of managing anxiety or worry is to develop the skill of attentional control. This means being able to consciously direct your mind to where you want it to go, rather than feeling controlled by inner experiences. Again, meta-cognitive research has demonstrated that people who feel upset by their level of anxiety often demonstrate poor attentional control. (Fisher & Wells 2009. See reference list on our website.) These cards are designed to help redirect attention and therefore to help cultivate the ability to intentionally redirect your mind or focus, should you feel the need.

The good news is that you have the power to make choices about what to focus on, about where to place your attention, about what actions to take. In making those choices you become increasingly skillful in getting in the driver's seat when it comes to managing anxious thoughts and feelings.



APPLICATIONS: What can I use the cards for?

There are many possible triggers for anxiety. You may be surprised to know that these can have a strong cultural component—an anxiety condition may be prevalent in one culture and unheard of, and even considered completely bizarre, in another (DSM V. See reference list on our website.) But, despite our differences, people are fundamentally the same, so no doubt we humans also worry about many of the same things the world over. Some of these worries will always have been part of the human story, and some will be unique to modern times.

Fortunately, the strategies on the *Anxiety Solutions* cards can be used for whatever people get anxious about, including the following applications:

Career: How to get started, how to choose, how to get ahead or change, recover or manage work issues.

Study: Worry about achievement, motivation, results, procrastination, pressure, expectations of self and others.

Health/medical: Actual illness, fears of illness, pain or other conditions, the health of others, age-related concerns, worries about strength, fitness or injury.

Panic attacks: With or without triggers, the nervous system can go straight into adrenalin overload, creating fast heartbeat, sweating, dissociation, crying, trembling and sensory changes. These patterns, though harmless and time-limited, can be very disconcerting and can lead to fear of further symptoms. It can also lead to avoidance of certain situations or perceived triggers. We need methods to be able to interrupt the nervous system pattern so that the mind can calm itself and regain composure.

Free-floating or generalised anxiety: Sometimes known as GAD (Generalised Anxiety Disorder), this type of anxiety has no obvious cause or trigger but just seems to hang around and direct itself towards all sorts of issues or situations! Many people are bothered by this type of anxiety and will say, 'There's no reason to be anxious.' But as we know, there might be a trigger beyond conscious awareness or it could be a nervous system pattern.

Online dating: This is a whole new app-based arena in which prowess in text messaging seems to have taken over from actual social skills (or is it a new social skill?) and knowing how to read situations via text message communication is stressful for many people. What's the new etiquette? What does this question mean? How do I read the time gap between messages? What happens if I get ghosted? Do I try to contact them? All these issues create stress for some.

Social media: What image do I portray? How do I compare to others? What effect do likes and comments (or lack of) have on me? How is my online life different to my in-person life? Tremendous anxiety can result from cyber-bullying or stalking.

Rejection/abandonment: Whether it's relationships with friends, family or intimate partners, sometimes things don't go according to our plans! Or maybe it's ambiguous, and we become concerned.

Death/change: Loss can be very hard to adjust to and can trigger fears or unpleasant feelings we can't seem to manage. This might include separation or divorce, as well as death. Sometimes we need a few tools to help us go through it.



Weight/appearance/body image: Of course, media and social media can feed into this one, and for some people it can get out of perspective. From a new state we can begin to see things quite differently.

Future: The unknown can be scary. Many aspects of the future can occupy our worry space.

Boredom: Often experienced as an unpleasant feeling that something that should be happening isn't, or that we don't like what is actually happening. For some people, the boredom feeling can lead to other unpleasant states including anxiety.

Supporting or working with others: Professional helpers such as therapists, carers, social workers, doctors (including people in so-called non-professionals roles such as parents) experience the worry of this role at times. Working with the thoughts, feelings and traumas of others can result in ongoing pressure and even vicarious trauma. A change of focus can help with perspective.

Performance anxiety: For athletes, musicians, actors, public speakers and students, the stress of having to perform on cue can be daunting. Even though we may feel confident in our skills or knowledge, the pressure can be overwhelming. Many cards from this set can help redirect our focus so we can get out of our own way.

Teacher anxiety: The pressure on professional educators has never been so intense and many teachers resort to unhelpful methods to cope with the responsibility, including overwork and addictions. These cards can help manage overwhelm and excess stress for people seeking a clear mind and a calm body.

Imposter syndrome: Many people report feeling fraudulent, as though they might be discovered one day to be less skilled than is assumed, and that failure or humiliation will result. While this common pattern is all in our minds, it can trigger concern that would benefit from redirecting.

Solutions won't work for me: Many people worry that their problem can't be solved, that somehow they are worse or that their anxiety is more powerful and intractable compared to others. Again, our fear can make our problem seem more unique and stubborn than it really is. We can improve most things with the right tools!

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD): This is like a brain glitch where we get caught in cycles of obsessive thoughts and compulsive actions, for example, repeatedly washing one's hands or needing to do things in a strict order. We may know that this compulsive repetition is anxiety speaking, but it seems so real. We need to become skilled in labelling these glitch thoughts without judgement, and redirecting or distracting the mind.

Claustrophobia and other phobias: A phobia is an extreme or irrational aversion to something. Phobias can vary in intensity, and can be ok if they don't disrupt our lives. But when they stop us from doing something we want to do, we can benefit from helping the mind operate differently.

Addictions: The most addictive substances are those that create the illusion of stopping anxiety. Most people with addiction issues are anxious people, even though they might not realise it. If we can reduce anxiety, we can reduce the need for substances that lead to addiction.

Insomnia/sleep anxiety: Many of us have trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep at different times in our lives. Sometimes it's because we are too worked up or 'hyped' from the day. Sometimes things are on our minds and sometimes there is no obvious cause at all. Choose some simple activities from the cards that you can do while you are waiting to fall asleep. Hopefully, you will forget to pressure yourself to fall asleep, and instead, fall asleep by accident while your mind is busy with the task. It's much easier to fall asleep when you're not trying!

PRACTICE BASE:

Where do the anxiety strategies come from?

The strategies on the *Anxiety Solutions* cards are drawn from a range of modalities including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Mindfulness, Brief Therapy, Performance Psychology, Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR), Choice Theory, Hypnotherapy and Positive Psychology. You will find activities that focus on breathing, counting, listing, reciting the alphabet, visualisation, physical movement and posture, affirmations, creativity, nature, tactile sensations, music and sounds.

These activities are solution-focussed and strengths-based in that they don't focus on 'the problem' but on simple, fun things people can do to self-soothe or de-escalate anxious feelings. Clinical experience and research have shown these strategies to be effective. (Please see the references and links to research papers on our website: www.innovativeresources/anxietysolutions.)

In addition, the cards do not 'pathologise' anyone; you don't need a diagnosis of anxiety to use them. You don't even have to label yourself as an 'anxious person'. But you are probably among the vast majority of people who experience anxious thoughts from time to time, so it's very useful to have a set of skills you can practise in advance, and draw on when stress or worry show up.

While these techniques are used by many psychologists and counsellors professionally, the activities in *Anxiety Solutions* have been selected because they can be done by anyone, anywhere, without supervision. No doubt you will find that some cards work better than others for different people, depending on culture, language, literacy and personal taste. For these reasons, feel free to adapt the activities on the cards. There are many ways to adjust the activity while still incorporating the core strategy described in the card—making a list, counting things, creating movement and so on.

The cards include activities that are inside or outside, quiet or loud, visual or audio, focussed on body or mind. They also cater for different learning styles. For predominantly kinesthetic learners, for example, activities that involve significant movement may be more effective in creating calm.

The illustrations on the cards cover an eclectic mix of art styles from photography and pop art to line drawings and font work. These too will have differing appeal according to aesthetic taste.

While respecting preferences is important, moving away from habit and into the spirit of experimentation can be a useful strategy in itself. Is it time to try something new?



**FOR COMMENTS ABOUT
THE PRACTICE BASE OF
EACH CARD, PLEASE SEE
THE NEXT SECTION.**

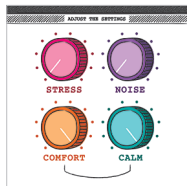
ALL FIFTY CARDS:

Practice base and possible uses for each card

In this section you will find thumbnail images of all 50 cards plus some comments about how each strategy works to calm the mind and soothe the body. These strategies will help you to enter the 'control room' for your mind. Experiment and see which techniques work best for you. You'll begin to notice your own particular style of anxiety loop, as well as noting which changes to physiology or mental focus help to change your state.



On the back of each card is an anxiety-reducing strategy. The strategies themselves are not reproduced below, but you will find comments about the practice base of each card and when this strategy might be most useful.



ADJUST THE SETTINGS

Choosing different **imagery** helps our brain represent our experience in a whole new way. The use of a control panel reminds us that we can, in fact, exercise **deliberate control** over aspects of our experience, moving the levels up on calm, pleasant aspects, and lowering the levels on aspects we don't enjoy so much. This method is used extensively in

Choice Theory which often focusses on the **metaphor** of a car and the idea of getting in the 'driver's seat' of one's life. It is also used in **hypnotherapy**, but we can do it effectively from our normal state of consciousness just by using our imagination. This method is great for **mood control**, sports, music or exam **performance**, or simply to feel better in any situation. Adjust those levels right to your place of comfort and lock them in!



ALPHABET LEGS

The alphabet is one of the earliest things we learn in our educational life, perhaps even before we go to school. It's a **listing** task we can do easily, and yet by physically **writing** the letters on a body part, or **imagining** writing them on a board, we bring in another aspect of awareness too, taking us closer to **mindfulness** (concentrating on

a task and experiencing **sensations in the body**) and further away from whatever we no longer wish to have in mind. This is a technique for keeping the conscious mind busy, again giving the restless 'monkey mind' a pole to climb while we allow the comfort of a relatively simple task to envelop our system. Use this **distraction** and **refocussing** technique to relax, to prepare to sleep, to take the mind off worries and to drift into a nice day-dream state.



THE BASICS

If we want to improve our mood and energy, we need to take care of the fundamentals. Interestingly, when people are under stress, these **building blocks of mood** are the areas most likely to be neglected, as well as the first areas that should be addressed! Are you eating healthy meals consistently? We need good protein, vegetables, good fats and

low GI carbohydrates in our **diet**, and we need to eat at least three times a day, preferably at regular times. Balanced **blood sugar** helps stop some of the physical sensations that can trigger stress and anxiety. We need roughly eight hours of **sleep** as well as rest and **leisure** time each day. We need to **exercise**, to expend some physical energy doing something we like—perhaps going for a walk, ride or swim. Yes, we can all improve in these areas and there's no need to get overwhelmed trying to do it all at once. Choose one area and one improvement and start today. Healthy practices help build healthy thoughts and feelings!



BE HERE NOW

Anxiety is often future-oriented; focussing on scenarios that might happen and scaring ourselves in the process. This card brings us back to NOW, the only place that really matters. We can always be ok if we focus on being here now. It's amazing how often we are not 'being here now' but, rather, we are off somewhere with some scenario that may never happen anywhere but in our imagination. Reminding ourselves to return to the **present moment** is a **cognitive** and **mindfulness** practice that helps calm us, and combined with the **physiological shift** in relaxing our shoulders, grounds us into chill. **Repeating the words** out loud is powerful, and makes it more real somehow. Repeat regularly for greatest results.



BEACH RUNNING

There's something about running on the beach. Maybe it's the **associations** with summer, freedom and sea air, plus the challenge of running on a sandy surface; we can almost smell it and feel the speed and strength in our bodies as we power along. It doesn't matter whether or not we've ever done it in real life, it generally feels empowering to imagine it. This **strengths-based, solution-focussed** scenario also takes us mentally out of 'problem territory' and places us in a positive, empowered environment. And if you don't like the beach you could imagine running down a country track, along a river, or powering around a stadium. Use this **visualisation technique** to boost energy or motivation, to take your mind away from fears, to ground yourself, and clear your thinking.



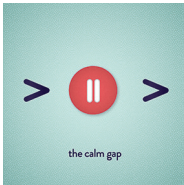
BOOK AT RANDOM

Have you noticed a theme yet? When reducing anxiety, it's good to **break the loop** by accessing some other input and this can influence how we feel quite quickly. Books are yet another way to bring a change of information into the **brain**, and if we read it out loud, we can't really think at the same time. Many people state that when anxious, they have trouble reading or concentrating on what they read. The purpose of this exercise is not to concentrate as such, but to read the material in various voices or in song, which will have some effect, **humorous** or otherwise, to **distract** you from present concerns. It can also remind us of the power of reading, and even of bibliotherapy, the process of deliberately prescribing the reading of certain novels for learning purposes related to what a person might be going through. Most of us enjoy reading and complain that we don't have time to do it. It doesn't take long, and even if you only have five minutes a day or night to read, it will bring therapeutic results. Go grab that book.



BREATHING IN, BREATHING OUT

When we wish to reduce stress, overwhelm or anxiety, sometimes we need the most basic and grounding process to focus on, that of the life-giving process of the breath, always moving in and out of us, often without any conscious awareness at all, yet we continue to breathe. And we can begin to do so consciously; **breathing** through the nose in order to promote a calm state, holding the thought of breathing in, then breathing out, **repeating those words** silently over and over. This activity is highly **meditative** and highly relaxing. It activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which slows everything down and improves all body functions nicely. Just breathing, knowing that with this **mindfulness** practice you are connecting with the strongest life force there is, the breath of life, and choosing to notice and enjoy this.



THE CALM GAP

This exercise is a **meditation** and **mindfulness** method that helps to create deeper states of calm. By consciously paying attention to the gap BETWEEN the thoughts, we can begin to notice that there actually is a gap—a small space of silence, of no thought, of free space—while we wait for the next thought to surface. That gap may be short or long,

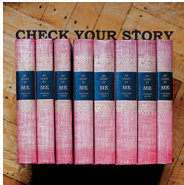
it doesn't matter at all. The key is paying attention to that gap, and noting that the more time we pay attention to it, the longer it will grow and the more inner peace you will feel during that gap. This method builds **attentional control** and **interoceptive awareness** and is a great for sleep preparation, mindfulness, meditation, relaxation or just taking a mental break in order to clear the head. Use regularly for best results!



CANDLE FLAME

Candles have been used in meditation and spiritual practices for centuries, perhaps as much for their **symbolic** value as well as a source of light. Watching a flame can be dreamy and **hypnotic** as well as just an interesting thing to do. Think of the different aspects of the candle—the wick, that thread that allows the candle to remain alight;

the shape, the way a flame can dance around or remain still; the way a flame can be small or leap up with the air into something bigger and brighter—just like you. You can also watch the candle purely as a **meditation** or **mindfulness** practice, **distracting** you from anxious thoughts as you pour all of your awareness into being with the candle and its movements—strengthening your **attentional control**. You may choose to make a wish, or perhaps send an idea, situation or habit into the flame—all practices that draw on **ritual** as a way of **creating meaning** and **optimism**. The possibilities in one candle are endless.



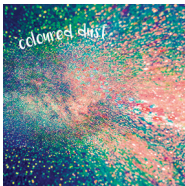
CHECK YOUR STORY

This card draws both from **cognitive therapy** (CBT) and also from **narrative therapy** in that we need to constantly examine the story we are telling ourselves about everything, but even more so when we are not feeling good. Our emotional phases influence how we see the world and colour the story we tell about it. Often when we look back we are surprised at how we formed our narrative. A key skill of **optimism** is learning to challenge unhelpful narratives by **restorying** or **reframing** them. There are many possible narratives so let's choose the best-feeling one. Evidence suggests that **writing** down our thoughts helps us catch, analyse and reframe them much more effectively than merely doing it in our mind.



CLEAN SWEEP

By changing our physiology via our **breathing**, we change the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the **brain**, which affects the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system balance. Slowly breathing and letting that air circulate helps to slow down **nervous system activity** as well as **refocussing** our attention deliberately on the breath. The breath has been used as a **meditation** and **mindfulness** focus for many centuries because it works. When in doubt, return to the breath. This card also uses the **imagery** of cleaning and clearing, using the breath to move around the system and release whatever needs to go. This activity can be used for any type of anxiety or concern. It is also beneficial to use it regularly throughout the day to help prevent build-up of stress or pressure.



COLOURED DUST

In the psychological methods known as ACT or **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy** (Hayes et al 2016. See the reference list on our website.) and MBSR or **Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction** (Kabat Zinn 2012, see the reference list on our website.) one of the key skills is learning that thoughts are just that ... thoughts. We can notice them as we may notice passing clouds, perhaps even broadly labelling them in the same way we might say that a cloud resembles a sheep or a face. But then we let that cloud go, we forget about it and move on to the next. In ACT and MBSR we learn not to 'fuse with' a thought, not to buy into it. Instead, we **externalise** it, we notice it with **detachment** and then let it go, just like tossing colored dust into the air and letting it float away or dissolve into the nothingness it came from. This **metaphor** and **visualisation** is an effective method for sleep preparation, worry phases, dating or relationship anxiety—or any situation where there's really no point spending mental time and energy on concerns. It's also good practice as a **depression preventative**. Learning not to take too much notice of our thoughts is a key skill for **building tolerance** of anxious thoughts and feeling good in all areas of life.



CONNECTING WITH ALL PEOPLE

This card connects us with several important ideas for cultivating joy and inner peace. Firstly, the idea that emotions are normal; they are part of everyone's inner life, even though we may not share them publicly. This is a **solution-focussed** technique known as **normalising**. It reinforces the common human experience of ups and downs; of being uncomfortable at times, of going through difficulties, wins and losses, and the full spectrum of emotions. The second idea is **frustration tolerance**, which comes from **cognitive therapy** (CBT). The more we are able to accept or tolerate some discomfort, the less we will be distressed by it. We can build up our tolerance by using strategies such as those contained in these cards. The key strategy of this card is to consciously cultivate the feeling of **connectedness** with others, or 'oneness' as it is

also known. Humans share more similarities than differences and when we are going through painful times it can be very therapeutic to connect (even in mind) with those who are also suffering.



ESSENCE OF CALM

Wouldn't you like a glass of 'essence of calm' any time you feel like it? Well, let's get started. Many people think that water absorbs the 'vibes' we project, so let's send essence of calm into the water so that we can benefit even more as we drink that calm **water**. As well as **hydration**, which is linked to **mood**, we also use **mindfulness** or conscious awareness in this exercise, deliberately focusing our attention on the feeling of the health-giving mg water flowing down our throat and through our system, bringing calm feelings as it circulates. Use this method whenever you need to have that bodily sensation of cool liquid calm that is so soothing to body and mind.



FAVOURITE NUMBER

We tend to think in words a lot. Words are great when they are uplifting. But if our inner dialogue is not so great, switching to **numeric mode** can help us access better feelings. Most of us have personal associations with different numbers. Some even see numbers in colour. Some numbers feel lucky; we choose them for lotteries or other chance competitions. Some numbers (for example, 7) seem to be popular lucky numbers! Many people like even numbers, some like odd numbers and yet others are attracted to prime numbers. Maybe the number one holds some meaning for you? Simply allow the **symbology**, feelings or **colours** associated with different numbers to appear; don't judge it, there isn't any need to rationalise or justify your preferences. This is a **mindfulness** approach that strengthens our capacity for witnessing without judgement. The activity on this card is another way of accessing a **different emotional code** in the **brain** in order to promote a change of feeling. Maybe it's a 4 kind of day today, and you're definitely a 10. Notice how the numbers affect you, and choose your fun number for today.



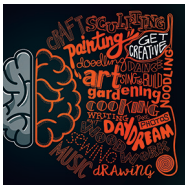
FEELING COLOURFUL

By jumping to another concept, we use another part of the brain. Many researchers have discovered that by using **right brain** concepts or methods, our mind generates different information and it may trigger a change in emotional content. This method is often used with **pain management** and its resulting anxiety. By asking what **colour** the pain is, we can also decide what colour comfort or calm might be, and perhaps move towards focussing on that colour. While we may not fully understand how the brain is affected by colours, we know from **brain imaging** studies that it can be quite powerful at the right moment. This method can be applied to performance or exam anxiety, health or relationship anxiety, or any vague free-floating type of anxiety, and is particularly useful for people who are strongly **visual**.



FLOATING

Using the **imagination** to generate relaxing scenarios is a common technique in many therapy methods, as well as in those that focus on **general relaxation** and **hypnotherapy** (McNeilly 2016. See the references list on our website.) Floating is a **pre-verbal** and **pre-cognitive** experience for humans; something we all did in the womb, and many of us did as kids, and perhaps do even now in the pool or the bath or the sea ... gently relaxing and letting the water carry us along. It's a **somatic** experience that is the antithesis of worry, pressure and mental energy. Water can represent the emotions **symbolically**, so we can use this method to float, cleanse and exit into a more peaceful and uplifted state. This card is for slowing things down, relaxing, sleeping, clearing the brain, and increasing our ability to trust and go with the flow.



GET CREATIVE

Creative outlets are an important part of bringing balance to life. Things can get busy and serious and sometimes even routine or boring. Creativity of some kind helps us activate different parts of our **brain**. It encourages us to stay in the mode of making something from nothing, of starting with some kind of seed that develops into a whole other aspect, whether it's gardening, music, art and craft, dance, cooking or something quite new. That's the thing—have something where you feel like you can create and progress, and perhaps even finish and display. Creative activities often involve rich experiences of colour, movement, shapes, textures, and aesthetics—all things that activate our **sensory** awareness. **Art therapy** methods are based on the understanding that when we create in a way we enjoy, we lose ourselves in the activity, creating a **flow state** that leads to peace and joy, even if there is a little frustration along the way as we push through the difficult parts. Kind of a **metaphor** for life really.



GO THE SLOW

For many people, there is a link between hurry and worry. If your nervous system is revved up too much, stress and anxiety may be the long term result. Let's slow it down. Consciously working to slow down our movements, our thoughts and our verbal output has the effect of slowing down our activation, of allowing the **nervous system** to operate at a more gentle and natural pace. You'll notice that this card uses alterations in **physiology** and **focus** in order to **deactivate** stress, **self-soothe** and bring about a state of calm. As our **body movements** slow down, so too do our **muscles** and **posture** relax. Use this when you need to lower the speed and get back into chill mode, preferably as an ongoing exercise during your daily routine.



HOUSE OF YOU

Using a **metaphor** to represent aspects of the self can be an illuminating exercise. Sometimes we have realisations about different parts of ourselves or **strengths** that we may have temporarily forgotten. The house concept is a great way of representing our identity, and some people suspect that the houses that show up in our dreams actually represent parts of ourselves from a **dream analysis** point of view. Using the house as a **symbol**, we can also make renovations, changing the exterior as well as the interior design, adding new rooms and perhaps removing old or unused aspects. This method draws from metaphoric and **hypnotic** approaches as well as **art therapy** and **psychotherapy**. It can be used in groups as well as individually. Maybe somebody else might draw the house of you quite differently from the way you would draw it?



IS SOMETHING MISSING?

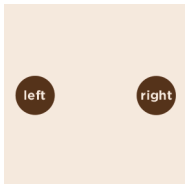
Looking at what's missing can help us to identify aspects of life that we might enjoy, that might increase our happiness. Perhaps they are things we used to do, until we got busy or maybe we just forgot. What's missing is a **question** that opens up possibilities for change and improvement, and most people can **list** a few key answers straight away. For some, it is exercise, music, fun, seeing movies, or other hobbies that they previously enjoyed and need to reactivate. This **cognitive** (CBT) method is from **solution-oriented** counselling and aims to help the brain focus on where it wants to be and how it could get there.



IT'S ALL IN THE DETAIL

When we are fearful or anxious, much of our focus is directed internally, and towards vague ideas or feelings. By deliberately choosing to focus our mind on concrete external detail, we shift our mind from that 'interoceptive' or internal state and out towards a world that can be quite grounding, if we remember to look. This

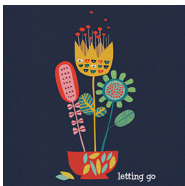
distraction, refocussing and **externalising** method is useful for breaking panic loops or for disengaging our mind from any unhelpful thoughts or focus. This is also a **mindfulness** technique, whereby we enter the present moment via carefully noticing details of an object that is right here before us now.



LEFT TO RIGHT

This method comes from **Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing** (EMDR) developed by Francine Shapiro, originally for treating **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder** (PTSD). (For professional help with PTSD please consult an EMDR practitioner.) EMDR involves moving the eyes in particular patterns while focusing on pleasant

or unpleasant imagery or ideas in order that the **brain** learns to process that material differently, just as happens naturally during rapid eye movement sleep. Most people notice a calming sensation with the slow left to right movement, and are often surprised that their mind goes a little blank, which can be great when there are too many thoughts. You might also want to experiment with other eye patterns such as an infinity symbol pattern or a vertical movement. You can use the left to right method on specific anxious or worry thoughts as well as vague or general anxiety sensations.



LETTING GO

You may have heard of a technique called ‘**progressive muscle relaxation**’ in which we move through the muscles in the body (starting from the head and moving down to the feet), tensing them, and then relaxing them. Some **hypnotherapists** use this method as a lead into relaxation or hypnotic states. The process of **tensing and relaxing** generates physiological change as well as giving the mind a structured focus in order to feel better. You can just do the tension hold and release in the fists for simplicity or you can extend to other body parts, if you like. This one is great for preparing for sleep and for any performance situation where you need tension release.



MAKE A PLAN

Having a plan, preferably a written plan, is highly correlated with getting things done. Research has shown that people who **write down plans and lists** are much more likely to reach their goals. A plan could be small—just a few items you can do right away is easier to manage mentally. If not right now, then sometimes writing a plan for tomorrow before going to bed tonight is a way of feeling in **control** and ready for the new day. Creating simple, practical strategies for **goalsetting** and ‘**concrete descriptions**’ for the ‘**picture of the future**’ are key features of **strengths-based, solution-oriented** practice. In addition, this card encourages people to take action in three categories that affect wellbeing—**exercise, connectedness** and **practical tasks**. Remembering that is all about **prevention** and **management** when it comes to anxiety, you can extend these categories to build in other helpful habits, including **blood sugar/diet**, and **relaxation**. We always feel better when we have a plan. Then we can tick each item off the list, see the progress, and get that inner **chemical reward** that comes from getting stuff done. Get that plan happening now!



MAKE PEACE WITH WHAT IS

Acceptance and inner peace are closely related. Often we are resistant to what is, thinking it shouldn't be this way, it's not fair, it should be different! There are times to act for change and there are times to be willing to accept what is. This understanding is a core part of **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy** or ACT (Hayes et al 2016.

See the references list on our website.) Acceptance may not mean we

like it, but it does mean we can be at peace with it—an aspect of **mindfulness**. By repeating the **affirmation**, 'I'm willing to accept this and I choose peace', you will likely notice a feeling of relief. This exercise is often useful when we are angry, worried, annoyed or confused about something. We can't always control the outcome of a situation, or how others think or behave, but we **can control** our own response. Knowing that it just 'is what it is' can take the sting or stress out of a situation. By changing our thinking, we change our inner feeling too. In this way, this is also a **cognitive** (CBT) technique.



MANY WAYS TO MEDITATE

Most people who say they can't meditate haven't found the method for them yet. There are as many methods as there are personality types! This card reminds us to try different methods of **meditation**, even if we already have one we like. We may discover that we prefer one method for chilling, another when anxious, and another still when energised. Or maybe we need a winter and summer method, an

active method (such as a walking or swimming meditation) and a **passive** method (such as listening to a voice or music recording). This card can prompt you to try out **mindfulness** methods you'd assumed you wouldn't like, or you can simply focus on a method you know and trust. The amount of time spent isn't as important as the consistency, so if you only have five minutes, then take that five minutes to direct your consciousness in a way that makes you feel calm and clear. And do experiment with repeating the phrase, 'Calm and clear'; this **word repetition** or **affirmation** is especially useful for job interviews, performance situations, exams, public speaking and other times when we need to deliver the goods!



MUSIC

Music is one of the quickest ways to change how the nervous system feels. Some people are more affected by music than others, and **music therapy** is a recognised method to treat many conditions. We can create the **sounds** using our voice, our imagination or actually listening to music as a recording; it doesn't matter as long as you can feel it. Maybe it's the **lyrics** that change your state, or maybe the **tempo** of the music lifts you up or calms you down, or perhaps it's a combination of both. This method has been used extensively in sports psychology, with many athletes choosing a theme song to **enhance motivation** and performance. You can even make playlists to enhance **different emotional states**—to rev up and to chill out. Music is powerful, so let's use it as a tool whenever needed.



OK IS OK

Acceptance is an antidote to anxiety. Reassurance is an antidote to anxiety. This card combines **acceptance** and **reassurance** using the **code word** 'ok'. You probably even know the hand signal for ok, either the thumb up, or the thumb and forefinger form an O while the rest of the fingers are upright. **Physical gestures** such as these have symbolic meaning and can alter our mental state. This card uses a **repetitive phrase** designed to keep the mind focussed on a key positive idea that makes us feel better. With strong links to **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy** (Hayes et al 2016. See the reference list on our website) this **cognitive** method can be used in any situation and preferably as often as possible. You can apply it to worries about yourself, others or the future. Either way, it's ok.



ONE AT A TIME

Basketballs are big, and reading this, perhaps you can feel their size, maybe even smell the rubber and discern the texture on the outsides of the basketballs. Holding three without dropping any is practically impossible for most of us and yet this is a great **metaphor** for what we try to do in our lives, either in practical or emotional terms. Are you holding too many things? This is a powerful **question** for the mind to consider, and as such is a **cognitive** (CBT) method. The metaphor helps to draw on the wisdom of our **body**. When we hold less, we have more **control**, it seems manageable. The **solution-focussed** process of **imagining** putting one ball down, then the other, and only holding one basketball with your two hands will help you to feel balanced and gain perspective. It will remind you not to juggle too many things at any level. This card is great for states of overwhelm and worry, and is a **mindfulness** practice for taking one thing at a time.



ONE SMALL STEP

Stress can lead to feeling stuck; stuck in the thought loop and paralysed by overwhelm or hopeless feelings. Often we procrastinate on the very thing that would help us feel so much better, yet it can all seem too much at times. It's amazing to remember just how much one tiny action can change everything. By taking one small step, we get the feeling that, 'It's starting to happen', we get the feeling, 'Yes, I can do this. It's possible!' and we feel the burden lift. Procrastination is an unpleasant state; we avoid doing something in order not to feel the discomfort involved, and yet, paradoxically, our discomfort grows as we subconsciously know we'd feel better for taking action. Taking one small step often leads to another, and that's how we get **momentum**. Focussing on **small incremental steps** is known as a **Kaizen** approach—a Japanese word meaning 'positive change'. This card is great for study anxiety, task overwhelm or addressing a problem that just feels too big. Drawing from **solution-focused** and **cognitive** (CBT) therapy, all we need to do is that one tiny thing that will help us regain control and get back in the driver's seat.



OVERARM

This card is a mixture of a **sensory** experience, a semi-challenging task to keep the mind busy and an exercise that involves the body. It's a form of **EMDR** (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing—like the 'Left to Right' card which involves looking from one side to the other) because it includes **bilateral tapping**, which helps the **brain** to process stressful emotions and assists in promoting a sense of calm.

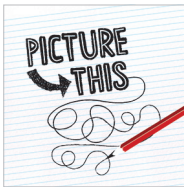
Going faster and slower is a way of experimenting to see which pace your system prefers—there is no one right way to do it. In addition, we practise tuning into **body temperature** thus increasing our **interoceptive awareness** of body signals. We learn a way to take ourselves out of our habitual thinking mode and into calmer states of being.



PET THERAPY

Pets are powerful. They **increase serotonin** levels and **decrease cortisol**, our stress hormone. Stroking an animal is very therapeutic and **animal therapy** has been used for many conditions with amazing and sometimes miraculous results. Connecting with the **sensory** experience of a pet (real or imagined) alters the nervous system and boosts all the good chemicals, as well as being a **mindfulness** practice.

It takes the mind away from concerns and towards a physical, sensory experience. Stroking a pet is **meditative** and calming and I recommend we take every opportunity to do so in mind and in life!



PICTURE THIS

By representing the anxiety in a different format, we take our awareness out of our heads and on to the paper. Often we can be surprised by what comes out when we use a modality other than words. We may find an answer we weren't expecting, or perhaps realise different proportions or perspective. **Art therapy** is a recognised method of learning to shape our experiences or

sensations into a **visual** format and often leads to insight and self-awareness. It's important not to judge the quality of our drawings; in fact, you may even like to use your non-dominant hand in order to enter a more **childlike creative mode**. Also, the focus on where you would like to be heading is a core tenet of **strengths-based, solution-oriented practice** which is more interested in what the 'preferred future' or '**picture of the future**' looks like, rather than in the problem.



POWER STANCE

Physiology is one of the key drivers of emotional state. If you look down, let your shoulders droop and cast your eyes downward, you're more easily able to access a low mood state. Conversely, by choosing the upward-oriented **posture** of power stance, it's much easier to access a state of confidence. This **positive psychology** method involving **movement** draws on the interplay of body and mind and is used

regularly in sports psychology and peak performance coaching. By adding the **verbal repetition** of the word or affirmation, 'Yes!' we also build a psychological state of confidence which adds to the **positive** emotional state. Use this exercise in any situation where you need a little pumping up!



SAFETY SWITCH

Whether it's to prevent social anxiety or maybe fear of panic attacks, we need to install that safety switch to help keep us in the green zone. You can do it, all you need is the power of your **imagination**. We've all seen some kind of safety switch in operation, and you can choose any design you like. Imagery is very powerful, and this **solution-oriented** image is symbolic of safety and inner **control**. We use **guided imagery**

and **visualisation** like this in **relaxation** and **hypnotherapy** and it's very effective. Install your safety switch now so you can use it whenever needed.



SAVOUR THE GOOD THINGS

Appreciation and gratitude are known antidotes to many unwanted phases of life. The ability to switch the mind to aspects of experience that we like or enjoy (known as **deliberate attentional control**) is a key skill for contentment as well as inner peace. The ability to notice and bask in the good stuff instead of always seeing what is missing or not going well, is also an aspect of **optimism** and **positive psychology**.

Many therapies use some form of **gratitude journal** and you can extend this card's exercise by expanding into gratitude journalling, if you like. But, just the ability to name or write down a few things that you like or enjoy will change your state instantaneously. You can do this in the car, in bed at night, when worrying about things or just because. It's a helpful habit for us all.



SECOND SKIN

We can focus on sensations in many ways, and this card helps shift from focus on internal sensation to other **tactile sensations**, while also directing our minds to label what we see or feel. By focussing on other feelings we alter our state of consciousness and **disassociate** our minds from whatever we were previously connecting to. This method is useful in **performance** situations and times when we may

have others around us while needing a calming method. This is also a **mindfulness** and **somatic** technique that helps us arrive right here in the body, in this present moment, not judging sensations as good or bad, but simply **witnessing** them.



SENSING HEAT

Focusing on the temperature of our limbs, a method often used in **hydrotherapy** (McNeilly 1994. See the references list on our website), can help us notice aspects of our experience that normally remain outside conscious awareness. It's quite relaxing to shift our **interoceptive awareness** to the warmth in our leg or foot while simply noticing, allowing that sense of comfort that can arise from

bodily sensations, tuning in to our physical body and out of that nonsense we can get caught up in inside our heads! This **distraction** and **somatic** activity is great for a quick calming exercise, or to use as part of a **mindfulness** or **meditation** session.



SHELVE IT

Most of our worries are quite vague, and due to this, they can sit like dark heavy shadows in our minds. By taking them out of our mental space and putting them down on paper, we begin the process of **externalising** them. By **writing** them down we may also make them more specific and therefore less overwhelming. We may realise that some of them are groundless or without substance. And some may be genuine matters we need to attend to at some agreed time. Either way, we are going to contain them by writing them on small pieces of paper and placing them in a box AND on the shelf. This is a **symbolic** and practical **cognitive** (CBT) method that **builds tolerance** of anxiety by training our minds to compartmentalise our concerns and put them aside for a more appropriate time, if ever!



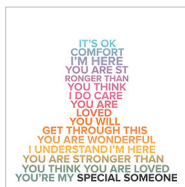
SKIMMING STONES

Skimming stones is **symbolic** of having plenty of time to pass, of doing a fun thing for its own sake, of letting an activity lull you into a day-dreamy state, of just having fun. **Imagery** like this is powerful to the mind and parallels the way we can just let a thought or feeling skim over the surface of our awareness until it skips and sinks into the depths of the water. Thinking of the smooth, flat **texture** of the stones is a **cognitive** (CBT) and **somatic** way of changing how we feel, just as imagining or touching any pleasantly textured object can change our state. This exercise will help with **mindfulness**, relaxation, sleep preparation, performance anxiety and other concerns.



SOUNDSCAPE

Focussing on environmental sounds helps to switch out of internal mode, as well as tuning into the world around us in a concrete, practical way. By bringing various background **sounds** into conscious awareness, we shift into a mode of **mindfulness**, of just noticing what's happening without need for judgement or action. This method is useful to replace unhelpful mental content or to ground us when we need to change perspective. It also helps **strengthen attentional control**—the capacity to choose where to place our attention. Particularly useful for people who enjoy **auditory** mode.



SPECIAL SOMEONE

As social beings, other people are important 'feel-good' anchors for us humans. But anxiety can trigger feelings of disconnection or isolation from others. By **connecting** in our **imagination** with somebody we think of as comforting, we can feel a closeness to that person, or perhaps connect with some of their wisdom. It takes us out of ourselves and into a more helpful, **solution-oriented** way of thinking. In brief therapy this **cognitive** (CBT) technique is an example of focussing on **exceptions** to the problem, or '**non-problem territory**'. The activity on this card can be used when we feel lonely, confused, isolated or unsure of what to do. This activity can be shortened by thinking of a person (real or imagined, dead or alive, known or unknown) and simply asking, 'What would they say to me right now?' May appeal in particular to strongly **auditory** people, and those who highly value **interpersonal relationships**.



SUPPORT NETWORK

Feeling connected to, and supported by, others is helpful when we feel troubled. By accessing our support network whether in **imagination** or real life, we can connect with the energy and words that might help us enter a more uplifted state. Research shows that having people that support and interact with us is helpful in **preventing depression and addictions**, and is often a key **recovery strategy**. We can also access our support network via books, recordings, videos and podcasts; sometimes it can feel as if the person is speaking directly to us, saying exactly the words we need to hear. This **strengths-based** exercise includes the technique of **listening** and it is helpful in times of loneliness when we need to experience the support of **interpersonal relationships** around us. Help is available so let's choose to access it in as many ways as possible.



TACTILE TERRITORY

Our feet don't touch the ground much these days! Our feet are sensitive parts of our **body**; they can convey **tactile sensations** very powerfully. Feeling the ground or floor beneath our feet is a terrific way to balance and bring ourselves literally back to earth. It's also a **mindfulness** exercise involving a **somatic** experience of focussing on a **tactile sensation**, and just savouring it. **Savouring** is a skill highlighted in the **optimism** studies of **positive psychology**. Use this card when you feel too much in your head and need to get back to earth quickly.



TAKE CONSCIOUS STEPS

Several quick physiological changes will activate the nervous system and also provide the brain with some action to take. The practice of **physically moving** usually leads to a small emotional shift, like we've given our system a shake up and reboot. Use this **mindfulness** activity whenever you need to clear your head or change gears or exit some sort of unhelpful mental loop. This activity also strengthens non-judgemental **interoceptive awareness**—the capacity to notice or witness subtle internal shifts and signals while remaining steady and unperturbed.



TAKE TWO

When we're in a low place, we tend to connect with a version of ourselves that is less than realistic and less than flattering. This card asks us to bring a strong, confident experience into **bodily awareness** and then, using a **dissociation technique**, see it as a movie. This allows objectivity and detachment, helping us to see the version of ourselves that we want to bring into the now. The second aspect asks us to step into that movie, which is an **association technique**. When we step into that imagined self, we see what we'd see, feel what we'd feel and do as we would do as that person. From there we can take that embodied experience and carry it with us where we need to go. This is a **strengths-based, solution-oriented** method that creates a 'concrete picture' of **non-problem territory**. It is a **positive psychology** method used in performance psychology, whether preparing for sports, exams, music performance, acting, public speaking, job interviews and dating. You always have access to that version of yourself, it's just a matter of going there.



TAPPING FINGERS

Switching to the **numeracy part of the brain** can take us into a rational mode, a place where things are more systematic, predictable—black and white, even. Linking numbers to our fingers makes it even more systematic, a clear and engaging task for the brain and body to translate into movement. Taking ourselves out of the emotional arena and using our numeracy mind to control **finger movements** is something of a challenge, and a task like this fully occupies our consciousness. While we're doing this, our mind is busy; the monkey has a pole to climb! It's almost a mantra, but a **numeric mantra** instead of a verbal one. Useful for sleep preparation, **mindfulness, distraction** and anytime you want to stop thinking about something by using a **replacement** task.



THIS TOO WILL PASS

One of the key aspects of **optimism** or **positive psychology** is to know that all unwanted experiences are temporary. When things are difficult it's easy to think it will be like this forever, which feels awful and scary and unbearable. But, it won't be that way because this too shall pass. There's a reason why this concept has been part of all key belief systems for centuries. It's because it's true. This *will* pass. Use this **cognitive** (CBT), **solution-focussed method** for all intense states. **Repeat the phrase**, 'This too will pass' over and over, if you need to. In **neuro linguistic programming** (NLP) moving to a more abstract or wider perspective like this is called '**chunking up**'. It's helpful and **normalising** to see our own individual experience in the context of wider human experience, which, like the seasons, includes a natural flow of smooth and not so smooth. It's ok.



THOUGHT BUBBLES

It's important to remember that we all have two key parts of our minds, the part that worries and freaks out, and the part that cleverly calms us down with its words of wisdom. Our **wise mind** is often very present when we are helping others with their problems, and we could all benefit by accessing this wise mind for our own inner thoughts as well. The third stick figure is useful to bring in somebody else's helpful words; a little objectivity can be very useful in times of worry. This draws on the powerful **externalisation** technique of creating an observer or **audience** for our experience. Drawing stick figures and thought bubbles to represent the different modes of thought is a great way to get it out of the head and onto the paper, making it easier to see what effect the thoughts have on us. Maybe it can even look **humorous** when we see the difference between the voices of the stick figures. Drawing from **cognitive behavioural therapy**, **voice dialogue** and **art therapy** methods, this process helps us to be more aware of the voice of the wise mind, and perhaps more easily access its helpful dialogue in times of need.



**THE SECTION CALLED
'MORE IDEAS FOR USING
THE CARDS' HAS LOTS MORE
SUGGESTIONS FOR USING
THE CARDS PERSONALLY
OR PROFESSIONALLY.**

TAKING CARE

What should I consider before I begin?

While the activities on the cards have been selected because they do not need professional supervision, it is always important to take care when using the cards with others. Even a light-hearted image or activity can cause strong emotions to surface. People are vulnerable when trauma or anxiety are present. They may not wish to, or be able to, concentrate on selecting a card, reading the text, or doing the activity.

Please consider the following:

- *Your own reaction to the cards.* It's good to try the activities yourself first. What did you notice?
- *Your knowledge of the cards.* Are all the cards appropriate? Will you want to leave any out? Will materials be needed for the activities?
- *Your knowledge of those using the cards.* Consider literacy levels and cultural background. Are the activities and artistic styles of the cards physically, mentally, emotionally and developmentally appropriate?
- *The safety of the setting—especially in groups:* Is there likely to be respect in the group? Is the timing right? How will people be supported if the cards elicit strong emotions? How will people's privacy be respected? How will you ensure that everyone gets a turn to speak, and that they can 'pass' if they wish?
- *Plan B.* Sometimes an activity simply doesn't work. Be prepared to adjust it or abandon it altogether and go to Plan B.

MORE IDEAS FOR USING THE CARDS

In the section of the booklet entitled 'All Fifty Cards', we identified the practice modalities and some possible uses for each card. This section offers lots more creative ideas that can be used by counsellors, psychologists and other professionals, or by individuals in almost any setting.

While there are countless ways of using the cards with young people and adults, they all fall into two broad methods—deliberate selection or random choice.

Deliberate selection

This method involves spreading the cards out on a table, inviting participants to look them over and select cards based on a question such as the following:

- Pick a card that jumps out at you for some reason.
- Pick your favourite illustration.
- Pick a card that has an activity you would like to try.

The *Anxiety Solutions* cards are double-sided—the illustration and title are on the front, and the activity is on the back. It may be easier for people to select cards based on the illustration, as people are responding to a strong visual cue, with very little reading required. More time will be needed if people are selecting cards based on the activity.

Spreading the cards out on the floor (illustration side facing up) is also an option. People get a bird's eye view of all the cards, and they can walk around them or follow a path of cards. (Make sure people are able to bend down safely if you want them to pick up a card.) Equally, the cards can be displayed on a wall, window or noticeboard.

Random choice

Random selection includes activities such as shuffling and dealing, playing games that involve hiding and finding cards, lucky dips, selecting a card from a fan or stack of cards, and so on.

Time and again people see significance in 'their' randomly-picked card. And they tend to relax when an element of playfulness enters the room, so random selection can work really well as an ice-breaker, or for those 'stuck' moments.

Ideas for individuals and groups in professional or private settings

- Spread the cards out illustration side up, and select 2 or 3 cards (or invite the person to do this, if you are facilitating someone else). Allow plenty of time to read the activity on the back, and discuss it, if appropriate.
- What appeals to you about the illustration or activity on the cards you selected?
- Choose one activity that can be completed right now.
- Before completing the activity on the card, rate your level of anxiety, stress or discomfort on a scale of one to ten.
- After completing the activity, rate your level of anxiety once again. Which were the most effective?
- Over the next few weeks, select other cards and try out other techniques. Give each one a 'calm rating' and note the ones that work best for you.
- Pick cards that remind you of things you did as a child to relax and feel calm. Deliberately build these into your day again. Get curious about what helps, even a tiny bit.
- Pick a card for an activity you have never tried, or maybe even one that doesn't appeal at first glance. In the spirit of experimentation, give it a go! What was your experience of doing the activity?

- Select a variety of activities that have mixed ‘qualities’. For example, inside/outside; reflective/active; focussed on mind/focussed on body. Try out the activities. Which ones suited you best and in which circumstances?
- Gather a few anxiety-reducing activities you can do while waiting in line, driving in traffic, at a social situation, at home alone.
- Think about an upcoming event that is potentially stressful, for example, a job interview, presentation or exam. Build a program of anxiety-busting activities by selecting 5 or more cards that you can practise in the lead up—3 weeks before, 2 weeks before, 1 week before, on the day while you are waiting to go in for the interview, and during the interview itself. Sometimes just bringing to mind an image, a phrase or symbol for a split second can be remarkably calming, especially if you have practised it before, and it becomes a trigger for your system to relax.
- Display your favourite card(s) on your fridge, desk or mirror where they can remind you of the strategy.
- Can you sort cards (or rate cards) from your least favourite to most favourite card or activity?
- What appeals to you about your top three activities?
- How often could you do a similar activity at home or at work?
- What appeals to you about your top three illustrations?
- How do you think the illustrations relate to the activity? Can you see any symbolism? (For example, on ‘The Basics’ card, the four shapes in the artwork—circle, square, rectangle and triangle—represent the four building blocks of mood.
- Choose a card and try that strategy out at least once a day for a week. More if possible. Note each day when and where you did it, and what effect it had on your mind and body (keeping a journal can be very helpful for this kind of monitoring).
- Did it change over the week?

- How did you remember to do it? Hint: using an aspect of your daily routine as a prompt can be very helpful. For example, each time you open or close a file on your computer, or go into the kitchen at work, you can practise your anxiety strategy.
- Did it get easier to do as you got used to it?
- Was it useful having a strategy to call on?
- Did anyone know you were doing it or did you keep it private?
- Think of someone you admire. Can you choose a card that matches them in some way—perhaps it is an activity you think they would be very good at, or would like. Why?
- Can you choose a card that relates to a goal or something you would like to become good at, or more comfortable with? For example, ‘Connecting with All People’ might remind you of a goal to increase your efforts to connect with others.
- Do you know anyone who is already doing this well or seems very comfortable with this? Can you emulate something they do?
- How will you know when you are taking positive steps towards this goal or strength?
- What might someone close to you notice when you are doing more of this?
- What simple step could you take today, or tomorrow towards your goal?
- How will you celebrate or acknowledge yourself when you have achieved this goal or taken steps towards it?
- Create your own card. What style of illustration will it have? Give it a name. Write the strategy. Experiment with it and give it a ‘Calm Rating’.
- If you have found a particular technique that works well for you (such as making a list, repeating a phrase or working with the breath), can you find other cards in the set that use the same technique? (The section entitled ‘All Fifty Cards’ identifies the primary modalities used in each card.)
- Pick cards that represent strategies for mood management that it is important to practise in an ongoing way (such as ‘The Basics’) and cards for strategies you might want call on occasionally.

Ideas for senior students

In addition to the above ideas, here are some activities designed especially with young people in mind:

- Students can be invited to sit in circle with cards placed face up in the middle of the circle.
- Each student selects one or more activities (cards) they would like to try by themselves or with a partner.
- Alternatively, games of shuffling and dealing the cards provide ways to distribute cards while also introducing an element of serendipity and fun.
- Teachers can set up a room with 'stations' based on activities in the cards. Students rotate through the stations.
- Students then come back together to discuss each activity and give it a 'Calm Rating' out of ten.
- Appropriate cards can also be used for guided meditation sessions. (Use the section called 'All Fifty Cards' to select cards where the practice modalities of 'mindfulness' or 'meditation' have been identified.)
- Choose a card and research related quotes, poems, or song lyrics.
- Research how anxiety affects the body and brain, and how calm does the same.
- Research different anxiety conditions in different cultures.
- Research the history of a practice modality, such as CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) or mindfulness. What is the thinking behind this modality?
- Brainstorm words to describe 'calm' and 'worry' and associated body signals so students further develop their vocabularies for describing feelings, and their capacity to recognise them in the body (EQ: Emotional Intelligence and BQ: Body Intelligence).
- Match particular cards that can work as 'antidotes' to de-escalate particular body signals, thoughts or anxiety-provoking situations.
- Choose three or more cards and use them as prompts for creative writing, journalling, storytelling or performance.

- Choose individual cards as a theme of the day or week. Everyone practises that technique and notices the effect over time.
- Choose a card and create your own artwork for it.
- Choose a card and rename it.
- Or create a new card based on a calming activity you like to do. Create the illustration.
- Choose a card that relates to a goal or dream you have.
- Use the cards at potentially anxious times—camps, exams, performances and so on.
- Create a program of calm-inducing activities leading up to these specific events.
- Invite teachers, parents and other staff to experiment with the strategies.
- Display cards on noticeboards and in corridors as reminders, and also to promote a culture of wellbeing in the school.
- Leave a pack of the cards in waiting rooms and counselling areas where they can be flipped through by a young person or a visitor.



ABOUT THE CREATORS

The author

Selina Byrne M.A.P.S is a consulting psychologist and clinical nutritionist specialising in developing individual wellbeing solutions. In addition to her educational and corporate conferences and staff seminars, Selina conducts a private practice offering individual counselling, fatigue and energy management, mood issues (anxiety and depression), nutritional approaches, clinical hypnosis, food-related concerns (food psychology strategies), career development and managing workplace and personal relationships.

Selina holds a Master of Social Science (Addiction), Graduate Diploma in Applied Psychology, Graduate Diploma in Clinical Nutrition, Diploma in Clinical Hypnosis, Graduate Diploma in Equal Opportunity and Bachelor of Arts (Psychology). Selina has presented many seminars and keynote addresses in various high-profile organisations and has been interviewed numerous times in the media in relation to her work with individuals and groups.

Selina is the author of *Optimism Boosters* (second edition) and *Anxiety Solutions for Kids*, two card sets published by Innovative Resources in 2017. She is also the author of *Daily Psych Bites: hundreds of quick installations for optimism and energy* (2016, available on Amazon) and a blog published on:

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<https://www.facebook.com/SelinaByrneWellbeingSolutions/>

The design team

Card and box designs were created by Sharon Dunn and Frida Petrie of Greengraphics. Frida Petrie is a graphic designer with a particular focus on eco-design and beautiful, elegant branding and graphics. Sharon is a designer and illustrator extraordinaire, and many of the artworks in this card set have been carefully hand-drawn by her. Greengraphics is a small graphic and web design studio based in Castlemaine, Victoria, Australia.

www.greengraphics.com.au

The publisher

St Luke's Innovative Resources is part of Anglicare Victoria, a community services organisation providing child, youth and family services in Victoria and New South Wales, Australia. We publish card sets, stickers, books, and digital and tactile materials to enrich conversations about feelings, strengths, relationships, values and goals. Our resources are for all people regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, culture, ability or age. They are used by counsellors, educators, social workers, mentors, managers and parents. We also offer 'strengths approach' training and 'tools' workshops, both online and in-person.

www.innovativeresources.org

References, Further Reading and Research Links

For an extensive list of references and research papers with live links to studies, please go to the *Anxiety Solutions* page on our website: www.innovativeresources.org/anxiety-solutions

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT (in Australia)

Beyondblue

www.beyondblue.org.au

Depression and anxiety information and support service.

1300 22 4636

www.beyondblue.org.au/getsupport

Headspace

www.headspace.org.au

National youth mental health foundation for young Australians.

Lifeline

www.lifeline.org.au

13 11 14

Access to crisis support, suicide prevention and mental health support services.

mindhealthconnect

www.mindhealthconnect.org.au

Access to mental health care services, online programs and resources.

While the strategies used in *Anxiety Solutions* are used in professional settings, this card set alone does not replace professional care. For persistent or acute anxiety, please consult a professional.



From a few worrying thoughts to full-blown anxiety, we humans are really good at worrying. Sometimes our worries can get the better of us. They can turn into free-floating anxiety with seemingly no cause at all.

Anxiety is the most common mental health condition in Australia. It's handy to have some simple, fun and effective strategies to calm your mind and soothe your body—anywhere, anytime.

Based on clinically-proven techniques used for many years by consulting psychologist and clinical nutritionist, Selina Byrne M.A.P.S., including:

**Mindfulness, Brain Research,
Positive Psychology,
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy,
Solution-focused Brief Therapy.**

**Use these cards at home, at work
or in professional therapeutic settings.**

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