

A PRINTABLE SELF-HELP PACK

Anxiety Relief Toolkit

Simple, science-backed tools to calm your body, quiet your mind, and take back your day — one page at a time.

INSIDE THIS PACK

- Learn how anxiety works (and why it is not your fault)
- Grounding and breathing exercises you can use anywhere
- A 7-day worry log and thought-challenging worksheets
- A trigger tracker and a menu of 20+ coping strategies
- A panic moment plan and cut-out affirmation cards
- A weekly reflection page to track your progress

A printable self-help pack based on cognitive behavioral (CBT) principles.

How to Use This Toolkit

Welcome. If anxiety has been taking up too much space in your life, you are not alone — and you are not broken. Anxiety is one of the most common human experiences, and there are practical, well-researched skills that can help. This toolkit puts those skills on paper so you can practice them at your own pace.

Getting started

1. **Print what you need.** Print the whole pack, or just the pages you want. Worksheet pages (like the worry log and thought-challenging sheet) are meant to be reused — print as many copies as you like.
2. **Start with the education pages.** Understanding how anxiety works makes every other tool easier to use. Read "Understanding Anxiety" first.
3. **Practice the calming skills when you are calm.** Grounding and breathing work best when your brain already knows the steps. Try them once a day for a week, even on good days.
4. **Use the tracking pages to spot patterns.** The worry log and trigger tracker help you notice what sets off your anxiety — and what actually helps.
5. **Keep the panic plan and cards close.** Cut out the panic moment plan and affirmation cards. Keep them in your wallet, bag, desk, or phone case.
6. **Check in weekly.** Use the weekly reflection page to notice progress. Small steps count.

A few gentle reminders

- There is no "right" order and no deadline. Use what helps. Skip what does not.
- Progress with anxiety is rarely a straight line. A hard week does not erase your progress.
- These tools are self-help, not therapy. If anxiety is seriously affecting your work, relationships, sleep, or safety, please reach out to a qualified mental health professional. Asking for help is a strength, not a failure.

I am starting this toolkit on (date):

One thing I hope will feel different:

Understanding Anxiety

Part 1: What Anxiety Really Is

Anxiety is your body's built-in alarm system. When your brain senses a possible threat, it sets off a rapid chain of changes designed to keep you safe. Your heart beats faster. Your breathing speeds up. Your muscles tense. This is often called the **fight, flight, or freeze** response.

Here is the important part: this system is not a flaw. It kept humans alive for thousands of years. The problem is that the alarm cannot always tell the difference between a real emergency and a stressful email, a crowded room, or a worry about the future. It reacts to *imagined* danger the same way it reacts to *real* danger.

Anxiety is a normal response happening at the wrong time, at the wrong volume, or for too long.

What anxiety can feel like

In your body:

- Racing or pounding heart
- Tight chest or shallow breathing
- Tense shoulders, jaw, or stomach ("butterflies" or nausea)
- Sweating, shakiness, dizziness, or feeling hot
- Trouble sleeping or feeling exhausted

In your mind:

- Racing thoughts or constant "what if...?" questions
- Trouble concentrating; mind going blank
- Imagining worst-case scenarios
- Feeling on edge, irritable, or dreading things

In your behavior:

- Avoiding places, people, or tasks
- Putting things off or over-preparing
- Seeking constant reassurance
- Checking things repeatedly

When is anxiety a problem?

Everyone feels anxious sometimes — before a test, a job interview, a difficult conversation. That is healthy anxiety. It becomes a problem when it is frequent, intense, hard to control, or starts shrinking your life: skipping things you care about, losing sleep, or feeling anxious most days.

The good news: anxiety is one of the most treatable mental health challenges. The skills in this toolkit come from cognitive behavioral approaches — one of the most researched forms of support for anxiety. They work best with practice, like any skill.

Understanding Anxiety

Part 2: The Anxiety Cycle — Body, Thoughts, Behavior

Anxiety is not just one thing. It is a loop where your **thoughts**, **body**, and **behavior** feed each other. Understanding this loop is the first step to interrupting it.

The cycle, step by step

1. **Trigger.** Something starts it — a situation, a sensation, even a memory. (Example: your boss says, "Can we talk later?")
2. **Anxious thought.** Your mind jumps to a threat. ("I'm in trouble. I'm going to be fired.")
3. **Body alarm.** Your body reacts to the thought as if it were fact: racing heart, tight chest, knots in your stomach.
4. **Behavior — usually avoidance.** You dodge the feeling: cancel plans, distract, over-check, avoid the meeting, ask for reassurance.
5. **Short-term relief... long-term cost.** Avoidance feels better *right away*. But your brain learns the wrong lesson: "That thing really was dangerous — good thing we escaped." So the alarm fires faster next time, and your world gets a little smaller.

The trap: the thing that soothes anxiety in the moment (avoidance) is the same thing that keeps it alive over time.

How this toolkit interrupts the cycle

- **Calm the body:** Grounding and breathing pages lower the physical alarm so your thinking brain can come back online. (5-4-3-2-1 Grounding, Box Breathing, Tense and Release)
- **Check the thoughts:** The worry log and thought-challenging worksheet help you question anxious predictions instead of accepting them as facts.
- **Change the behavior:** The trigger tracker and coping menu help you respond on purpose instead of avoiding on autopilot.

You do not have to break the whole cycle at once. Interrupting it at *any* point — body, thoughts, or behavior — weakens the loop.

Think of a recent anxious moment. Can you name your trigger, your thought, your body's alarm, and what you did next?

My trigger:

My thought:

My body's alarm:

What I did:

5-4-3-2-1 Grounding _____

Come back to the present, one sense at a time

When to use it: when worry pulls you into the future, when your thoughts are spinning, or when panic is rising. Grounding works because your senses only exist in the *present* — and anxiety mostly lives in the *future*.

How to do it: pause. Take one slow breath. Then work through your five senses, slowly. Say each item out loud or write it below. Take your time with each one — notice colors, textures, and details.

Before you begin

My anxiety right now (circle one): 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10" (0 = calm, 10 = worst)

The exercise

5 — Five things I can SEE:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

4 — Four things I can TOUCH or FEEL: (the chair under you, fabric on your skin, cool air...)

1.

2.

3.

4.

3 — Three things I can HEAR:

1.

2.

3.

2 — Two things I can SMELL: (or two smells you like)

1.

2.

1 — One thing I can TASTE: (or one taste you enjoy)

1.

After

My anxiety now (circle one): 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

One word for how I feel:

Tip box: "No pen? No problem. You can do this exercise silently anywhere — in a meeting, on a bus, in a waiting room. Nobody will know."

Box Breathing

Four sides. Four counts. A calmer nervous system.

Slow, steady breathing sends a direct message to your body: "We are safe." It activates your body's natural calming response and slows your heart rate. Box breathing is simple enough to remember under stress — which is exactly when you need it.

The four steps

1. **Breathe IN through your nose — count 1, 2, 3, 4.** Let your belly expand, not just your chest.
2. **HOLD — count 1, 2, 3, 4.** Gently, without straining.
3. **Breathe OUT slowly through your mouth — count 1, 2, 3, 4.** Like you are softly fogging a mirror.
4. **HOLD — count 1, 2, 3, 4.** Rest at the bottom of the breath.

That is one round. Repeat for 4 to 6 rounds, or about 2 minutes.

Tips for success

- Trace the square on the page with your finger as you breathe — one side per step.
- If 4 counts feels like too much, start with 3. The rhythm matters more than the number.
- Feeling a little lightheaded? Breathe normally for a minute, then try again more gently.
- Practice once a day when you are already calm. You are training your body for the hard moments.

My practice tracker

Date	Time of day	Rounds completed	Calm before (0-10)	Calm after (0-10)

Tense and Release

A whole-body reset for stored stress

Anxiety hides in your muscles — clenched jaws, raised shoulders, tight stomachs — often without you noticing. This exercise (based on progressive muscle relaxation) works by tensing each muscle group on purpose, then letting go. The release teaches your body what "relaxed" actually feels like.

When to use it: before bed, after a stressful day, or any time your body feels wound up.

How to do it

Find a comfortable seat or lie down. For each muscle group below: **tense for 5 seconds** (firm, not painful), then **release for 10 seconds** and notice the difference. Check the box as you complete each one.

Checklist (7 items, each with a checkbox):

- ☐ **Hands and arms** — make tight fists, squeeze up through your forearms... and release.
- ☐ **Shoulders** — raise them up toward your ears... and let them drop.
- ☐ **Face** — scrunch your forehead, eyes, and jaw... and soften.
- ☐ **Chest and back** — take a deep breath in, hold it, gently arch... and exhale everything.
- ☐ **Stomach** — tighten your belly like bracing for a nudge... and release.
- ☐ **Legs** — squeeze your thighs and press your knees together... and let go.
- ☐ **Feet** — curl your toes and flex your feet... and relax completely.

Finish with three slow breaths. Notice any part of your body that feels heavier, warmer, or looser.

Check in

Body tension before (circle one): 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Body tension after (circle one): 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Where does my body hold the most stress?

Tip box: "Short on time? Do just three groups: shoulders, jaw, and stomach. These are where most people carry anxiety."

Caution note : "Skip any muscle group that is injured or painful. Tension should feel firm, never sharp."

7-Day Worry Log

Put your worries on trial — with evidence

Anxious minds are excellent at predicting disasters — and surprisingly bad at checking whether those disasters ever happen. This log helps you catch your worries in writing, then follow up on what *actually* happened. Over one week, most people discover a pattern: the feared outcome rarely arrives, and when it does, they cope better than they expected.

How to use it: each day, write down one worry when you notice it. Later (that evening or the next day), come back and fill in the last two columns.

Days 1-4

Day	My worry (what is on my mind?)	What I'm afraid will happen	What actually happened	What this teaches me
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				

Example: Worry: "I stumbled over my words in the meeting." Feared outcome: "Everyone thinks I'm incompetent." What happened: "Nobody mentioned it. Two people asked follow-up questions." Lesson: "People notice my mistakes far less than I do."

7-Day Worry Log (continued)

Days 5-7

Day	My worry (what is on my mind?)	What I'm afraid will happen	What actually happened	What this teaches me
Day 5				
Day 6				
Day 7				

End-of-week review

Answer these after your seventh entry:

Out of my 7 worries, how many feared outcomes actually came true?

When something difficult *did* happen, how did I handle it?

What is the biggest pattern I notice in my worries? (Common themes: work, health, what others think, money, family...)

If my worry brain makes predictions that usually don't come true, how much should I trust its next prediction?

Worry is your mind trying to protect you by rehearsing bad outcomes. You can thank it for trying — and still check its math.

Challenge the Thought

Anxious thoughts feel like facts. They are guesses.

When anxiety speaks, it uses a confident voice: "You will fail." "They are upset with you." "Something is wrong." This worksheet — a core CBT skill — helps you step back and examine the thought like a fair judge would: hear the evidence on both sides, then reach a balanced verdict.

How to use it: fill this in when you notice a strong anxious thought. Print a fresh copy each time. It gets faster with practice — eventually you can do it in your head.

Step 1: The situation

What happened? (Just the facts — where, when, who, what.)

Step 2: The automatic thought

What went through my mind?

How much do I believe this thought right now?

What emotion do I feel, and how strong is it? Emotion:

Step 3: The evidence

Evidence FOR this thought <i>Real facts that support it — not feelings or fears</i>	Evidence AGAINST this thought <i>Facts that don't fit; times it wasn't true; other explanations</i>

Helper questions : "What would I tell a friend who had this thought? Have I survived this before? Am I confusing a feeling with a fact? Am I predicting the future or reading minds?"

Step 4: The balanced thought

Looking at all the evidence, what is a fairer, more balanced way to see this?

Step 5: Re-check

How much do I believe the original thought now?

How strong is the emotion now? (0-10):

Note box: "The goal is not forced positivity. It is accuracy. A balanced thought is one you can actually believe."

Anxiety Trigger Tracker

You cannot change a pattern you cannot see

Triggers are the situations, places, people, times, or sensations that switch on your anxiety alarm. Most of us never track them — so they feel random and uncontrollable. Two weeks of honest tracking usually reveals clear patterns. And once you can predict your anxiety, you can prepare for it.

How to use it: any time you notice a spike of anxiety, add a row. Do not judge the entry — just record it like a scientist collecting data.

The tracker

Date	What set it off? (the trigger)	Where was I / what was happening?	Anxiety level (0-10)	What I noticed in my body	What helped (even a little)

Patterns I'm noticing

My anxiety shows up most often when...

My earliest body signal is usually...

The strategies that helped most were...

Knowing your triggers is not about avoiding them all — it's about seeing the alarm coming so it can't ambush you. Your early body signal is your cue to use a grounding or breathing tool *before* the wave peaks.

Coping Strategies Menu

24 ways to help yourself — pick what fits the moment

No single strategy works every time, for every person. That is why you need a menu, not a rule. Check off the ones you have tried. Star the ones that work for you. When anxiety hits, you will not have to think — just look at your stars.

Calm the body

- ☐ Box breathing (4 counts in, hold, out, hold)
- ☐ 5-4-3-2-1 grounding with your senses
- ☐ Tense and release your muscles, head to toe
- ☐ Splash cold water on your face, or hold something cold
- ☐ Slow your exhale — breathe out longer than you breathe in
- ☐ Drop your shoulders and unclench your jaw (check them right now)

Shift the mind

- ☐ Write the worry down and schedule 10 minutes of "worry time" later
- ☐ Fill in a thought-challenging worksheet
- ☐ Name the feeling out loud: "This is anxiety. It will pass."
- ☐ Count backward from 100 by 7s
- ☐ Do one small task that needs your full attention (a puzzle, a recipe, tidying one drawer)
- ☐ Ask: "Will this matter in one week? One month? One year?"

Move the energy

- ☐ Take a 10-minute walk, ideally outside
- ☐ Stretch slowly for 5 minutes
- ☐ Put on one song and move to it
- ☐ Do 10 slow squats or wall push-ups

Connect

- ☐ Text or call someone who feels safe
- ☐ Say the feeling to someone: "I'm having an anxious day"
- ☐ Spend time with a pet
- ☐ Write a note to your future self about what helped today

Comfort and soothe

- ☐ Make a warm drink and drink it slowly, noticing the warmth

-
- ☐ Wrap up in a blanket for 10 quiet minutes
 - ☐ Listen to calming sounds or music
 - ☐ Step away from screens and news for one hour

My top 5 go-to strategies

When anxiety shows up, I will try these first:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

My Panic Moment Plan

For the moments when anxiety hits hard

During intense anxiety or panic, the thinking part of your brain goes partly offline. That is why you plan *now*, while you are calm. Fill in this card, cut it out, and keep it where you will find it — wallet, phone case, desk drawer, car.

When panic rises, I will...

Step 1 — Name it. "This is a wave of anxiety. It is very uncomfortable, but it is not dangerous, and it will pass — usually within minutes."

Step 2 — Slow one breath. Long, slow exhale, like fogging a mirror. Then box breathing: in 4, hold 4, out 4, hold 4.

Step 3 — Ground. 5 things I can see, 4 I can feel, 3 I can hear, 2 I can smell, 1 I can taste.

Step 4 — Say my phrase.

My calming phrase:

Step 5 — Reach out or move.

A person I can text or call:

A place I can go to feel steadier:

My best go-to strategy from my menu:

Afterward: be kind to yourself. Drink some water. A panic wave is exhausting — you just rode it out. That took strength.

Panic peaks and passes — it cannot climb forever. Riding out the wave (instead of fleeing it) teaches your brain the alarm was false. If panic attacks are frequent or you ever have chest pain you're unsure about, please see a medical professional to rule out other causes.

Pocket Affirmation Cards

Cut them out. Keep them close.

These are not magic words — they are reminders of what is true, written for the moments when anxiety makes it hard to remember. Cut along the dashed lines. Keep one in your wallet, tape one to your mirror, tuck one in your coat pocket.

<i>"This feeling is intense — and temporary. Every wave I have ever felt has passed. This one will too."</i>	<i>"I have gotten through 100% of my hardest days so far. That is my actual track record."</i>
<i>"I can slow my breath, and my body will follow."</i>	<i>"I do not have to believe every thought I think. Anxiety makes guesses, not facts."</i>
<i>"I don't need to handle the whole day. Just this moment. Then the next."</i>	<i>"Feeling anxious does not mean I am in danger. It means my alarm is loud. I can turn toward it, breathe, and let it settle."</i>

Cut along the dashed lines.

Weekly Reflection

Notice your progress — especially the progress that hides

Anxiety recovery is built from small wins that are easy to overlook: the call you made anyway, the breath you took before reacting, the worry you wrote down instead of spiraling. This page helps you see them. Fill it in once a week — print a fresh copy each time.

Week of:

1. This week's anxiety, overall

On average, my anxiety this week was (circle one): 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Compared to last week, that is (check one): [] Lower [] About the same [] Higher

2. Tools I used this week (check all that apply)

- ☐ 5-4-3-2-1 grounding
- ☐ Box breathing
- ☐ Tense and release
- ☐ Worry log
- ☐ Thought-challenging worksheet
- ☐ Trigger tracker
- ☐ Coping menu strategy
- ☐ Panic moment plan
- ☐ Affirmation cards

3. Reflection prompts

One moment I handled better than I would have a month ago:

My hardest moment this week — and one thing that helped, even slightly:

Something I did this week even though anxiety told me not to:

One thing I learned about my anxiety this week:

4. Looking ahead

Next week, one small thing I will practice is:

One kind thing I will say to myself when it gets hard:

A higher-anxiety week is not a failed week. Showing up to this page *is* the practice. If several hard weeks stack up, that is useful information — and a good reason to talk with a mental health professional.

Please Read: Important Information

About this toolkit

This toolkit is an educational self-help resource. It shares general information and skills drawn from widely used cognitive behavioral (CBT) and stress-management approaches.

It is not psychotherapy, counselling, medical care, or mental health treatment. Using this toolkit does not create a therapist-client or any other professional relationship with its creator. It is not a substitute for assessment, diagnosis, or treatment by a qualified physician, psychologist, psychotherapist, counsellor, or other licensed professional, and it is not intended to diagnose or treat any condition.

Everyone's situation is different. If anxiety is significantly affecting your daily life — your sleep, work, school, relationships, or health — please reach out to a qualified mental health professional or your primary care provider. Seeking help is a sign of strength, and effective treatments for anxiety exist.

If any exercise in this toolkit feels distressing, please stop and consider speaking with a professional. Breathing and relaxation exercises are generally safe, but consult your healthcare provider if you have a medical condition that affects your breathing or heart.

If you need help now

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 911 (Canada and the US) or go to your nearest emergency department.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (Canada and the United States)

- **Call 988** — free, confidential, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- **Text 988** — if you prefer texting to talking

Additional support:

- **United States — Crisis Text Line:** text HOME to 741741 (24/7)
- **Canada — Kids Help Phone (for young people):** call 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868 (24/7)

You do not need to be in crisis to reach out. If you are struggling, these services are there for you.

You matter. Your struggles are real. And support is available.

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