

# SUPPORTING EXAM ANXIETY

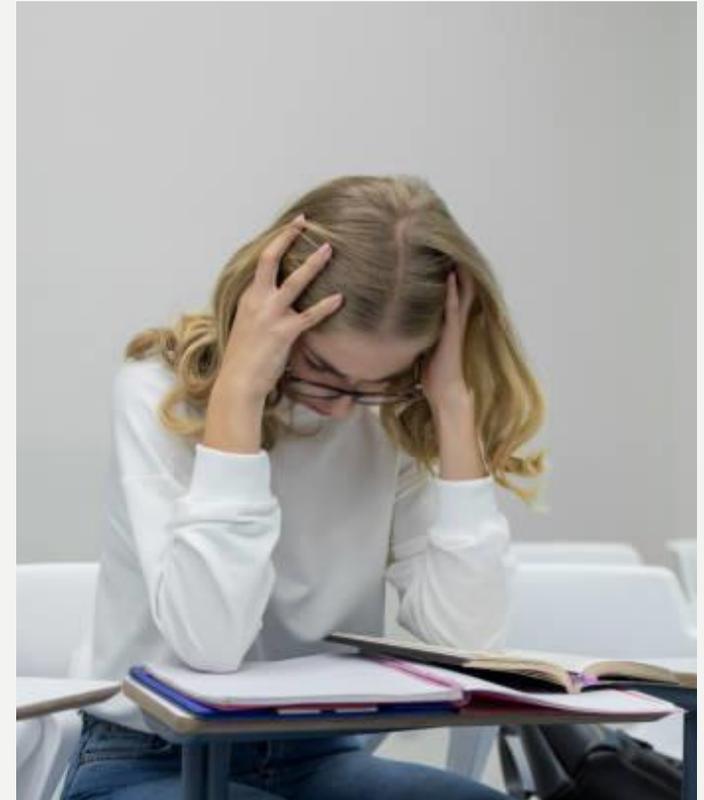


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**CAMDEN EPS**

# SESSION OVERVIEW:

- What is **anxiety**?
- What is **exam anxiety**?
- How to support **anxiety**
- **CBT/Mindfulness**
- Support available at **CSfG**
- **External support and resources**



# THINK OF A TIME WHEN YOU HAD TO TAKE A TEST...

Think about **how you felt** at this time. What was **helpful**?



# UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY



## ANXIETY:

- Is a **NORMAL EMOTION** - it helps us cope with **difficult, challenging or dangerous** situations.
- Is **COMMON** - there are times when we all feel worried, anxious, uptight or stressed.
- Can become a **PROBLEM** - when it is **out of proportion** to a situation and gets in the way of things you want to do. Anxiety can make thinking and doing simple things challenging.

## ANXIOUS FEELINGS:

- When we become anxious, the body prepares itself for some form of **physical action**, often called the **FIGHT-FLIGHT** reaction.
- As the body prepares itself, we may notice a number of **physical changes**. It is important that we know how to **interpret** and **manage** those changes.
- **EXAM ANXIETY** is experiencing psychological distress **before, during or after an exam**, that interferes with **normal learning** and (likely) test performance.

# Anxiety - spotting the signs



## Physical

Headaches  
Muscle tension/back ache  
Tight jaw/grinding teeth  
Raised heart rate/faster breathing  
Changes in appetite  
Stomach problems  
Difficulty sleeping



## Emotional

Irritable  
Frightened  
Worried/anxious  
Angry  
Feeling overwhelmed  
Fear  
Shame



## Behavioural

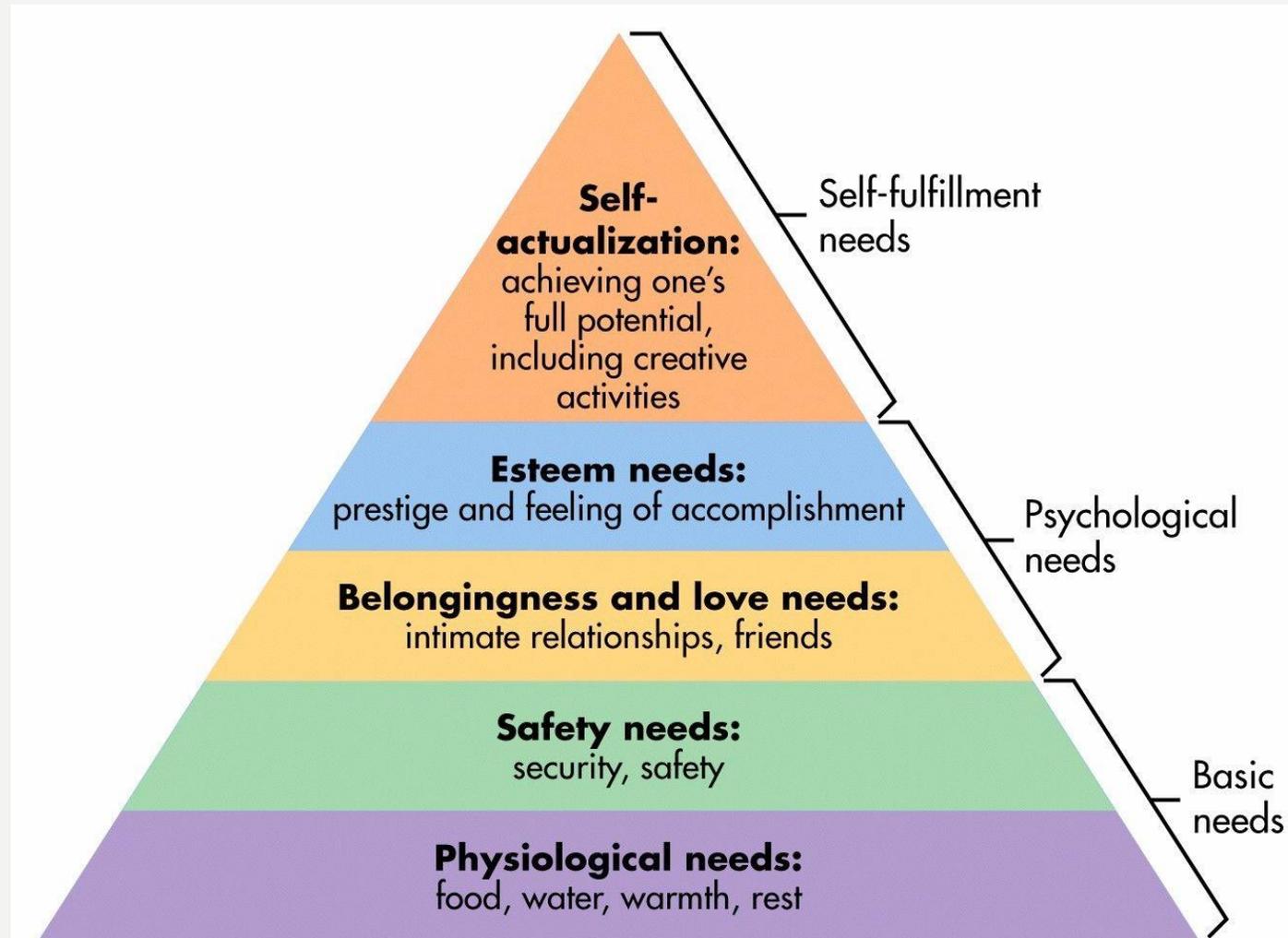
Avoiding and blaming others  
Changes in eating habits  
Using alcohol, substances or smoking  
Snapping at others  
Becoming more accident prone  
Biting nails  
Self-harm



## Cognitive

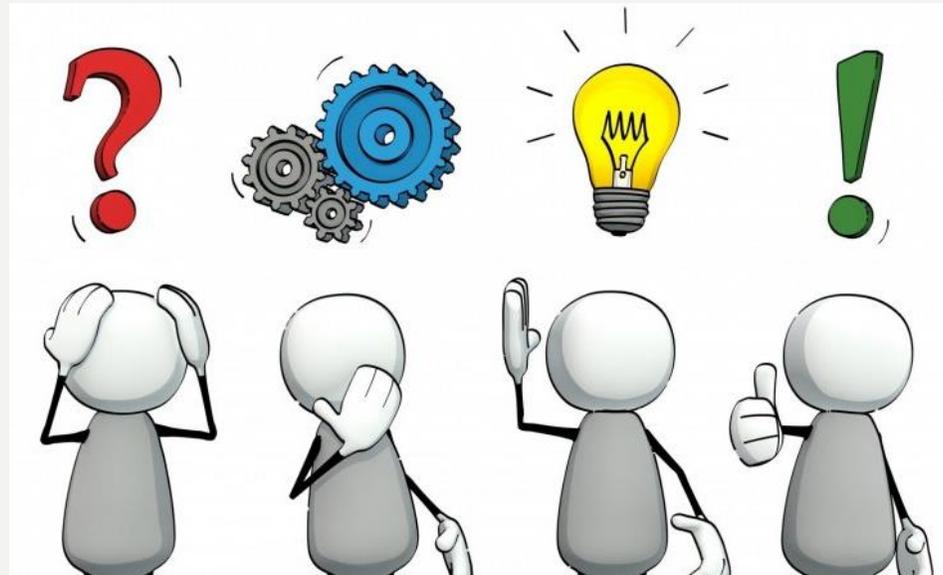
Worrying about the past of future  
Racing thoughts  
Panic attacks  
Problems concentrating  
Memory lapses/forgetting things  
Difficulty making decisions  
Unable to think clearly

# UNDERLYING THEORY I: MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS:



# WHAT ARE YOU ALREADY DOING TO SUPPORT EXAMS/ANXIETY?

Think about how you approach **exams/anxiety** already and what has been **most helpful** for your child?



# TIPS TO REDUCE EXAM ANXIETY



1. **Take care of yourself** – Diet, Sleep and Exercise!
2. **Facing the fear** – Take practice exams to increase familiarity.
3. **Preparation** – Arrive early and check that you have all of the necessary equipment.
4. **Positive self-talk** – Replace irrational negative thinking with positive self-talk.
5. **Talk about worries** – ask your children what is on their mind.

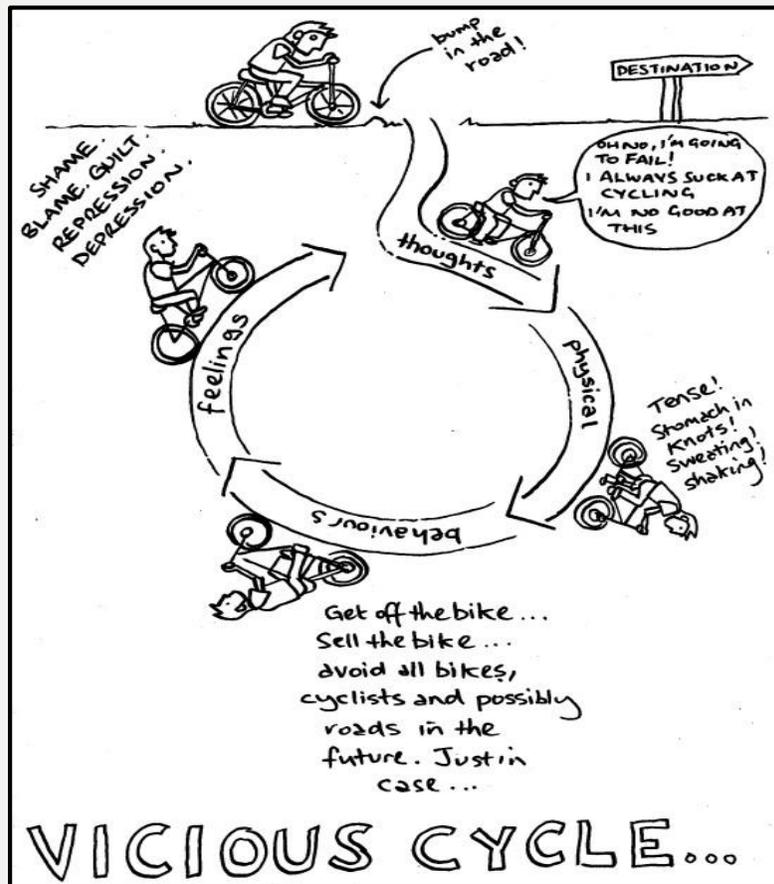
I can **DO** this!



6. **Put your worries in a box** – If a worry pops in to your head, imagine locking it in a box until there is an appropriate time to talk it through with a parent.
7. **Rest and relaxation** – Take time to do things that you find relaxing e.g. yoga, meditation, breathing exercises, visualisation.
8. **Leisure Activities** – Enjoy interests and hobbies on a regular basis.

# COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT)

Based upon the idea that **how you think** determines **how you feel** and **how you behave**.



Aim is to help identify, understand and change unhelpful thoughts and behaviours to be able to function more effectively in everyday life.

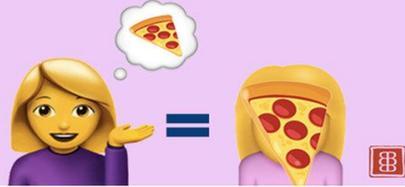
A lot of anxiety problems are related to **the way we think**. If we can change the way we think, we can learn to **control our anxious feelings**.

Anxiety often leads us to:

- ❖ Think in **negative and critical** ways
- ❖ Overestimate the likelihood of **bad things happening**
- ❖ Focus on **things that go wrong**
- ❖ **Underestimate our ability to cope**
- ❖ Expect to be **unsuccessful**

## EMOTIONAL REASONING

assuming that because we feel a certain way, that we think must be true



## OVERGENERALIZING

seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw



## LABELLING

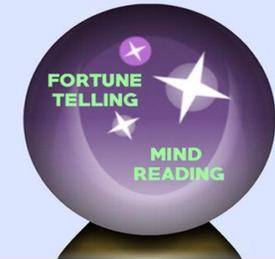
assigning labels to ourselves or other people

Hello  
my name is

STUPID

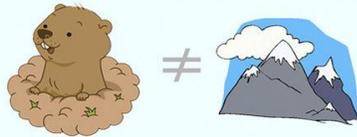
## JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS

IMAGINING WE KNOW WHAT OTHERS ARE THINKING OR PREDICTING THE FUTURE



## MAGNIFICATION (CATASTROPHISING) & MINIMIZATION

blowing things out of proportion (catastrophizing), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important



"DON'T MAKE A MOUNTAIN OUT OF A MOLEHILL"

# UNHELPFUL THINKING STYLES



BALANCE  
eating disorder treatment center™

## MENTAL FILTER

ONLY PAYING ATTENTION TO CERTAIN TYPES OF EVIDENCE. NOTICING OUR FAILURES BUT NOT SEEING OUR SUCCESSES



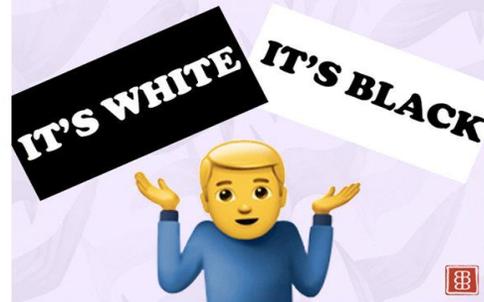
"I AM A FAILURE"

## DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE

DISCOUNTING THE GOOD THINGS THAT HAVE HAPPENED OR THAT YOU HAVE DONE FOR SOME REASON OR ANOTHER



## ALL OR NOTHING THINKING



## PERSONALIZATION

blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault. conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault.



## SHOULD/MUST

using critical words like 'should,' 'must,' or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed. If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is frustration.



# COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT)

## THOUGHT CHALLENGING:

Once you have noticed your unhelpful thoughts, you can **challenge these thoughts** and turn them into **more balanced/realistic thoughts**. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this **fact or opinion**?
- **What would someone else say** about this situation?
- What's the **bigger picture** or helicopter view?
- What is **another way** of looking at this?
- What **advice would I give** someone else?
- Is my reaction **in proportion** to the event?
- Is this **really as important** as it seems?

Then think of a more **helpful and realistic** thought...



# HOW TO HAVE A SUPPORTIVE CONVERSATION

- Choose the right **environment**
- Give your **full attention** and listen **without judgement**
- Ask **open questions**, e.g. “How are you today?”
- Show **empathy** rather than sympathy
- **Empower** that person - **give information** rather than advice
- **Reflect back** and clarify
- Focus on **their situation**
- **Validate feelings**, try not to ‘silver-line’ situations
- Remember that you are **not expected** to be an expert

# MINDFULNESS

## HOW CAN MINDFULNESS HELP TO REDUCE ANXIETY ABOUT EXAMS?

*“You can’t stop the waves but you can learn how to surf on them.”*

- ❖ Life consists of many **challenges** (e.g. exams) and we all experience varying degrees of sadness and stress.
- ❖ When we are really **‘present’** in such situations (without wishing that they weren’t happening) we can see what might be needed.
- ❖ When we focus on the ‘waves’ for what they really are, we can make **better-informed choices** and act accordingly.
- ❖ For example, by becoming more aware of your anxiety about exams, you can pause, take a breather, look at the situation and note what you are **thinking, feeling and wanting to do**.



# MINDFULNESS

## TAKE AWAY TECHNIQUES:

### MINDFUL BREATHING:

- “7-11 Breathing” (Breath in for 7 seconds, out for 11 seconds).
- “Take 10 breaths” (Throughout the day, pause and take 10 slow, deep breaths).

### MINDFUL MOVEMENT

- Stretching and breathing
- Yoga
- Balancing

### VISUALISATION:

- Visualise thoughts as ‘leaves on a stream’ or ‘passengers on a bus’.
- Imagine putting unhelpful thoughts in your ‘junk mail’.
- “My relaxing/happy place”
- Meditation

### RELAXATION:

- Creative activities (drawing, art, colouring, dot-to-dot)
- Music
- Reading
- Mindful walking
- “The body scan” – relaxing the body.

### BECOME MORE IN TUNE WITH YOUR SENSES:

- Mindful eating (chocolate/raisin meditation)
- Sound meditation (relaxing music)
- Bring awareness to a routine activity e.g. brushing teeth.
- “Notice 5 Things” that you can see, hear and feel.



# SUPPORT AT CAMDEN SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

- High level of communication and support from **teaching staff**
- **Subject teacher support** outside of lessons - subject clubs and individual support
- Extensive **pastoral support** - tutors provide **1:1 mentoring** to develop organisation and positive thinking
- 2 x **Counsellors**
- **Art Therapist**
- **Educational Psychologist** drop-ins



# EXTERNAL SUPPORT

- [NHS](#) (GP/CAMHS)
- [Mental Health Camden](#)
- [Camden Parent Carer Counselling Service \(PCCS\)](#)
- [iCope Talking Therapy](#)
- [The Hive](#): Social Hub and 1:1 mentoring.
- [Brandon Centre](#): support for young people and parents, including BWell coaching for young people
- CYP IAPT services



# USEFUL RESOURCES

## ANXIETY AND WELLBEING:

- Young Minds: [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)
- Kooth: [www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)
- NHS Live Well: <https://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/youth-mental-health/Pages/Youth-mental-health-help.aspx>
- MindEd for Families: [www.mindedforfamilies.org.uk/young-people/](http://www.mindedforfamilies.org.uk/young-people/) (Parent Resource)
- Sleep: [www.teenleaphub.org.uk](http://www.teenleaphub.org.uk)

## STUDY SKILLS:

- Education Corner: <https://www.educationcorner.com/study-skills.html>
- Managing Test Anxiety (Jim Wright), Ideas for Students: [www.interventioncentral.org](http://www.interventioncentral.org)
- Letts 'GCSE Success Essentials': [www.lets-education.com](http://www.lets-education.com)

# USEFUL RESOURCES

## COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY:

- CBT resources and self-help guides: <https://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-worksheets/cbt/adolescents>
- Anxiety workbook for teens:  
<https://www.algomafamilyservices.org/Files/AFS/resources/Anxiety20Wkbk20for20Teens.pdf>

## MINDFULNESS:

- Black, A (2015) – The Little Pocket Book of Mindfulness (CICO Books)
- Rowan, T (2013) – The Little Book of Mindfulness (Quadrille Publishing)
- Williams, M. & Penman, D. (2011) – Mindfulness: A practical guide to finding peace in a frantic world (Platkus)
- Apps – ‘Smiling Mind’ and ‘Headspace’.
- Mindfulness activities and exercises: <http://youth.anxietybc.com/mindfulness-exercises>
- Further information and resources: <http://mindfulnessforteens.com/resources/resources-for-mindfulness/>

# THE END... QUESTIONS?

