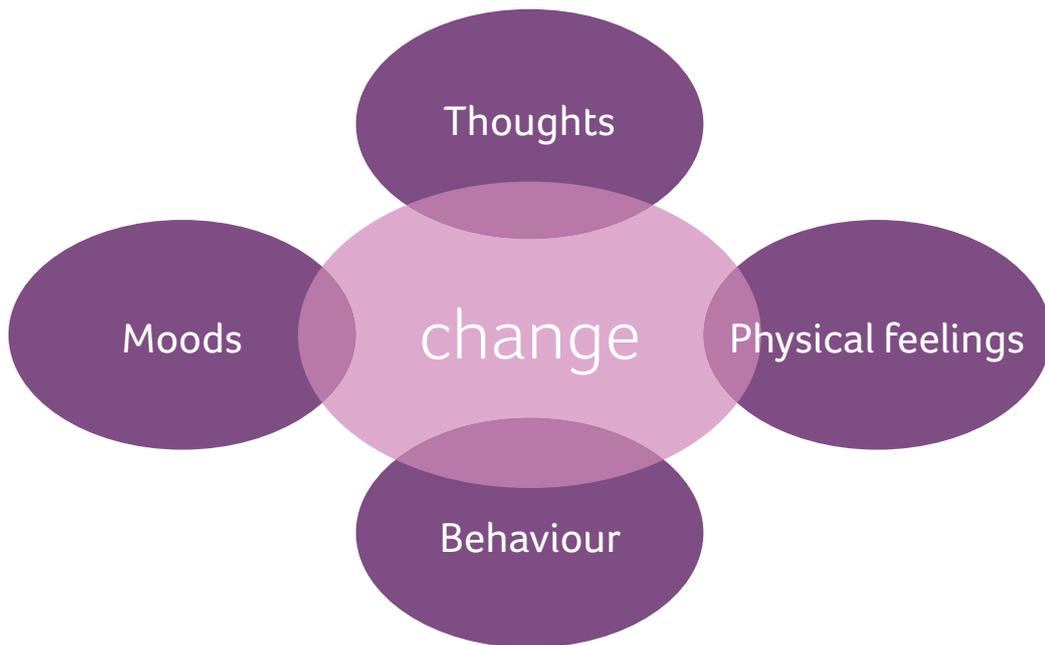


Mind and Body Toolkit

This short self help guide is divided into three sections:

1. Being Kind and Valuing Yourself
2. Changing Your Behaviour and How You Feel.
3. Changing Your Difficult Thoughts.

These three sections provide you with a toolkit that you can use to work with on the more difficult issues that you face. They will not provide instant results and do need patience and perseverance; if you are able to do that then you have succeeded in starting to make important changes.



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1. Being Kind and Valuing Yourself

When we are experiencing difficulties we often forget to look after ourselves.

There are three basic rules to remember to help us be kind to ourselves and value who we are:

- a. **Treat yourself kindly** – learn to breathe and relax and enjoy feeling less agitated and low.
- b. **Give yourself permission for treats and rewards** – do things that make you feel better; these create a good environment for change and work better than self-criticism
- c. **Do not undervalue yourself** by undervaluing and diminishing the importance of your achievements

Learning to Breathe and Relax

‘Breathing’ and ‘muscular relaxation’ exercises are two common techniques to help people to relax and combat symptoms of anxiety. They may also help to ease symptoms of depression.

Breathing is a largely unconscious process that keeps our bodies supplied with oxygen and removes waste gases. During stressful situations we become tense and our breathing becomes less effective.

So the purpose of these exercises is to make us more aware of our breathing, take in more oxygen and help us relax. This results in two major benefits:

1. By following our breathing, we can for a moment, distance our minds from the most immediate thoughts and we give ourselves space to calm down.
2. Breathing gently opens up our chest and abdomen thus helping to relieve tension that has built up.

A simple breathing exercise

- Choose a quiet place and sit comfortably on a chair, with a straight back and hands resting lightly on your knees.
- Breathe in, notice how the air flows in through your nostrils, they feel cool; your chest and abdomen expand. Don’t force your inhalation, be gentle with your body! Exhale slowly.
- Observe how exhalation follows inhalation immediately – you need do nothing; your lungs gently deflate forcing the used air out. As you exhale, the air in your nostrils feels warm.
- Next, place your hands gently on your abdomen and feel it rise and fall, this means that you are using all of your lung capacity.
- Repeat this process 4 or 5 times, counting on the in-breath. During this time gently focus on either the changes of air temperature flowing in and out of your nostrils or the rising and falling of your abdomen. As thoughts or distractions enter your mind, be aware of them and then gently return your attention to your breathing.
- Notice how you feel, physically how the tension in your chest and abdomen has reduced, particularly on the out breath; did you notice that during your counting, your attention and thoughts briefly shifted from the things that had been concerning you?

Try and practise this exercise as many times as you remember during the day. Longer periods of breathing exercises can also help relieve tension – remember – **don’t force your breathing**. Trust your body to decide on the best speed and depth of inhalation.

And finally – you don’t need any special equipment; you can practise breathing anywhere!

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Relaxation – removing tension from our muscles

Muscle relaxation and deep breathing exercises when done together are particularly useful to combat the two common physical symptoms of anxiety: muscular tension and shallow or over-breathing. You will need to practise these relaxation and breathing exercises regularly to gain the maximum benefit from them and then use them whenever you feel tense or anxious. Here is an exercise which combines them both.

Find a quiet, warm place where you won't be disturbed. Choose a time of day when you do not feel pressured to do anything else. Lie down on your back, or sit in a well supported chair or perhaps lie on a firm bed with cushions for support. Try to get comfortable and close your eyes.

Once you are comfortable focus on your breathing for a few minutes as you learned to do in the breathing exercises. Then start the muscle exercises, working around the different muscle groups in your body. The routine then is to work on each of your muscle groups by

- tensing the muscles, as much as you can
- then relaxing, them fully.

Breathe in when you **tense** the muscles and breathe out when you relax.

- Hands - clench one hand tightly for a few seconds as you breathe in. You should feel your forearm muscles tense. Then relax as you breathe out. Repeat with the other hand.
- Arms - bend an elbow and tense all the muscles in the arm for a few seconds as you breathe in. Then relax as you breathe out. Repeat the same with the other arm.
- Neck - press your head back as hard as is comfortable and roll it slowly from side to side. Then relax.
- Face - try to frown and lower your eyebrows as hard as you can for a few seconds, then relax. Then raise your eyebrows (as if you were startled) as hard as you can, then relax. Then clench your jaw for a few seconds, and then relax.
- Chest - take a deep breath and hold it for a few seconds, then relax and go back to normal breathing.
- Stomach - tense the stomach muscles as tight as possible, then relax.
- Buttocks - squeeze the buttocks together as much as possible, then relax.
- Legs - with your legs flat, bend your feet and toes towards your face as hard as you can, then relax. Then bend them away from your face for a few seconds, then relax.

Repeat the whole routine 3-4 times. Each time you relax a group of muscles, note the difference in how they feel when relaxed compared to when they are tense.

Treats and Rewards

Next you might like to offer yourself a 'treat', this is part of being kind to yourself and valuing yourself more with rewards and behaving differently towards yourself. Think about doing something that you might have done in the past and that you have gained pleasure from. This might be walking along your favourite path in the woods or fields, riding your bicycle or playing a sport again, preparing a small flower or vegetable bed in the garden and planting seeds or young plants, deciding on a favourite meal and preparing it for yourself and family.

Whatever appeals, choose something that you can do locally and that involves physical activity. Again start small, perhaps just 15 minutes walk or ride; just one dish for the meal you make. Remember to treat yourself kindly; avoid anything that will be stressful or make you anxious, for example travelling long distances.

Once you have completed your chosen 'treat', think about how you have benefitted from it. How did you feel physically and how did this affect your mood and thoughts. If it helps, score the experience from 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 where 1 is 'no change', 3 is 'I have noticed some improvement in how I feel' and 5 is 'I am very pleased with the change in how I feel'. Then the next time you repeat the treat you will be able to measure how it improves how you feel about yourself. This table might be useful to record your progress; put a dot in the box opposite the score.

My score	Date....	Date....	Date....	Date....
	Treat 1	Treat 2	Treat 3	Treat 4
5 – I am very pleased with the change in how I feel				
4				
3 - I have noticed an improvement in how I feel				
2				
1 – no change				

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2. Allowing Yourself to Recognise That You Can Change Your Behaviour and How You Feel

Acknowledging Avoidance.

At times, we all avoid confronting our difficulties.

Avoidance:

- makes the problem worse
- creates new problems
- interferes with life

So we need to acknowledge and face our problems and difficulties and then work on ways to make positive changes to the circumstances surrounding the problem.

Experiment and observe change happening

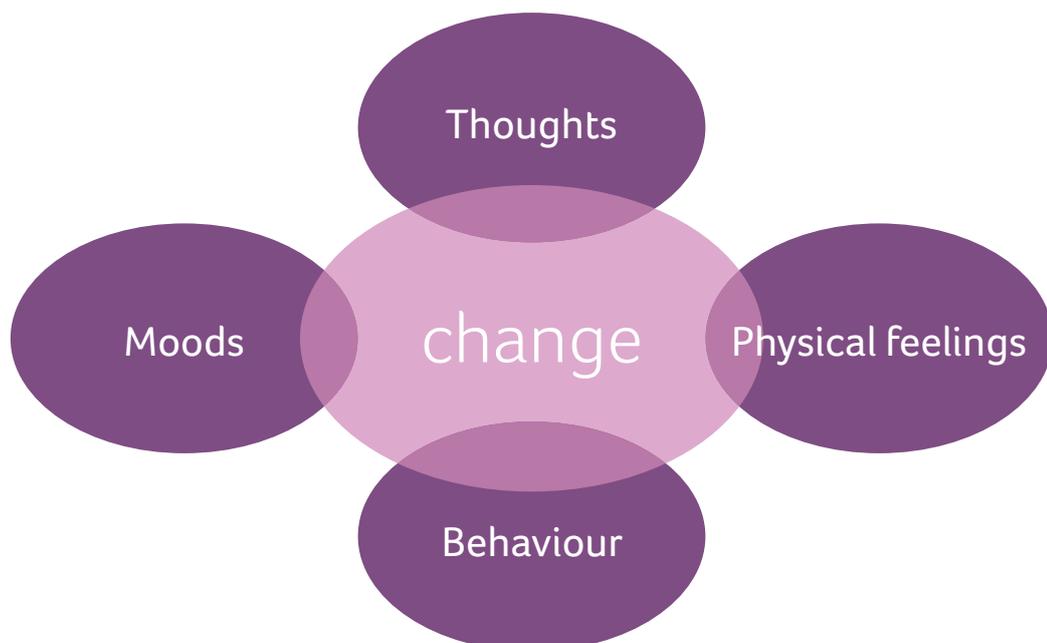
We can do this by recognising that our **moods** (how we feel), **thoughts** (what we are thinking), **physical feelings** (how our body feels) and **behaviour** (what we do) are all linked and affect each other and that if we can change one, we can influence them all.

This is illustrated in the picture below.

There are a number of activities that you can practice to prove to yourself that change can occur. **Breathing and relaxation** exercises are very useful to start with. However, it is very important to recognise that the change you notice may be limited at first; don't expect enormous changes at the first attempt. But as you progress you will notice more change happening.

So start with the **breathing and relaxation** exercises that you have already learnt. During and after doing these, use the picture above to see that. As your body feels more relaxed, your thoughts and moods will calm and settle. You may even feel anxiety reducing. As you become more familiar with these exercises and do them more frequently you will notice how feeling physically more relaxed improves your mood and your thoughts are not so intrusive.

Why not give yourself another **treat or reward**, as discussed in the earlier section, perhaps try something different or if you enjoyed what you did last time, why not do it again?



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3. Changing Difficult Thoughts

“Men are disturbed not by things, but by the views which they take of them”.

Epictetus AD 55-135

Or to put this quote in another way:

“Your thoughts become your realities”.

Just as relaxation, breathing and giving ourselves a treat, made our body feel more relaxed and we were able to recognise how this affected our moods and thoughts and behaviour, we can also attempt to change our thoughts and make our reality easier to cope with.

Changing your thoughts

This experiment focuses again on being kind to yourself and recognising self-criticism. As we noted earlier, we can all tend to be hard on ourselves. We can change this and certainly make ourselves feel better. You might want to consider a typical thought for example, when walking to the shops, such as ‘people don’t like me’. This is being hard on yourself and self critical!

Ask yourself how true is that thought; could you interpret in another way? Is there evidence to support the thought or is there evidence against this thought? If you conclude that the thought you have about yourself is a bit unfair and that you are being a little hard, how does this make you feel?

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You might like to write your experience down; here is a simple table to complete:

Situation	How do I feel physically?	What do I do or how do I behave?	What sort of mood am I in?	What is the main thought I have at the moment?	What is the evidence supporting thinking like this?	What is the evidence against thinking like this?
<i>Wednesday pm Walking to the shops</i>	Tight chest and sweaty palms	Look downward and hurry along	Anxious	People don't like me	Nothing at the moment, but people have been very abrupt with me when I have asked for assistance in the past	I had a lady smile at me outside the post office. The shop keeper commented on how nice it was to see me again

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It seems from the example in the table that this thought is very self critical and probably stems from a specific incident with other people, which has become generalised to include everyone we come across. Once we can recognise how our thinking may have become distorted and thus change our reality, then we can begin to make changes to improve our thinking and reality. And then this leaves us with a better feeling about ourselves and other people, whilst at the same time recognising how quickly a specific experience has clouded our judgement.

Now you have reached the end of this short set of exercises you will have assembled some useful tools in your Mind and Body Toolkit:

Being Kind and Valuing Yourself

Breathing and relaxation

Allowing yourself a treat

Changing Your Behaviour and How You Feel

Acknowledging avoidance

Behaving differently

Changing difficult thoughts

Try using these as frequently as you can. And don't forget to congratulate yourself for getting this far – you have changed!

We hope you have found this Mind and Body Toolkit helpful and don't forget your Personal Nurse Adviser is also available to help you.

We would like to hear your feedback about this Toolkit, please email to yourwellbeing@redarc.co.uk or write to the address below.

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