EXAM STRESS WORKSHOP

First Steps Psychology Team
INTRODUCTIONS

- Who are First Steps?

- One thing you’re looking forward to after exams are over?

- What would you like to get from this workshop?
What is stress & anxiety?

What is anxiety?
Anxiety is:

- Normal
- Useful
ANXIETY RISES AND FALLS
UPs AND DOWNs

Level of anxiety

Time
How does it feel?

- Nervous
- Butterflies in stomach
- You may feel dizzy
- Alert
What happens in our bodies?

- Heart rate increases
- Breathing gets faster
- We start to sweat more
- Muscles tense up
- Mind becomes alert
What happens in our minds?

- Chaos!?
- Can’t think and concentrate
- Negative thoughts and predictions?
- Racing thoughts...
What does it make us do?

- Avoid?
- Procrastinate?
- Cram
- Overeat
- Oversleep
Panic Attacks

- Short, intense period of unpleasant physical sensations
- We feel like something bad is going to happen
- We may feel afraid of fainting, being sick or doing something embarrassing
Panic Attacks

- Very common! 1 in 10 people
- Frightening BUT no physical harm can come from having a panic attack
- Come on suddenly but pass quite quickly
- Normally last for max 10 minutes!!
Panic attacks do’s:

- Make a conscious effort to slow your breathing down
- Breathing in through your NOSE and out through your MOUTH
- Remind yourself: this is just anxiety, anxiety can’t harm you, it will pass, I am in control
- Challenge your thoughts to make them more helpful
- Distraction-count objects around you
Unhelpful Thinking Styles

All or nothing thinking
- Sometimes called ‘black and white thinking’
- If I’m not perfect I have failed
- Either I do it right or not at all

Over-generalizing
- Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw
- “everything is always rubbish”
- “nothing good ever happens”

Jumping to conclusions
- There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:
  - Mind reading (imagining we know what others are thinking)
  - Fortune telling (predicting the future)
- $2 + 2 = 5$

Magnification (catastrophising) & minimization
- Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophizing), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important

Labelling
- Assigning labels to ourselves or other people
- I’m a loser
- I’m completely useless
- They’re such an idiot

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 often frustration
**THE WORRY TREE**

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**THE WORRY DECISION TREE**

**Question 1: What am I worrying about?**

- e.g. I’ll fail my biology exam and won’t be able to study it at 6th form
- e.g. I’m not going to do as well as my friends

**Question 2: Is there anything I can do about this?**

- **No**
  - Let the worry go and distract yourself

- **Yes**
  - Work out what you could do
  - If you can do it now - do!
  - If it can’t be done now, make a list
  - Let the worry go and distract yourself
THINGS I CAN DO RIGHT NOW: SETTING SMART GOALS

- **Specific** – what are you going to do?
- **Measurable** – how will you know you’ve done it?
- **Achievable** – Be kind to yourself. Is it realistic?
- **Relevant** – Choose a goal that matters.
- **Timely** – Give yourself a deadline.
MANAGING IN THE RUN UP TO EXAMS: PRACTICAL ADVICE

- Get enough sleep – 8-10 hours.
  Fun fact: Teenagers need more sleep than both adults and children

- Eat well – not too much of the sugary stuff or caffeine – affects concentration.

- Drink water – brain functions better!
MANAGING IN THE RUN UP TO EXAMS: PRACTICAL ADVICE

- Exercise – great way to relieve stress, and reinvigorate your body and mind.

- Talk to someone about how you’re feeling.

- Take some time out from revising – watch TV, see friends, play Xbox etc.

- Do 45 minute chunks – 1 topic at a time
REVISION: DIFFERENT WAYS OF LEARNING

- Everyone learns differently and has a different style.
- Repetition is helpful
- Revising small chunks of material at a time – don’t overwhelm yourself.
- Give yourself breaks – little and often. It helps your brain to process and memorise.
- Make connections between things (e.g. using mind maps) rather than memorising
On exam day....

- Make sure you’re well rested
- Have some breakfast
- Give yourself lots of time to get there

In the exam:
- Take some time at the beginning to plan.
- Structure – beginning, middle and end.
- Don’t panic – if you’re stuck, move on and come back.
POSITIVE STATEMENTS: CHALLENGING UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

- Think of a time you’ve struggled with stress, but things went well...

- How did you get through it?
- What skills/techniques did you use?

We’d love to hear your tips for managing with stress that we can share with other young people.
Letting the Worry Go…
Mindfulness

- Noticing
- Non-judgemental
- Paying attention to the present
- Letting go
what is that?

oh, just my mind
Your body is present. Is your mind?

Past  Present  Future

Doug Neill
Mind Full, or Mindful?
**Mindfulness exercise**

What did you notice showing up for you? Emotions, thoughts? Did your mind wander?
REVISITING THE STRESS SCALE

- How are you feeling now?
- Any questions/comments?
- Thank you!!