

Courage & Capability: The secrets to overcoming anxiety and building confidence

Anxiety is:

- The tendency to consistently over-estimate threat and danger in a non-dangerous setting
- A thinking style that over-estimates the likelihood of things going wrong and how bad it would be if something did go wrong
- The physiological processes and sensations characterised by the adrenal response
- Typified by avoidant coping.

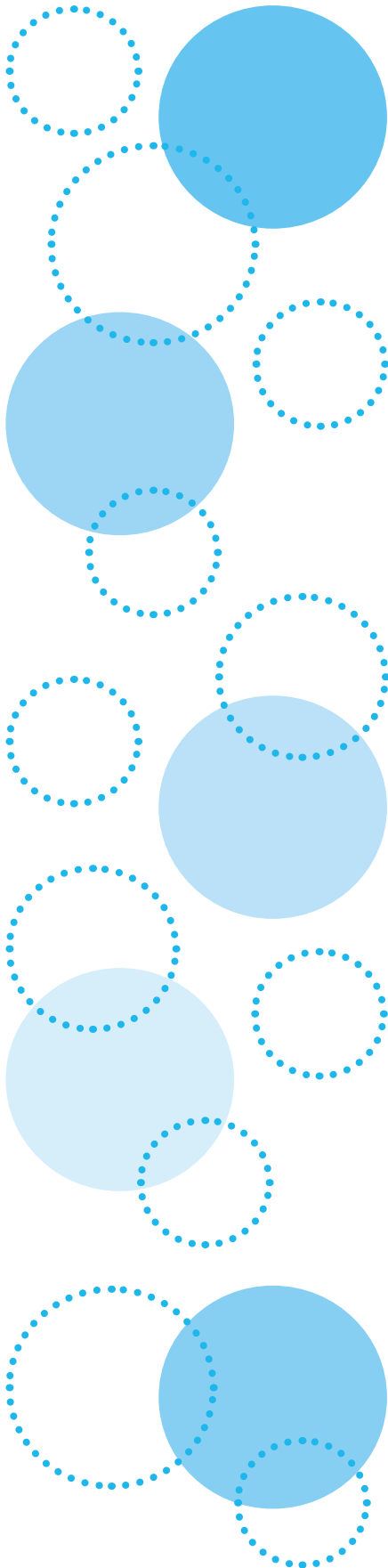
Social Anxiety is:

- The tendency to over-estimate negative social outcomes, to experience hyperarousal in social situations, and the urge and tendency to avoid social interactions with others
- Feeling anxious becomes an anxiety disorder based on the intensity, duration, and level of functional impairment that results.

5 things you need to know about anxiety:

- #1 It is natural and normal to sometimes feel anxious
- #2 The fear response is designed to help us
- #3 Feeling anxious is only a problem if we avoid things that are safe, but challenging
- #4 The opposite of anxious behaviour (e.g. avoidance) is exposure
- #5 Anxious thinking over-estimates risk (i.e. the likelihood of something bad happening, and how bad it would be if something bad happened).

Beware of the *Great Mistake*: Prioritising short-term emotional states over longer-term learning, development, or values.



It is better to build a willingness to experience discomfort than to make feeling calm the aim.

Encountering and enduring challenges is necessary to build our capacity to handle future challenges. There can be no resilience without the opportunity to be resilient.

Exposure tips:

- Start low on the ladder, engineer early success
- Reinforce success
- Set goals of 'doing' not 'feeling'
- Individualise and be creative
- Exposure must usually be repeated and prolonged to be successful
- It is important that avoidance has the least reinforcement value possible

What we can do:

- Understand the cognitive and behavioural drivers of anxiety – especially habituation and the *Great Mistake*
- Recognise socio-cultural influences (media, perfectionism, evaluation, psychological safety)
- Normalise discomfort, difficulty, mistakes
- Discomfort is inherent to personal growth: 'The Zone' of personal development
- Set the expectation of yourself that courage and effort – not perfection – is required
- Interrupt the vicious cycle of avoidance
- Use graded exposure*
- Setting the emotional tone in the workplace: "High warmth, low pressure"
- When intervention is required – functional impairment. Better to intervene early.

*Don't try to tackle clinical-grade anxiety on your own – enlist the help of a psychologist.

Create your Personal Development Manifesto to remind yourself of the ingredients to prevent or overcome anxiety and to have a robust psychology.

