

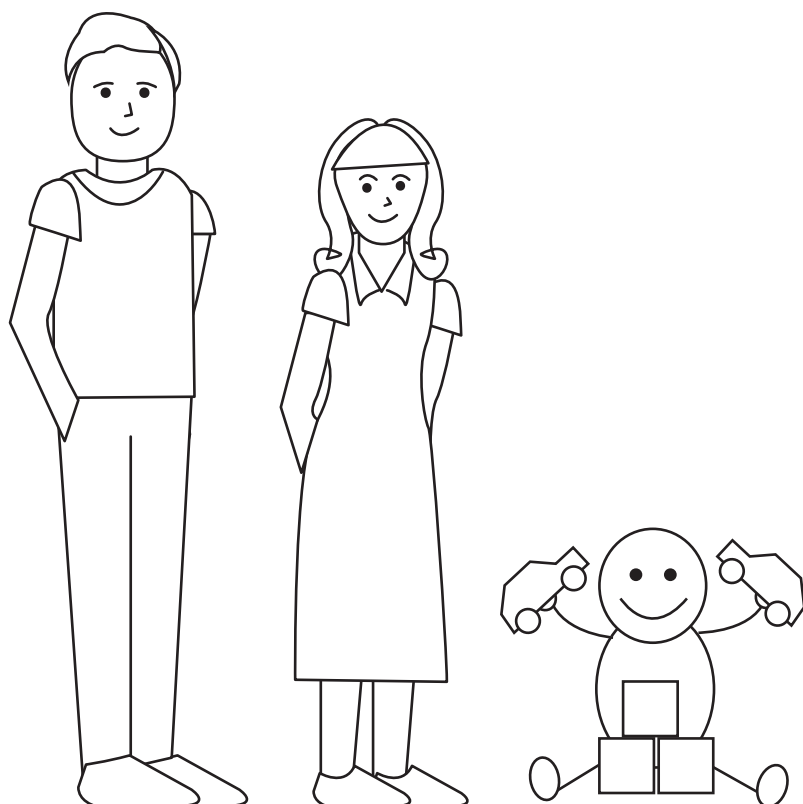
I don't want to be...

# Scared of

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# anymore

A guided self-help booklet for young people.



**Just about everyone has a fear of something -** snakes, flying, wasps, lifts, and the dark. As a rule, we can put up with these fears. Problems arise when your reaction to the thing or place is more than you know it should be. Here are some of the things children say about phobias:

Susan has been scared of spiders since she was very little – her mum is scared of spiders too. *“I get really scared whenever I see a picture of a spider!!! People don’t understand that a tiny thing could upset me so much – but it does. I feel very hot and sweaty. My tummy turns over and I think to myself – ‘I have to get out of here’. I get so bad I feel I can’t breathe properly.”*

Fiona is very scared about going out of the house. *“I wake up each day and I feel I can’t face things because I know I’m too scared to go out. I can go to the shops with my mum but doing anything just makes me feel panicky.”*

Tom is very scared of blood, *“I have to avoid any place where I might see blood. I am worried that I will faint. I try to sit down and wiggle my toes when I feel a faint come on because I think this will stop me from fainting.”*

**IMPORTANT: Though they cause great worry, phobias are not dangerous. They will do you no harm.**



## What is a phobia?

A phobia is a dread of certain things or of certain places. Phobias can cause great distress and badly affect the way you are able to live your life. In theory, it should be possible to become phobic of almost anything but the phobia may lead you to avoid situations that involve it. You might go to great lengths to avoid it. Phobias can relate to one of the following:

- **Animal phobia** A fear of e.g. rats, dogs, snakes, spiders, cats, bees and wasps. You may avoid places where you think you will see the animal e.g. dogs outside shops, spiders in the loft, and wasps in bus shelters.
- **Height phobia** A fear of crossing bridges, going into tall buildings etc. It may also include the fear of flying. You may go out of your way to avoid these places e.g. drive an extra twenty miles a day to avoid having to cross a high bridge, be unable to visit a friend who lives in a high flat. You may fear e.g. getting dizzy and falling, having a panic, acting 'strange' or even feeling that you might jump off (you won't).
- **Fear of small spaces** A fear of going into small, small spaces such as lifts, cupboards, the back seat of two door cars etc. You may find it hard flying due to the anxiety caused when they close over the door leaving you feeling trapped. For example; you may fear that you will lose control if trapped in a lift with other people.
- **Fear of the dark** Fear of e.g. going to bed without leaving a light on or fearing that the lights will go out while you are alone. You may fear walking outside at night. This is a common fear among small children and can be taken into adulthood.
- **Social phobia** A fear of not coping with e.g. weddings, parties, talking to certain people e.g. strangers, attractive members of the opposite sex, people in authority etc. You may be afraid of how you are coming across



to other people. You may fear making a fool of yourself; other people criticising you; drawing attention to yourself. You may be afraid of eating or drinking in public. You may fear that you might say something stupid in conversation.

- **A fear of busy places** A fear of being in busy places. The most common places people fear are: cars, buses, trains, planes, traffic jams, shops/ supermarkets, queues, crowds, lifts, being alone at home, being far from home, escalators, cinemas/theatres, churches, pubs/restaurants, tunnels, shopping centres, large offices. You may be able to go out in the darkness or when you have someone with you.

**It is possible to have a phobia of anything!**  
Write down what you are afraid of.

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## Fighting the phobia

### Step 1 – Becoming more aware by keeping a diary

It is a good idea to keep a diary of situations you find difficult or scary. It will help you understand the things that are happening to you. Then you can fight the phobia. You can watch your own progress and notice what you are doing well.

Sometimes when we are stressed we only remember the bad days and not the good ones. Make a diary like the one below. Remember to rate your anxiety in a difficult situation (0 = not at all frightening, 10 = very frightening). As you progress you will see your anxiety rating for difficult situations go down.

Look at this example of how to fill in the diary.

Date and time	Doing what? Where?	How did you feel	How anxious am I? 1 = Only a little 8 = very anxious
Monday 5pm	Looking in the shed for my football, saw a massive spider.	Frightened and scared.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 8



Date and time	Doing what? Where?	How did you feel	How anxious am I? 1 = Only a little 8 = very anxious
			1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8



## Step 2 – Break down the challenges

The next step is to make a list of difficult things. Each thing will have a different rating (1 = no anxiety 8 = very anxious). Put the most difficult thing at the top, then the next most difficult one, and so on, all the way to the bottom, just like this example below.

Situation	Rating
<i>Let a spider run around my hand and arm</i>	8
<i>Control a spider in my hand</i>	8
<i>Let a spider walk across my finger</i>	7
<i>Touch a spider with my finger tip</i>	6
<i>Touch the spider with a pen</i>	4
<i>Hold the box with a spider in it</i>	3
<i>Look at a spider in a plastic box</i>	3

Use the challenge sheet below to make your list

Situation	Rating



### Step 3 – Face the situation

The best way to fight a phobia is to go back to the difficult situations – slowly. Go back to your 'Breaking down the challenges list' of situations or places you find scary. Start with the easiest at the bottom of the list. Practise going into this situation until you may feel able to cope with it and you notice your anxiety rating drop. Choose a more difficult thing and practise this. Do not be tempted to try any scary difficult things until you find the easier ones less scary.

### Step 4 - Be prepared

We need to think about how you can prepare for going into the difficult situations on your list. There are 2 things you can do to help with this:

- **Relaxation** – You might start to feel anxious about going into difficult situations. You need to notice when you first start to feel panic
- **Positive thinking** – when we are anxious and panicky our thinking can go out of control. Scary thoughts like *"I am going to die"* or *"I might faint"* feed our anxiety and make it worse. They are not true, but it is difficult not to think like this when you are in a scary situation. The most common scary thought is to think that the worst thing is going to happen. You end up in a vicious circle!





## Learn to relax

Worrying and fear often comes with some unpleasant physical sensations. When we worry, changes in our breathing and the tension of our muscles bring on these bodily sensations and make us feel even worse. These changes are warning signs that you are becoming anxious. Next we will learn what to do when you notice these signs.

## Breathing

By learning how to maintain a calm and relaxed rate of breathing, it is possible to stop many of the unpleasant physical symptoms we experience when feeling nervous and worried.

First we need to make sure that you are a **belly breather!** Put one hand on your belly and one on your chest, when you breathe in which hand moves the most? If it is the hand on your belly that's great, if it is the hand on your chest you need to change how you breathe. To get use to belly breathing push out your belly before you breath in, this will help you to get into the habit of belly breathing. It is tricky at first but you will get it with **practise.**



## Controlled breathing

When you're anxious your breathing gets faster. You need to learn to slow it down. Getting your breathing into a natural rhythm will soon get you breathing and feeling normal again.

Follow these three steps:

**1. Breath in through your nose for four.**

*1,2,3,4*

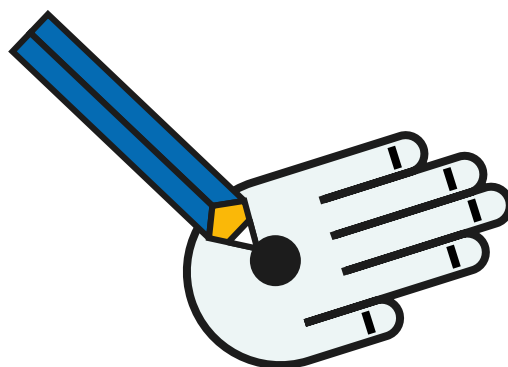
**2. Hold for two.**

*1,2*

**3. Out through your mouth for 6.**

*1,2,3,4,5,6*

To help you to practise this breathing, draw a black spot on your hand.



Every time you notice the spot that you have drawn practise the rhythm breathing once!



## Step 5 – Come up with a ‘Big Challenge Thought’

A big challenge thought is one that you can use to fight the negative thoughts. The next worksheet shows you to come up with a Big Challenge Thought. You need to use it with the breathing exercises whenever you are in a difficult situation.

### 1. Write down your worrying thought

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Decide how much you believe it using a 0 – 8 scale  
(with 8 being you totally believe it)

### 2) Try to find a more balanced approach, ask yourself what reasons you have for this thought

It might help if you think of:

- What would you say to yourself if you were not feeling so worried?
- What might you say to someone else if they said this to you?
- What might your friend say to you about your worries?
- What could you say to yourself that is more helpful and less worrying

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### 3) Big Challenge Thought and a new rating of worry (0 -10)

Big Challenge Thought

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Rating 0 – 8 scale



## In summary...

- Face what you fear – don't avoid things.
- Prepare - practise relaxation, control your breathing.
- 'Big challenge' any negative thoughts.
- Don't rely too much on others – practise coping by yourself.
- Don't be too hard on yourself – focus on what you can cope well with.
- Take your time, take things step-by-step - you will have good and bad days.
- Talk things through with someone you trust. Use this guide to help someone else to understand your phobia.



**If your difficulties come back... it's not a problem!**

The first thing to do is:

- Tell someone!
- Next, look through this booklet and read all the hard work which you have already done.
- Finally contact your CAMHS primary practitioner

**Your CAMHS primary practitioner is:**

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You can contact them by speaking to a member of school staff or you can contact a member of CAMHS team directly by calling:

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### **The primary intervention team**



# References

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