

Inclusion Thurrock IAPT
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inclusionthurrock.org

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Managing Panic

Session 3: Reducing and managing panic attacks

Jan 2020

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Housekeeping

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Keeping yourself safe


Sometimes emotional difficulties can lead to feelings of despair, including thoughts about hurting yourself, ending your own life or hurting others.

- Speak to a friend or family member
- Call NHS direct on 111 select option 2 'in mental health crisis'
- Call the Samaritans 116 123
- In an emergency go to A&E for assessment
- Visit you GP to explore your options
- Please find details in your handouts.



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Course Slides and Worksheets



- We will be going through quite a lot of information throughout this course.
- So, you may find it helpful to download the slides in advance or for your own records.


Slides and worksheets to support home tasks can be found on our website at:

<http://inclusionthurrock.org/panic-materials/>



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Course Overview



Session 1: Recognising symptoms of anxiety and panic

Session 2: Understanding why panic attacks happen

Session 3: Reducing and managing panic attacks



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Session Aims

To bring everything we have learned together	To recognise the patterns in your panic	To challenge catastrophic misinterpretations
To dispel common myths about panic	To introduce further support options	To learn that panic will naturally decrease and how we can help this process

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Recap:
What is panic?



- A sudden sensation of fear and anxiety.
- We experience overwhelming changes in our thoughts, physical feelings and behaviours.


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Why do we have panic symptoms?





Fight or Flight Response

- When we perceive a threat (real or imagined), our body gets ready to fight it off or run away.
- All of the changes in our thoughts, physical feelings and behaviours are our body's way of preparing us to fight or run.



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Panic is therefore our body's way of protecting us and helping us to survive




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Reducing Panic

Now that we know the symptoms of panic are safe and normal, we can start to challenge the fear that we may have about our panic.


An effective way to do this is to keep a Panic Diary...



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Panic Diary

Date & Situation (What happened, where, when, with who?)	Physical Body Symptoms (eg. dizziness, breathlessness, shaking, chest pain, nausea, choking)	Intensity of Panic (Rate from 0-100)	Negative Thought Misinterpretation (What did I think the symptoms meant? What did I think was going to happen?) Rate your belief in this thought from 0-100%	Behaviour (What did I do? What happened as a result of the panic?)	Alternative Explanation for symptoms (What the symptoms actually mean)




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Panic Diary: Why it Works

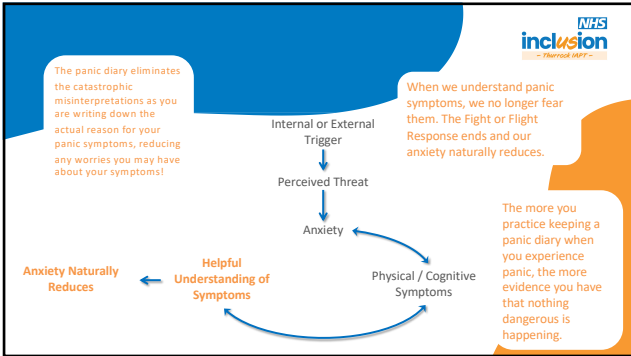
Fearing and trying to explain our panic symptoms is what keeps panic going!

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    graph TD
      A[Internal or External Trigger] --> B[Perceived Threat]
      B --> C[Anxiety]
      C --> D[Physical / Cognitive Symptoms]
      D --> E[Catastrophic Misinterpretation]
      E --> C
      E --> D
  
```



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Challenging Misinterpretations

- It can be difficult to challenge our beliefs about panic, especially if we have been fearful of our panic or have been avoiding it for a long time.
- The following are explanations to dispel some common myths we may believe about panic...



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"I'm having a heart attack"

Evidence for why people believe this	Counter evidence
Read about people dying from heart attacks	No one has died from panic
Anxiety affects our heart	Stress or panic is only a problem for the heart if you already have a serious health condition with your heart
Heard that people can die from fright	People under intense stress (e.g. soldiers) do not die from stress or panic
Experiencing tingling in arm and fingers and feel chest pain when panicking	Panic causes us to release adrenaline. Adrenaline is administered to start hearts, not stop them
Panic increases blood pressure and high blood pressure is dangerous for the heart	Panic causes a temporary increase in blood pressure, the same way exercise does and exercise is good for our heart. It is only when blood pressure is constantly high that it can become a problem

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"I'm having a heart attack"



- The heart is designed to react the way it does when we panic.
- It can feel unnatural as we don't often experience this type of heart activity, unless we are exercising for example.
- Unless you have a heart condition, panic is not a threat to your heart.
- If you are worried that you may have a heart condition, speak to your GP or medical practitioner.

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"I'm suffocating" or "I can't breathe"



- You are actually less likely to suffocate during panic than at any other time because you are taking in more oxygen.
- Our breath becomes shorter because we need more oxygen to keep our muscles prepared for Fight or Flight.

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"I'm losing control"



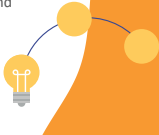
- It is common to feel as though you are losing control when you panic.
- This is because you have shifted from your conscious mind to your instinctive mind where things are just being regulated differently.
- The Fight or Flight Response is designed to keep us safe automatically, so do we need to control it?

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"I'm having a stroke"




- People often think this because they are trying to explain what is happening to them in terms that they know.
- However, strokes have nothing to do with panic attacks and none of the symptoms are the same.



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"I'm having a stroke"




Symptoms of Stroke	Symptoms of Panic
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sudden, terrible headache• Weakness on one side of body• Loss of vision in one or both eyes• Trouble walking, talking or understanding things	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dizziness or unsteadiness• Tension or numbness in certain areas• "Tunnel Vision"• Racing thoughts


Symptoms come Suddenly

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"I feel weak, I can't move or I might fall down"





- The feeling of weakness when you panic is caused by the shaking. Your muscles shake due to being in your Fight or Flight response, so they are ready for action.
- The feeling of being lightheaded or dizzy is where your body hasn't used up all of the extra oxygen that you have taken in when panicking.
- In fact, you are at your strongest when panicking because your large muscles are being supplied with plenty of oxygen.



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“I’m going to be embarrassed or humiliated”

- During panic, it is natural to worry that your body cannot take what is happening, but panic is a short-term response which can decrease very quickly.
- Have you actually been humiliated by a panic attack before?
- If you have, was it really that bad?
- Think of others – do you judge other people if you notice any of the anxiety symptoms we’ve talked about?

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“I’m going to faint”

- Fainting is not a survival option when we panic.
- If our Fight or Flight made us faint when we were faced with danger, would it be a good survival mechanism?
- Fear of fainting is often due to the dizziness and light-headedness that panic can cause.
- However, like a stroke, panic and fainting share no symptoms.

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“I’m going to faint”



Symptoms of Fainting

- Heart beat decreases
- Blood pressure falls
- Feel warm
- Feel sleepy
- Everything starts to slow down, fade to black

Symptoms of Panic

- Heart beats faster
- Blood pressure rises
- Dry mouth
- Unsteadiness
- Things seem fuzzy or bright

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But I've fainted in the past...

There are only a few situations in which fainting could happen:

- If you have a blood or needle phobia.
- If you have a pre-existing medical condition such as vasovagal syncope or low blood pressure.
- If you are fainting when you panic, seek advice from your GP.


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Have a belief that isn't covered?



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Take-home Technique

- During the course, you have started to explain your own panic symptoms.
- Today, we learned how to reduce future panic attacks using the **Panic Diary**.
- If you still experience panic attacks, record them using the panic diary and use your understanding of panic symptoms to explain what is actually happening in your body.
- Remind yourself that your fears or beliefs about panic are not true. Panic is an instinctive response to help us **survive**.

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Panic Diary: an example



Date & Situation (What happened, where, when, with who?)	Physical Body Symptoms (eg. dizziness, breathlessness, shaking, chest pain, nausea, choking)	Intensity of Panic (Rate from 0-100)	Negative Thought Misinterpretation (What did I think the symptoms meant? What did I think was going to happen?) Rate your belief in this thought from 0-100%	Behaviour (What did I do? What happened as a result of the panic?)	Alternative Explanation for symptoms (What the symptoms actually mean)
In a busy restaurant with my friends on Saturday.	Shortness of breath and feeling dizzy.	60/100	I can't breathe. I'm choking. 70%	Went to the bathroom.	I experienced shortness of breath because my breathing increased as my body tried to build up enough oxygen for my flight or fight. I then felt dizzy as my body wasn't using up the extra oxygen that I had inhaled. Both feelings are safe.

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Your Next Steps



- Throughout the course you have learned how to manage panic and our beliefs around it.
- For many, this will be enough to improve your wellbeing and you may not need any further treatment.
- However, for some people, the initial trigger for panic remains a problem that they wish to work on, even if it no longer leads to panic attacks.
- If that is the case, we have some treatment options that will allow you to manage the trigger itself.

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Your Next Steps




Low Intensity CBT

- Generalised Anxiety – general worries that seem like they won't stop coming.
- Specific Phobias – fear and avoidance of one specific thing that affects your life (e.g. Agoraphobia). Does not include more complex phobias like blood/needles, food/vomit or medical phobias.
- Low Mood & Depression

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Your Next Steps



High Intensity CBT

- Social Anxiety – anxiety specific to social situations and how you may act in them.
- Health Anxiety – anxiety specific to your health and the idea that you have a dangerous physical health condition.
- Post-traumatic Stress – anxiety related to the re-living and re-experiencing of a traumatic event from the past.

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Your Next Steps



For now, you will remain on the waiting list for the treatment agreed at your initial assessment. If you feel that things have changed and you may be suitable for a different type of treatment, or that you no longer need further treatment, please contact us for a Panic Review.

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Email: inclusionthurrock@mpft.nhs.uk

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