Inclusion Thurrock Talking Therapies
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Managing Panic

Session 1: Recognising symptoms of anxiety and panic

April 2024

Housekeeping

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Keeping Yourself Safe

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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 on **111**, select **Option 2** for mental health crisis support.
- Call the Samaritans on **116 123.**
- Text SHOUT on **85258.**
- Visit your GP to explore your options.
- In a life-threatening emergency go to A&E for assessment or call 999.

Nature of the Course

- Three webinar sessions.
- Starting 6:15pm, aim to end at 7:30pm, with time for questions.
- Evidence-based treatment programme for symptoms of panic and panic attacks.
- Home tasks to support you to manage your panic symptoms.
- A specific treatment programme but not ‘group therapy’.

Course Slides and Worksheets

- We will be going through quite a lot of information throughout this course.
- We have sent you a resources pack to go through in advance or for your own records.
- You can also download the slides from our website.

If you have not received your pack or have any issues, please contact us to discuss this further.

Course Overview

Session 1: Recognising symptoms of anxiety and panic.

Session 2: Understanding why panic attacks happen.

Session 3: Reducing and managing panic attacks.

Session Aims

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To recognise symptoms of anxiety and panic, and understand the differences between them.

To understand what panic attacks are and why they happen.

To learn about the cycle of panic.

Introduce home-tasks to enhance your learning through the course.

What is Anxiety?

- A general feeling of worry, tension or fear.
- A natural, human response to potential threats or stresses.
- Experienced through changes in our thoughts, physical feelings and behaviour.
- Something we will all experience at certain times and in certain situations.
- Something that can become a problem when it affects our ability to live our lives as we want to.

Symptoms of Anxiety in the Mind

- Feeling tense, nervous or unable to relax.
- Having a sense of dread, or fearing the worst.
- The world seems like it is speeding up or slowing down around you.
- Thinking others can see you are anxious, or are looking at you.
- Worrying about the future.

Symptoms of Anxiety in the Body

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Unsteadiness, light-headedness

Changes in vision

Heart beats faster

Muscle tension

Nausea

Sweating/hot flushes

Dizziness

Dry mouth or throat

Rapid breathing

Breathlessness

Bladder urgency

Shaking

What is a Panic Attack?

- A sudden rush of anxiety which may exaggerate your usual anxiety symptoms.
- You may notice additional symptoms that you don't usually experience when anxious.
- Generally lasting for around 5-20 minutes.
- Can be a response to something we fear, general stress or a specific threat.
- Can come 'out of the blue' when not anxious, or even asleep.

The Human Car Alarm

- The part of our brain which deals with anxiety is often called a faulty car alarm.
- It is designed to alert us to any dangers we may come across.
- Sometimes it is set off by a genuine problem, or something we actually need to be anxious about.
- More often than not, it is a gust of wind, or a leaf, or nothing at all.

Symptoms of a panic attack

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Somatic (Physical) Symptoms

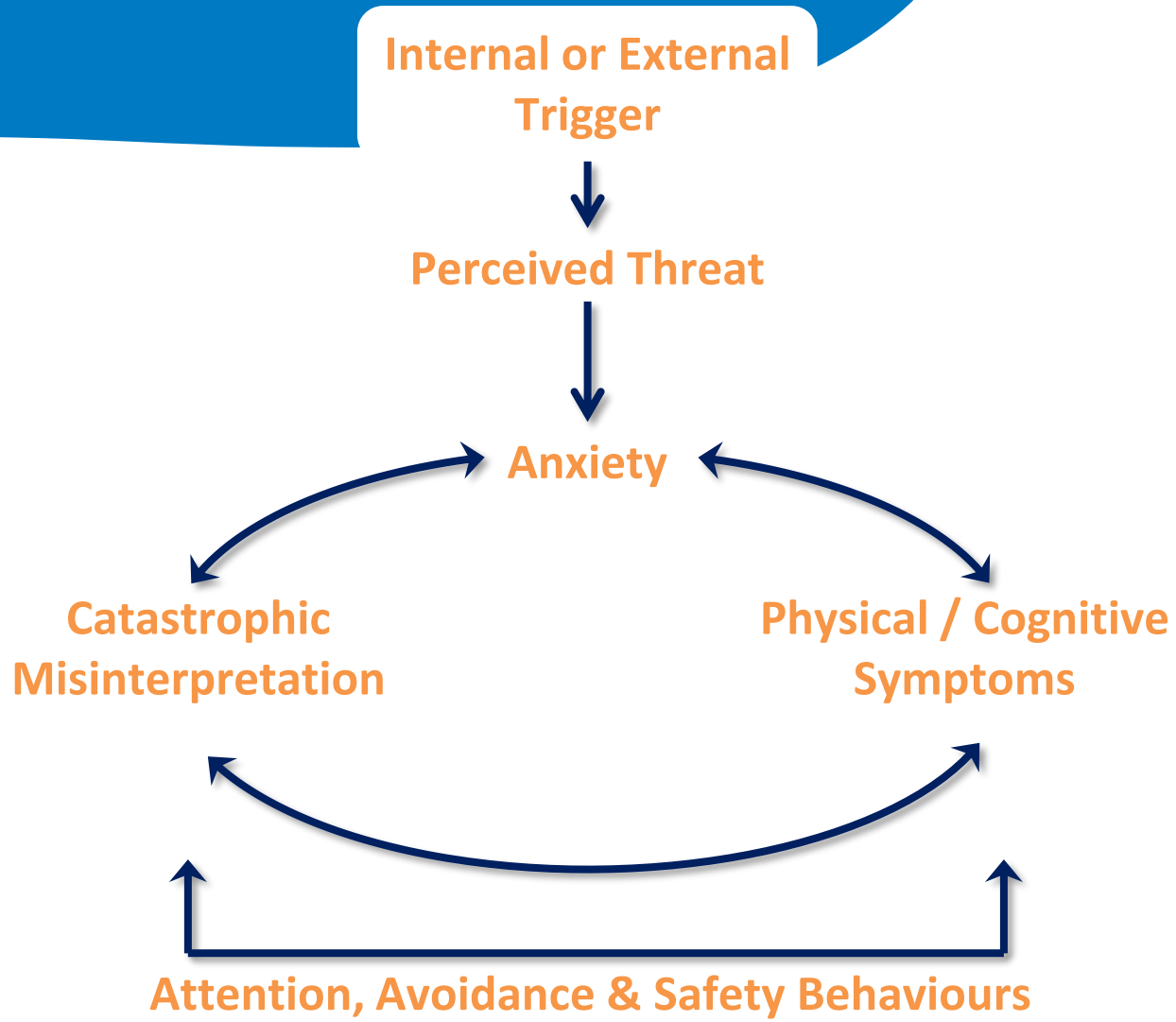
- Heart palpitations, pounding heart, or accelerated heart rate
- Sweating
- Trembling or shaking
- Sensations of shortness of breath or smothering
- Feeling of choking
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Nausea or abdominal distress
- Feeling dizzy, unsteady, lightheaded, or faint
- Chills or heat sensations
- Paresthesia (numbness or tingling sensations)

Cognitive (Psychological) Symptoms

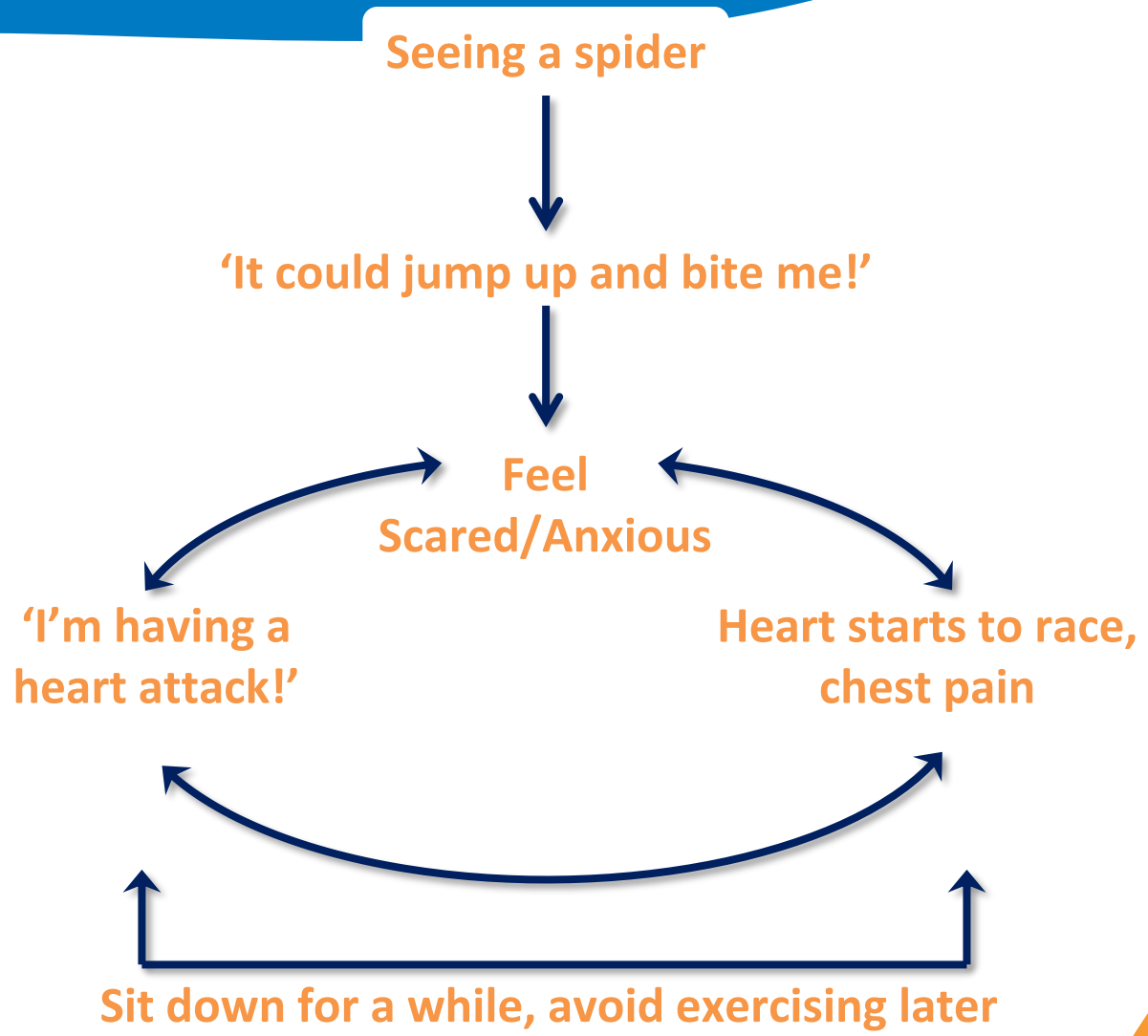
- De-realisation (feelings of unreality)
- De-personalisation (feeling detached from oneself)
- Fear of losing control or going crazy
- Fear of dying

You may not experience all of these – only 4 from this list are required to officially be classified as a panic attack.

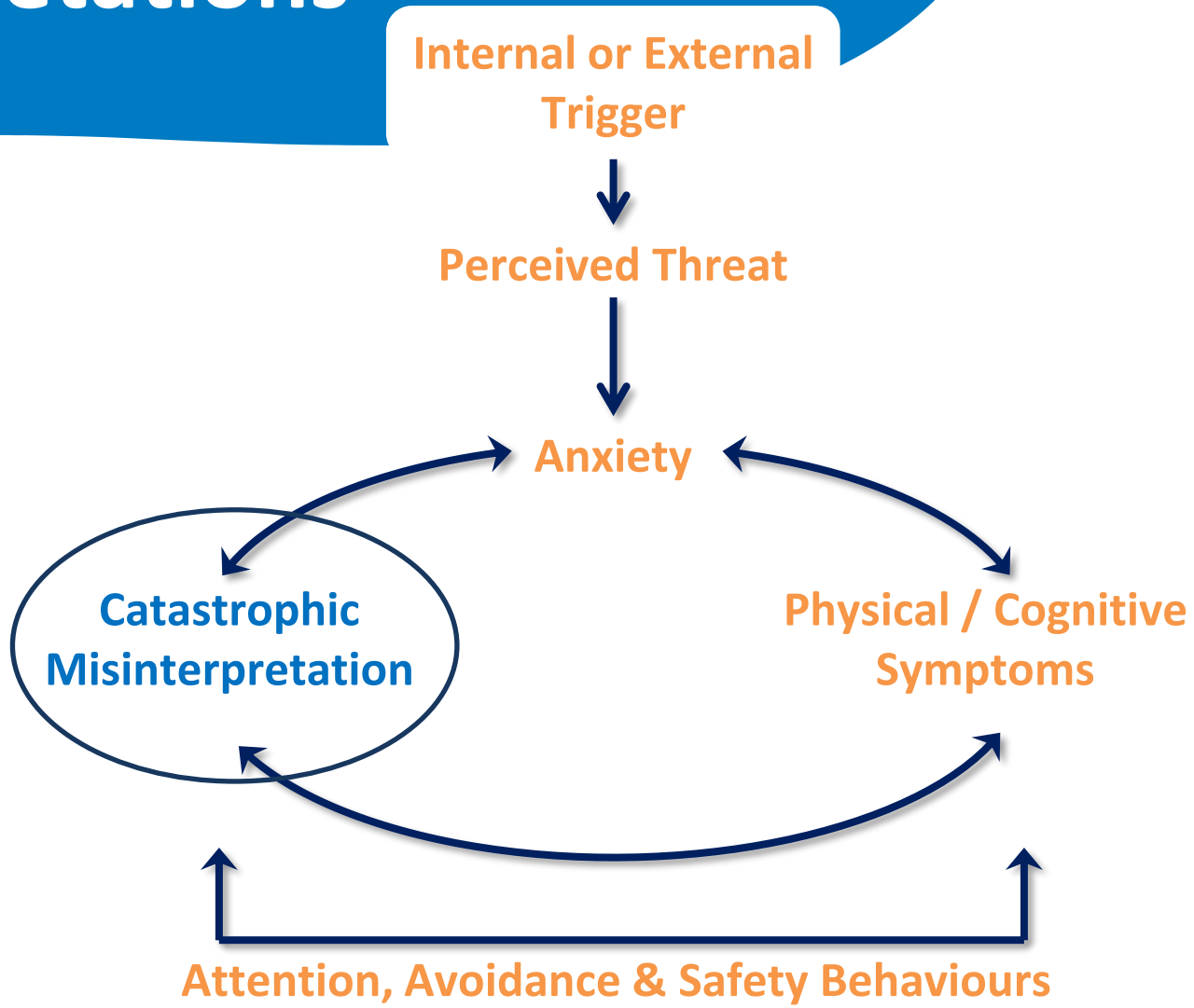
The Panic Cycle



The Panic Cycle: Example



The Panic Cycle: Catastrophic Misinterpretations



Catastrophic Misinterpretations

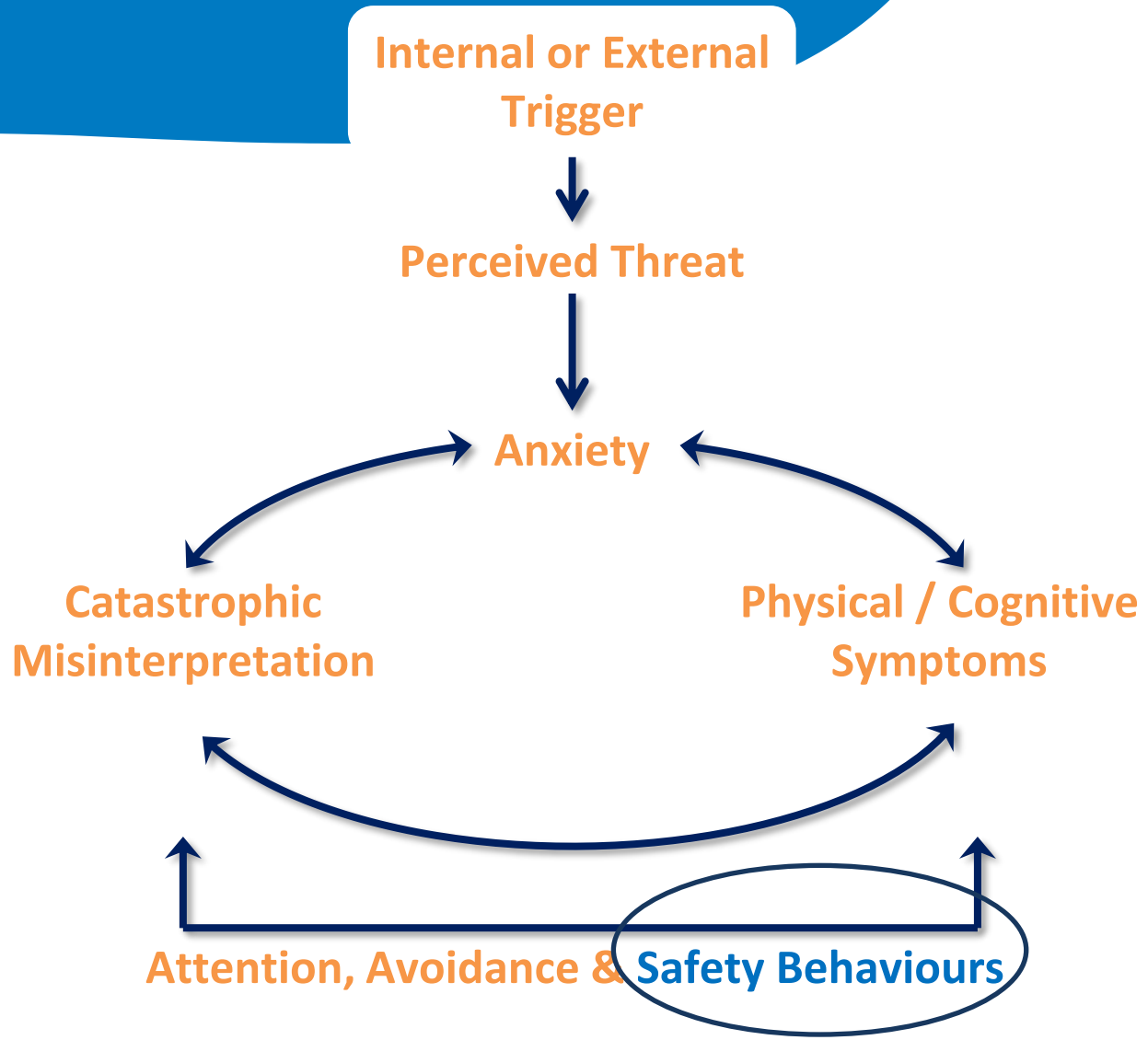
- The symptoms of panic can be very scary, especially when we don’t know what is causing them.
- When we notice these symptoms we try to explain them and often come to the conclusion that they are dangerous.
- When we assume something dangerous is happening in the body (e.g. a heart attack), we become more anxious, keeping the panic going.

Common Misinterpretations

Anxiety Symptoms	Misinterpretation
Heart racing and chest pain	
Feeling short of breath	
De-realisation or de-personalisation	
Dry mouth or throat	
Changes in vision	

- **Next week, we will start challenging these misinterpretations by finding out exactly what is happening in our bodies when we feel this way.**
- **For now, think about what you are worried might happen when you're panicking.**

The Panic Cycle: Safety Behaviours



Safety Behaviours

- In an attempt to avoid future panic attacks or to make anxious situations more comfortable, you might engage in:
  - Obvious Avoidance: Completely avoiding a place, object or activity that triggers symptoms of anxiety, *e.g.* avoiding spiders.
  - Subtle Avoidance: Not engaging in activities that may mimic symptoms of anxiety, e.g. exercise, or introducing new things to make you more comfortable, e.g. always being with others
- These are safety behaviours, they provide relief from some panic symptoms but only in the short-term.

Common Safety Behaviours

Misinterpretation	Safety Behaviour
‘I’m having a heart attack!’	
‘I’m going to faint!’	
‘I’m losing control, I’m going mad!’	
‘I could choke to death!’	
‘I’m going blind!’	

- **Next week, we will learn more about how these behaviours do not help us avoid having future panic attacks.**
- **For now, think of any safety behaviours you may have. There are many types and only a few are listed here.**

What is a Panic Attack?

Summarised

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A sudden rush of anxiety where both physical and cognitive anxiety symptoms are exaggerated.

Something that can happen to us when we are scared, under stress, threatened or completely out of the blue.

We misinterpret many panic symptoms as dangerous, which makes us more anxious and keeps the panic going.

We try to reduce our experiences of panic by using safety behaviours.

Home Task

- As we discussed earlier, experiences of panic are very personal and differ from person to person.
- Next week will allow you to understand what is really going on in your body when you're panicking.
- Before you do that, it is helpful to have a short summary of the symptoms you experience.

Spend some time before next session writing down how you experience panic – the physical and cognitive symptoms and the safety behaviours you use to try to manage them.

Home Task Examples

Physical	Cognitive	Safety Behaviour
Heart beats faster	‘I’m having a heart attack!’	Sit down to relax
Chest pains	‘I can’t breathe!’	Breathing exercises
Sweating	‘I need to get out!’	Avoid exercise later on
Hands shake	‘Everyone can tell I’m panicking!’	Hide hands in pockets, avoid other people

‘I experience panic attacks when I’m out in crowded places, or when I feel trapped. When I panic, I notice that my heart starts beating faster and my chest hurts. I worry that I am having a heart attack and need to find some space to relax. When I sit down, I try and focus on my breathing. I also notice my hands shaking and I start to sweat.’

Final Questions?

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