 Inclusion Thurrock Talking Therapies

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 [www.inclusionthurrock.org](http://www.inclusionthurrock.org)

# Managing Panic

Session 3: Reducing and managing panic attacks

# 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 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.



# 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

To reflect on the previous home task

To learn that panic will naturally decrease and how we can help this process

To dispel common myths about panic

To challenge catastrophic misinterpretations

To learn how to use a panic diary to reduce further panic attacks

To introduce further support options

# Reflections on Previous Session

- What do you remember from last week?
- What did you find useful?
- Did you try the home-task and if so, how did you get on?

Panic Symptom	Explanation
Heart rate increasing	My heart is pumping more blood to my muscles so they are prepared for Fight or Flight.
Sweating	My body is sweating to keep itself cool and make sure it is working effectively if I need to Fight or Flight.



# Recap:

## What is panic?

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



# 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.
- When we misinterpret our fight or flight symptoms as being harmful, it causes panic to occur.



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





# Reducing Panic

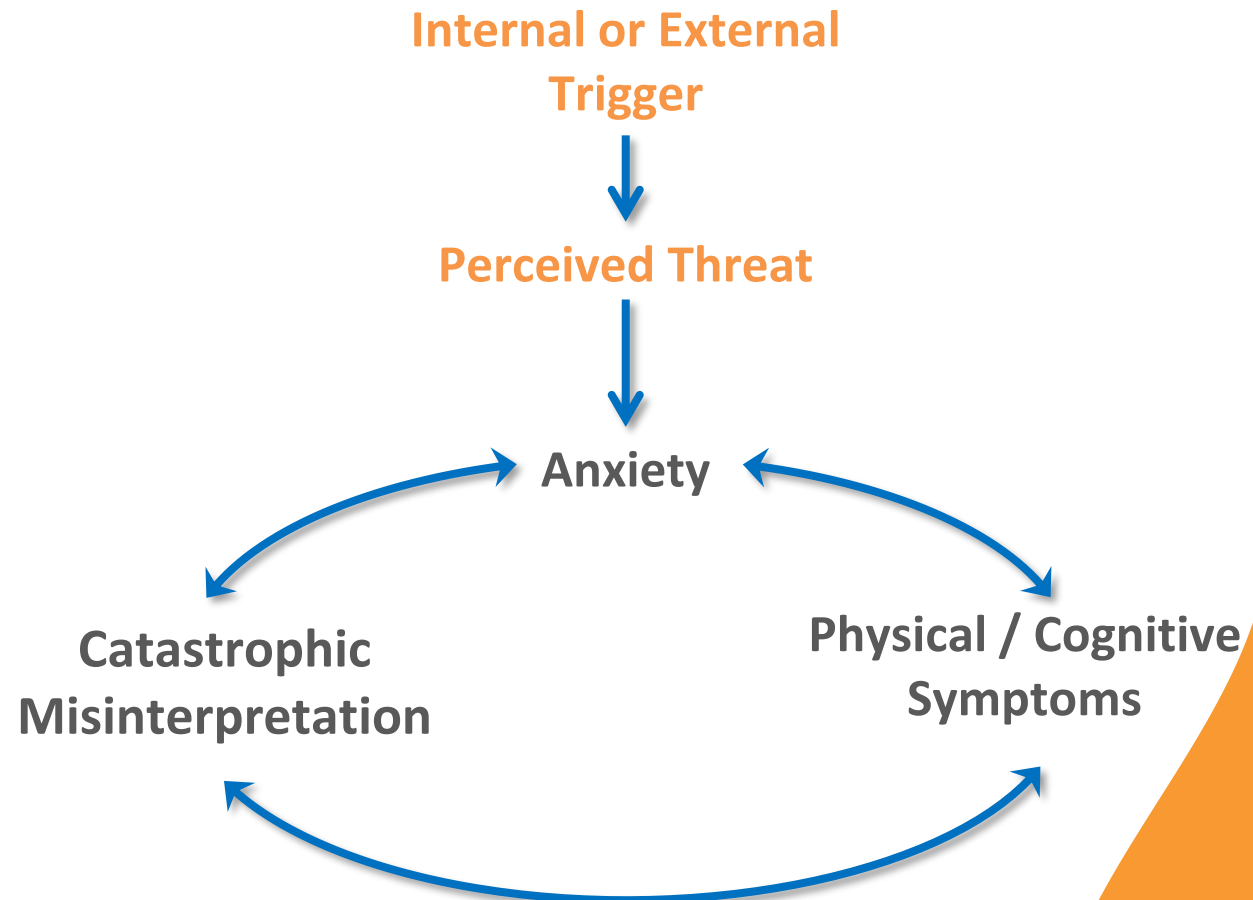
Now that we know the symptoms of panic are safe and normal, we can start to challenge the fear that we may have about our panic.

**Lets look at why challenging our fears about panic is helpful...**

# Breaking the Cycle

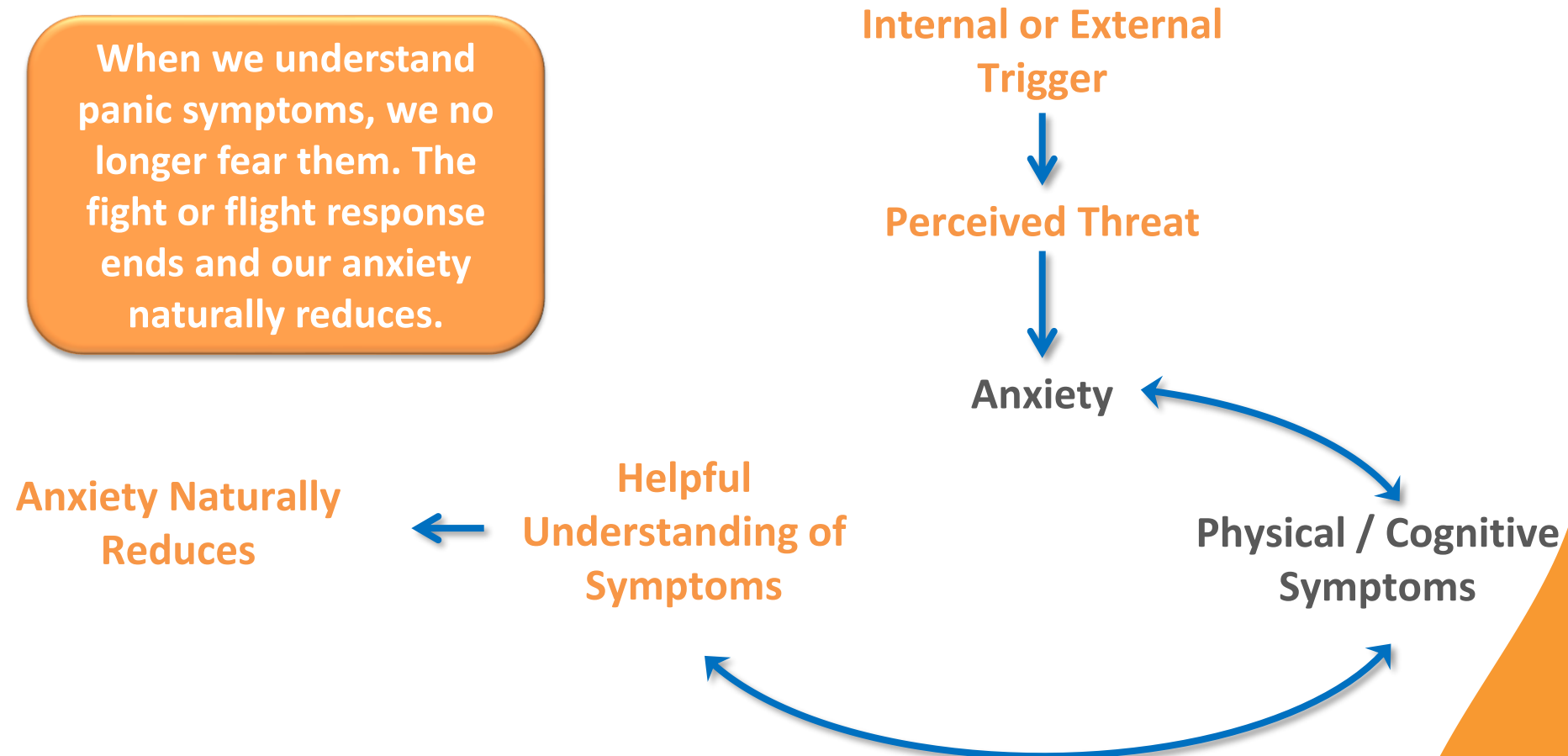


Misinterpreting  
our panic symptoms as  
dangerous is what keeps  
panic going!



# Breaking the Cycle

When we understand panic symptoms, we no longer fear them. The fight or flight response ends and our anxiety naturally reduces.



# 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.
- Remember, believing something is true does not necessarily mean that it is!

# Challenging Misinterpretations

- To make challenging our misinterpretations easier we are going to look at several examples of:
  - Why people might believe a catastrophic misinterpretation.
  - How we know these beliefs are *not* accurate.

# “I’m suffocating” or “I can’t breathe”

- People tend to believe this during panic as their breathing becomes quicker than usual.
- We know that our breathing changes due to our fight or flight response, which is there to keep us safe.
- You are taking in lots of oxygen in case you need to run or fight, so you are actually less likely to suffocate during panic than at any other time!



# “I feel weak, I can’t move or I might fall down”

- People may believe this during panic due to feeling shaky or lightheaded.
- It may not feel like it, but you are at your strongest when panicking because your large muscles are being supplied with plenty of oxygen.
- Often we do not run or fight, so the extra oxygen can make us feel lightheaded and our bodies find other ways to use it up e.g., shaking.



# “I’m having a heart attack”

- When experiencing panic, people frequently misinterpret chest pain, tingling sensations, and/or heart palpitations as signs of a heart attack.
- When the fight or flight response is activated, adrenaline is released, which causes changes in heart rate and blood flow which can cause the symptoms above.
- Although this can feel very frightening it is safe. Our body is designed to react this way during panic as a survival mechanism.





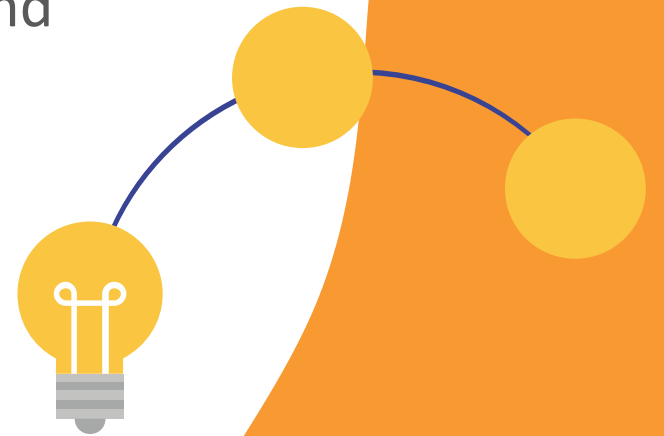
# “Panic is causing long-term damage to my health”

- People under intense long-term stress (e.g. soldiers) do not die from stress or panic.
- Similar to exercise, panic temporarily raises blood pressure; it's only when blood pressure is consistently high that it can become a problem.
- 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.



# “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.



# “I’m having a stroke”

## Symptoms of Stroke

- Sudden, terrible headache
- Weakness on one side of body
- Loss of vision in one or both eyes
- Trouble walking, talking or understanding things

**Symptoms  
come on  
suddenly**

## Symptoms of Panic

- Dizziness or unsteadiness
- Tension or numbness in certain areas
- ‘Tunnel Vision’
- Racing thoughts

# “I’m going to faint”

- 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.
- Plus 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?



# “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

**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.

# “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?



# “I’m going to be embarrassed or humiliated”

- Most panic symptoms are internal and less obvious to see if you’re not the person experiencing them.
- Have you had a panic attack and felt embarrassed before? Did you feel as embarrassed as you thought you would? How did you cope?
- Think of others – do you judge other people if you notice any of the anxiety symptoms we’ve talked about?





Have a belief that isn't covered?



# Take-home Technique

- During the course, you have started to explain your own panic symptoms.
- Now, we will learn 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**.

<b>Date &amp; Situation</b> (What happened, where, when, with who?)	<b>Physical Body Symptoms</b> (e.g.: dizziness, breathlessness, shaking, chest pain, nausea, choking)	<b>Intensity of Panic</b> (Rate from 0-100)	<b>Negative Thought / Misinterpretation</b> (What did I think the symptoms meant? What did I think was going to happen?) <b>Rate your belief in this thought from 0-100%</b>	<b>Behaviour</b> (What did I do? What happened as a result of the panic?)	<b>Alternative Explanation for symptoms</b> (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. My friends are going to think I'm embarrassing. 70%	Tried to distract myself by scrolling on my phone, then went to the bathroom.	<p>My breathing changed because of my fight/flight response which pumps the inhaled oxygen around my body in case there is a threat.</p> <p>I felt dizzy as I wasn't using up the extra oxygen, like all symptoms this is safe and will pass.</p> <p>Panic is very common, my friends didn't seem embarrassed and invited me for dinner next month.</p>

**You can find a blank Panic Diary to use from your resources pack or our website!**

# 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. Or, you may wish to address another problem that hasn't been discussed in this course.
- If that is the case, we have some further treatment options.

# Your Next Steps

You will each receive a **review call** to discuss your next steps with us.

This will be a short call to review how you found the course and to discuss your next steps.

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