



# Wellbeing

## Anxiety

### Identifying and Managing Anxiety Part 2

How we think about a situation is critical to the level of anxiety we feel about it – and quite often it feels like we don't always have control over what we think. But we do. It's just a skill that needs to be practised. When we use our stress diary (which we explored in the article last week) to identify the thoughts we have when we feel anxious, we can pick up on them more consciously, and either distract ourselves (through mindfulness or activity) or directly challenge them.

There are three very common thought biases when it comes to anxiety:

1. **Exaggeration:** assuming everything is bound to go wrong, because if it always does why would this time be any different?
2. **Jumping to conclusions:** thinking you know what is happening because a worst-case scenario has come to mind (e.g. James is late from work he must have been in an accident)
3. **Focussing on the negative:** spending too much time remembering the bad things in our day and ignoring all the little wins and positives.

When we think like this, we will only increase that anxiety more, and get into a pattern of thinking this way more regularly.

#### Thought Balancing

Through actively practising 'thought balancing', we can catch these negative biases early, and rationalise with ourselves to reduce our anxiety.

So how does it work?

The first thing to do is to imagine yourself in a court of law, arguing against the thought you had. Ask yourself (and be serious about this) what actual, FACTUAL evidence do you have to suggest that the anxious thought you had is true. Really true. If it helps, pretend you are a defence lawyer helping your friend against their negative thoughts!

Identified anxious thought	Rationalised evidence	New balanced thought
<i>Jamie is late from work; he must have been in an accident</i>	<i>No call from police No sign of an accident Jamie is a good driver He's only 10 minutes late</i>	<i>Jamie is probably stuck in traffic. I'll give him another half an hour/hour before I check in.</i>
<i>My colleagues don't like or respect me</i>	<i>No one has ever told me they don't like me They include me in meetings Everyone is less sociable at the moment I have positive conversations with them most days My work is appreciated, i have nver been told otherwise.</i>	<i>I have no evidence of being disliked or disrespected, my work relationships are better than I thought.</i>

Almost every time we revise our thinking this way, we start to realise there is no real evidence, because what we are worrying about is not true – it's just a thought, and those can be overcome.