



## Panic Stations

### Module 7

## Evaluation and Balanced Thinking

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**: Evaluation and Balanced Thinking**

When you challenge your thinking by using the Thought Diary, you describe an **A**ctivating Event and you identify your automatic and unhelpful **B**eliefs and thoughts (including the Hot Thought) that have contributed to your experiencing distressing emotions (**C**onsequences). You then use the **D**isputation section to challenge your hot thought. This process helps you to start changing how you think to improve how you feel.

The aim of this Info Pax is to give you information about how you can evaluate your thinking to include your thought disputation. This will enable you to develop balanced thinking.

Changing your thinking to improve how you feel is not just thinking the *opposite* of negative thoughts. Swinging the pendulum to the opposite extreme and being overly positive can sometimes be just as unhelpful. Instead, it is important to create a **balanced thought**. Look at this example.

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**Hot Thought:** “I’m going to get so panicky in my new job that I’ll get fired”

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**Overly Positive Thought**

Everything’s going to be fine. As if I’m going to have a panic attack. I won’t even get the slightest bit anxious, I’ve done this for years. It will be fantastic.

**Outcome:** In this case, thinking overly positive thoughts might lead to unrealistic expectations.

After all, we all get anxious sometimes, so if for some reason you do get anxious, it is easy to then feel disappointed.

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**Balanced thought**

I might be anxious in my new job, but it doesn’t mean I’ll have a panic attack. Even if I do, I have valuable skills and experience. Besides, most people get anxious in new situations.

**Outcome:** In this case, thinking in a balanced way means that even if you do get anxious, you can still acknowledge your achievements and skills.

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As you can see, balanced thinking means **E**valuating your thoughts and including the positive and the negatives – both of which are a part of our everyday lives. Think of yourself as a judge, trying to balance up the facts of the case, taking into consideration all of the available evidence.

**To create a balanced thought**, ask yourself, “How can I revise my hot thought to take into account all the evidence I have listed?” and write down your answer to this question. This becomes your new, balanced thought. A balanced and helpful thought or belief is one that takes into consideration all the evidence, objective information, and alternative viewpoints. This is the fifth step of the ABC analysis – the **E**valuation, where you replace your original, unhelpful thought with this new, balanced, and helpful belief.



After you have written down your new, balanced thought or belief, ask yourself, “How do I feel now?” Look at the most intense emotion you identified in section **C**, and re-rate how intense that emotion feels for you now. Often, you will find that it is not as extreme and distressing. Finally, read through the Detective Work and Disputation section again, and re-rate how much you believe the hot thought now.

This final step of replacing your unhelpful (hot) thoughts with balanced thoughts is very important. Challenging your beliefs and evidence testing is the process of change, but the final step is where you **MAKE** the change. You’ll probably find that this process becomes easier after some practice. So keep it up. Over the next two pages, an example of the full Thought Diary (steps A to E) is provided, followed by one that is blank, for your use. Keep practising and remember that you can be your own expert at managing your moods!

*Thought Diary (example)*

**A Activating Event**

This may be either: An actual event or a situation, a thought, a mental picture or recollection.

*Walking into the meeting room at work*

**B Beliefs**

1. List all statements that link A to C. Ask yourself: "What was I thinking?" "What was I saying to myself?" "What was going through my head at the time?"
2. Find the most distressing (hot) thought and underline it
3. Rate how much you believe this thought between 0 to 100.

*"I can't breathe - I'm going to suffocate"*

*I'm going to have an attack in front of everyone"*

*"I'll have to run from the room and they'll think I'm crazy"*

**Thought discovery question: "... and what does this mean?"**

*"I'm going crazy" (85)*

**C Consequences**

1. Write down words describing how you feel.
2. Underline the one that is most associated with the activating event.
3. Rate the intensity of that feeling (0 to 100).

*Panic (90)*

*Stressed (60)*

**Unhelpful Thinking Styles**

Do you recognise any unhelpful thinking styles you might have been using? (Mental filter, jumping to conclusions, personalisation, catastrophising, black & white thinking, shoulding & musting, overgeneralisation, labelling, emotional reasoning, disqualifying/ignoring positives)

- *Catastrophising*
- *Jumping to conclusions -Mind reading*
- *Jumping to conclusions - Predictive thinking*

1. Jot down any physical sensations you experienced or actions carried out.
  - *Heart pounding, lightheaded, dry mouth, fast breathing*
  - *walked close to the wall*
  - *Left to get a drink of water*

**D Detective Work & Disputation**

<b>My HOT Thought</b> <i>"I'm going crazy"</i>	
<b>FACTUAL EVIDENCE FOR MY HOT THOUGHT</b>	<b>FACTUAL EVIDENCE AGAINST MY HOT THOUGHT</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>I feel strange, like I'm not connected to my body</i></li> <li>- <i>I can't think clearly, my thoughts keep racing</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>The symptoms I have are due to the fight-flight response</i></li> <li>- <i>I am still able to recognise how I am thinking</i></li> <li>- <i>I have had these sensations before and it only takes a little while before they go down</i></li> </ul>

**Disputation questions:**

- *The symptoms I have are part of a normal fear response. Everybody has similar sensations when they are in fight-flight, so it's unlikely that I am going crazy.*
- *I'm stressed about the meeting because there's so much to do before the end of the month*
- *Thinking this way adds to my anxiety and then I end up not concentrating on what people are saying.*

**E End Result**

**Balanced Thoughts:** After looking at all the evidence for and against your hot thought, and having considered the disputation questions, replace the hot thought with helpful, balanced thought/s.

*I might feel a bit strange, but it doesn't mean I'm going crazy. Many of these symptoms are common to everyone when they experience fear and anxiety. I'm stressed about work and that might be why I'm feeling some of these sensations to begin with. They're not harmful and they tend to go down after a while anyway.*

**Re-rate Emotion:** Now, re-rate the emotion you underlined in C, from 0 to 100.

40

**Re-rate Hot Thought:** Read through Detective Work & Disputation. Now re-rate how much you believe the hot thought, between 0 to 100.

30

## *Thought Diary*

### **A Activating Event**

This may be either: An actual event or a situation, a thought, a mental picture or recollection.

### **B Beliefs**

1. List all statements that link A to C. Ask yourself: "What was I thinking?" "What was I saying to myself?" "What was going through my head at the time?"
2. Find the most distressing (hot) thought and underline it
3. Rate how much you believe this thought between 0 to 100

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### **C Consequences**

1. Write down words describing how you feel.
2. Underline the one that is most associated with the activating event.
3. Rate the intensity of that feeling (0 to 100).

1. Jot down any physical sensations you experienced or actions carried out.

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### **Unhelpful Thinking Styles**

Do you recognise any unhelpful thinking styles you might have been using? (Mental filter, jumping to conclusions, personalisation, catastrophising, black & white thinking, shoulding & musting, overgeneralisation, labelling, emotional reasoning, disqualifying/ignoring positives)

**D Detective Work & Disputation**

<b>My HOT Thought</b>	
<b>FACTUAL EVIDENCE FOR MY HOT THOUGHT</b>	<b>FACTUAL EVIDENCE AGAINST MY HOT THOUGHT</b>

**Disputation questions:**

- What other ways are there of viewing the situation?
- If I were not anxious, how would I view the situation?
- Realistically, what is the likelihood of that happening?
- How might someone else view the situation?
- Does it really help me to think this way?
- Think of some helpful self-statements

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**E End Result**

**Balanced Thoughts:** After looking at all the evidence for and against your hot thought, and having considered the disputation questions, replace the hot thought with helpful, balanced thought/s.

**Re-rate Emotion:** Now, re-rate the emotion you underlined in C, from 0 to 100.

**Re-rate Hot Thought:** Read through Detective Work & Disputation. Now re-rate how much you believe the hot thought, between 0 to 100.

 **F : Following Through**

Often, many people say they can understand the new helpful thought or belief in their minds, but find it difficult to “feel” it or believe it. They understand that the new belief is balanced and helpful, but at the same time, are not all that convinced. This is probably because the balanced thought or belief may have been newly ‘activated’ into the knowledge system, but has yet to be integrated into the person’s belief system.

This will take time and a bit of practice because you have probably established a habit of thinking in an unhelpful way, especially when you are anxious. Now is the time to uproot the old habits and establish a new pattern of balanced and helpful thinking. This process requires that you re-train yourself to think in a helpful way and continue to practice it until it becomes an unconscious skill. It’s all about repetition, repetition, repetition. One day, it will feel right and you might not even realise it. Remember how we learned to tie our shoelaces? We kept practising until we were no longer conscious of the way we bring the laces together and how we tie the bow. Learning to think in helpful ways goes through the same process.

### **Thought cards**

You might want to write out your balanced beliefs on small cards and carry them in your pockets or handbags so that you can refer to them regularly and in situations where you may become upset or distressed. Remember that it takes a little time for a new habit to be established. Be persistent in practicing your new helpful beliefs so that they will be integrated into your belief system. Use the Thought Diary whenever you feel upset or distressed, and work through the process of identifying, challenging, and changing your unhelpful beliefs. When you become familiar with this process, you can become better at managing your moods.

### **Turning your thoughts into actions**

Another important way of integrating the helpful and balanced thoughts into your belief system is to **ACT ON THEM!** This means applying the balanced thoughts to your life and translating them into action. Ask yourself, “**How can I change what I do to reinforce my balanced thoughts?**” In the example that we’ve been using over the last few modules, the balanced thoughts are: *“I might feel a bit strange, but it doesn’t mean I’m going crazy. Many of these symptoms are common to everyone when they experience fear and anxiety. I’m stressed about work and that might be why I’m feeling some of these sensations to begin with. They’re not harmful and they tend to go down after a while anyway..”* What do you think this person could do to reinforce their balanced thoughts? Sometimes, taking a look at the consequences (the “C”) might give you some ideas. For example, they could try to stay in the situation rather than leaving, or perhaps they could try to walk through to the room without walking close to the wall. If you have completed a thought diary, you can probably already think of some ideas for yourself.

Following through is especially important if you often avoid doing certain things or avoid certain situations. Avoidance of actions or situations can maintain and perpetuate anxiety because you never give yourself the chance to show that you can stay in the situation. We will be discussing this further in the modules to come, but for now try to make small changes that can more strongly reinforce your balanced thoughts.

We’ve worked through a substantial portion of how you can change your thinking to combat social anxiety. Now, just keep going. **Follow through.** Keep reviewing and practising those helpful and balanced thoughts AND act on them!

## **Reviewing the ABC's – and the DEF's**

We've spent quite a while on looking at all the different components of how thoughts influence feelings, and how you can start changing your thoughts to change your feelings. It might be useful to review this process now, and summarise all the new steps that you've learnt. Below is an outline of the general steps you need to take in order to replace unhelpful thoughts with more balanced thoughts.

### **STEP 1. Recognise the activating event and the consequences (“A” & “C”)**

The very first step in being able to manage your feelings is to initially recognise when you are experiencing a strong feeling and to be able to name the feeling. It also means recognising what kinds of situations activate the whole thinking-feeling process and what kinds of consequences result.

- Activating events are an objective “snapshot” of the situation, with facts only – not beliefs or feelings.
- Activating events include situations and events, but also memories and thinking about something.
- Consequences include emotions especially (there could be more than one), as well as physical sensations and behaviours.
- In the thought diary, underline the strongest emotion, then rate the intensity between 0-100.

### **STEP 2. Identify the thoughts and beliefs (“B”)**

Now that you know what you are feeling it is necessary to identify what you are saying to yourself or thinking. These are your beliefs, and you usually need to slow down your thinking and look at what's going on beneath the surface thought to get a good idea of how your thinking is influencing your feeling.

- Use the unhelpful thought discovery questions to get at the underlying thoughts (eg “what is so bad about that?”)
- In the thought diary, underline the “hot thought” – the thought that relates most to the strongest emotion – and rate how much you believe the thought between 0-100.
- Identify any unhelpful thinking styles that relate to the unhelpful thoughts.

### **STEP 3. Do some detective work and disputation to weigh up the evidence (“D”)**

Okay, so now you have identified the beliefs, and the “hot thought” that is producing the intense feeling. Now the next very important step is to do some detective work and disputation, examining the evidence for and against what you are thinking.

- Identify what evidence there might be for the hot thought
- Ask yourself the disputation questions, such as looking at things from a different perspective, assessing the realistic probability of things, and making sure your not missing the positives.
- Challenge the unhelpful thinking styles

### **STEP 4. Replace the unhelpful thought with a balanced thought (“E” and “F”)**

Now that you have thoroughly evaluated all of the evidence, you are in a position to generate a more balanced thought. Rather than being unrealistically positive, a balanced thought is a thought that takes into consideration the evidence that does and does not support your hot thought.

- Incorporate aspects of the evidence for and against the hot thought that can contribute to a helpful, balanced thought.
- In the thought diary, re-rate what was your most intense emotion between 0-100.
- In the thought diary, re-rate how much you believe in your hot thought between 0-100.
- Try to strengthen your new balanced thought by using thought cards or finding ways to turn your thoughts into actions.

## Module Summary

- After completing A to D, ask yourself, “How can I revise my hot thought to take into account all the evidence I have listed?” Then, write out an alternative explanation, which becomes your new, balanced thought
- A balanced thought or belief is one that takes into consideration all the evidence, objective information, and alternative viewpoints
- Replace your original, unhelpful hot thought with this new, balanced, and helpful belief
- Integrating balanced beliefs into your system takes practice and repetition
- You could write out your balanced beliefs on cards and refer to them regularly and in situations where you may become upset or distressed
- Integrating helpful and balanced thoughts into your belief system also requires you to act on them – applying them to your life and translating them into action
- In reviewing the ABCDEF process, there are a number of steps to follow
  1. Recognise the activating event and the consequences (“A” & “C”)
  2. Identify the thoughts and beliefs (“B”)
  3. Do some detective work and disputation to weigh up the evidence (“D”)
  4. Replace the unhelpful thought with a balanced thought and act according to that thought (“E” and “F”)

In the next module, we will discuss how to challenge strongly-held thoughts and beliefs that seem particularly hard to let go of.



## About This Module

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### Some of the material in this module was taken from

Nathan, P.R., Rees, C.S., Lim, L., & Smith, L.M. (2001). *Mood Management – Anxiety: A Cognitive Behavioural Treatment Programme for Individual Therapy*. Perth: Rioby Publishing.

### BACKGROUND

The concepts and strategies in this module have been developed from evidence based psychological practice, primarily Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy (CBT). CBT for panic disorder is a type of psychotherapy that is based on the theory that panic disorder is a result of problematic cognitions (thoughts) and behaviours. There is strong scientific evidence to support that cognitions and behaviours can play an important role in panic disorder, and that targeting cognitions and behaviours in therapy can help many people to overcome panic disorder. Examples of this evidence have been reported in the following:

Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists Clinical Practice Guidelines Team for Panic Disorder and Agoraphobia. (2003). Australian and New Zealand clinical practice guidelines for the treatment of panic disorder and agoraphobia. *Aust N Z J Psychiatry*, 37(6), 641-56.

### REFERENCES

These are some of the professional references used to create this module.

Barlow, D.H. (2002). *Anxiety and Its Disorders: The Nature and Treatment of Anxiety and Panic (2nd Edition)*. London: Guilford Press

Craske, M.G., & Barlow, D.H. (2001). *Panic disorder and agoraphobia*. In D.H. Barlow (Ed.), *Clinical Handbook Of Psychological Disorders, Third Edition*. New York: Guilford Press.

### FURTHER READING

There have been many other information resources written for people with panic attacks and panic disorder.

Barlow, D. H., & Craske, M. G. (2000). *Mastery of your anxiety and panic (3rd edition)*. San Antonio, TX: The Psychological Corporation. (ISBN: 0127850783)

Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists. (2003). *Panic Disorder and Agoraphobia: Treatment Guide for Consumers and Carers*. Available: <http://www.ranzcp.org/publicarea/cpg.asp> (click on "Panic Disorder and Agoraphobia"). Accessed Feb. 2004.

Zuercher-White, E. (1998). *An End To Panic: Breakthrough Techniques For Overcoming Panic Disorder (2nd Edition)*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications. (ISBN: 1567313760)

### "PANIC STATIONS"

We would like to thank Uta Juniper for the title of the InfoPax that this module forms part of:

Nathan, P., Correia, H., & Lim, L. (2004). *Panic Stations! Coping with Panic Attacks*. Perth: Centre for Clinical Interventions.

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