

The 3 C's of anxiety

Control, certainty and comfort: what anxiety feeds on, and how to stop feeding it

Anxiety, a common experience that many individuals face, can often feel overwhelming and debilitating. Understanding anxiety and the factors that contribute to its persistence is an essential step toward managing and mitigating its impact on our lives. Here, we will delve into the three C's that anxiety feeds off: certainty, control, and comfort. By gaining insight into these elements and discovering healthy coping mechanisms, we can begin to take control of our anxiety and promote emotional well-being.

CONTROL

Control, or the lack thereof, plays a significant role in nurturing anxiety. As teenagers, we grapple with demanding schedules, external expectations, and a desire to steer our lives in a specific direction. The immense pressure to have complete authority over our circumstances often leads to feelings of powerlessness and increased anxiety.

CERTAINTY

Anxiety strongly thrives on a desire for certainty in an uncertain world. As teenagers, we face an array of challenges, such as exams, relationships, and future goals, that generate feelings of unease due to their inherent uncertainties. The need to know the outcome and ensure everything falls into place can intensify anxiety.

COMFORT

Anxiety often feeds off our inclination to seek comfort in familiar surroundings and routines. While routines provide a sense of safety, clinging to them too tightly can hinder personal growth and perpetuate anxiety. Stepping outside of our comfort zones can feel intimidating but can also be a catalyst for growth and self-discovery.

A note on wording. This workbook was written for teenagers, which is why two sentences say “as teenagers, we...”. Everything in it applies at any age; read those lines as “as people”.

WHERE AM I FEEDING ANXIETY THIS WEEK? · 0 = NOT AT ALL, 10 = CONSTANTLY

Control	Certainty	Comfort

Control

Reflection questions from the original, with room to write

“Anxiety’s grip is strongest when we try to control everything within our reach. Release the need for absolute power, and instead, find solace in mastering the art of controlling our responses and attitudes. For it is in surrendering control that we gain true freedom from anxiety’s relentless grasp.”

However, it’s crucial to understand that control is not an absolute. Rather than fixating on trying to control every aspect of our lives, it’s more beneficial to focus on managing what we can control. By directing our attention to our thoughts, actions, and reactions, we can establish a sense of inner control and navigate uncertainty more effectively. Remember, real power lies in how we respond to situations rather than our attempt to dictate every outcome.

How do you react when you feel like you’re losing control of a situation? How does this impact your anxiety levels?

Reflect on instances when you’ve tried to control situations or outcomes beyond your control. What impact did this have on your mental well-being?

Can you identify any triggers that activate your need for control? How can you explore alternative ways of managing these triggers without resorting to controlling behaviors?

Identify any patterns of perfectionism or placing excessive pressure on yourself. How does this relate to your anxiety, and how can you shift your mindset to prioritize self-compassion and acceptance?

What activities or hobbies help you feel more empowered and in control of your emotions? How can you incorporate these activities into your daily routine to reduce anxiety?

In my control

The circle of control, then your own

As humans, we sometimes find ourselves consumed by external factors, worrying unnecessarily about things outside our control. However, mastering the art of letting go can lead to profound shifts in our mindset and overall happiness.

Imagine a circle that represents your control. Within this circle are the things you have direct influence over, such as your actions, thoughts, and choices. Conversely, outside the circle lie events, people's reactions, and external circumstances that are beyond your influence. Understanding this distinction is fundamental to learning how to let go and refocus your attention.

Using this strategy of thinking is a helpful coping tool when you or someone else is struggling to process their emotions or if they feel too overwhelmed. Sometimes, when we break down our worries and visualize them, we can see that some worries everybody has, some worries belong to other people, some worries are small and are not worth thinking about, and some worries are entirely out of our control, so worrying about them won't change anything except that they will make us feel worse.

"Worrying about something outside your control is like sitting on a rocking chair... It gives you something to do but doesn't get you anywhere."



The original



Mine: write today's worries into the right ring

One worry from the outer ring I am going to set down this week, and what I will do with the energy instead

Comfort

Reflection questions from the original, with room to write

“Anxiety, the insidious thief, often disguises itself as comfort, thriving on our longing for safety and familiarity. But beware, for when comfort becomes a mere facade, anxiety feasts upon our vulnerability, growing stronger with every crumb of false reassurance. It is in recognizing this deceit that we must reclaim our power, forging a true and resilient fortress of self-care, compassion, and unwavering authenticity. For only then can we starve anxiety of its feeding ground and liberate ourselves from its grip.”

To alleviate anxiety, challenge yourself to push boundaries and embrace new experiences. Start by venturing into gentle discomfort and gradually expanding your comfort zone. Each step toward unfamiliar territory signifies personal growth, resilience, and confidence. Embrace the exciting and unknown, for it is where opportunities for growth and self-realization await.

What comfort-seeking behaviors do you engage in when you feel anxious? Are these behaviors healthy or unhealthy for your overall well-being?

Reflect on past experiences when you've sought comfort as a means to temporarily alleviate anxiety. How did these behaviors impact your long-term anxiety levels?

Can you identify any negative coping mechanisms you rely on to seek comfort? How can you replace these habits with healthier alternatives that still provide solace?

Identify any avoidance behaviors you engage in to prevent discomfort or anxiety. How do these behaviors hinder your personal growth and resilience? How can you challenge yourself to face your fears gradually?

What self-care practices or relaxation techniques have you found beneficial for managing anxiety?

Certainty

Reflection questions from the original, with room to write

“Anxiety thrives in the abode of certainty; its insatiable hunger is nourished by the deep-rooted need for absolute assurance amidst the ever-changing nature of life.”

It's important to recognize that not everything in life is certain. Embracing uncertainty can be liberating and open doors to personal growth and new opportunities. Instead of obsessing over the unknown, try shifting your focus towards what you can control: your reactions, attitudes, and efforts. By acknowledging that uncertainties can lead to valuable experiences, we can begin to reduce anxiety's hold on our lives.

How do you personally seek certainty in your life? Are there specific areas or situations that make you feel more anxious when uncertainty arises?

Reflect on past experiences when you faced uncertain situations. How did you react to them, and how did it impact your anxiety levels at the time?

Can you identify any unrealistic expectations of certainty that you may be placing on yourself or others? How can you adjust these expectations to decrease anxiety?

Identify any negative thought patterns related to uncertainty. Are there any recurring beliefs that intensify your anxiety? How can you challenge and replace these thoughts with more rational ones?

What coping mechanisms or strategies have you found effective in managing uncertainty? How can you incorporate these strategies into your daily routine to alleviate anxiety?

Loosening the three C's

Three small experiments, one per C. Additions to the original.

CONTROL · Hand one thing back.

- 1 Pick one thing from the outer ring you keep trying to manage (someone's mood, an outcome, the weather of a day).
- 2 For one week, when the urge to control it shows up, name it ("there's the urge") and do one inner-ring thing instead.
- 3 Rate anxiety before and after each time, 0 to 10. Notice what happens to the number over the week.

CERTAINTY · Practise not knowing.

- 1 Choose a small decision you would normally over-research or check repeatedly.
- 2 Decide it with the information you already have and set a rule: no checking, no reassurance-seeking, for 24 hours.
- 3 Write down what you predicted would happen, then what actually happened. Most certainty-seeking is paid for in advance for events that never arrive.

COMFORT · One step past the edge.

- 1 Write a ladder of five situations from "slightly uncomfortable" to "really rather not".
- 2 Do the first rung this week, and stay until the discomfort drops by about half before leaving.
- 3 Move up one rung when the current one feels ordinary. Growth lives on the edge of the circle, not outside it.

The experiment I will start with, and when

What I noticed
