Exercise #2: True Danger or False Alarm?

Useful for: Rewiring your brain to better distinguish between true danger and false alarms.

Time needed: Fifteen to twenty minutes for Parts A and B. Part C should be completed over the course of a week.

Part A: Identify whether each situation represents true danger or a false alarm.

- · You're taking an important exam and begin to feel hot and flushed and have a difficult time concentrating.
- · You're driving on the highway and notice that your heart rate is accelerating and your hands feel tingly.
- · A fire breaks out in your home.
- A lion lunges at you.
- · You're at a party with friends and begin to feel weird and out of control.
- · You're about to step on a rattlesnake.
- · You're walking up a flight of stairs and have trouble taking a deep breath and a tight feeling in your chest.
- · You're about to give a class presentation and your mind goes blank.

Part B: Answer these questions:

- · Think of a time when anxiety helped protect you from true danger.
- · Now think of a time when anxiety was a false alarm and you weren't actually in harm's way.
- · How were the thoughts, feelings, and sensations you experienced in these two scenarios similar?
- · How were the thoughts, feelings, and sensations you experienced in these two scenarios different?

Part C: For the next week, keep a log of all moments when you find yourself feeling increased anxiety. Write down the date and time and a few details about the situation you're in. Next, look around your immediate environment and ask yourself, *Am I in true danger, or is this a false alarm?* Finally, write down one coaching thought you can offer yourself to get through each moment that is a false alarm.

Sample Worksheet: True Danger or False Alarm?

Date/time	Situation	True danger or false alarm?	Coaching thought
7/24 2:30 p.m.	At park, talking to friends. Made a joke and no one laughed.	False alarm	Even if they thought my joke was dumb, it's not actually a big deal.
200	Immediately felt anxious and wanted to go home.		I often think my friends' jokes are dumb, but I still want to be friends with them.

True Danger or False Alarm?

Date/time	Situation	True danger or false alarm?	Coaching thought

Exercise #3: Your Body on Anxiety

Useful for: Rewiring your brain to decrease its anxious reaction to anxiety sensations.

Time needed: Fifteen to twenty minutes

First, jot down the anxiety sensations you tend to experience the most often. Next, write down different explanations you've told yourself about why you were feeling these strange, uncomfortable feelings; for example, I'm going crazy, or I'm dying, or There's something wrong with me. Finally, write out your new understanding of the biological explanation for these sensations.

Sample Worksheet: Anxiety Sensations

My most frequent anxiety sensations	What I've told myself about these sensations in the past	Biological explanation of these sensations
Increase in heart rate	I'm having a heart attack.	My heart is pumping more blood
	I'm dying.	to help me escape from danger (but it's actually a false alarm).
	Something is really wrong with me.	
Difficulty breathing	I can't breathe.	My lungs are taking in more air
	I'm dying.	to provide me with the fuel to run and escape from danger (but
	Something is really wrong with me.	really it's a false alarm).
Difficulty concentrating	Something is wrong with my brain.	Because I'm overbreathing and
	I'm going crazy.	taking in extra oxygen, it's making me foggy headed.
Feeling weird and out of it	Something is wrong with my brain.	Because I'm overbreathing and
	I'm going crazy.	taking in extra oxygen, it's making me feel a bit off.

Anxiety Sensations

My most frequent anxiety sensations	What I've told myself about these sensations in the past	Biological explanation of these sensations

Exercise #4: Play with Anxiety

Useful for: Rewiring your brain to get used to anxiety sensations rather than fighting with or hiding from them.

Time needed: Twenty to thirty uninterrupted minutes daily

This exercise requires repetition for at least a week or until you grow bored with it and no longer have a fear-based reaction to the sensations of anxiety.

Part A: Review the list of anxiety sensations in the column on the left. If you could eliminate the ones that bother you most, which three would you choose?

Circle the three anxiety sensations you find the most unbearable. Follow the instructions on how to engage in all the different recommended exercises that assist in bringing on feelings similar to your least favorite anxiety sensations. We recommended that you practice each exercise for one minute or for as long as it takes for your brain to grow bored with it or stop feeling anxious about the feeling.

Note: Although these exercises are in no way dangerous, people who are actively struggling with anxiety may fear trying them. If you're feeling hesitant, we suggest you ask a friend or family member to join you in bringing on these feelings. And you never know—they might also be struggling with anxiety and these exercises may benefit them as well.

Anxiety sensations	Exercises to bring on feeling
Foggy headed, difficulty concentrating, or light-headed	Hyperventilate for one minute (breathe loudly and rapidly, like a panting dog), taking approximately forty-five breaths per minute.
	Place your head between your legs for one minute, then quickly sit up.
Feeling weird and out of it	Stare up at the sky and think about the solar system and how teeny-tiny you truly are.
	Stare up at the sky and picture yourself standing on the earth as it rotates around the sun.
	Stand still in a dark room, blindfolded, with noise-canceling headphones on for five minutes.
	Think to yourself, Who am I? Who am I? over and over for five minutes.
Distorted vision	Stare intensely at your eyes in a mirror for one minute.
	Stare at a spot on the wall for one minute.
	Put on dark glasses indoors. With your eyes open, spin rapidly in a circle for one minute.
	Stare at a light bulb for one minute and then try to read.
Difficulty breathing	Hold your nose and breathe through a thin straw for one minute.
Feelings of suffocation	Wrap your hands tightly around your throat.
	Wear a tight turtleneck.
	Spend one minute in a small space, such as a closet.
Increased heart rate or	Drink a coffee or espresso or other caffeine-based drink.
tightness in your chest	Run up and down stairs for five minutes.
	Do five minutes of moderately intense cardiovascular exercise.
Upset stomach	Think about something upsetting or write down upsetting thoughts for five minutes.
	Do twenty jumping jacks after a meal.
Tingly, cold hands or feet	Hyperventilate for one minute (breathe loudly and rapidly, like a panting dog) at a rate of
Feeling shaky	approximately forty-five breaths per minute. Tense all your muscles and hold the tension for one minute.
Feeling hot, or increased	Wear a jacket or wrap yourself in blanket in a hot room.
sweating	Run up and down stairs for five minutes.
	Do five minutes of moderately intense cardiovascular exercise.
Feeling dizzy	Spin around really fast for one minute.
,	Spin around in a chair for one minute.
Other sensations not listed	How can you creatively conjure up these feelings? (Hint: What activities have you avoided for
	fear it will bring on these feelings?)

Part B: After you have gotten yourself as anxious as possible (Go, you!), follow these directions:

- 1. Do ten jumping jacks.
- 2. Recite the alphabet out loud.
- 3. Draw a picture of a house.
- 4. Find five objects with names beginning with the letter T.
- 5. Count backward from 100 by 7s (100 ... 93 ... and so on).
- 6. Go to a store and order a drink.
- 7. Read a news story and then ask yourself, What is one thing I learned from this article?
- 8. Do some more math: what does 856 plus 930 equal?
- Were you able to speak, think, move, communicate with others, and complete multiple commands while experiencing the sensations of anxiety?
- What do these exercises tell you about your ability to function while on anxiety?

Exercise #5: Where Your Brain Most Often Goes upon Detecting a Mistake

Useful for: Rewiring your brain to just observe and not believe the self-criticism that surfaces when you make an error or underperform.

Time needed: Ten minutes a day

Over the next week, practice noting when you make a mistake or underperform, what thoughts automatically follow, and how you react. Use this log to track key data from these "mistake moments."

Sample Worksheet: Mistake Moments

Date/time	My "mistake moment"	My automatic thoughts	How I reacted
12/15	When I asked a	☑ I'm a disaster.	☑ I got angry at myself.
	question in math	☐ I suck.	☐ I got angry at others.
	about something that	l'm pathetic.	shut down.
	had already been covered, the whole	Something is wrong with me.	☐ I avoided.
	class laughed.	l'll never be okay.	☐ I procrastinated.
	J. J. J. J.	l'm weak.	☐ I slept.
		l'm broken.	late something.
		Other:	☐ I used technology.
			I tried to fix the problem.
			Other:
12/17	I wanted to ask my	l'm a disaster.	☐ I got angry at myself.
	friend Brian to hang	✓ I suck.	☐ I got angry at others.
	out this weekend, but	l'm pathetic.	I shut down.
	I was too nervous he'd	Something is wrong with me.	☑ I avoided.
	say no and think it was weird so I didn't.	l'll never be okay.	☐ I procrastinated.
		l'm weak.	☐ I slept.
		l'm broken.	late something.
		Other:	☐ I used technology.
			I tried to fix the problem.
			Other:

Rewire Your Anxious Brain for Teens Exercise #5: Where Your Brain Most Often Goes upon Detecting a Mistake

Mistake Moments

Date/time	My "mistake moment"	My automatic thoughts	How I reacted
		l'm a disaster.	☐ I got angry at myself.
		☐ I suck.	☐ I got angry at others.
		l'm pathetic.	☐ I shut down.
		Something is wrong with me.	☐ I avoided.
		l'll never be okay.	☐ I procrastinated.
		l'm weak.	☐ I slept.
		l'm broken.	☐ I ate something.
		Other:	☐ I used technology.
			I tried to fix the problem.
			Other:
		l'm a disaster.	☐ I got angry at myself.
		☐ I suck.	☐ I got angry at others.
		l'm pathetic.	☐ I shut down.
		Something is wrong with me.	☐ I avoided.
		l'Il never be okay.	☐ I procrastinated.
		l'm weak.	☐ I slept.
		l'm broken.	☐ I ate something.
		Other:	☐ I used technology.
			☐ I tried to fix the problem.
			Other:

Exercise #8: Positive Coaching Slogans

Useful for: Rewiring your brain to know what to do when anxious thoughts and self-criticism set in.

Time needed: Fifteen minutes

For the next week, anytime you experience an anxious moment, notice your initial level of anxiety. Next, note your automatic self-critical thoughts. Remind yourself of your positive coaching slogan, and then note your anxiety level.

Sample Worksheet: Anxious Moments

Date/time	Anxious moment	Initial anxiety level	Automatic self- critical thoughts	Positive coaching slogan	New anxiety level
1/4 4:02 p.m.	Only exercised twice over holiday break from school	7	I'll never reach my fitness goal.	Just one step at a time. I'll have ups and downs and some weeks are better than others.	4
1/7 12:31 p.m.	Overwhelming anxiety before a class presentation	9	I'm going to mess this up for sure.	It may not be okay now, but it will be okay soon enough. I've practiced enough and will do better than I think.	5

Anxious Moments

Anxious moment	Initial anxiety level	Automatic self- critical thoughts	Positive coaching slogan	New anxiety level

Exercise #14: Challenge Your Catastrophic Beliefs About Emotional Discomfort

Useful for: Rewiring a brain that frequently makes extreme and anxiety-provoking predictions about how hard an upcoming challenge will be.

Time needed: Throughout the day

For the next day, notice the thoughts your brain offers up when facing a challenging moment.

First, describe the distressing situation. Observe and then write down all the catastrophic thoughts that surface. Next, rate your overall distress level, from 1 to 10.

For each thought you wrote down, try offering up a more realistic prediction: a balanced, fact-based interpretation of the distressing situation and your ability to manage it. Rate your overall distress level again.

Sample Worksheet: Revising My Catastrophic Beliefs

Date/time	Situation	Catastrophic thought	Distress rating	More realistic prediction	Distress rating
11/26 8:00 a.m.	Stuck in traffic and potentially late to school	This is awful. I'll need a late pass and it's going to be embarrassing and my teacher will be mad at me.	9	This isn't ideal and I might be late. It's snowing, so they may be more lenient about giving out late passes. Even if I do get a late pass, it's not the end of the world. Next time the weather is bad, I'll just try to leave earlier.	5
11/27 4:45 p.m.	Saw a recent post with a picture of a bunch of my friends hanging out at a gettogether that I didn't know about.	They're all better friends with each other than they are with me. They didn't invite me because they think I'm annoying and not fun to be around. I'm an idiot for thinking they were my friends.	10	Maybe it was more of an impromptu get-together. Most of the people in the picture all are in a Spanish class together that I'm not in. Maybe it started as a study group. Or maybe no one thought to invite me but that still doesn't prove they think I'm annoying and no fun. And if they do think I'm annoying and no fun, that would mean I need to find friends I relate to better, like the kids I recently made at my improv comedy class	6

Revising My Catastrophic Beliefs

Date/time	Situation	Catastrophic thought	Distress rating	More realistic prediction	Distress rating

Exercise #16a: Identify Your Negative Biases

Useful for: Rewiring a brain that needs some extra help noticing when it focuses on the negatives and skips the positives.

Time needed: About ten minutes

In the first column, make a list of your negative biases: the ways you tend to focus on the negative in your own life. Include any of the common ones you read about before starting this exercise, and add others that are accurate for you. Try to list as many as you can think of. Leave the other three columns blank for now.

Sample Worksheet: My Negative Biases

Ways I focus on the negative	How this affects my life	How my life would change if I challenged this bias	Hot spots
Thinking over and over			
about how my friends			
don't really like me but			
are just being nice			

My Negative Biases

After you complete this exercise by filling in the first column, save this worksheet. You'll be using it again for exercises 16b and 16c.

Ways I focus on the negative	How this affects my life	How my life would change if I challenged this bias	Hot spots

Exercise #16b: Challenge Your Negative Biases

Useful for: Rewiring a brain that often interprets situations and events as negative.

Time needed: Ten to fifteen minutes

For this exercise, continue with the worksheet you downloaded for exercise #16a. In the first column, you should have already listed some of the negative biases from your life. In the second column, list at least one effect each negative bias has on your life.

Now, in the third column, list at least one way in which your life would be different if you challenged each cognitive bias. As a hint, you might look at the previous column, and consider how those things could be flipped.

Sample Worksheet: My Negative Bias

Ways I focus on the negative	How this affects my life	How my life would change if I challenged this bias	Hot spots
Thinking over and over about how my friends don't really like me but are just being nice	I shut down and don't text them back. I want to be alone and just feel sorry for myself.	I'd socialize and spend time with friends and enjoy life more.	

Exercise #16c: Identify Your Negativity Hot Spots

Useful for: Rewiring a brain that automatically sends negative thoughts in certain situations.

Time needed: About ten minutes

Once again, continue with the worksheet you downloaded for exercise #16a. In the last column, write down the hot spots where the bias most often pops up. In this case, a "spot" can be a person, place, or anything else that frequently triggers the negative bias.

Sample Worksheet: My Negative Bias

Ways I focus on the negative	How this affects my life	How my life would change if I challenged this bias	Hot spots
Thinking over and over about how my friends don't really like me but are just being nice	I shut down and don't text them back. I want to be alone and just feel sorry for myself.	I'd socialize and spend time with friends and enjoy life more.	Social media Summer, when all my friends are at the same camp With Jake and Jose

Exercise #18: Slow Breathe Past Anxious Moments

Useful for: Rewiring a brain that could use some help dialing down physical symptoms of anxiety.

Time needed: Five minutes twice a day for a week

Part A: Find a quiet place where you can focus your attention on your breath. For the next week, practice slow breathing twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening, for five minutes, using a timer (your phone would work great!).

- 1. Slowly breathe in for three seconds, resting your hand gently on your stomach. As your hand rises, slowly count to 1 ... 2 ... 3 Picture the air rising through your body, from your belly upward toward your brain, filling your brain with a fresh dose of oxygen.
- 2. Gently hold your breath for three seconds, 1 ... 2 ... 3
- 3. Slowly breathe out for three seconds, 1 ... 2 ... 3 Notice your hand on your stomach falling and your lips gently pursed as your mouth slowly releases air. Picture the oxygen moving slowly from the top of your head, slowly through making its way down your body to the soles of your feet.
- 4. Gently hold your breath for three seconds, 1 ... 2 ... 3
- 5. Repeat.

Rate your anxiety on a scale from 1 to 10 before and after, and add any notes about your experience.

	Anxiety level before slow breathing	Anxiety level after slow breathing	Notes
Day 1 Morning			
Day 1 Evening			
Day 2 Morning			
Day 2 Evening			
Day 3 Morning			
Day 3 Evening			
Day 4 Morning			
Day 4 Evening			
Day 5 Morning			
Day 5 Evening			
Day 6 Morning			
Day 6 Evening			
Day 7 Morning			
Day 7 Evening			

Part B: Now, it's time to take this slow breathing tool on the road. Use it whenever you notice your amygdala overreacting to a situation and determining you're in mortal danger when in reality you're simply facing a modern-life challenge. The next time you feel extreme emotions, practice five minutes of slow breathing. You'll find that your body and mind settle down after this time-out.

For the next week, fill out this log every time you have an anxious or stressed moment. Again, rate your anxiety before and after five minutes of slow breathing.

Day and time	Where I am and what I'm doing	Anxiety level before slow breathing	Anxiety level after slow breathing

Exercise #19: Practice Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Useful for: Rewiring a brain that needs help dialing down physical tension in the body.

Time needed: Five minutes twice a day, once in the morning and once before bed, for a week

Just as critical as it is to practice PMR when you're feeling relatively calm, it's also important to practice applying PMR to high-stress situations when you could most benefit from this release of tension. Fill out this worksheet every time you have an anxious or stressed moment and then engage in PMR. Use a scale of 1 to 10 to rate your anxiety before and after.

Day/time	Description of stressful situation	Anxiety level before PMR	Anxiety level after PMR
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

Exercise #21: Observe and Disengage from Anxious Thoughts

Useful for: Rewiring a brain that gets stuck in overthinking.

Time needed: Five to ten minutes daily for one week

For one week, practice noticing when you're having the urge to procrastinate. Start by writing down the task you'd like to avoid. Next, rate your anxiety on a scale from 1 to 10. Write down all the anxious thoughts that surface and, finally, include what kind of thinking error your mind is engaging in.

Sample Worksheet: Anxious Thoughts and Thinking Errors

Date/ time	Task I want to avoid	Anxiety level	Anxious thoughts	Thinking error
4/11 2 p.m.	Work on final project	9	If I don't get an A on this project, it's going to ruin my GPA. I'm so lazy.	Perfectionism
4/13 4 p.m.	Complete reading assignment	8	I'm never going to succeed in life. I'm too tired to read all fifty pages. There's no point in trying to read any of it.	All-or-nothing thinking
4/14 4 p.m.	Work on final project	9	I don't understand how to summarize such a big topic into a few paragraphs. I'll never figure out how to do this assignment.	Intolerance of uncertainty

Anxious Thoughts and Thinking Errors

Date/ time	Task I want to avoid	Anxiety level	Anxious thoughts	Thinking error

For each of the scenarios you've written down, spend a few moments coming up with a more realistic interpretation. Imagine you're a lawyer trying to make your case to a judge and jury, and your argument must be based on facts. What statements would be accepted into the court record? Is not getting an A on a project enough evidence that you'll never succeed in life?

After you practice challenging your anxious thoughts and providing a more balanced assessment of the situation at hand, rate your anxiety level once more.

Sample Worksheet: Reinterpreting Your Anxious Thoughts

Date/ time	Task I want to avoid	Initial anxiety level	Anxious thoughts	More realistic interpretation	Revised anxiety level
4/11 2 p.m.	Work on final project	9	If I don't get an A on this project, it's going to ruin my GPA.	If I get a B or even a C on this project, I can always ask for an extra credit assignment to boost my grade.	5
4/13 4 p.m.	Complete reading assignment	8	I'm too tired to read all fifty pages. There's no point in trying to read any of it.	Even if I grasp only some of the material, it's better than doing nothing.	5
4/14 4 p.m.	Work on final project	9	I don't understand how to summarize such a big topic into a few paragraphs. I'll never figure out how to do this assignment.	I can just take the next step forward even if I don't yet understand how all the pieces will come together.	5

Reinterpreting Your Anxious Thoughts

Date/ time	Task I want to avoid	Initial anxiety level	Anxious thoughts	More realistic interpretation	Revised anxiety level

Exercise #22a: Where Are You Now?

Useful for: Rewiring a brain that needs help setting goals for what it wants in life.

Time needed: Ten minutes

Consider your values—the areas of life that are most important to you—and rate how important each is on a scale of 1 to 10. Next, consider how much time and energy you actually channel into these areas, and rate how much you've been accomplishing in the past month, again on a scale of 1 to 10. The gap between what's important to you and what you're accomplishing is likely filled with anxiety, stress, and fear. For top priority aspects of your life where you feel stuck, identify one or two specific goals for yourself.

Sample Worksheet: Where Are You Now?

Area of life	How important is the area to me?	How much have I been accomplishing?	Specific goals
Academics	9	3	To read at least two books over the summer To start my next social studies project as soon as it's assigned
Relationships (family, friends, dating)	8	5	
Career/professional endeavors	9	2	To apply for a summer internship by the end of April To meet with an architect during winter break
			so I can learn more about the field
Spirituality	7	3	
Community service/ serving others	5	2	
Hobbies/leisure activities	6	4	

Where Are You Now?

Area of life	How important is the area to me?	How much have I been accomplishing?	Specific goals
Academics			
Relationships (family, friends,			
dating)			
Career/professional endeavors			
Spirituality			
Community service/ serving others			
Hobbies/leisure activities			

Exercise #22b: Create a Master Task List

Useful for: Rewiring a brain that gets overwhelmed by too many to-dos.

Time needed: Ten minutes

Create a master task list to store and organize to-dos based on values and goals you identified in the previous exercise. For each item, determine its priority (low, medium, high) as well as how much time you'll need (a short, medium, or long amount). Update this list on an ongoing basis with new tasks as they surface.

Sample Worksheet: My To-Dos

Area of life	Task	Priority	Amount of time needed
Academics	Read at least two books over the summer	low	long
Relationships (family, friends, dating)	Buy a birthday present for Sydney	medium	short
Career/professional endeavors	Apply for summer internship	high	medium
Spirituality	Prepare for youth group on Saturday	medium	medium
Community service/ serving others	Organize group for the soup kitchen on Sunday	high	short
Hobbies/ leisure activities	Do club soccer drills on my own	high	medium

My To-Dos

Area of life	Task	Priority	Amount of time needed
Academics			
Relationships			
(family, friends, dating)			
Career/professional endeavors			
Spirituality			
Community service/			
serving others			
Hobbies/			
leisure activities			

Exercise #23: What Does Valued Living Mean to You?

Useful for: Rewiring a brain that has trouble seeing the opportunities and exciting times ahead.

Time needed: Ten to fifteen minutes

Using the blank worksheet, write a list of any tasks you assigned yourself in your weekly "Just Do It" plan and ended up not completing. In the next column, remind yourself why completing the task is important and helps you live a life in line with your values. To remind yourself of the domains of life most important to you and your specific goals within them, you can refer back to exercise 22a.

Sample Worksheet: Valued Living

Self-assigned task I didn't complete	Why completing this task is important	What value it helps me with	
Using my planner for my	It keeps me organized and on top	Being a good student	
assignments	of my tasks.		
Picking up my sister from	My family depends on me.	Being a responsible person	
cheerleading			
Taking my dog out for a long walk	My dog is my responsibility and	Being a loving caregiver to my pet	
	needs the exercise.		

Valued Living

Self-assigned task I didn't complete	Why completing this task is important	What value it helps me with