

Coping with Anxiety

Managing Anxiety: A Real-Life Strategy Guide

Using a Real Example to Learn How to Cope Effectively

Context



When Anxiety Hits: A Real Example

Imagine you're about to speak in front of a crowd. The night before, your heart races, thoughts spiral—*"What if I freeze?"*—and you can't sleep. This is anxiety. It's real, but it's also manageable.

Let's break down **how to process and move through anxiety**, step by step.

Step 1: Name It

"This is anxiety."

By identifying your emotional state, you reduce its power. Labeling emotions activates the prefrontal cortex and calms the brain's threat system (Barlow, 2002).

Step 2: Challenge the Thoughts

- Thought: *"I'm going to embarrass myself."*
- Challenge: *"I'm prepared. I may stumble, but I'll recover. People are supportive."*

This is called **cognitive restructuring**, a key part of **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)**, which is proven to reduce anxiety (Beck, 2011).

Step 3: Breathe

Try **4-7-8 breathing**:

- Inhale for 4 seconds
- Hold for 7 seconds
- Exhale for 8 seconds

Deep breathing slows your heart rate and tells your body: *You're safe* (Jerath et al., 2006).



- “What if I mess up?” → “Everyone makes mistakes. I can recover if something goes wrong.”
- “What if they don’t like me?” → “I’m not for everyone, and that’s okay. I bring value either way.”

This reframing helps to lower the intensity of my fear.

Step 4: Ground Yourself with Mindfulness



Do a quick **body scan**:

- Close your eyes
- Focus on each part of your body from head to toe
- Release tension as you go

Mindfulness is shown to reduce anxiety symptoms and improve focus (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Step 5: Remember Your Why

Ask: “*Why am I doing this?*”

Connect to your **values** (e.g., helping others, growing in confidence). Focusing on meaning gives you strength to act even when you’re scared (Hayes et al., 2011).

Outcome:

Yes, you might stumble. But that’s okay. You’ll still be proud of showing up. That’s the real win.

Helpful Tips

Strategy	Tool	Why It Helps
Label the feeling	“This is anxiety”	Activates regulation
Reframe your thought	CBT	Reduces catastrophizing
Deep breathing	4-7-8 method	Slows nervous system
Grounding	Body scan	Reconnects mind and body
Values check	“Why am I here?”	Restores motivation



- **Insight Timer or Calm app** – Free breathing and meditation exercises
- **CBT Workbooks** – e.g., *The Anxiety and Worry Workbook*
- **Therapist** – A licensed clinician can guide you with personalized strategies

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This handout is designed to support your growth, not replace clinical guidance. Talk to your therapist to explore which strategies fit your life best.

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