



Map one anxious loop, notice avoidance or reassurance-seeking, and choose one small thing to try. For everyday worry, not a diagnosis. If anxiety is constant, stops you doing things you need to do, or comes as panic attacks, see a GP. A new or changing physical symptom is worth checking with a doctor.

01 Before I start

Pick a moment you can look at calmly. If any of these is true, set the sheet aside and get help first.

Get help first if:

- ☐ I have chest pain or trouble breathing (call 999 (UK) or 911 (US); use NHS 111 if you are unsure)
- ☐ I am having thoughts of harming myself (Samaritans 116 123 in the UK and Ireland, 988 in the US, findahelpline.com)
- ☐ Someone I live with or depend on scares me (this sheet is not for that, see selfgrowth.org/help)
- ☐ My anxiety is constant, is stopping me doing things I need to do, or comes as panic attacks (book a GP appointment)

The person or line I will turn to first if I need to:

02 The moment I am mapping

Choose one situation and describe it in a sentence or two.

What happened, where and when?

How anxious did I feel at the peak?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Calm

As bad as it gets

03 Map the loop

Go in order. The loop starts with a trigger and, if nothing changes, comes round to the next one.

Trigger: what set it off?

A message, a place, a date in the diary, a memory, a sound. Sometimes you will not know, and that is fine.

Thought: what went through my mind?

Write it as it came, for example 'I have upset them' or 'I will not cope'.

Body: what did I feel?

For example a tight chest, a knot in the stomach, a racing heart, shaky hands, restlessness.

What I did: what did I do, or avoid doing?

Left, cancelled, put it off, checked, asked, looked it up, kept busy, had a drink.

Short-term relief: how did I feel straight afterwards?

What it taught me: what did my mind take from it?

For example 'I only got through it because I left' or 'I needed them to say it was fine'.

04 Avoidance and reassurance

Avoidance and reassurance-seeking are two kinds of safety behaviour: things you do to feel safe. Tick any that were part of this loop.

In this loop I:

- ☐ Stayed away from, left, or cancelled something
- ☐ Put something off because of the worry
- ☐ Asked someone to tell me it was fine
- ☐ Checked, re-read or looked something up to be sure
- ☐ Needed someone with me, or a particular object, to cope
- ☐ None of these

What did the relief cost me (time, plans, energy, a relationship)?

Did the worry come back, and how soon?

05 Where I could try one small change

You do not have to break the whole loop. Pick one place in it and try one small thing. Small and doable beats big and dropped.

Places in the loop I could try something different:

- ☐ Trigger: notice it earlier, or change how often I meet it
- ☐ Thought: write it down and ask what else could be true
- ☐ Body: slow my breathing or move before I decide what to do
- ☐ What I did: wait a few minutes before I avoid or check, or take one small step toward the thing
- ☐ What it taught me: write down what actually happened afterwards

My one small change (kept small and safe):

For example 'wait a few minutes before asking for reassurance' or 'stay in the shop a little longer'.

Who or what could help me do it:

06 After I tried it

Come back to this part afterwards. 'It was hard and I did it' counts, and so does 'I could not do it yet'.

What did I do, and what happened?

How anxious did I feel at the peak this time?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Calm

As bad as it gets

What did the anxiety do over time, and what did I learn?

When you're done, a moment to reflect

- Which part of the loop did you find hardest to see: the trigger, the thought, the body feeling or what you did?
- What does the relief give you now, and what does it take away later?
- Is there something you have been avoiding that you would like to get back to?
- Who could you ask for company, rather than reassurance, while you try something small?
- If this loop keeps coming round and costs you a lot, who could you talk to about it?

Free worksheet from selfgrowth.org. Free self-growth worksheets for real life. Fill it in online and it saves as you go: selfgrowth.org/worksheets/anxiety-cycle-worksheet



If things feel heavier than a worksheet can hold

These are self-reflection tools, not therapy. If you're struggling, especially if you have any thoughts of harming yourself, please reach out to someone now. In the US, call or text **988**. In the UK & Ireland, call **116 123** (Samaritans). Elsewhere, find a free helpline at findahelpline.com. If you're in immediate danger, call your local emergency number.