

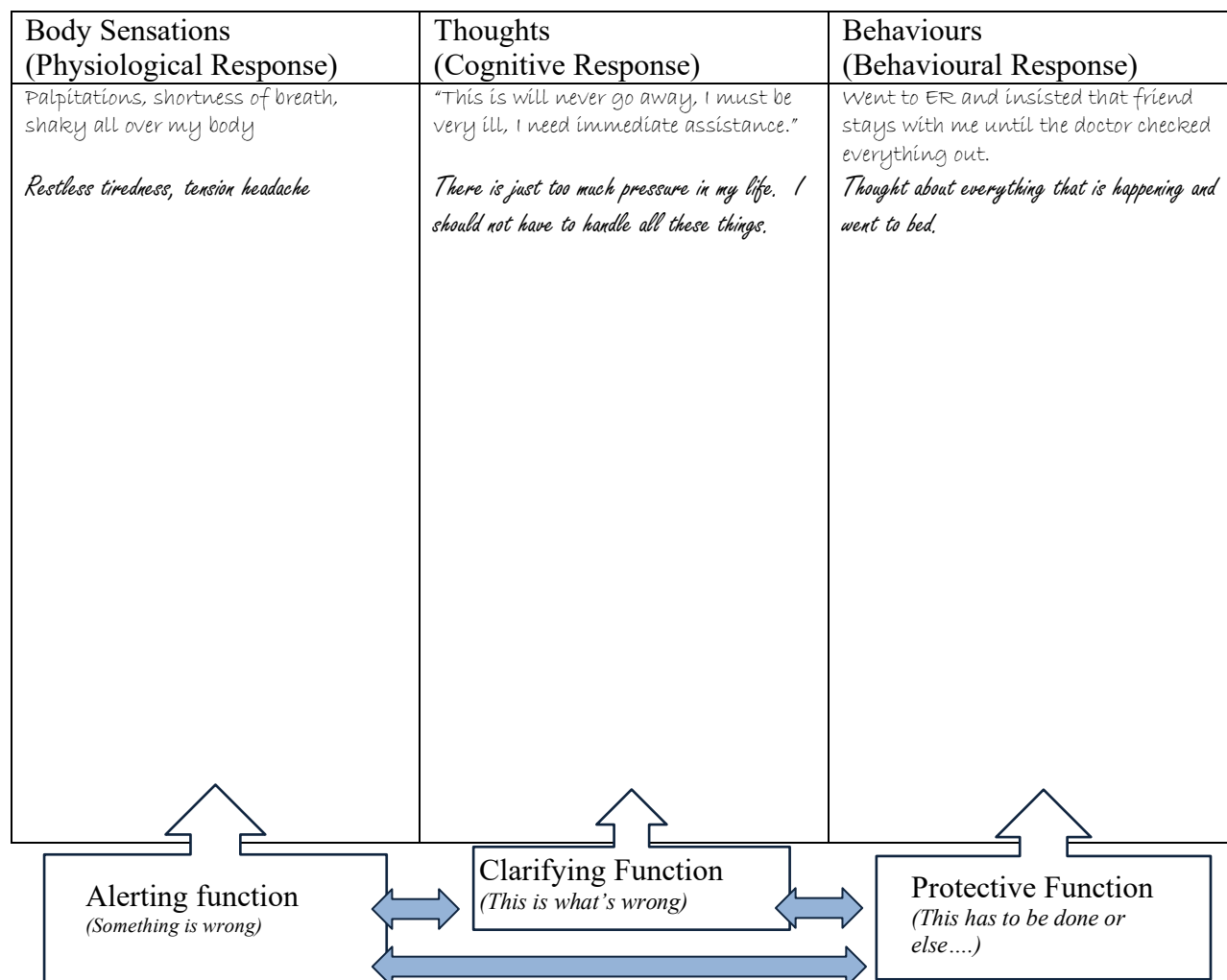


UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY – PART 2

ADAPTIVE BASIS OF ANXIETY:

Anxiety is a part of our fight/flight/freeze response. It is a life-saving biological mechanism. Anxiety is neither bad nor good. It is a response to a real or *perceived* threat. Problems arise when we feel anxious in situations when there is no real danger. Too little anxiety and we might not have enough motivation to do anything. Just imagine having absolutely no worries about an exam, the job interview or your dream trip. If you had no worries whatsoever, chances are that you would not be sufficiently motivated to study, review your resume or even book your flight and hotel. You would simply not think about these issues and left scrambling at the last minute. On the other hand, if you experience too much anxiety, you would be thinking about it all the time, perhaps even to a point of not being able to do anything useful. Your worries and body reactions would simply make it impossible.

Let's turn to the components of anxiety. Use your homework sheets from the previous section to write down the body sensations, thoughts and behaviours you have observed when anxious.



WHAT MAKES THOUGHTS SO IMPORTANT?

For one, thoughts might create a perception of threat when none exists.

Consider the picture of the centipede on the right. It is a picture. As such, it is not dangerous. Your risk of catching disease from touching this picture is as high as from touching any other part of this handout or screen on which you are reading this information. Yet for persons who are afraid of bugs it might be virtually impossible to touch this picture.

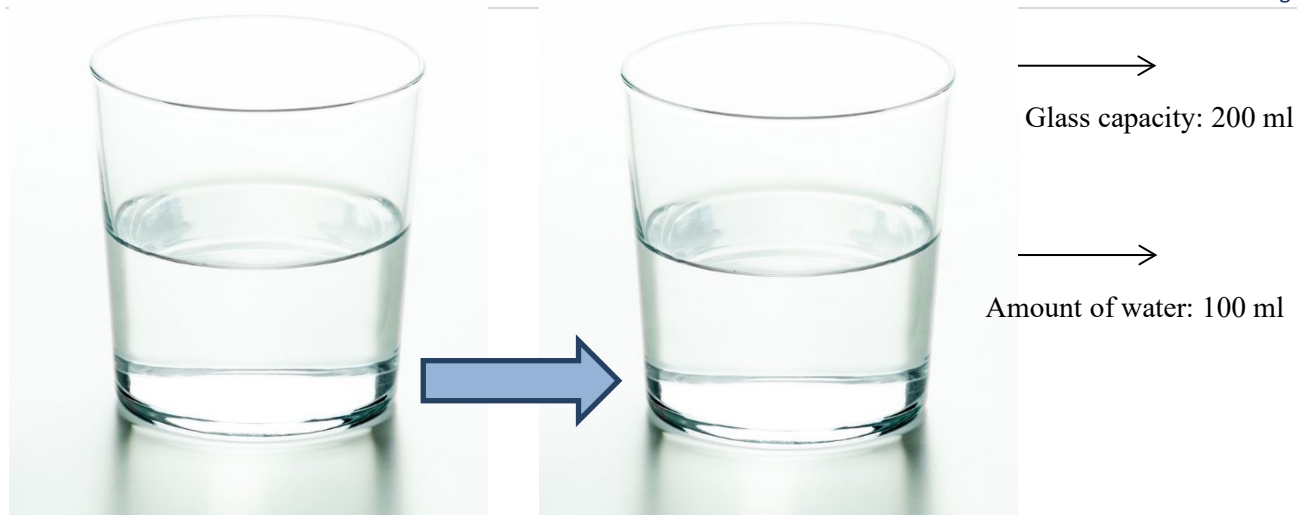


Perhaps you had no thoughts with respect to that picture or that you just had a “yuck” reaction.

Well, if you started questioning the reason for a photograph of the bug to be on the handout, you had thoughts. Here examples of typical thoughts in this situation: “Why is this thing here?” “This is just weird”. “Is it the type I have seen at...?” “This gives me creeps” This is stupid and has absolutely nothing to do with my anxiety”. Be honest. Now, what thoughts or questions did you have in response to the table at the bottom of the page? Probably not too many. And there was no “yuck” reaction either.

Let’s use the table below to write examples thoughts and facts.

THOUGHTS	FACTS
<p>“Yuck, I hate creepy centipedes”.</p> <p>“The glass is half empty.”</p>	<p>“There is a picture of a centipede”.</p> <p>“There is 100 ml of liquid in a 200 ml glass”</p>



Is the glass half-full or half-empty?

There is 100 ml of water in a glass that can contain 200 ml.

The perception of danger depends on our automatic thoughts. Automatic thoughts are spontaneous, fast, and sometimes quite difficult to notice. Despite that, these thoughts color our reactions and serve to build and reinforce assumptions that guide our lives. Our job is not to change all negative thoughts into positive ones. Instead we will be working on building awareness of our thoughts and ensuring that these thoughts reflect reality of our situation. ***In other words, it is not about a glass being half full or half empty. It is about knowing how much water is in the glass and whether or not we need to use it.***

Sometimes these automatic thoughts are quite difficult to recognize and observe. One way to discover them is to notice what we have the urge to do or what we have done to decrease the anxiety. If you run out of the room, then you might have thoughts about room being unsafe or that there is something urgent to do outside. By asking yourself about the reasons for your actions, you are likely to uncover the thoughts that guide your actions.

Over the next week, spend some time observing the thoughts, emotions and behaviours. Don't guess or try to polish your answers. Just write what you notice coming into your mind. Use the monitoring forms below. The more you practice, the easier it will get. Pay attention to thoughts **NOT** triggers. Practice distinguishing thoughts from facts.

MONITORING FORM – Example

<p>1: Describe the circumstances in which you felt anxious: <i>I was sitting on a couch trying to watch a movie. There was no one else in the room. It was late evening.</i></p>		
<p>2: What thoughts came into your mind? <i>Tomorrow might be very stressful. I won't be able to manage it. This "peace" is short-lived. I hate traffic. I might be late and miss my appointments.</i></p>	<p>3: What are the facts about what makes you anxious? <i>I am in the room watching TV I am feeling anxiety I have two appointments tomorrow that are one hour apart and require me to drive downtown.</i></p>	<p>4: What did you do or had an urge to do? <i>I continued watching the show but also thought a lot about pressures of the next day.</i></p>

1: Describe the circumstances in which you felt anxious:		
2: What thoughts came into your mind?	3: What are the facts about what makes you anxious?	4: What did you do or had an urge to do?

1: Describe the circumstances in which you felt anxious:		
2: What thoughts came into your mind?	3: What are the facts about what makes you anxious?	4: What did you do or had an urge to do?

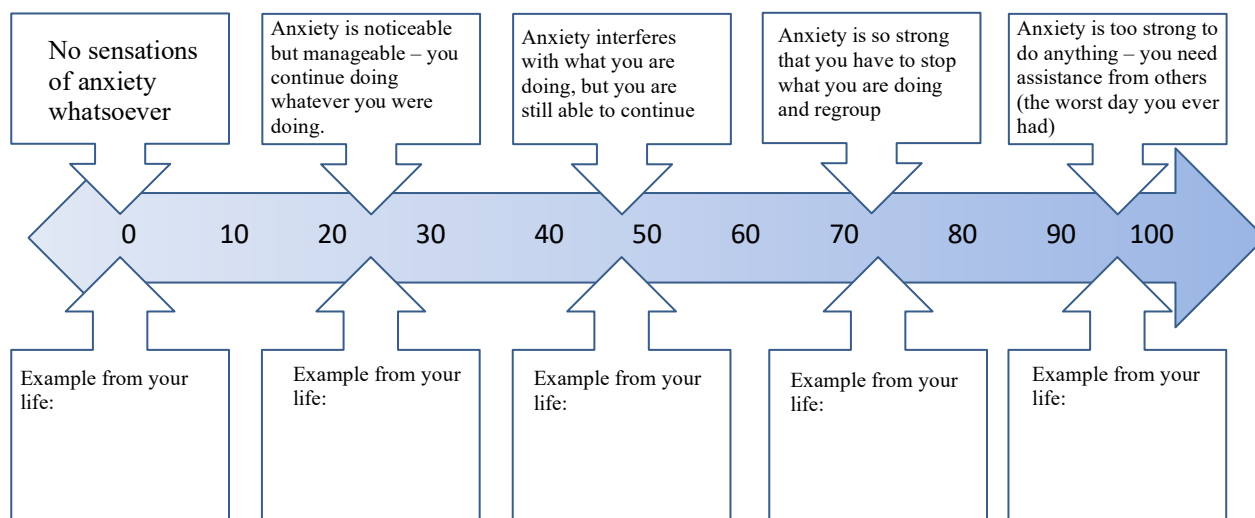
1: Describe the circumstances in which you felt anxious:		
2: What thoughts came into your mind?	3: What are the facts about what makes you anxious?	4: What did you do or had an urge to do?

1: Describe the circumstances in which you felt anxious:		
2: What thoughts came into your mind?	3: What are the facts about what makes you anxious?	4: What did you do or had an urge to do?

KEEPING TRACK

Because of its adaptive role, the severity of anxiety response changes according to our circumstances. Not surprisingly we become more anxious when experiencing lot of stresses in our lives (illness, arguments, financial concerns) and less anxious when such pressures go away. Yet persons with anxiety disorders might remain anxious even when such pressures are not present. By contrast, people who managed to build resilience, might remain non-anxious even when presented with multiple stressful events. Our goal is to reduce anxiety and to build more resilience. Since we cannot prevent all life problems from happening – we might as well learn how to deal with them.

The graph below will help us keep track of your progress.



DATE:							
100							
90							
80							
70							
60							
50							
40							
30							
20							
10							
0							
Stressful events that you encountered during the day							
Things you were able to accomplish							