**STEPS TO MANAGING ANXIETY**

In this workshop we are going to be looking at steps to manage anxiety and also stress and negativity.

It can be broken down into three steps essentially.

STEP ONE – recognise the negative thought cycle as early as possible when it starts.

STEP TWO – break the cycle and then ground yourself to bring down the adrenaline and therefore the feelings of anxiety

STEP THREE – replace the negative thought cycle with a positive one.

Below we look at the steps and the tools we can use to achieve them

**STEP ONE – Recognising the negative thought cycle**

Negative thought cycles are a large part of anxiety but they are also something that all of us get locked into at stressful or uncertain times so relevant to all of us in this situation. They are a pattern of thoughts that become a habit and with any habit if we can learn to recognise when it is happening we can break the habit and replace it with a new way of thinking. Attached is a document that lists the most common negative thought cycles and I am sure that you, like us, will recognise several if not all of these as cycles you get pulled into at times.

Recognising these is the first step, so read the document several times so that you can easily recognise the next time the cycle starts.

As soon as we recognise the cycle beginning and our anxiety rising we need to stop the cycle. The stop technique is below and you can start to use this whenever you notice the negative thought cycles starting. At first with stage one you may want to practice this at home and as you get more practiced at it then you will move to stage two and use anywhere.

STAGE ONE: Say STOP out loud, if you are sitting stand up, if you are standing stamp your feet and slap your thigh. This will shock your senses and break the cycle.

Once you have practiced this a few times and it is an automatic reaction you can move to

STAGE TWO: Say STOP in your head, tap your feet and then tap your wrist or have a band on your wrist that you can snap.

**STEP TWO – Ground yourself**

Once you have stopped the negative thought cycle you need to then ground and distract yourself and your brain. Once you start to use a grounding or distraction technique the brain is distracted and the adrenaline release it has triggered will stop and you will feel the anxiety drop.

Attached are some documents with grounding and distraction techniques. Read through them and decide on some that you feel will work for you – there are a lot of different options on the documents as we all different so need to find options that work for us. Once you have decided on a couple to try start to practice them, use them when you are not anxious. The reason for this is because when we are feeling anxious or stressed it can make it worse if we are trying to remember something we are unfamiliar with or not used to. For example – the 5 senses technique, I at first could not remember what the senses even were when I was feeling anxious and trying to use it for the first time. So needed to practice it at times when I wasn’t anxious so that when I needed it the sequence was memorised and I could just run through them without having to look for a piece of paper or google it.

**STEP THREE – Replace the negative thought cycle with a positive one**

The third step once you have broken the cycle and grounded yourself is to replace the negative thought cycle with a positive one. If we don’t do this then at the early stages the negative thoughts will restart.

For this you can use your positive affirmations. The last workshop we sent on Confidence and Self-esteem contained documents on positive affirmations and set the task of writing on post it notes or notepaper some positive affirmations that all start with I am. You then need to stick these up in places where you will see them at the start and end of day as well as through the day – maybe by your bed and then on the fridge, by the kettle. As the workshop explained these you need to then repeat to yourself out loud at the start and end of the day and also several times through the day. These then become a “Mantra” for you.

This Mantra is what you replace the negative thought cycle with – repeating this several times out loud to start with and as you find you are managing the anxiety more easily and the mantra is more natural to you, you can recite it silently to yourself.

Using these techniques and tools will become easier and more natural each time you use them and you will find that they become more effective to so please do practice and use them and stick with them. As with a lot of things in life it can take a little time to make a difference and it takes practice, hard work and dedication but it is worth it. These tools we know from not only personal but also participants experience work and can have a hugely positive impact.