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PLAY: "Play, Learn, fight back AnxietY"

Del-02-IO1: Educational Material

Intellectual Output	**IO1 Educational material**
Short Description	**Creation of short educational material that will be available into the 3D virtual world. The aim of such material is to be offered naturally, during games, or in areas between games to the students and to be embedded in the environment in such a way that will not remind learning.**
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List of abbreviations

3DVW	3-Dimensional Virtual World
PLAY	Play, Learn and fight back AnxietY
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
ICT	Information and Communication Technology

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1. Introduction

This document outlines the development of Deliverable 2 (Intellectual Output 1) – Educational content. The PLAY 3D virtual world involves a psychoeducational gamified approach to promoting student wellbeing, particularly reducing stress and anxiety and promoting positive coping strategies. Within the 3D virtual world, educational material is also provided to support the overarching aims of the game and to develop knowledge and skills related to overcoming stress and anxiety, whilst also helping to strengthen student awareness and understanding of mental health difficulties. An overview of the design of the educational content, as well as the learning materials will be provided below.

1.1. Background

Mental health can be understood in several ways. However, it is important to note that, when understood from a public health perspective, mental health and wellbeing can be viewed as an integral aspect of life and that mental health difficulties can affect anyone. Indeed, the prevalence of mental health problems is significant and high – while the figure "one in four" is frequently used as an estimation of the prevalence of these challenges, more recently, it has been argued that the actual prevalence of mental health disorders across the lifespan is closer to one in two (Moffitt et al., 2010). Entry into third level education – a time of key transition which typically coincides with early adulthood – can be a sensitive period for mental health. Stressors in university, which can include entry into an unstructured learning environment from a structured school environment, financial stressors, moving away from support systems (family and friends) and other social stressors, as well as increased academic demands and pressures, can precipitate the emergence of mental health problems in university students (Price, Smith & Kavalidou, 2019). A growing body of research from across Europe has shown a trend towards increasing rates of mental health difficulties in young people and in university settings (Conley et al., 2020; Duffy et al., 2019; Dooley et al., 2019; Macaskill, 2012; Ribeiro et al., 2018).

1.2. Mental health literacy

Health literacy refers to a person's ability to understand and make effective use of health-related information, particularly to better understand and better adhere to health

information and medical recommendations (e.g. treatments, behaviours) (Nutbeam, 2008). International research has shown that patients who are better informed about their health have more successful interactions with healthcare staff and are better informed about preventative approaches and treatments. They are also more likely to adhere to prescribed treatments and, consequently, to have improved health outcomes (Kutcher, Wei & Coniglio, 2016). On the other hand, individuals who have low health literacy levels can lack awareness of the importance of prevention-focused health behaviours and actions and are at increased risk of poor health outcomes. A low level of health literacy may undermine one's understanding of health-related information, as well as their capability of managing their own health effectively and accessing health services in a timely manner.

The term "mental health literacy" was coined as a way of building on the concept of health literacy and defining the "knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which aid their recognition, management or prevention" (Jorm et al., 1997, p. 182). Mental health literacy therefore, refers to knowledge and understanding of mental health and wellbeing, but also of actions which can be taken to prevent and/or reduce difficulties when they arise. Specific elements of mental health

literacy include:

- Knowledge of mental health difficulties which aid their recognition, management and prevention
- Beliefs and attitudes about mental disorders which aid their recognition, management and prevention
- The ability to recognise the symptoms and signs of specific disorders, as well as risk factors and causes
- Knowing how to seek mental health information and support
- Knowledge of self-treatments
- Knowledge of professional help available and attitudes that support help-seeking.

(Jorm, 2000)

As in the case of health literacy, low levels of mental health literacy can act as a barrier to preventative actions, as well as help-seeking and accessing to services (Chambers & Murphy, 2011). Thus, it is increasingly recognised that young people and university students – an at risk population – *"must be able to recognise signs and symptoms in themselves and others and this requires a high level of mental health literacy in the population"* (Lawlor et al., 2008). Mental health literacy can be strengthened in a variety of ways, such as awareness raising campaigns, interventions in educational settings and group- or peer-based approaches (NHS England, 2019). Mental health literacy can also be improved by identifying "at risk" groups and creating tailored strategies and approaches which address their specific requirements, (e.g. accessible educational targeted to needs) (Mental Health Foundation, 2019).

1.3. Play, Learn and fight back AnxietY

PLAY is a new cross-European, Erasmus+ funded project. PLAY stands for *Play, Learn and fight back AnxietY*. The primary aims of PLAY are to help university students become better prepared for university curricular activities and, more specifically, to help them reduce their anxiety, strengthen their awareness of mental health and to develop positive and proactive coping strategies. PLAY will develop an innovative scenario-led, gamified tool with which university students can engage. This will involve the design and development of a 3D virtual world which aims to support students in learning a range of skills and strategies for overcoming the stresses and anxiety associated with university life.

More specifically, The PLAY 3D virtual world involves a psychoeducational gamified approach to promoting student wellbeing. The virtual world comprises a suite of scenarios that allow a player (university student) to engage with stressful circumstances related to university life (the selection of these circumstances was guided by the focus groups with students). Gamified elements allow players to develop knowledge and gain skills related to overcoming stress and anxiety, whilst psychoeducational material built into the world also help to strengthen student awareness of mental health difficulties and strategies for overcoming stresses, as well as positive approaches to wellbeing.

Overall, PLAY consists of several elements which allow students to progressively understand their mental health needs (including physiological/psychological symptoms) and to learn coping skills to deal with the challenges of university life (e.g. managing the symptoms

of anxiety, developing social skills and coping mechanisms). Within the environment, players are tasked with helping other students (non-player characters) who are present in the environment and are experiencing stress and anxiety. In line with a CBT-based approach, interactions between the player and the non-player characters provide students insights into cognitive distortions associated with anxiety, as well as the physiological symptoms of stress and anxiety, as well as the links between thoughts, feelings and behaviour. A coach is also present in the environment, who can provide "guidance" in helping participants recognise faulty thought patterns and the physical signs and symptoms of stress and anxiety. Gamified elements also allow players to gain positive coping skills and strategies for overcoming university related challenges. Educational information is also embedded in the world which can help to strengthen the mental health literacy of students. The educational material will be tailored to ensure participants/players can build their knowledge and awareness of mental health difficulties (particularly stress and anxiety), develop self-help behaviours and promote awareness of, positive attitudes towards, avenues for help seeking.

Gamification and "serious games" involve the use of e-technology to achieve change in an individuals' skills, ability (either physical or cognitive), knowledge, health or mental wellbeing (Chambers et al., 2011). Virtual World games are a specific subset of game-based approaches to intervention and can be described as involving an immersive and interactive environment. These game-based approaches are an increasingly popular means of tackling mental health difficulties, including promoting knowledge and learning and developing knowledge and skills in relation to mental health problems (Fleming et al., 2019).

2. Designing PLAY – Developing the Educational Content

PLAY involves the development of an Open 3D virtual world learning environment. The world is designed to allow students participate in a range of gamified activities which are related to their university life and which may be sources of anxiety and/or stress. The gamified activities will be embedded within a series of scenarios which offer opportunities for exposure to stressful circumstances and guide students in the development of positive coping strategies and skills, as well as allow students to gain access to interactive online educational material. The world will also provide opportunities for users to monitor their mental health by means of virtual surveys *(See Deliverable 03)* and to participate in anonymous, virtual counselling sessions inside the environment. The specific objectives of PLAY are to:

- Develop a series of gamified scenarios/situations which are related to university life and which may be stressful and/or anxiety-inducing for students
- Develop a psycho-educational counselling environment within the virtual world
- Provide a means of monitoring student's mental health needs via a virtual world survey

A core aspect of PLAY Virtual World involves the development of gamified activities or "scenarios". These scenarios provide an operationalisation of students needs in respect of their mental health (e.g. the identification of stressful university/academic-related situations) and are tailored to the specific dynamics of the environment. The overarching aims of these gamified scenarios are to promote positive reactions to stressful circumstances, create opportunities for students to develop skills to tackle stress and anxiety and to learn how to reduce and prevent stress and anxiety. These aims will also be supported by the development of educational content, which will be embedded within the Virtual world and complement the gamified scenarios. The educational material will be designed to reinforce the psycho-educational approach to mental health and wellbeing implicit within PLAY, provide additional supporting information which can further strengthen participant/player knowledge of mental health, positive attitudes and promote help-seeking behaviours.

3. Creating educational content for the 3D virtual world

3.1. Designing the educational content

In line with the concept of mental health literacy, educational content was designed to:

- Build knowledge of mental health difficulties, specifically university-related stress and anxiety, in a manner which can help players recognise the symptoms of stress and anxiety, as well as the risk factors and causes of these kinds of mental health difficulties in university settings.
- Strengthen knowledge of the management and prevention of stress and anxiety,
- Cultivate positive beliefs and attitudes about stress and anxiety, as well as positive attitudes and beliefs towards help-seeking,
- Build knowledge of self-treatments and preventative actions as well as how and when to seek mental health information and support
- Knowledge of support and help-seeking.

The development of the educational content involved collaboration between: (i) psychologists – experts in anxiety, wellbeing and mental health; (ii) computer scientists – experts in game-based learning, gamification and interaction design; and (iii) expert software developers. Collaboration between key stakeholders outlined above was essential to ensure that the educational content was rooted in an evidence-based, psychologically-informed approach to strengthening mental health awareness and knowledge, whilst being simultaneously tailored to the specific dynamics of the environment, including the use of avatars, virtual objects, etc. This activity was enriched by a brief review of available resources for promoting mental health that specifically target university students and/or young adults. This was undertaken to identify additional resources / supportive information which could be beneficial to participants in the game.

3.2. Key considerations – The rationale for the educational content

The PLAY 3D virtual world consists of several gamified scenarios (*See Deliverable 01*) which allow students/players to engage in several tasks which allow them to engage in stressful scenarios related to university life. The selection of these scenarios was led by a process of

data collection and inquiry conducted with university students based in Greece and Ireland. The 3D virtual world is designed to allow players to develop knowledge and gain skills related to overcoming stress and anxiety. Overall, the educational content was designed to dovetail with the PLAY 3D virtual world scenarios (i.e. the gamified situations). In this way, the educational content reinforces the "messages" and skill building processes triggered by participation in the scenarios that make up the 3D virtual world. Additionally, the educational information was also tailored to the technological requirements of the game, whilst pedagogical issues were also taken into considerations. Overall, the educational information was designed to be accessible and was shaped to provide "informational nuggets" or key take away messages which could strengthen knowledge, awareness and beliefs in relation to stress and anxiety, as well as their management and treatment. This is outlined in some more detail below.

3.2.1. Psychological rationale for the educational content

It is important to note that the 3D virtual world game dynamic is rooted in a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) -based approach to tackling stress and anxiety. CBT is a commonly used, evidence-based approach to psychotherapeutic counselling. It is widely considered to result in significant benefits in the treatment of mental health difficulties, including anxiety, stress and depression. CBT focuses on the links – which are often unconscious – between our feelings, thoughts and behaviours. More specifically, it aims to help participants to gain insight into the cyclical relationships between our feelings, thoughts and behaviours and to change feelings and thought patterns (including conscious, unconscious beliefs, attitudes), and, ultimately, to change behaviour, in order to promote healthier behaviours and to help participants overcome difficulties and achieve their goals (Beck & Emery, 1985). The fundamental premise underpinning CBT is that altering negative or distorted patterns of thinking and feeling and replacing them with more positive patterns of thinking and feeling can help to promote more positive behaviours and actions (Christ et al., 2020) *(See Deliverable 01).*

Educational material embedded in the world is designed to complement the underlying theoretical and psychological rationale for the game environment. Therefore, it is in part intended to reflect a CBT-oriented approach to mental health and wellbeing. Thus, the

educational materials embedded in the game are designed to help build an awareness and understanding of the signs and symptoms of mental health difficulties, particularly anxiety and stress. For instance, educational content which helps participants understand the physiological symptoms of stress and anxiety will be included, whilst information which outlines the links between feelings, thoughts and emotions is also provided. The information will also provide information on cognitive distortions and how they may have a detrimental impact on behaviour. CBT-based approaches to tackling negative patterns of thinking and feeling in order to promote positive and proactive mental health behaviours are also addressed (e.g. positive coping, help-seeking).

3.2.2. Pedagogical rationale for the educational content

Pedagogical considerations for the development of educational content were also important. Thus, the educational material was constructed to bring additional learning into the experience of being in the virtual world. The goal was to design educational material which was integrated into the virtual world, accessible and interactive. Thus, a range of different types of educational materials were created in order to enhance the learning experience and to help to strengthen the mental health literacy of students, particularly their awareness of stress and anxiety, it's consequences for mental health and wellbeing, as well as steps they can take to promote mental health and wellbeing.

Instructional techniques and strategies adopted are outlined in brief below:

- "Chunking": Clear and brief educational material was created in which passages of text were deliberately short. Concentration for online materials can decline quickly. Thus, "chunks" or brief educational nuggets of content were created to ensure that the material met the learning needs of players/participants, whilst also not distracting from the immersive playing experience.
- Checklist-type materials: Like "chunking", educational content was organised into brief "checklist-type" materials (e.g. brief lists, bullet points). This approach was adopted to ensure that materials were presented in a digestible format, whilst also allowing players to organise their thoughts and to think about how it applies to their own circumstances.

- Visual material: Supporting visual materials (e.g. diagrams, infographic-type materials, posters) were also provided as educational content. Visual material was provided to ensure that educational information could be presented in a digestible and accessible manner.
- Interactive material: Reflective pedagogical strategies such as quizzes were implemented in the world in order to encourage an active learning experiences, where participants / players are motivated to engage with the materials and must reflect on its content. This type of approach has been found to improve online learning outcomes (Dobson, 2008).

3.2.3. Technological rationale for the educational content

Experiential learning principles support pedagogies such as “learning by doing” (Ying, 1967), which engage students in critical thinking, problem solving and decision making. Having in mind that, as well as the fact that ICT technologies are important driving factor for the developments in education, the work in the PLAY aims to offer educational material in the students that are immersed in the virtual world while playing games.

The concept of immersion is very important for the success of providing educational material into PLAY 3D Virtual Word and is the feeling of "actually being there", accompanied with the interaction with virtual objects can enhance learners' interest and engagement to the learning tasks and help them to develop a stronger conceptual understanding, depending on the content (Dickey, 2005; Frisbee). Therefore, with the prospect of providing learners with experiences they would otherwise not be able to experience in the physical world (or in a classroom), a rapidly growing interest in 3D virtual world learning activities is observed by a large number of schools and universities worldwide (De Freitas, 2008). A number of research works aim at providing learners with experiential learning of different scientific topics through simulations or role-play games in 3D interactive virtual worlds (Maratou, Xenos, Vucković, Granic, & Drecun, 2015; Ntokas, Maratou, & Xenos, 2015; Xenos, Maratou, Ntokas, Mettouris, & Papadopoulos, 2017; Xenos, Maratou, Stefanov, & Stefanov, 2016).

Many teachers find the idea of adding scenario-based learning to their teaching methods interesting, as it makes classroom experiences more appealing and highly engaging. Generally, scenario-based learning immerses the learners in real life or situational simulations

or learning experiences that allow them to gather skills or information that they will recall for future use. This work, therefore, exploits innovative technology-based learning strategies and pedagogical frameworks which are in compliance with the 2013 EU initiative: “Opening Up Education: Innovative teaching and learning for all through new technologies and open educational resources”. Through these innovative methods, the aim of this work is to provide children and public with awareness and knowledge and help them develop essential skills necessary to cope with natural hazards.

According to educational theorist, Kolb (2014) “Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience”. Similarly, Beard and Wilson (2002) argue that experiential learning engages students in critical thinking, problem solving and decision making. The emergence of ICT has added another aspect that influences to a significant extent the way both educators (teachers) and students view the learning process. In the context of the work of PLAY project, ICT technologies are used to include educational content into the PLAY 3D virtual world, allowing students to learn while they play.

4. Creating educational content for the 3D virtual world

Drawing together the psychological, technological and pedagogical rationale for the educational material and informed by the overarching approach to the virtual world / game experiences of players, a range of educational material was developed. This educational material reinforces the psychoeducational approach which underpins the PLAY virtual world and aims to strengthen the mental health literacy of the targeted participants – university students. The educational content was designed to be embedded in the world and to allow for an immersive, interactive and engaging learning experience.

Several chunks of educational content were developed which were designed to: a) build knowledge of university-related stress and anxiety, including awareness of symptoms, risk factors and causes of stress and anxiety; b)strengthen awareness of preventative strategies, as well as the management of university related stress and anxiety; and c) cultivate positive beliefs and attitudes, as well as understanding of positive coping strategies and help seeking behaviours.

Importantly, these also dovetail with the content/gamified scenarios in the PLAY virtual world (see Deliverable 01) and therefore, the content also feeds into participants' experiences of the scenarios and the learning acquired during the game. The educational content is listed below, these are also described in detail in Appendix 1.

Table 1: Overview of Educational Content

No.	Educational material	Aims
1	Anxiety and negative stress	• Understanding / Awareness of anxiety and negative stress • Awareness of symptoms
2	Understanding Anxiety	• Building understanding / knowledge • Awareness of Anxiety and negative stress • Awareness of symptoms • Awareness of effective approaches to reducing physical symptoms of • anxiety
3	Stress, Anxiety and Mental Health	• Building understanding / knowledge • Awareness of anxiety and negative stress • Awareness of symptoms • Awareness of risk factors and causes • Awareness of positive coping strategies

4	Understanding links between thoughts, feelings and behaviours	• Awareness of anxiety and negative stress • Awareness of symptoms • Awareness of risk factors and causes • Awareness of positive coping strategies
5	Tips for dealing with study anxiety	• Awareness of / knowledge of preventative approaches • Awareness of positive coping strategies • Promoting self-help
6	Social anxiety	• Building understanding / knowledge • Awareness of anxiety and social stress • Awareness of symptoms and causes • Awareness of positive coping strategies • Promoting help seeking
7	Tips for Managing Social Anxiety Disorder	• Awareness / knowledge of preventative approaches • Awareness of positive coping strategies • Promoting self-help
8	Additional Tips for managing social anxiety	• Awareness / knowledge of preventative approaches • Awareness of positive coping strategies • Promoting self-help
9	Additional tips for social anxiety	• Further awareness of social anxiety • Additional coping strategies
10	Awareness of Overthinking / Tips for combating overthinking	• Awareness of overthinking / knowledge of rumination • Tips for combating overthinking • Awareness of coping strategies
11	Educational information about fear of failure / tips to combat fear of failure	• Awareness of fear of failure • Knowledge of positive coping strategies
12	Managing Group activities	• Building awareness / knowledge / positive attitudes • Awareness of positive coping strategies
13	Tips for working on group assignment	• Building awareness / knowledge / positive attitudes • Awareness of positive coping strategies
14	Awareness of social anxiety	• Strengthening awareness of social anxiety • Building students' ability to recognise social anxiety
15	Recognising social anxiety	• Strengthening awareness of social anxiety • Building students' ability to recognise social anxiety
16	Tips for managing social anxiety	• Building awareness of positive social skills to manage social anxiety

17	Additional information for mature students	• Building awareness / knowledge / positive attitudes • Awareness of positive coping strategies

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Appendix 1 – Educational information

Educational information 1	Anxiety and negative stress

- Feeling stressed can be triggered by an event that makes you feel frustrated or nervous. Anxiety includes feelings of nervousness, worry, unease and dread. Anxiety can occur as a reaction to stress.
- Most people experience stress and anxiety on occasion – like before a big test – this is normal; but it can escalate and interfere with our ability to cope.
- Stress and anxiety produce physical and psychological symptoms
- Common physical symptoms include:
  - Stomach pains
  - Muscle tension
  - Headaches
  - Rapid breathing
  - Fast heartbeat
  - Sweating
  - Shaking
  - Dizziness
- Mental and emotional symptoms include
  - Panic, fear, nervousness,
  - Feeling of doom
  - Difficulty concentrating
  - Your thoughts are racing and you cannot seem to stop them
  - Restlessness

(Healthline, n.d.)

Educational information 2	Understanding Anxiety

Which of the following are physical symptoms of anxiety?

1. Racing heart
2. Sweaty palms
3. Rapid breathing
4. All of the above

Answer = 4

What happens when you're feeling negative stress and anxiety?

1. You feel you can't cope with the situation
2. You feel you can't think straight
3. You think everything will be OK
4. Both 1 and 2 of the above

Answer 4 – both 1 and 2

The symptoms of anxiety can be calmed by:

1. They can't be calmed
2. Controlling your breathing
3. Releasing tension from the body
4. Both 2 and 3 of the above

Answer 4 – both 2 and 3 are true

Which of the following is true of breathing relaxation techniques?

1. It can be self-taught
2. It can be done anywhere
3. It helps to release tension and clear the mind
4. All of the above are true

Answer = 4 all of the above

Educational information 3	**Stress, Anxiety and Mental Health**

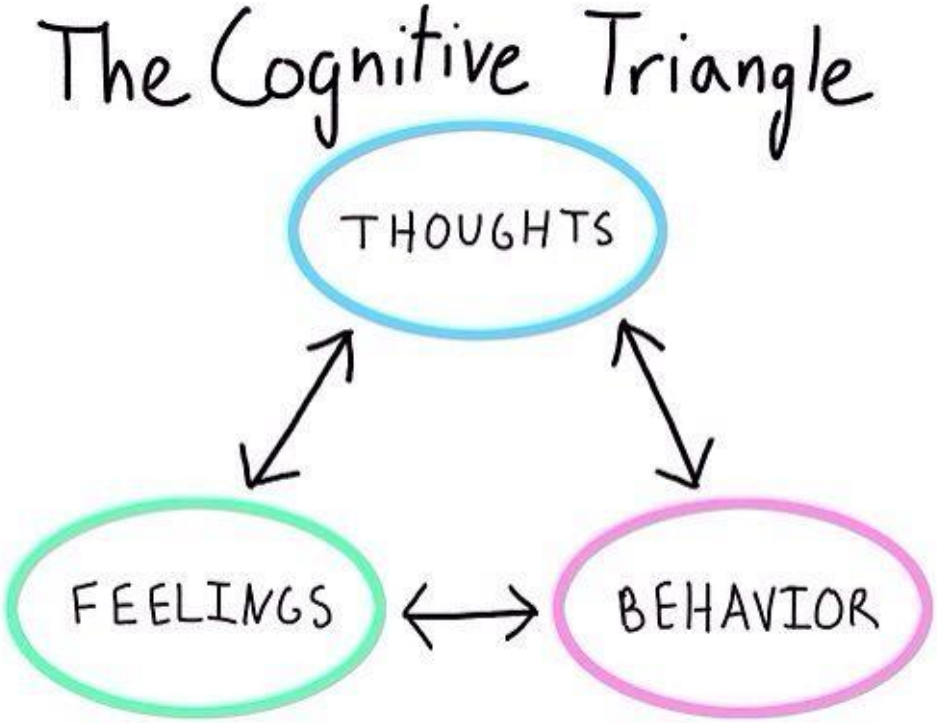
Everyone has problems, both big and small. Thinking about your problems leads to anxiety. When you get anxious you get stuck in a negative thinking pattern. To solve your problems, it helps to learn how your thoughts, feelings and actions are connected.

Imagine you have an upcoming test and you think "I'm going to fail" - because of this thought, you start to worry. You are so worried that you feel sick just thinking about the test, and because you feel sick – you cannot study and find it hard to remember information because all you can think about is not doing well in the exam.

What might happen if your control your anxious thoughts? What if you changed how you are thinking and became more relaxed and more positive?

(Adapted from Therapist Aid, 2018)

Educational information 4	**Understanding links between thoughts, feelings and behaviours**



Educational information 5	**Tips for dealing with study anxiety**

Write down a to do list

Your challenges will seem a less overwhelming if they are broken down into steps.

Break things down into manageable chunks

Achieving a simple task (and ticking it off the to-do list) can help to get us started and give us a boost. This can reduce stress and motivate us to take on the next task. Some students find a study timetable can help.

Watch your inner voice

What how you talk to yourself and avoid being overly critical – negativity can make you more stressed. Think of a time that you did well in an exam –What did you do to prepare and study? How did you feel? Thinking of your successes can help you feel more confident.

Talk it out

Talking to someone else about how you're feeling can make a huge difference. This could be with a friend, parent, counsellor or teacher. Talking about what's stressing you will help you find your own solutions. A problem shared is a problem halved.

Relax

Catch yourself when you are getting anxious - what are the signs that you need to take a break and relax? Relax and stay calm if you feel you are getting anxious by using your breathing to regulate the intensity of your emotions and help to ground yourself. Make sure to break from your studies to enjoy life and relax, exercise can help or socialising talking with friends and family.

(Adapted from Jigsaw, n.d.)

Educational information 6	**Social anxiety**

Social anxiety is a common problem that many people have to face and overcome in their lives. It refers to strong feelings of nervousness and discomfort which might arise for you in some or all of the social interactions within their life. You may feel anxious in one particular type of social situation (approaching an authority figure, giving a presentation, meeting new people) or may have a more general aversion to social scenarios.

Social anxiety does not arise out a lack of social competence, but rather, from a stronger than average wish to be liked by others which may create an increased sense of internal stress and worry relating to whether you feel you are conducting yourself in a socially acceptable way.

Social anxiety might make you feel as if your every act and movement is being closely scrutinised in an unfavourable manner by others and might make you more sensitive to teasing/criticism, leading to you taking incidents of this nature very personally. The sense of anxiety created can impose a burden on your capacity to express yourself freely and may lead to you displaying some or all of the following signs in social scenarios:

- Jittery and nervous demeanour (e.g., shuffling feet, fidgeting hands, fast speech, mind going blank etc.)
- Excessive sweating or blushing
- Withdrawal or noticeable quietness within group settings
- Easily embarrassed/Avoid completing certain tasks out of fear of failing in front of others
- Difficulty expressing yourself clearly in the presence of other, particularly in the case of interactions with authority figures

Social anxiety can seem overwhelming and make certain social situations appear particularly daunting and unmanageable. However, it is possible to overcome these feelings and begin to behave in a manner which will enable to feel more comfortable in expressing ourselves and ensure that we are able to do what is required to have our needs met.

Educational information 7	Tips for Managing Social Anxiety

Educational information 8	Additional Tips for managing social anxiety

The following can help you to manage the anxieties you may experience around social situations:

1. Seek assistance:

If you find yourself at a crisis point or feel debilitated by experiences of social anxiety, you may need to consider availing of some professional assistance. Try to make an appointment at your university's counselling services. If this seems like too big an ask, perhaps you might try calling a mental health helpline which may allow you to preserve your own anonymity to begin talking about the problem. Taking the first step is often the most difficult but also the most crucial in getting the help you need and deserve.

2. Celebrate your achievements:

Don't allow your victories or progress to pass by unacknowledged. Every step forward, however small you may deem it to be, is a step in the right direction. Be proud of the progress you make and try to keep track of it. These small wins can be your fuel for further achievements at a later date

3. Try journaling:

Making regular journal entries (ideally on a daily basis) can be a really effective means through which to do this. It will enable you to document the progress you make and provides a valuable vessel through which you can express yourself in a clear, open and uncensored manner – something which is equally important during the tough times as when you are taking positive steps.

4. *Become your own advocate:*

No one know you as well as you know yourself. Inform yourself about what you are experiencing and try to let others (including tutors/lecturers) know about the challenges you face. Your experience is unique to you, so it is important that you communicate to others about it so they can better understand and accommodate for your needs.

5. Put yourself out there:

The temptation may be to avoid social situations if they result in feelings of stress or anxiety. However, it is important to retain your power and not be ruled by anxieties. Accept friends' invitations to go places and, where possible, try to do things that take you out of your comfort zone. Consider joining a club/group based around something you are good at or enjoy as this could offer a significant boost to your confidence and the level of positive emotion you experience in your life.

6. Look after your body:

Research has shown that exercise, particularly in forest or waterside environments, can have a considerable positive impact on our anxiety and stress levels, and overall wellbeing. Try to embed regular exercise into your routine. This can offer time to clear your mind and reflect on how you are feeling. Equally, be mindful of your diet and make an effort to moderate your caffeine and sugar intake.

Educational information 9	**Tips for managing social anxiety**

Procrastinators are often perfectionists, for whom it may be psychologically more acceptable to never tackle a job than to face the possibility of not doing it well. They may be so highly concerned about what others will think of them that they put their futures at risk to avoid judgment. This means that you have trouble persuading yourself to do the things you should do or would like to do. When you procrastinate, instead of working on important, meaningful tasks, you find yourself performing trivial activities. (Psychology Today, n.d.)

Procrastination is one of the main barriers blocking you from getting up, making the right decisions, and living the dream life you've thought of.

Recent studies have shown that people regret more the things they haven't done than the things they have done. In addition, feelings of anxiety, regret, and guilt resulting from missed opportunities tend to stay with people much longer. Sometimes all our opportunities seem to be on our fingertips, but we can't seem to reach them. When you procrastinate, you waste time that you could be investing in something meaningful. If you can overcome this fierce enemy, you will be able to accomplish more and in doing so better utilize the potential that life has to offer. (Procrastination.com, n.d.)

Educational information 10	**Awareness of overthinking / Tips to combat overthinking**

Overthinking comes in two forms: ruminating about the past and worrying about the future. It's different from problem-solving, because problem-solving involves thinking about a solution and overthinking involves dwelling on the problem. Overthinking is also different from self-reflection, which is about learning something about yourself or gaining a new perspective about a situation whereas overthinking involves dwelling on how bad you feel and thinking about all the things you have no control over. Time spent developing creative solutions or learning from your behavior is productive, but time spent overthinking, whether it's 10 minutes or 10 hours, won't enhance your life.

Here are 10 signs that you're an overthinker:

1. I relive embarrassing moments in my head repeatedly.
2. I have trouble sleeping because it feels like my brain won't shut off.
3. I ask myself a lot of "what if..." questions.

4. I spend a lot of time thinking about the hidden meaning in things people say or events that happen.
5. I rehash conversations I had with people in my mind and think about all the things I wished I had or hadn't said.
6. I constantly relive my mistakes.
7. When someone says or acts in a way I don't like, I keep replaying it in my mind.
8. Sometimes I'm not aware of what's going on around me because I'm dwelling on things that happened in the past or worrying about things that might happen in the future.
9. I spend a lot of time worrying about things I have no control over.
10. I can't get my mind off my worries.

(Bauwens, n.d.)

Overthinking often involves two destructive thought patterns: ruminating and incessant worrying. Ruminating involves dwelling on the past, which translate in thoughts like:

- I shouldn't have said those things at the meeting yesterday. Everyone must think I'm an idiot.
- I should have stayed at my last job. I would be happier than I am now.
- My parents didn't teach me how to be confident. My insecurities have always held me back.

Persistent worrying involves negative, and often catastrophic, predictions about the future:

- I'm going to embarrass myself tomorrow when I give that presentation. I know I'm going to forget everything I'm supposed to say.
- Everyone else will get promoted before me.
- I know we won't ever have enough money to retire. We'll be too sick to work and we'll run out of money.

(Morin, 2017)

Note#2 How to stop overthinking.

1. Notice when you're stuck in your head.

Overthinking can become such a habit that you don't even recognize when you're doing it. When you're replaying events in your mind over and over, or worrying about things you can't control, acknowledge that your thoughts aren't productive. Thinking is only helpful when it leads to positive action.

2. Keep the focus on problem-solving.

Dwelling on your problems isn't helpful but looking for solutions is. If it's something you have some control over, consider how you can prevent the problem or challenge yourself to identify five potential solutions. Focus on the things you can control, like your attitude and effort.

3. Challenge your thoughts.

It's easy to get carried away with negative thoughts. So, before you conclude that forgetting one deadline will cause you to become homeless, acknowledge that your thoughts may be exaggeratedly negative. Remember that your emotions will interfere with your ability to look at

situations objectively. Take a step back and look at the evidence. What evidence do you have that your thought is true? What evidence do you have that your thought isn't true?

4. Schedule time for reflection.
Stewing on your problems for long periods of time isn't productive, but brief reflection can be helpful. Incorporate 20 minutes of "thinking time" into your daily schedule. During that time period let yourself worry, ruminate, or mull over whatever you want. When your time is up, move onto something else.

5. Learn mindfulness skills.
It's impossible to rehash yesterday or worry about tomorrow when you're living in the present. Mindfulness will help you become more aware of the here and now. Just like any other skill, mindfulness takes practice, but over time, it can decrease overthinking. There are classes, books, apps, courses, and videos available to help you learn mindfulness skills.

6. Change the channel
Telling yourself to stop thinking about something will backfire. The more you try to prevent a thought from entering your brain, the more likely it is to keep popping up. Change the channel in your brain by changing your activity. Exercise, engage in conversation on a completely different subject, or work on a project that distracts you. Doing something different will put an end to the barrage of negative thoughts.

(Morin, 2017)

Note#3 Communication and overthinking

When communicating with a person that is an overthinker one should be mindful that saying something that will help the person to focus on the problem will only help to increase anxiety and, consequently, to renew the overthinking on negative and catastrophic thoughts associated with fear of failure and procrastination. Alternatively, one should communicate towards directing the overthinker to focus on problem-solving and solutions, that will help him/her to break the cycle of negativity and self-doubt.

Educational information 11	**Educational information about Fear of Failure / Tips to combat Fear of failure**

Fear of failure has been defined as “persistent and irrational anxiety about failing to measure up to the standards and goals set by oneself or others” (American Psychological Association 2007, p. 369). Failure fearers tend to be anxious, high in self-doubt, and are uncertain about their ability to avoid failure or achieve success (Covington 1992).

While these students may work hard and achieve, they tend to be adversely affected by setbacks as it tends to confirm their doubts about their ability and their uncertain control (Covington 1992; Martin and Marsh 2003). Often in response to this fear of failure, these students may actively sabotage their chances of success (e.g., procrastinate, leave tasks until the last minute, or expend little effort) so that they have an excuse if they do not do so well. This excuse serves a protective function in that they can blame their poor performance on their procrastination, for example, rather than a possible lack of ability (Covington 1992; Martin 2010).

Recent theory and research (Covington 1992; Martin 2010; Martin and Marsh 2003) has separated many failure fearers into two groups:

(1) students who deal with their fear of failure by hard work and/or success, often referred to as overstrivers (or sometimes as perfectionists);

(2) The self-protector, that means students who deal with their fear of failure through counterproductive activity that is aimed more at self-protection than attaining success.

The overstriver tends to avoid failure by succeeding (Covington 1992). Factors that are associated with this form of failure fearing include anxiety, perceptions of low control, and an unstable self-esteem (Martin 2010). The risks inherent in this form of failure fearing are twofold. First, it renders the academic journey as somewhat unpleasant, fraught with anxiety, perceptions of low control, and unstable self-esteem (Martin 2010). Second, when overstrivers do not succeed, failure is seen as proof of suspected incompetence and this increases the risk of falling into the second and more counterproductive form of failure avoidance: self-protection (Covington 1992).

The self-protector does not aim so much to avoid failure but to avoid the implications of failure (Covington 1992). They avoid the implications of failure through strategically manoeuvrings in ways to protect their self-worth. In doing so, they are able to mitigate the extent to which failure reflects poorly on their ability and consequent self-worth (Covington 1992).

(Martin, 2012)

Note#5 Educational information about "How to reduce Fear of Failure"

- **No shame policy**: The most common fear of failure that young people report is the fear of shame and embarrassment. This is seen in students who don't volunteer an answer to a question in class for fear of looking bad in front of their peers. Trying and failing is definitely seen as not cool. We can overcome this fear by creating an environment where failure isn't followed by laughter, ridicule and embarrassment.
- **Address the problem:** Psychologists believe that there are three ways people cope with situations. These are Avoidant, Emotional and Problem Focused. Let's say you are worried about snakes in your garden. You could decide to never go into your garden again (avoidant focused), or convince yourself that having snakes in your back garden isn't that bad (emotion focused) or go into your garden and get rid of the snakes (problem focused). Whereas avoidant and emotional focused coping may provide a short relief, problem focused coping addresses the issue head on, allowing you to make long term gains. Don't be an ostrich and bury your head in the sand. If something is worrying you, work out how you can make it better.
- **Learn from your mistakes**: Those who focused on their learning are called task-orientated. Creating a task orientated environment (by focusing more on individual development and less in comparison to others) should increase motivation, confidence, self-regulation, academic performance as well as reducing anxiety.

- **Don't bottle it up**: If something is worrying you, talk to someone like a parent, friend, teacher or coach. These people can give advice, support, or even just listen to you. Using the support available to you is one of the strategies that Olympic champions use to develop their resilience.
- **Question your fears**: Are your fears actually irrational and highly unlikely to come true? Many students end up worrying about the worst-case scenario, often for no logical reason. It's good to reassure them that if they have put the hard work in, there is no reason to assume the worst.
- **Focus on what you can control**: When people focus on things that they can't change, it often makes them stressed or nervous. By helping people focus on what they can control, it gives them a sense of certainty and confidence. Students can't control what grade they will achieve, but they can be processed focused if they concentrate on what they can control (their effort, their attitude, how organised they are).
- **Embrace the grey**: Young people can think that a good grade means that everything is good. On the flip side, a poor grade or a defeat and everything seems all doom and gloom. This sort of black and white thinking can lead to stress, anxiety and fragile self-esteem. Judging yourself on your attitude, effort and what you've learned are better markers and are probably more likely to result in the good grades and wins that they so desire.

(Inner Drive, n.d.)

Educational information 12	**Managing Group activities**

Everyone has a skill or talent. No one likes being assigned to a group project as they often do not know the person that they have to work with. In order to work well together it is important that you identify everyone's talents and use them according to their skills. Each individual has to negotiate their position and problem solve the best way to get a good outcome for all the members of the group.

One way to move forward is to use problem solving techniques. Learning to use negotiation / good problem-solving skills can be adapted to every aspect of your life.

Educational information 13	**Tips for working on group assignment**

- **Hope and Optimism to motivate participants**
  Stay optimistic and positive about reaching the final goal. Be enthusiastic about the project and the positive outcome if everyone works together.
- **Choose a project leader**
  Assign a project leader who want to lead the group and who will be responsible for communicating with the others.
- **Establish regular meetings**
  Be very clear about the expectation to attend meetings and the get the group working well together. Set up regular group meetings online or face to face
  Identify the best way to update /communicate with everyone in the group (email text teams zoom face to face)
- **Break down the steps in the assignment**
  Break the assignment into tasks to be completed and set dates for each section. Also establish where the deadline will be posted up, how the group will be notified and how the leader will be monitored progress.
- **Equal distribution of tasks**

Try to evenly distribute the task to all members of group respecting individual strengths. If someone is not participating or holding up the group go back and discuss this as a team and if necessary, contact the lecturer who assigned the project.

- **Timelines**
  Be sure to set the final completion date a few days prior to the due date of the assignment so that you have a window to check over the completed work.

Educational information 14	**Awareness of social anxiety / Tips**

Social anxiety disorder involves intense fear of certain social situations—especially situations that are unfamiliar or in which you feel you'll be watched or evaluated by others. These situations may be so frightening that you get anxious just thinking about them or go to great lengths to avoid them, disrupting your life in the process. Underlying social anxiety disorder is the fear of being scrutinized, judged, or embarrassed in public. You may be afraid that people will think badly of you or that you won't measure up in comparison to others. And even though you probably realize that your fears of being judged are at least somewhat irrational and overblown, you still can't help feeling anxious (Smith, Segal, & Shubin, 2021).

When communicating with a person with social anxiety one should avoid communicating in a way that could be interpreted by them as a judgment of their actions, thoughts and/or feelings, as fear of being (poorly) judged by others in social situations is one of the more common and stronger sources of social anxiety.

Educational information 15	**Recognising social anxiety**

Just because you occasionally get nervous in social situations doesn't mean you have social anxiety disorder or social phobia. Many people feel shy or self-conscious on occasion, yet it doesn't get in the way of their everyday functioning. Social anxiety disorder, on the other hand, does interfere with your normal routine and causes tremendous distress.
For example, it's perfectly normal to get the jitters before giving a speech. But if you have social anxiety, you might worry for weeks ahead of time, call in sick to get out of it, or start shaking so bad during the speech that you can hardly speak.

Emotional signs and symptoms of social anxiety disorder:

- Excessive self-consciousness and anxiety in everyday social situations
- Intense worry for days, weeks, or even months before an upcoming social situation
- Extreme fear of being watched or judged by others, especially people you don't know
- Fear that you'll act in ways that will embarrass or humiliate yourself
- Fear that others will notice that you're nervous Physical signs and symptoms:
- Red face, or blushing
- Shortness of breath
- Upset stomach, nausea (i.e. butterflies)
- Trembling or shaking (including shaky voice)
- Racing heart or tightness in chest
- Sweating or hot flashes
- Feeling dizzy or faint

Behavioral signs and symptoms:

- Avoiding social situations to a degree that limits your activities or disrupts your life
- Staying quiet or hiding in the background in order to escape notice and embarrassment
- A need to always bring a buddy along with you wherever you go
- Drinking before social situations in order to soothe your nerves

(Smith, Segal, & Shubin, 2021)

NOTE #4: Educational material about "How to deal with Social Anxiety"

While it may seem like there's nothing you can do about the symptoms of social anxiety disorder or social phobia, in reality, there are many things that can help. The first step is challenging your mentality.

Social anxiety sufferers have negative thoughts and beliefs that contribute to their fears and anxiety. These can include thoughts such as:

- "I know I'll end up looking like a fool."
- "My voice will start shaking and I'll humiliate myself."
- "People will think I'm stupid"
- "I won't have anything to say. I'll seem boring."

Challenging these negative thoughts is an effective way to reduce the symptoms of social anxiety.

Step 1: Identify the automatic negative thoughts that underlie your fear of social situations. For example, if you're worried about an upcoming work presentation, the underlying negative thought might be: "I'm going to blow it. Everyone will think I'm completely incompetent."

Step 2: Analyze and challenge these thoughts. It helps to ask yourself questions about the negative thoughts: "Do I know for sure that I'm going to blow the presentation?" or "Even if I'm nervous, will people necessarily think I'm incompetent?" Through this logical evaluation of your negative thoughts, you can gradually replace them with more realistic and positive ways of looking at social situations that trigger your anxiety.

Ask yourself if you're engaging in any of the following unhelpful thinking styles:

- Mind reading – Assuming you know what other people are thinking, and that they see you in the same negative way that you see yourself.
- Fortune telling – Predicting the future, usually while assuming the worst will happen. You just "know" that things will go horribly, so you're already anxious before you're even in the situation.
- Catastrophizing – Blowing things out of proportion. For example, if people notice that you're nervous, it will be "awful", "terrible", or "disastrous."
- Personalizing – Assuming that people are focusing on you in a negative way or that what's going on with other people has to do with you.

(Smith, Segal, & Shubin, 2021)

NOTE #5: Communication and Social Anxiety

When communicating with a person with social anxiety one should avoid communicating in a way that could be interpreted by them as a judgment of their actions, thoughts and/or feelings, as fear of being (poorly) judged by others in social situations is one of the more common and stronger sources of social anxiety.

Educational information 16	**Tips for managing social anxiety**

Tip 1: Focus on others, not yourself

When we're in a social situation that makes us nervous, many of us tend to get caught up in our anxious thoughts and feelings. You may be convinced that everyone is looking at you and judging you. Your focus is on your bodily sensations, hoping that by paying extra close attention you can better control them. But this excessive self-focus just makes you more aware of how nervous you're feeling, triggering even more anxiety! It also prevents you from fully concentrating on the conversations around you or the performance you're giving.

Switching from an internal to an external focus can go a long way toward reducing social anxiety. This is easier said than done, but you can't pay attention to two things at once. The more you concentrate on what's happening around you, the less you'll be affected by anxiety. Focus your attention on other people, but not on what they're thinking of you! Instead, do your best to engage them and make a genuine connection. Really listen to what is being said not to your own negative thoughts.

Remember that anxiety isn't as visible as you think. And even if someone notices that you're nervous, that doesn't mean they'll think badly of you. Chances are other people are feeling just as nervous as you, or have done in the past.

Focus on the present moment, rather than worrying about what you're going to say or beating yourself up for a flub that's already passed. Release the pressure to be perfect. Instead, focus on being genuine and attentive, which are qualities that other people will appreciate.

Tip 2: Learn to control your breathing

Many changes happen in your body when you become anxious. One of the first changes is that you begin to breathe quickly. Overbreathing (hyperventilation) throws off the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in your body—leading to more physical symptoms of anxiety, such as dizziness, a feeling of suffocation, increased heart rate, and muscle tension.
Learning to slow your breathing down can help bring your physical symptoms of anxiety back under control. Practicing the following breathing exercise will help you stay calm:

- Sit comfortably with your back straight and your shoulders relaxed. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.
- Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose for 4 seconds. The hand on your stomach should rise, while the hand on your chest should move very little.
- Hold the breath for 2 seconds.

- Exhale slowly through your mouth for 6 seconds, pushing out at much air as you can. The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale, but your other hand should move very little.
- Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Focus on keeping a slow and steady breathing pattern of 4-in, 2-hold, and 6-out.

Tip 3: Face your fears

One of the most helpful things you can do to overcome social anxiety is to face the social situations you fear rather than avoid them. Avoidance keeps social anxiety disorder going. While avoiding nerve-wracking situations may help you feel better in the short term, it prevents you from becoming more comfortable in social situations and learning how to cope in the long term.

While it may seem impossible to overcome a feared social situation, you can do it by taking it one small step at a time. The key is to start with a situation that you can handle and gradually work your way up to more challenging situations, building your confidence and coping skills as you move up the "anxiety ladder."

Take a social and communication skills class or an assertiveness training class. Volunteer doing something you enjoy, such as walking dogs in a shelter, anything that will give you an activity to focus on while you are also engaging with a small number of like-minded people. Work on your communication skills. Good relationships depend on clear, emotionally intelligent communication.

(Smith, Segal, & Shubin, 2021)

Educational information 17	**Additional information for mature students**

1. Accept that you have a problem, that it is your personal responsibility to deal with it
2. Ask for and accept help
3. Make an honest self-assessment of your strengths and weaknesses; Boost yourself with truths about you while Understanding and accepting your objective restrictions (job, family, background)
4. Think in your past: how did you resolve similar issues in the past? Think of others: how do people you admire deal with such issues?
5. Be flexible, patient; Break down the problem and find practical solutions

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