

FREE GUIDE · 12 PAGES

The Anxiety Toolkit

Breathing techniques and thought tools that actually hold up in research — used in real sessions.

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START HERE

How to use this guide

A suggestion before anything else: don't try to use all of it. Pick one tool — the box breathing on page 4 is where I'd start — and use it badly for a week. Badly is fine. Consistency beats technique.

Everything in here is something I actually use in sessions. Nothing requires equipment, an app, or a quiet mountain. Most tools take under three minutes.

The goal of this guide is not a calm mind. It's a body that remembers it's allowed to stand down.

One more thing. If a tool doesn't work for you, that's information, not failure. Different nervous systems answer different doors. Try the next one.

This guide is educational and is not a substitute for therapy, diagnosis, or assessment. If you are struggling, please reach out to a mental health professional. In crisis: Turkey 182 · Poland 116 123 · EU emergency 112.

What anxiety actually is

Anxiety is not a character flaw and not a malfunction. It's an alarm system — one that once did its job. Somewhere along the way, your system learned that staying alert kept you safe. The problem is that the danger it was built for has mostly passed, and nobody told the alarm.

This is why 'just calm down' and 'think positive' fail: trying to suppress a thought makes your brain rehearse it. To not think about something, the mind must first summon it. The fight is the fuel.

So the tools in this guide don't fight anxiety. They do two smarter things instead: they speak to the body in the body's own language (breath, senses), and they change your position relative to thoughts instead of arguing with them.

You can't reason with an alarm. But an alarm can be retrained — with evidence, repetition, and time.

Box breathing

The fastest lever you own. Your exhale is directly wired to the calming branch of your nervous system — slow the breath, and the body starts concluding the threat has passed.

- 1 — Breathe in through the nose for a count of 4.
- 2 — Hold for 4.
- 3 — Breathe out slowly for 4.
- 4 — Hold empty for 4. That's one box. Repeat for 8–10 boxes (about three minutes).

Do it before the anxious moment when you can — before the email, the call, the conversation. It works mid-spike too, but like any skill, it performs best where it was practiced.

Don't measure success by calmness. Measure it by whether you finished the ten boxes.

The long exhale

When four-count anything feels impossible — mid-panic, mid-meeting — use the shortest version that exists: make the exhale longer than the inhale. That's the whole tool.

- 1 — Take two short inhales through the nose (one full, one small sip on top).
- 2 — Then one long, slow sigh out through the mouth. Longer than felt natural.
- 3 — Repeat 3–5 times.

This double-inhale-long-exhale pattern is what bodies do naturally after crying — it's the nervous system's own reset gesture. You're not imposing anything foreign; you're borrowing the body's existing exit.

If you can sigh, you can regulate. It's rarely more complicated than that at minute one.

5-4-3-2-1 grounding

Anxiety lives in the future — in scenarios, predictions, rehearsals. Your senses only work in the present. This tool uses that fact as a lever.

5 — Name five things you can see. Slowly. Actual details: the scratch on the table, the color of the light.

4 — Four things you can feel. The chair against your back, fabric on your skin.

3 — Three things you can hear.

2 — Two things you can smell.

1 — One thing you can taste.

The point isn't distraction. The point is giving the scanning system a real, present-tense job — instead of the imaginary, future-tense one it invented.

You cannot be fully in your senses and fully in a catastrophe at the same time.

Defusion — stepping back from the thought

You can't delete an anxious thought. But you can change where you stand relative to it. In ACT this is called defusion, and its simplest form is one sentence long:

Instead of 'I'm a failure' — try 'I'm having the thought that I'm a failure.'

Say it slowly. Notice what shifts. In the first sentence you are inside the thought; in the second, you're the one watching it. The thought is still there. Its grip is not.

Variations that work: 'My mind is telling me that...' · 'Here's the danger story again.' · Saying the thought in a cartoon voice (absurd, and effective — it exposes the thought as sound, not fact).

Practice on small thoughts first. Defusion is a muscle; don't test it first on the heaviest weight in the room.

Name the story

Anxious minds don't produce infinite content. They produce reruns. Most people discover they have three, maybe four core stories: the not-enough story, the they'll-leave story, the something's-wrong-with-me story, the it-will-all-collapse story.

So name yours. Literally. When the spiral starts, see if you can recognize which rerun is playing, and greet it: 'Ah — the not-enough story. I know this one.'

Naming does two things: it converts an ambush into a recognition, and it quietly reminds you that you have survived every previous episode of this exact show.

A named story is a story you're reading. An unnamed story is a story you're inside.

The thought record

Once a day — or after any spike — take three minutes and write four lines. Paper slows the mind to the speed of a pen, and that alone changes what's possible.

1 — Situation: What actually happened? (Facts only, one line.)

2 — Thought: What did my mind say it meant?

3 — Feeling & body: What did I feel, and where in the body?

4 — Another angle: What would I say to a friend who brought me this exact situation?

That fourth line is the quiet engine of this tool. Most people possess remarkable compassion and clear judgment — currently reserved for everyone but themselves. The exercise borrows it back.

You don't need to believe the kind answer yet. You just need to write it down.

The worry window

Worry resists suppression but responds surprisingly well to scheduling. Instead of fighting worries all day, give them an office with fixed hours.

1 — Choose a daily 15-minute slot. Not within two hours of bedtime. Same time daily works best.

2 — When a worry appears outside the window, note it in one line ('money', 'the reply', 'health') and tell it: you have an appointment at six.

3 — At the appointed time, sit down with the list and worry properly, on purpose, for the full fifteen minutes.

Two things happen. First, postponing turns out to be possible — which itself is news to the system. Second, half the list, viewed at six o'clock, no longer feels worth the meeting.

The goal isn't fewer worries. It's worries that respect office hours.

Riding the wave

A wave of panic feels endless from the inside. Physiologically, the initial chemical surge is far shorter than it feels — what stretches it into hours is the fight: the second fear, the fear of the fear.

So when it spikes: stop trying to make it stop. Plant your feet. Long exhale (Tool 02). Name what's happening: 'This is a wave. It rises, it peaks, it passes. It always has.' Then let the body shake, heat up, buzz — waves are physical, and they are allowed to be.

Two habits quietly make anxiety stronger, and they deserve naming: safety behaviors (avoiding, checking, escaping early) teach the alarm that the situation really was dangerous. And reassurance loops — asking again, googling again — feed the very uncertainty they promise to soothe.

Every wave you ride to the end is evidence. Evidence is what retrains an alarm.

When to seek support

Tools manage moments. Therapy changes what generates the moments. If anxiety is shaping your decisions, your sleep, your relationships — or if the same pattern keeps returning no matter what you try — that's not a sign the tools failed. It's a sign the pattern has roots, and roots are therapy's territory.

How I work, briefly: online sessions in English or Turkish. ACT and schema therapy — one looks at the present and your values, the other at where the pattern learned its shape. Research-based, plain language, no shame.

The first step is a free 15-minute call. You ask your questions; we see if it's a fit. No pressure to decide.

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