

Riding the Wave of Anxiety

A Handout and Reflection

Worksheet

Understanding Anxiety

Anxiety often feels as though it will continue to rise forever, but research and clinical practice consistently show that emotions naturally rise, peak, and gradually fall over time. Although the experience can be intensely uncomfortable, anxiety is not designed to remain at its highest level indefinitely. Learning to stay with anxiety without immediately escaping or avoiding it helps your brain discover that you are capable of coping.

Evidence-based therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) each encourage a different but complementary approach. CBT helps people evaluate anxious thoughts and reduce avoidance. DBT teaches mindfulness and distress tolerance skills that help people remain effective during emotional storms. ACT emphasizes making room for uncomfortable experiences while continuing to move toward what matters most. Together, these approaches support the same principle: emotions are temporary experiences that can be observed, managed, and allowed to pass.

Why 'Riding the Wave' Works

Many people understandably respond to anxiety by avoiding situations, seeking reassurance, or trying to make the feeling disappear as quickly as possible. While these strategies often provide short-term relief, they can also teach the brain that anxiety is dangerous. Gradually learning to stay present with anxiety while using healthy coping skills allows the nervous system to settle naturally and builds confidence in your ability to cope.

Evidence-Based Facts

- Anxiety naturally rises and falls like a wave rather than increasing forever.
- Avoidance often reduces anxiety in the moment but can strengthen it over time.
- Mindfulness helps shift attention from fighting anxiety to observing it.
- Small, repeated practice is more effective than waiting until anxiety disappears.
- You do not have to eliminate anxiety before taking meaningful action.

Worksheet: Riding the Wave of Anxiety

1. Describe the Situation
2. What happened? What triggered your anxiety?

3. Notice the Wave
4. What did you notice in your body, thoughts, emotions, and urges?

5. Observe Rather Than Fight
6. If your anxiety could speak, what would it be saying? What did you notice without judging?

7. Skills I Used

Which skills helped? (Breathing, grounding, mindfulness, opposite action, self-soothing, other)

8. Watching the Wave Change

How did your anxiety change over time? Did it rise, peak, or begin to settle?

9. What I Learned

What surprised you? What would you like to remember next time?

My Personal Wave Plan

Early signs that my anxiety is beginning to rise:

What usually makes me want to avoid the situation?

What healthy response would help me ride the wave instead?

Who or what supports me when anxiety is high?

One small step I am willing to practise this week:

Reflection After the Wave

Complete this after you have had some time to reflect on your experience.

What happened that you feared would happen?

What actually happened?

What strengths did you discover in yourself?

What will you do differently the next time anxiety shows up?

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This handout is intended to support education and self-reflection. It is not a substitute for psychological assessment or treatment. If anxiety is persistent or significantly affecting your daily life, consider speaking with a qualified mental health professional.

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