




Your Mind Matters

PSYCHOLOGY SERVICES

eBook

We heard that some of our clients wanted to kick off their mental health journeys as soon as possible! With that in mind, we thought we would create a book to help you on your way, even before your first appointment with a YMM clinician.

Within this eBook, you'll find some information about us, what we do, information about common mental health difficulties, and some of our favourite exercises and techniques – just look for the  symbol.

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WELCOME TO YOUR MIND MATTERS PSYCHOLOGY SERVICES

RESEARCH TODAY INDICATES THAT APPROXIMATELY HALF OF US SUFFER FROM DISTRESS OR STRUGGLE WITH OUR MENTAL HEALTH AT LEAST ONCE DURING OUR LIFETIME, AND AT ANY GIVEN POINT, APPROXIMATELY 25% OF US (1 OUT OF 4 PEOPLE) ARE STRUGGLING.

Long gone are the days when seeing a psychologist, counsellor, or therapist was only for people in desperate need. Thankfully, we are living in a time where people recognise **mental health as being a fundamental pillar of overall well-being**. According to research, sleep, diet, and exercise are strong predictors of mental health and well-being (e.g., Wickham, 2021).

Psychologists are here to support clients on their journey, and wherever you start your journey with us is totally fine! You may start whilst you're in deep despair, or maybe you're just starting to struggle. Maybe you've thought about working with us for a while but weren't sure, and now you're ready to take the plunge. Perhaps you're at the top of your game and want to stay there!

Think of psychological therapy like going to the gym. At the start of a new workout regime, it's really hard. A trainer will look at how you're doing, evaluate your goals, and create a plan to get you there. Our team work much in the same way. It's hard at the start, but if you persist and persevere, you get stronger. No matter where you are on your mental health journey, we're here to support you!

The fact that you are even reading this shows that you're ready to start focusing on your well-being; you really ought to give yourself some kudos! And before you tell yourself that it's self-indulgent, please remember that caring for your well-being is *essential* to living a full and personally meaningful life.

What do psychologists do?

We use different modalities of talk therapy to help clients better understand themselves, their barriers to happiness, triggers for anxiety, stress, mood dysregulation (etc.), and work with them to overcome those barriers.

Please note that we do not prescribe medications, psychologists aren't medical practitioners, we fall under the "allied health" umbrella. However, we do work very closely with general practitioners, paediatricians, and psychiatrists, so if you are also following a medication regime, we can help monitor this with you.

At YMM, we have a team of clinicians who have different areas of interest, and different skills related to therapy modalities. When you call YMM to book in, our administration team will match you with a clinician who is skilled in supporting you with whatever you're struggling with and consults at a time which is convenient for you (e.g. after hours, school hours etc). Much like working on health goals, psychological therapy takes time and work.

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR AND CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST AT YOUR MIND MATTERS

Coming to see a psychologist can feel a bit overwhelming at first. Who wakes up in the morning and thinks, “I’d love to chat with a stranger about my deepest fears, thoughts, and feelings, and see what they think?” We totally get it. It’s natural to have those “What if…” thoughts creeping in, like “What if they think I’m crazy?” or “What if they can’t help me?” But here’s the thing—we DO NOT think that way. We’ve spent *at least* six years (usually, it’s closer to a decade!) learning how to help you, and it’s truly an honour for us.

When you reach out to us, you’ll talk to one of our administration team members. They will ask what you would like support with and then share information about our team and figure out who might be the best clinician for you.

Our administration team will also ask for some details like your name and email (so we can send you our intake forms, location map, and info about your psychologist), and mobile number for appointment reminders or calls if needed.

We encourage clients to arrive 5-10 minutes early to ensure all paperwork is completed, and if you have a referral, our admin team will collect this from you so we can process your Medicare rebate.

When it’s time for your session, your clinician will greet you at reception and take you to their consulting room. Our rooms are set up with comfy armchairs and couches, and we want you to feel at ease—so kick your feet up, lie down, sit up, or wrap up in a blanket. Whatever feels right for you. If your session is online, click the telehealth link in your “Welcome to YMM” email – it’s the same for all appointments! (Easy, right?)



During your first appointment, your clinician will review important things like privacy, session duration, and our policies. This usually takes about 2 minutes. Then it’s your turn! We’ll ask something like, “What brings you here today?” This first session is about gathering information. We want to understand your situation, circumstances, what is and isn’t working for you, and your goals for counselling. That helps us create a personalised treatment plan specific to your needs.

If your session is at the clinic, your psychologist will walk you back to reception after your appointment. For online sessions, they’ll email the administration team a handover.

The first session is the most daunting, however, we find most clients are at ease from here onwards and most look forward to coming back – even though it’s hard work.

We hope to see you soon!

Laura.

Fear is an integral part of our survival instinct, designed to be intensely uncomfortable and drive strong urges to escape or avoid perceived threats. In genuine survival scenarios, this system proves highly effective at ensuring our safety. For instance, imagine crossing a road and hearing a car horn too close; instinctively, you dash to safety before conscious thought kicks in, feeling a rush of adrenaline. That is the fight-or-flight response working as it should. But a system that works that fast does not have time to contemplate what signs are valid and which ones might be less reliable signs of danger. In situations where your life is not in danger, these strong urges persist. For instance, when asked to speak in a meeting, your heart may race, your breathing rate may increase, and your muscles may tense preparing your body for alertness and performance, despite no actual danger.



TECHNIQUE: ABDOMINAL BREATHING

Abdominal breathing is a technique which helps you to breathe slowly and deeply; it is exactly the opposite of the way you breathe when you're anxious or tense, which is typically shallow and high in your chest. Abdominal breathing will help turn off your fight-or-flight breathing response and allow your body to slowly relax and down-regulate.

To practice abdominal breathing, follow these steps:

1. Place one hand on your abdomen right beneath your ribcage.
2. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose into the bottom of your lungs. Your chest should move only slightly, while your stomach rises, pushing your hand up.
3. When you've inhaled fully, pause for a moment, and then exhale fully through your mouth. Purse your lips and imagine that you are blowing on a hot cup of tea.
4. As you exhale, just let yourself go and imagine your entire body going loose and limp. It should take you twice as long to exhale as it did to inhale.
5. Take and release ten abdominal breaths. Try to keep your breathing smooth and regular throughout, without gulping in a big breath or exhaling suddenly.



TECHNIQUE: SPOTTING UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

Your clinician will help you to spot unhelpful thoughts that make you feel worse. There are a few thought biases that commonly occur when we are feeling anxious. Click [here](#) to read more. If you can, keep a thought diary during times of distress, and see if you can identify the unhelpful thought. Is there a pattern here? In therapy, your clinician will help you understand your thought patterns and help you to better navigate distressing thoughts (e.g. thought challenging or reframing). This technique is a cornerstone of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and can be applied to a range of issues.



TECHNIQUE: MINDFULNESS AND PRESENT MOMENT AWARENESS

Mindfulness is the mental skill of staying alert to the present moment and observing sensations without judgment or getting caught up in them. This can involve mindfulness meditation, mindful breathing, or simply noticing and acknowledging thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations without trying to change them. This technique helps reduce rumination about the past or future, increasing your capacity to engage with the here and now.

Try this **3-Minute Breathing Space** technique:

Take a seat, and ensure you are going to be comfortable for the next 3 minutes.

Minute 1: The first minute is spent on answering the question “How am I doing right now?” while focusing on the feelings, thoughts, and sensations that arise, and trying to give these words and phrases.

Minute 2: The second minute is spent on keeping awareness of the breath. Simply notice your breath initially and follow its path. If you feel like it, try to breathe slightly deeper and really expand and fill your lungs.

Minute 3: The last minute is used for an expansion of attention outward from the breath, feeling the ways in which your breathing affects the rest of the body. Check for any tension in your body, any aches, or perhaps move a little, or have a drink or some food.

App recommendation: We love Smiling Mind for mindfulness! Click [here](#) for one way you can put mindfulness into action.

For a huge list of mindfulness activities to try, click [here](#).



TECHNIQUE: RELAXATION AND STRESS REDUCTION

Many simple yet effective relaxation techniques can significantly reduce tension and stress. These include techniques such as [deep breathing](#) exercises, which focus on slow, deep breaths to calm the mind and body, [progressive muscle relaxation](#), which involves tensing and then relaxing different muscle groups, and [guided imagery](#), which uses visualisation to create calming mental images or scenarios. These are practical tools that can be readily applied in daily life. By incorporating these techniques into your routine, you can lower your experience of anxiety.



TECHNIQUE: 5-4-3-2-1 GROUNDING EXERCISE

The 5-4-3-2-1 technique helps ground you in the present moment by engaging your senses. By actively observing and experiencing your surroundings, you shift your focus away from overwhelming thoughts, bringing your attention back to the here and now.

5: Start by looking around and identifying five things you can see. This could be things like a picture frame on the wall or a plant on your desk. As you name each, take a moment to observe its details, colours, and textures.

4: Next, shift your focus to four things you can touch. This could include sensations like the texture of your clothing or the warmth of your skin. Notice how each object or sensation feels against your skin or in your hands.

3: Now, listen for three things you can hear. These might be sounds like birds chirping outside or the hum of a fan or air conditioner. Pay attention to the sound and its qualities, notice whether its loud or soft, constant or intermittent.

2: After that, identify two things you can smell. It could be the aroma of a coffee or a scent. Inhale deeply and focus on each scent.

1: Finally, focus on one thing you can taste. This could be a sip of water or the lingering flavour of a meal. Pay attention to the taste, temperature, and texture in your mouth.

STRESS

Stress and anxiety typically feel the same, hence you probably use the words interchangeably. In psychology, we like to differentiate between the two since they have different causes, which can impact our treatment planning. We use the term “stress” when there is an identifiable stressor, for example, an exam, or a job interview. If we believe we may not have the tools, skill, time, resources (and so on) to manage the stressor, we start to feel stressed. Once the stressor has been dealt with, the feeling of stress or anxiety usually disappears. Given the similarities between stress and anxiety, the anxiety management techniques in this eBook will help, but here are a few more strategies for you to try specifically to manage identifiable stressors.



TECHNIQUE: MOVEMENT

When you're stressed, your muscles fill up with oxygen and adrenaline, ready to move fast. However, if you don't move and expend that energy, it's like revving up a car without driving anywhere. This can result in restlessness, shaking, and an urge to pace. Exercise is one of the best stress and anxiety management techniques because it mirrors your body's natural response to threat. Your body is wired for movement. By engaging in physical activity, you enable your body to expand the excess energy and stress hormones it has produced. You can move your body in any way that feels right for you at the time. It can be as simple as a walk around the block, or something requiring more energy, like hitting the gym, swimming, or a Pilates class.



TECHNIQUE: STRUCTURED PROBLEM SOLVING

When it comes to solving problems, we often go around and around, sometimes having so many ideas that we simply take no action at all! Try this instead:

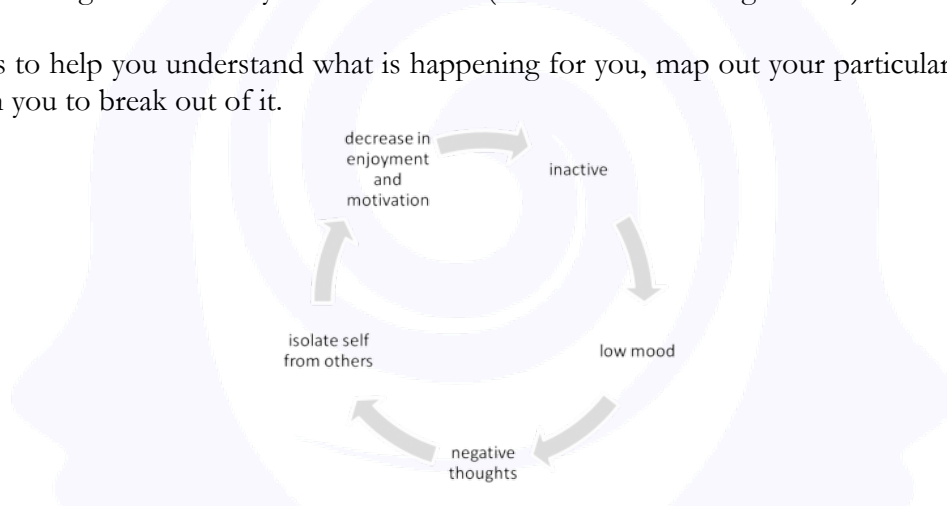
1. Write down what the stressor is. From here, work out if this is a “what if” worry (a hypothetical, and potentially falls more within the anxiety category), or an actual stressor.
2. If you have an identifiable stressor, write down exactly what that stressor is. From here, you need to:
3. Consider all your available resources (people, tools, time) and then...
4. Write down at least 3 possible actions you could take to take control of the stressor. For example, if you were stressed about an exam, you could schedule in time every day to study, attend study groups, listen to audio playbacks, or speak with your lecturer.
5. Once you have at least 3 options, we need to weigh up which will give you the most chance of success. From here, take each option, and weigh up the pros and cons of each.
6. When you have weighed up which action is best, give it a go!!
7. If that solution doesn't fix the problem, you can either trouble-shoot that solution or move on to the next best solution.

DEPRESSION

Depression and low mood are common mental health issues marked by persistent (weeks or months) feelings of sadness and disinterest in once-enjoyable activities. These emotions can impact various areas of life; perhaps you start avoiding friends and family, or you can't muster up the energy to engage in your hobbies, which is counter-intuitive because you know you'd feel better if you did either...but you simply can't bring yourself to do it.

The relationship between our emotions and thoughts works both ways. Our thoughts impact our mood, and our mood can influence the nature of our thoughts, making us more susceptible to negative and self-critical thinking. Even when we're aware that our thought patterns are unhelpful, changing them can be challenging, especially during low moods. It's important to note that our actions, or lack thereof, also play a significant role in shaping our mood. When feeling down, the tendency to withdraw and avoid activities we typically enjoy can further perpetuate negative feelings, resulting in a vicious cycle of low mood (as shown in the image below).

Our job is to help you understand what is happening for you, map out your particular cycle, and work with you to break out of it.



TECHNIQUE: TAPPING INTO YOUR THOUGHTS

Start keeping a journal and choose specific moments to focus on (both positive and negative). Make a distinction between what you were thinking at the time, what emotions you noticed and what physical sensations came with that. Do you notice that when you focus on the not-so-good, you feel worse, and when you focus on the positives, you feel a little better? This is why gratitude journals are so popular. Although it sounds corny, an “attitude of gratitude” helps to strengthen our ability to think more positivity habitually (more info [here](#)).



TECHNIQUE: DEFUSING FROM YOUR THOUGHTS

“Thought defusion” involves distancing yourself from unhelpful or distressing thoughts by using language that creates some distance from those thoughts and feelings. Try saying “I am having thoughts that...” or “I am noticing these sensations...”. This helps to step back from your thoughts and feelings, seeing them as passing, temporary experiences rather than absolute truths.



TECHNIQUE: BEHAVIOURAL ACTIVATION

Behavioural activation involves engaging in activities that are aligned with your personal values or that provide a sense of achievement or pleasure. This might start with simple tasks like taking a walk, calling a friend, or pursuing a hobby. Engaging in fun and fulfilling activities helps counteract withdrawal, inactivity, and depression by encouraging positive experiences and achievements. Behavioural activation can gradually help lift mood and improve quality of life.

Sleep - yes, we know. Not particularly interesting, however, we are meant to spend a third of our lives recharging. If you aren't sleeping well, it's hard for the other two-thirds to be enjoyable. Sleep plays a crucial role in our physical and mental well-being, yet many people experience difficulties with getting adequate sleep. Difficulties may include trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or experiencing restless sleep. Therapy can be incredibly beneficial in addressing these issues by exploring underlying factors such as stress, anxiety, depression, or unhelpful sleep habits.

How much sleep do I need?

Everyone needs a slightly different amount of sleep. Children and adolescents often need more sleep than adults. Healthy adults need on average 8 hours of sleep, but some people can be alert with 6 hours of sleep while others need 10 hours.



TECHNIQUE: HOW MUCH SLEEP DO YOU NEED?

Working out how much sleep you need to feel good, alert, and focused is a good place to start. Over the next month, on days when you don't set an alarm, track when you fall asleep and when you wake up. If you have a smartwatch (e.g., an Apple Watch or a Garmin), wear it overnight – It can track sleep data for you!

What happens when we don't get enough sleep?

As life progresses and we are faced with exciting new adventures and possibilities, responsibilities and commitments, time can become fleeting, and sleep can often be traded off instead of other things that we may deem more essential. But what are we trading off?

Without a good night's rest, we may experience a range of negative impacts on both our physical and mental health. Common effects are:

- **Physical Health:** Lack of sleep can weaken the immune system, making you more susceptible to illnesses such as colds and infections. It also increases the risk of developing chronic conditions like obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Sleep deprivation can also lead to hormone imbalances, affecting appetite and metabolism.
- **Mental Health:** Insufficient sleep is linked to mood disturbances such as irritability, anxiety, and depression. It can also impair cognitive function, leading to difficulties with concentration, memory, and decision-making. Over time, chronic sleep deprivation may contribute to more serious mental health disorders.
- **Daytime Functioning:** Poor sleep quality or insufficient sleep can result in daytime fatigue, sleepiness, and decreased productivity. It impairs motor skills and coordination, increasing the risk of accidents and injuries.
- **Quality of Life:** Consistently not getting enough sleep can significantly reduce overall quality of life. It can lead to exhaustion, frustration, and a decreased ability to enjoy daily activities. Chronic sleep problems can also contribute to a cycle of stress and sleep disturbances, worsening the negative effects on health and well-being.



TECHNIQUE: 4-7-8 BREATHING

Breathing techniques are designed to bring the body into a state of deep relaxation. Specific patterns that involve holding the breath for a period of time allow your body to restore its oxygen levels. This benefits your organs and tissues by providing them with a much-needed oxygen boost. Relaxation practices also help bring the body back into balance and regulate the fight-or-flight response we feel when we're stressed. This is particularly helpful if you're experiencing sleeplessness due to anxiety or worries about what happened today or what might happen tomorrow. Racing thoughts can keep us from being able to rest, but techniques like 4-7-8 redirect your focus from anxious thoughts to regulating your breath.

To practice the 4-7-8 technique, follow these steps:

1. Inhale for four seconds, hold it in for seven seconds then slowly release your breath for eight seconds.
2. As you exhale, release the anxiety, stress and tension from your muscles, shoulders, and face.



TECHNIQUE: COGNITIVE SHUFFLING

This technique moves you from a high state of alertness to a more relaxed state conducive to falling asleep. Cognitive shuffling involves disrupting your thoughts so that your brain doesn't engage in its usual process of organising information. It interrupts the process of memory, evaluation, planning, scheduling, and problem solving.

To practice, follow these steps:

1. Pick a word, like "bedtime".
2. Start with the first letter, "b," and think of a word that starts with "b", such as "broom". Visualise a broom as you think of it. Then think of another word that begins with "b" and visualise it. Keep going until you run out of words that begin with the letter "b".
3. Move onto the next letter in "bedtime", which is "e". Think of words that start with "e" and visualise them as well.
4. Continue this process at your own pace until you fall asleep. If stressful thoughts come your way, acknowledge them, and return to shuffling your thoughts.



TECHNIQUE: SLEEP HYGIENE

The term "sleep hygiene" refers to healthy sleep habits. Extensive research has been conducted to establish guidelines and tips aimed at improving sleep quality, with evidence indicating that these strategies can offer lasting solutions to sleep problems. Some tips to help with getting to sleep and staying asleep can be found [here](#).

How can a psychologist help with sleep? A thorough assessment will be conducted, and you may be asked to keep a sleep diary for a week. Using a range of techniques, such as Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), your psychologist can assist with developing strategies you can use to help with relaxation and sleepiness, managing anxious thoughts and low mood, and developing a bedtime routine that suits you. To learn more about sleep, click [here](#).

How long will it take for me to feel better?

This is a tricky question, it depends on where you're starting from, what you want to work on, and what you want to achieve. For example, a client who is experiencing some workplace stress but has many supports in place may only need a few sessions to learn some new techniques and strategies and be on their way. However, a client with ongoing, or historical stressors, with limited support, and who has never worked on their mental health, may wish to attend therapy every fortnight for years, not just for skill development, but then also for maintenance. We also know that some mental health conditions, much like medical conditions, can be trickier to overcome. If you would like a ballpark idea, ask your clinician at the end of your first session.

Why do you book 4 appointments to begin with?

Therapy is a process, and we found in the past that clients would book one appointment, attend, and at the end, they would want to rebook but their clinician would be booked out for weeks! To ensure we can gather momentum, we book at least 4 sessions, so you don't find yourself in the position of having to restart over and over again due to long gaps between appointments. Once you commit, so do we!

Will I be set homework?

Sometimes! If you see a personal trainer once a week, they will still ask that you exercise during the week to keep working on your fitness. Psychological therapy can be similar. We may ask you to complete a thought diary, track your sleep (very easy if you have a smartwatch), or engage in some behavioural strategies or social experiments.

What if I don't get along with my therapist?

Not every client-clinician match is bliss. Although it's uncommon thanks to our triage process, if you don't feel 100% comfortable with your clinician, we'll help you find someone you click with. You can let your clinician know, or you're welcome to call our administration team and we'll support you through this. Trust me, we won't be offended! Our priority is your well-being, and if you aren't completely comfortable with us, it's unlikely that you'll be able to push yourself, be vulnerable, and reach your goals.

What types of therapy do you use?

Different clinicians use different therapies based on their training and your presenting difficulty. Most clinicians are skilled in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Interpersonal Therapy, and all use a client-centred approach. However, we also make use of Motivational Interviewing, Schema Therapy, Play Therapy (for our younger clients), Gottman Therapy (for couples) ...plus more! When clients call YMM, our administration team will ask for a little information about what you're seeking support with and will try to match you with an appropriately skilled clinician. We also encourage clients to check out our website, which has information about all our clinicians and their various areas of interest.

Do I need a referral?

No, you don't need a referral however, if you do have a referral from your GP, paediatrician, or psychiatrist, rebates may apply which can heavily subsidise the cost of sessions. You can read more about our fees [here](#).

Do I need therapy?

We believe that **everyone can benefit from therapy at any time!** It's like asking someone if exercise would be good for you. Yes, it will be. Maybe you're at the start of your fitness journey and you have a health condition requiring an exercise regime. Maybe you're in maintenance with your fitness, or maybe you're looking at a regime change. Psychological therapy is much the same. There are times you may really "need" therapy, and other times, it'll help you remain balanced and tuned into your own needs, or even propel you further.

THAT'S ALL FROM US! WE HOPE YOU FOUND THIS EBOOK HELPFUL AND THAT SOME OF THE ACTIVITIES HELP YOU ON YOUR WAY, NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE STARTING FROM 😊

For more information about Your Mind Matters, our team, and bookings, please give us a call on (03) 9802 4654, or head over to our website and fill in the [Online Contact Form](#) and we'll get in touch with you as soon as we can.