

Your Mind Matters Psychology Services



eBook for Adolescents and Adults

A collection of our favourite tips, techniques, and activities.
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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.

Thankfully, the stigma around mental health is continuing to shift. It's now widely recognised that caring for your mental wellbeing is just as important as caring for your physical health. Seeking support doesn't require a crisis—it can be a proactive step toward building resilience, improving self-awareness, or simply maintaining balance.

At Your Mind Matters, our clinicians are here to support you at every stage of your mental health journey—whether you're navigating a difficult period, facing new challenges, or seeking to build on existing strengths.

Psychological therapy is a bit like going to the gym. It can feel uncomfortable at first, but with the right support and a bit of persistence, you become stronger and more equipped to manage what life throws your way. No matter where you're starting from, we're here to help.

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 our Director

Reaching out to a psychologist for the first time can feel a little daunting. After all, who wakes up and says, "I'd love to talk to a stranger about my biggest fears and worries"? It's completely normal to feel uncertain. You might wonder "What if they think I'm overreacting? What if they can't help?" Let me reassure you, we don't think that way at all!

Psychologists spend years (often a decade or more) training to understand how to support people through difficult times. It's a privilege to be trusted with your story, and we take that responsibility seriously.

When you contact us, one of our friendly administration team members will guide you through the next steps. They'll ask a few questions to understand what kind of support you're looking for, share information about our clinicians, and help match you with the right person. They'll also collect your details so we can send you everything you need ahead of your appointment.



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, simply click your telehealth link.

At your first session, your clinician will review confidentiality, session structure, and our clinic policies. After that, we'll begin to explore what's been going on for you and start working together on a personalised plan to move forward. The first session can feel like the biggest hurdle, but most clients tell us that once they've started, it gets much easier.

We encourage on-site clients to arrive 5-10 minutes early to their initial consultation 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.

At the end of your session, your clinician will walk you back to reception and provide our administration team with a brief handover. For online sessions, clinicians email the administration team a handover, who will then contact you to organise bookings, payment, and rebates.

We hope to see you soon!

Laura Forlani - Clinical Psychologist

Anxiety

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.

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.



Technique: 3-Minute Breathing Space

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](#) to download and put mindfulness into action immediately!

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

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 restful 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: Work out your sleep quota

The best way to determine how much sleep you personally need is through self-experimentation and careful observation over a period of time. A great starting point is the sleep test, which involves going to bed at a consistent time each night and waking up naturally without an alarm. This method works best when done over at least 7–10 days, allowing your body to regulate itself. By tracking how many hours you naturally sleep, you can identify your ideal sleep quota. Another way to gauge your sleep needs is by observing how much you sleep on weekends versus weekdays. If you tend to sleep significantly longer on weekends, this may indicate that you are not getting enough rest during the week. Gradually increasing your weekday sleep time until it matches your weekend sleep duration can help create a more balanced and sustainable routine.

Using sleep tracking tools can also provide helpful insights. Apps and devices like Sleep Cycle, Oura, Fitbit, or Apple Watch can monitor your total sleep duration, sleep quality, and any disturbances throughout the night. Reviewing this data over time can help fine-tune your sleep schedule to ensure you are meeting your body's needs.

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](#).

FAQs

How long will it take for me to feel better?

This varies for each person and depends on your individual circumstances, goals, and the nature of the challenges you're facing. For example, someone experiencing mild stress may benefit from just a few sessions. Someone managing more complex or longstanding issues may benefit from ongoing support over a longer period. Your clinician will discuss a tailored plan with you after your first session.

Why do you recommend booking in several appointments to begin with?

Therapy works best when sessions are consistent. We often find that clients who only book one session struggle to secure follow-up appointments due to limited availability. To maintain momentum, we recommend booking at least four sessions to begin with. This allows us to build a strong foundation and work towards your goals effectively.

Will I be given homework?

Sometimes, yes. Just as a personal trainer might ask you to exercise between sessions, we may suggest activities to try between appointments—like keeping a thought diary, tracking sleep, or practising new skills. These strategies help reinforce the work we do in session and support real-world progress.

What if I don't connect with my therapist?

Finding the right fit is important. While our intake process is designed to match you with a suitable clinician, we understand that sometimes it's just not the right match. If that happens, please let us know—either by speaking with your clinician directly or by contacting our administration team. We won't be offended! Our priority is making sure you feel comfortable and supported.

Do I need a referral?

No, a referral isn't required. However, if you have a referral from your GP, paediatrician, or psychiatrist, you may be eligible for Medicare rebates that can significantly reduce the cost of your sessions. You can read more about our fees [here](#).

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 therapy?

We believe that everyone can benefit from therapy throughout stages in their lives. Like exercise, it's not just for when things are going wrong—it's a proactive way to maintain your mental health, improve resilience, and achieve your personal goals.



We hope this ebook has provided you with valuable insights and practical strategies 😊

If you require additional support, please reach out to us!

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.



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