

## Coping with uncertainty

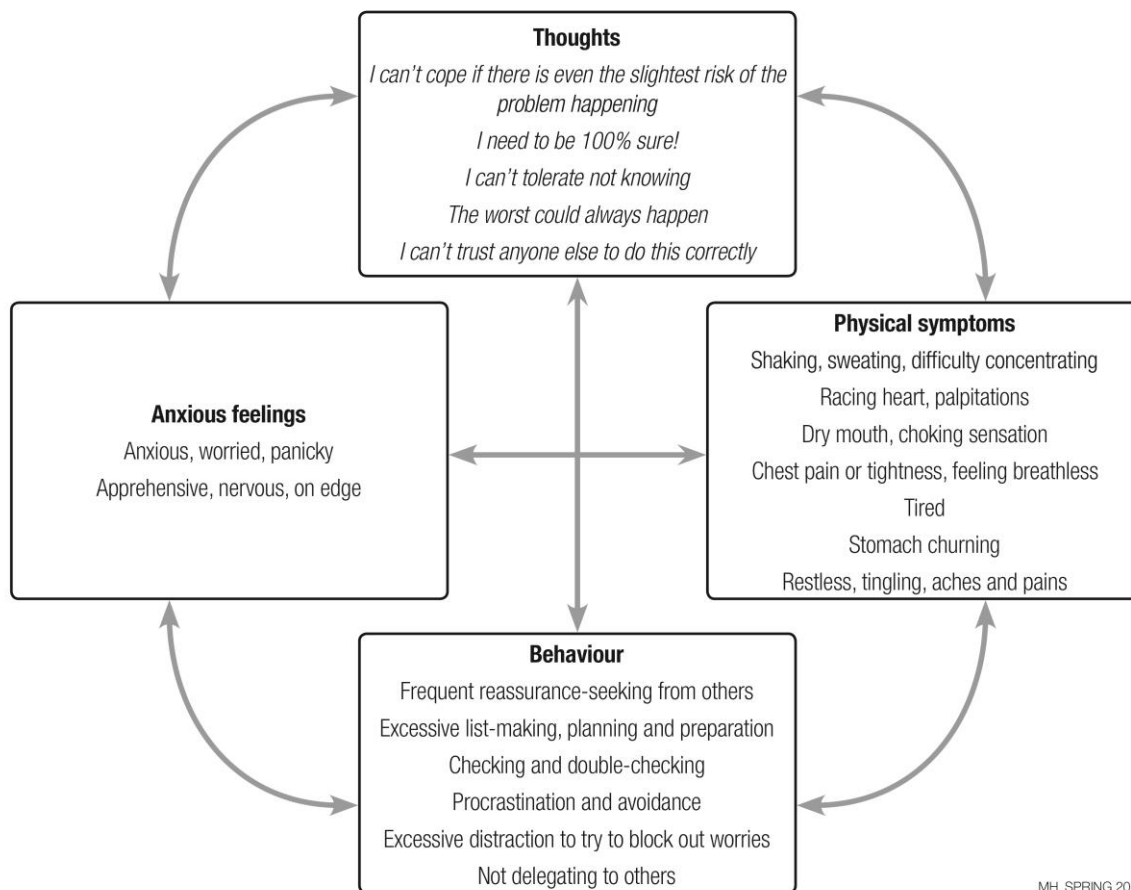
*We can use this microskill to offer support to people experiencing anxiety. It is also common for clinicians to experience difficulties with coping with uncertainty, and this may be helpful for our colleagues and even ourselves. Other microskills in this chapter may help to support this, including mindfulness, distraction and increasing activity.*

Uncertainty is an aspect of life that cannot be completely avoided. Unfortunately, it is impossible to be 100% certain what will happen in the future, or to be sure that nothing will go wrong.

People who are anxious or worry a great deal may find it hard to cope with uncertainty. They will often try to plan and prepare for everything as a way of avoiding or eliminating uncertainty. They may also worry excessively about a possible future problem, even if it is very unlikely to actually take place.

Seeking certainty can cause difficulties for people if it leads to repeated behaviours that interfere with people's lives and worsen feelings of anxiety.

We can understand difficulties coping with uncertainty using a CBT framework:

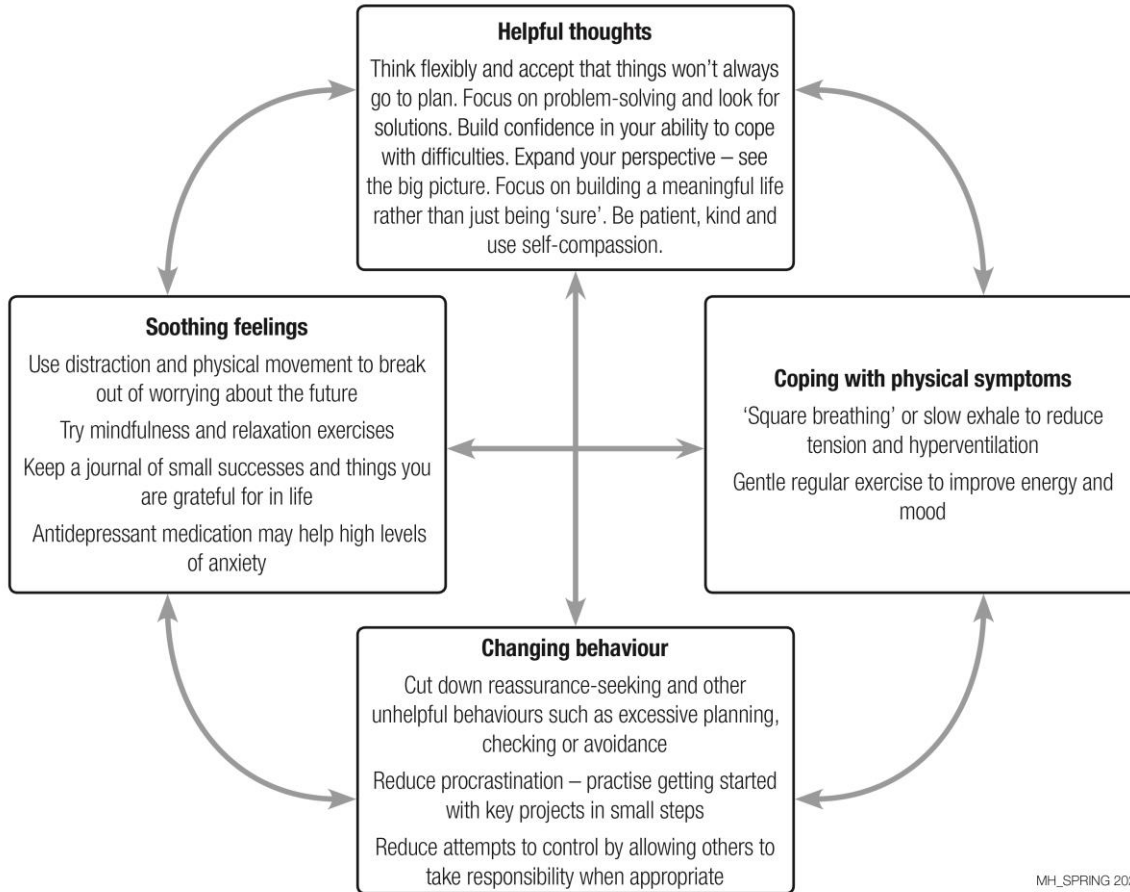



## Learning to cope with uncertainty

Some strategies for overcoming anxiety are shown in the CBT framework below. There is also an acronym for learning to cope with uncertainty: **ABLE** (from *Managing Anxiety* by Lee David (2020), Scion Publishing).

- **A**cknowledge and **A**llow what is happening: notice when you are feeling a strong desire for certainty. Notice and give a name to the thoughts and feelings which lie underneath this desire:  
*"I'm thinking that I couldn't cope if things went wrong", "I'm feeling anxious" or "I'm feeling afraid."*  
 Just allow the thoughts and feelings to be present without resisting or struggling to feel differently.
- **B**reathe: take a deep breath and exhale as slowly as possible. Repeat 3–5 times to create a pause and allow yourself time to decide what to do next.

- **Let go of the need for certainty:** let go of the thought or feeling about needing certainty. It will pass. You don't have to respond to it or act on it. You might imagine it floating away like a bubble or a cloud. Remind yourself that trying to seek certainty is not helpful or necessary, and can get in the way of living your life.
- **Expand your attention and move back to something important.** Shift your focus and think about what is most important to you right now. What were you doing before you started to worry? What action is likely to be most helpful in achieving your long-term goals and living a fulfilling and meaning-filled life? Then, move on to carry out this activity mindfully, with your full attention.



	<p><b>Coping with uncertainty</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulties coping with uncertainty are common in people experiencing anxiety.</li> <li>• Thinking about it using a CBT model can help.</li> <li>• Complementary microskills that may make coping with uncertainty easier include distraction, mindfulness and building physical activity.</li> </ul>
