



# **A Mental Health First Aid Kit - Quick strategies and tools to manage anxiety, panic, and low mood.**



Created by ARC and local teens to help you  
feel more in control when life feels  
overwhelming.

# Why this matters

Anxiety, panic, and low mood don't always show up with big warning signs. Sometimes they build slowly – like background noise that gets louder over time.

You might not even realise you're anxious or low. You just know something doesn't feel right. Modern life is busy. School, exams, friendships, family, online pressure, trying to “keep up” – it's a lot.

And when we push through without taking breaks, emotions can pile up like an overflowing inbox.

That's when things start to show up in other ways:

- 💬 Snapping at people for no reason
- 😴 Feeling drained, even after sleeping
- ❌ Avoiding stuff that used to feel easy
- 🧠 Spacing out or struggling to focus
- 🤯 Getting overwhelmed by small things

But mental health isn't about being strong all the time – it's about knowing what helps when things feel hard.

## **This guide is your Mental Health First Aid Kit.**

It won't fix everything – but it will help you:

- ✓ Recognise signs of anxiety, panic, or low mood
- ✓ Understand what your brain and body might be trying to tell you
- ✓ Try tools that calm, ground, and give you space to feel better

**You don't have to wait until you're in crisis.**

**You deserve support before it gets that far.**



# For When You Feel Panicky or Overstimulated 🌟

## Box Breathing

**Best for:** panic attacks, stage fright, insomnia, or that “I can’t calm down” feeling

When your body feels shaky, your heart’s racing, or you can’t catch your breath – this is your go-to.

**How to do it:** Breathe in for 4 seconds, Hold for 4 seconds, Breathe out for 4 seconds, Hold again for 4 seconds, Repeat 4 times

💡 **Why it works:** It slows your breathing down on purpose, which tells your brain: “You’re safe now.” After a few rounds, your heart rate drops, your muscles start to relax, and your thoughts feel less scrambled.

🧠 Used in CBT, sports psychology, and NHS calming strategies.

## Grounding (5-4-3-2-1)

**Best for:** feeling overwhelmed, spaced out, anxious in public. When your thoughts are spinning or everything feels too loud, grounding brings you back to the here and now.

**How to do it:** Find 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing you can taste

💡 **Why it works:** This technique connects you to your senses – which can be a lifeline during panic or dissociation.

You might start the exercise shaky, spaced out, or like you’re “not in your body.” By the end, you’ll feel more stable, more present, and better able to think clearly.

🧠 Based on trauma-informed counselling techniques used across UK therapy services.





# For When Your Thoughts Feel Too Loud

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## **Name it to Tame it**


**Best for:** general anxiety, sadness, numbness, “I don’t even know what’s wrong” moments. Emotions are like toddlers – if you ignore them, they get louder. By naming what you’re feeling, you help your brain process an emotion instead of being ruled by it.

**How to do it:** Feeling anxious? Low? Panicky? Try saying:

“I’m feeling \_\_\_\_ right now, and that’s okay.”

“This feeling is here, but it won’t stay forever.”

 **Why it works:** Naming your emotion calms the emotional centre of your brain. It’s a real brain hack.

 Developed through neuroscience research and used in UK-based counselling like ACT and CBT.


## **The Thought Flip**


**Best for:** negative thinking, catastrophising, overthinking. Your brain might be feeding you thoughts like “Everyone hates me” or “I’ll fail anyway, so why try?”

This tool helps you catch that voice, challenge it, and reframe it. It helps you feel more in control and less defeated.

**How to do it:** When you spot a harsh thought like: “I’ll never be okay.”

Try to flip it to something more realistic such as: “This is hard right now, but I’ve got through tough things before.”

 **Why it works:** You don’t have to fake positivity – just shift toward truth.

 Core tool in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy across the UK – especially useful for anxiety and depression.

# For When You're Feeling Low or Worthless

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## **Your Inner Mate (Self-Compassion Check-In)**


**Best for:** low self-esteem, self-criticism, or feeling like you're "not enough"


Imagine if you spoke to your friends the way you sometimes speak to yourself. You'd never say "You're useless" to them – so why say it to yourself? This tool flips your inner dialogue from harsh to human.

**How to do it:** Speak to yourself like you would a best friend.

Instead of: "I'm so useless."

Try: "I'm having a rough time. That doesn't make me weak – it makes me human."

 **Why it works:** Self-kindness literally reduces cortisol (the stress hormone). You start feeling less ashamed, more understood – even by yourself.

 Inspired by Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT), used widely in UK counselling for depression and trauma.

## **Ditch the Doomscroll**


**Best for:** when you feel worse after being online, or stuck in the comparison trap


Ever noticed how scrolling can leave you feeling more anxious or flat? That's no accident – algorithms are designed to keep you hooked, not happy.

By pausing or muting apps for a while, you create breathing space in your brain. You'll likely feel lighter, less "wired," and more in charge of what you're taking in.

**How to do it:** Not forever – just for now. Try:

- Turning off notifications
- Switching to Airplane Mode
- Setting a 10-minute timer before re-checking socials

 **Why it works:** Your brain needs space to process, not pressure to perform.

 A top recommendation in digital detox therapy and low mood recovery plans.



# Recognising Emotions

Ever felt nervous and embarrassed?

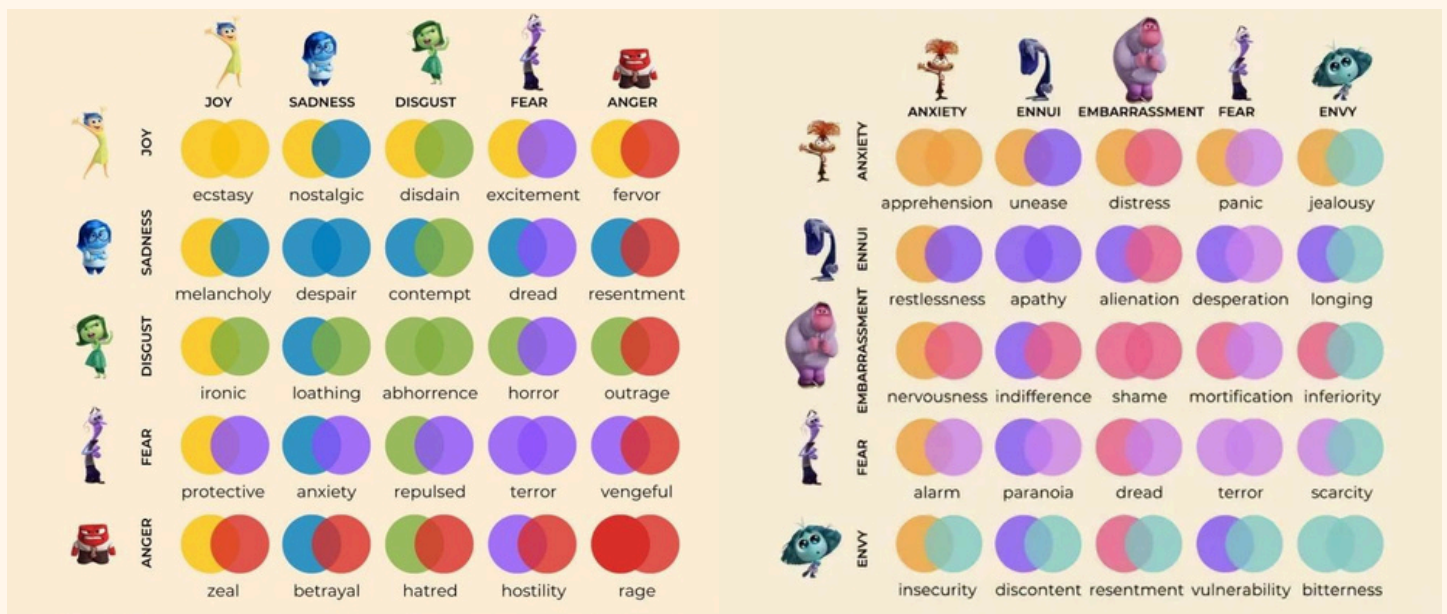
Excited but kind of scared?

Downright sad... and angry at yourself for feeling it?

**You're not broken. You're just human.**

Thanks to films like Inside Out, we've learned that emotions aren't just one-note.

They're layered, messy, and often combine to create complex feelings – especially when you're dealing with change, stress, or pressure.

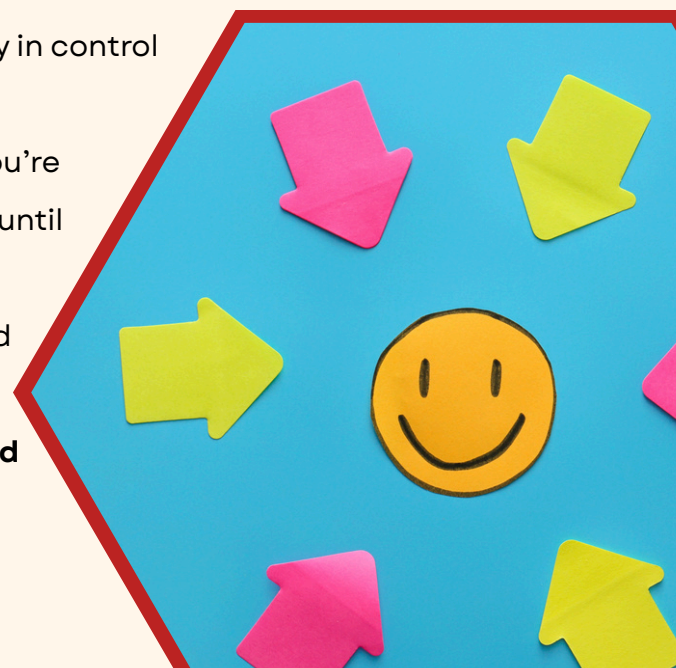


## 💡 Why It Matters

Getting to grips with complex feelings helps you stay in control – not by ignoring them, but by understanding them.

When you recognise what's really going on inside, you're less likely to lash out, shut down, or bottle things up until they explode. It's not about being perfectly calm all the time – it's about learning how to respond instead of react.

**That's how you protect your mental health and build real emotional strength.**



# How to Deal with Emotions

**So how do you deal with that emotional chaos?**

**Name what's going on underneath**

**Try saying:**

"I think I feel embarrassed, but really it's also fear and anxiety underneath."

This takes the edge off and gives your brain a way to process what's happening.

Can't figure it out? Use the Inside Out emotion charts for clues. Sometimes seeing it mapped out helps the fog lift.

**Ask yourself: What do I actually need right now?**

Each emotion is trying to tell you something.

If you feel jealous + anxious → maybe you need reassurance.

If you feel sad + angry → maybe you need rest or to speak to someone who gets it.

If you feel excited + scared → maybe you just need a moment to breathe and feel safe.

You don't have to fix everything.

Just taking a second to check in with yourself is enough.

 **Try saying:**

"This feeling is complicated, but I don't have to figure it out all at once."

"It's okay to feel two things at the same time."

"I've felt like this before – and it passed."

Your emotions don't make you weak – they make you real.

And the more you understand them, the more power you have to respond kindly and calmly.





# Did You Know?

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## **Anxiety & Panic**

- One in three UK teens (aged 13–19) say they often feel anxious in social situations, school, or around peers. (YoungMinds, 2023)
- 36% of girls aged 17–19 in England have an anxiety-related mental health condition. (NHS Digital, 2022)
- Panic attacks affect around 10% of young people in the UK by their late teens – and many go undiagnosed. (Mind UK, 2022)

## **Low Mood & Depression**

- 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 10 boys aged 17–19 in England have experienced major depression. (NHS Digital, 2022)
- Over 50% of teens who report feeling sad or low also say they don't talk to anyone about it. (Mental Health Foundation, 2023)
- Young people are most likely to experience mental health struggles around exam time, after breakups, or during online/social pressure spikes. (YoungMinds Survey, 2022)

## **Seeking Support**

- Despite rising mental health needs, over 60% of young people with probable mental health disorders do not currently receive any treatment. (NHS Digital, 2023)
- Only 35% of teens who feel low or anxious say they would tell a parent or teacher. Most stay silent. (Mental Health Foundation, 2023)
- Talking to a trusted adult, counsellor, or GP is proven to reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression – even after one or two sessions. (NICE Guidelines, UK)





# Get in touch



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ARC offers one-to-one counselling to Adults and Young People across Wokingham and the surrounding areas. We provide confidential counselling at our main site in Wokingham, Oakwood in Woodley, schools and GP surgeries across the area.

ARC provides an important role within the community, with referrals coming from other agencies as well as self-referrals.

In addition to counselling, we also offer important support for 16 – 25 year olds through our Youth Access program. This program provides information to young people on where and how to access support, from housing, to work and mental health.

Our counselling services are free to young people under the age of 21 years and low cost for adults. We believe that counselling should be accessible for all and that cost should never be a barrier to better mental health.

We are a charity with over 25 years offering support within the Wokingham area.