

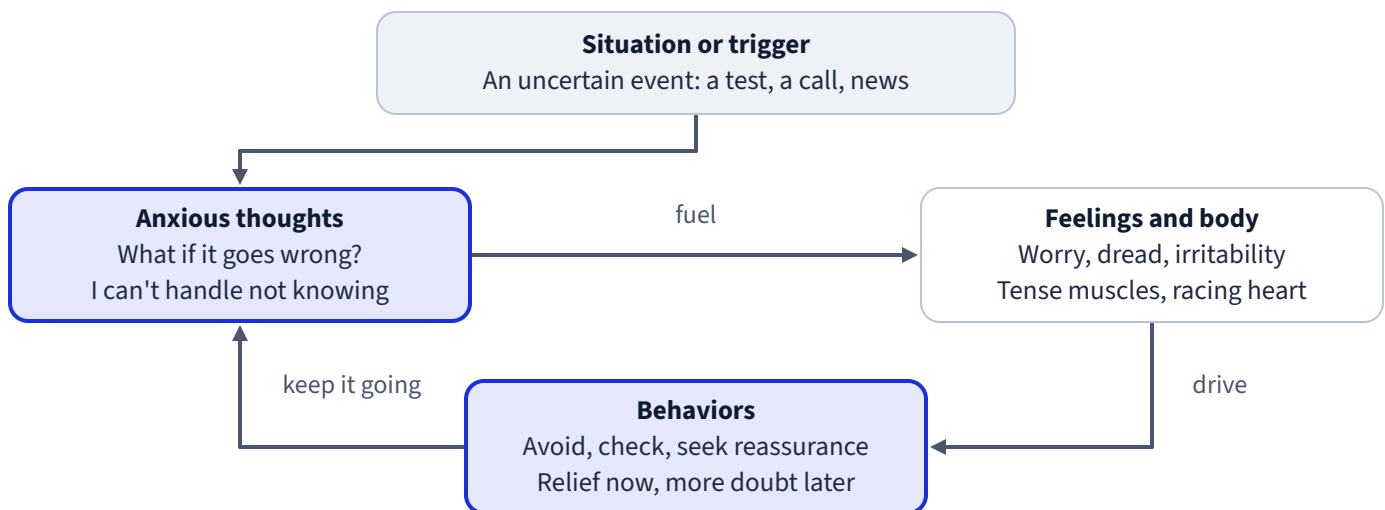
Living With Uncertainty

— Brenda Grigsby, LCSW • Mission Ready Mindset

Anxiety is your brain's alarm system trying to protect you. It becomes a problem when the alarm goes off too often, too loudly, or for things that are unlikely or out of your control.

Many anxious people find **uncertainty** hard to tolerate, so they worry, check, seek reassurance, or avoid. That brings quick relief but teaches the brain that not knowing is dangerous. The goal of CBT is to **notice anxious thinking, test it, and build confidence that you can cope with not knowing.**

The anxiety cycle • CBT steps in at the highlighted boxes



Common thinking traps • name the trap to create distance from it

Thinking trap	What it sounds like	Ask yourself instead
Catastrophizing	<i>"This will be a disaster."</i>	What's most likely, not just the worst?
Fortune telling	<i>"I know it won't work out."</i>	Have my predictions been wrong before?
Overestimating danger	<i>"It's bound to happen."</i>	Out of 100 times, how often does it happen?
Underestimating coping	<i>"I couldn't handle it."</i>	What hard things have I gotten through?
Mind reading	<i>"They think I'm incompetent."</i>	How do I know? What else could it be?
"What if" spiraling	<i>"What if... then what if...?"</i>	Is this a problem now, or an imagined one?
Needing certainty	<i>"I can't relax until I know."</i>	Can I live with "probably okay" for now?

Sorting your worries · ask: can I act on this now?

Yes: practical worry

A real problem you can act on (“Rent is due Friday”)

1. Define the problem.
2. List your options.
3. Pick one and take a first step today.

No: hypothetical worry

A “what if” you can't control (“What if I get sick?”)

1. Jot it down and tell yourself, “Not now, later.”
2. Revisit it in a daily 15-minute worry time.
3. Accept not knowing yet, then refocus.

Worksheet: thought record · fill in when anxiety spikes

1. Situation Where were you? What happened?

2. Feelings (0–100) What did you feel, and how strongly?

3. Anxious thought What's the “what if”? Which trap?

4. Evidence What supports it? What doesn't fit?

5. Balanced thought What would I tell a friend?

6. Re-rate (0–100) How strong is the feeling now?

Building tolerance for uncertainty

Watch for certainty-seeking habits: asking for reassurance, checking, over-preparing, avoiding, or procrastinating. **Try an experiment:** pick one small habit and drop it, such as sending an email without re-reading it three times. Predict how anxious you'll feel (0–100), then notice what really happens. Discomfort means you are practicing, not failing.

Calming the body · settle the body first, then work with your thoughts

Slow breathing

Breathe in through your nose for 4, out through your mouth for 6. Repeat 8 to 10 times. A longer out-breath signals safety.

5-4-3-2-1 grounding

Name 5 things you see, 4 you feel, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, and 1 you taste.

“I don't have to know how this turns out to take the next step.”

This handout is an educational tool, not a substitute for professional care. Reach out to a licensed professional if anxiety affects your sleep, work, or relationships. If you are in crisis or thinking about harming yourself, call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, US), or call 911 in an emergency.