

The AWARE technique

Explanation: The emotion of anxiety is there to protect us and to keep us safe, but it can get out of hand. Sometimes it stops us from doing the things that are good for us or that we want to do. Sometimes the anxiety voice is very loud and it often wants you to avoid doing the very thing that will make you feel better. This is particularly true when it triggers social anxiety. It feels as though doing what the voice is telling us, for example not going out, will quieten that voice, but in fact the opposite is true. The more the anxiety voice has its own way, the stronger it gets.

This technique allows you to challenge the anxiety voice making it less powerful.

How to do it: AWARE stands for five things to do when you notice the anxiety voice getting louder.

A **Accept** and acknowledge the feelings of anxiety. Recognise them. It's ok – there they are. They are not you. You can even name the anxiety voice if it's helpful. (Ideally, give it a silly name: "Oh that's just Mr Worryhead again.")

W **Watch**, wait and scale. What is it wanting you to do/not do? How loud is it on a scale of 0-10? – It doesn't matter what the number is but giving it a number means you can see it going up and down which reminds the brain that it is temporary and variable.

A **As you were:** act normally – keep doing whatever you were planning to do. Try not to let the anxiety voice have its way.

R **Repeat.** Back to the first A and acceptance, scale it again, keep resisting whatever the anxiety voice wants you to do/not do.

E **Expect** the best – this feeling will pass. It will be ok. You know the anxiety voice when it gets like this and it's usually lying. The world won't end and you'll feel better and calmer again soon – especially if you can manage to push back against the anxiety voice and what it wants you to do.

When it's useful: This is particularly useful for social anxiety or when anxiety makes us want to avoid things that we need to do or that are good for us – like meeting up with good friends, learning new skills, taking exercise or going to school or particular lessons, etc. If we can challenge the anxiety we definitely feel better and it's easier to do those things again next time.

