

Anxiety Reappraisal

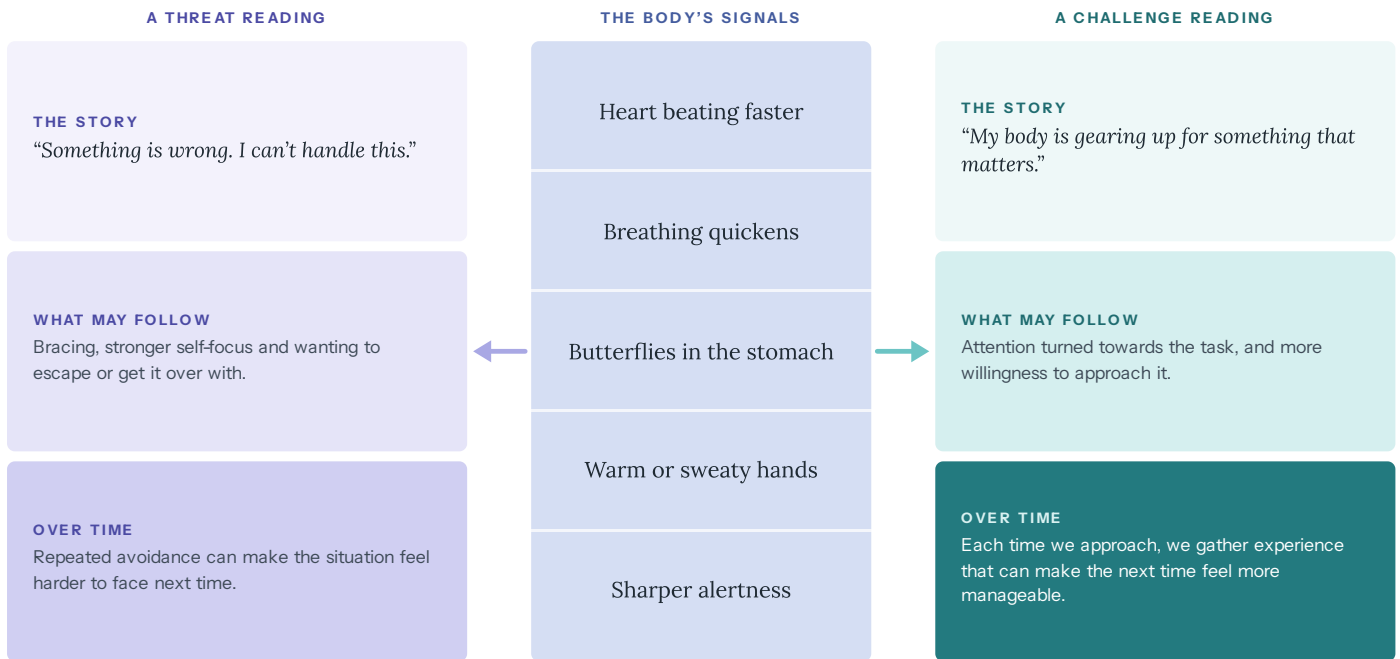
PSYCHOEDUCATION · REAPPRAISING STRESS AND ANXIOUS AROUSAL

Understanding what the body is doing, and how the meaning we give it can matter

Before a test, a presentation or a difficult conversation, the body often speeds up. Anxiety reappraisal involves noticing these signals and considering a different, believable reading of them: not as a sign that something is going wrong, but as the body getting ready for something that matters. It does not aim to remove anxiety.

01 Same signals, different readings

a simplified model

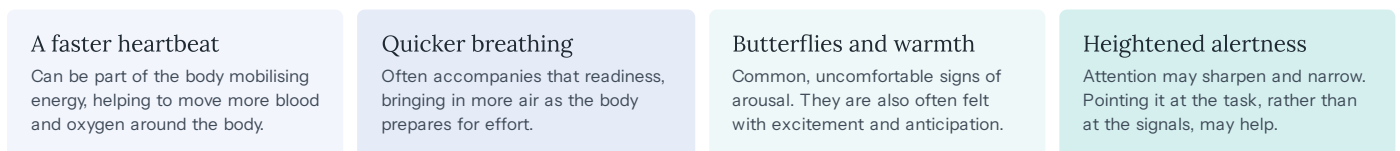


The signals may stay much the same. What can shift is the meaning we give them, and where our attention goes next.

Original diagram informed by research on challenge and threat responses (Jamieson et al., 2018). Real reactions are usually a mix of both.

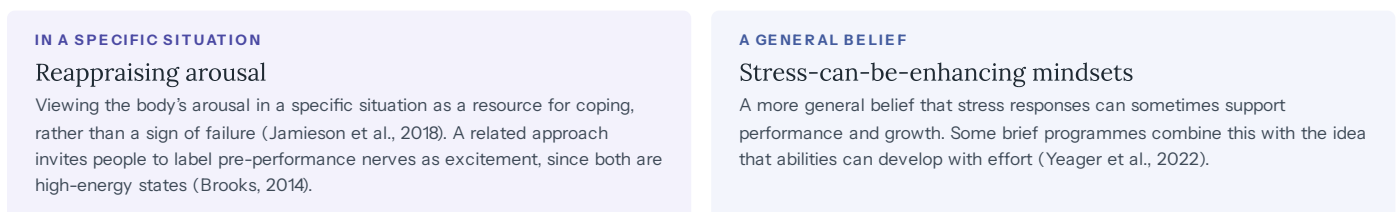
02 What the signals may be doing

in performance situations



03 Different ways of rethinking stress

related ideas



What the research suggests

EVIDENCE NOTE

- A 2019 meta-analysis found reappraisal interventions were linked with lower self-reported stress, but not with overall differences in physiological stress measures (Liu et al., 2019).
- A 2024 meta-analysis of randomised trials found a small average improvement in task performance, which tended to be larger when combined with other supportive content (Bosshard & Gomez, 2024).
- In one study, socially anxious adults taught to reframe arousal showed more adaptive cardiovascular responses and less attention to threat (Jamieson et al., 2013).

Most studies involve students in brief, one-off laboratory tasks. Effects are generally small, and longer-term benefits for anxiety problems are less clear. Reappraisal is best seen as one helpful skill, not a replacement for treatment.

Anxiety Reappraisal

PRACTICE GUIDE · WHEN AND HOW TO REAPPRAISE

Choosing a reading of your nerves that feels both helpful and believable

Reappraisal is not about pretending to feel calm or confident, or telling yourself that nothing could go wrong. It is about widening the story, so that feeling anxious and doing something that matters can happen at the same time.

04 When it may help, and when it may not

context matters

It may be a good fit for

- Nerves before something you have chosen or need to do: an exam, a talk, an interview, a match or a first day.
- Anticipatory anxiety that is making you want to avoid something you value.
- Moments when the body feels “too much” but there is no present danger.
- Alongside other skills, such as slower breathing, preparation and support.

It may not be the right tool when

- Anxiety may be signalling real danger, or a situation that is unsafe or controlling. Your safety comes first.
- The anxiety points to a problem that needs action, such as a deadline or an unresolved conflict.
- It turns into pressure to “feel excited”, or a way to dismiss your own needs.
- Physical symptoms are new, unusual or severe. These are worth checking with a doctor.

05 A four-step practice

before or during a stressful moment

1

Notice

Name the signals as plainly as you can.

“My heart is racing and my hands feel shaky.”

2

Allow

You do not need to get rid of the feelings before you begin.

“These feelings can be here.”

3

Reinterpret

Offer a believable reading of what the body is doing.

“My body is gearing up because this matters to me.”

4

Redirect

Turn attention to the first small step of the task itself.

“My first step is to say hello and read my opening line.”

06 Statements to try

tick any that feel believable

☐ My body is gearing up for something that matters.

☐ I can feel nervous and still do this.

☐ This energy can help me focus.

☐ A racing heart does not mean things are going wrong.

☐ I'm keyed up, and that makes sense right now.

☐ I can feel anxious and excited at the same time.

☐ I don't need to feel calm to take the first step.

☐ These sensations are uncomfortable, and they usually pass.

In my own words: _____

 If a statement feels untrue, it is unlikely to help, and forcing it may make things feel worse. Choose one that feels believable, soften it (for example, “I might be able to...”), or write your own.

07 Making it easier

small things that may help

Practise ahead

Try out your reading in a lower-pressure moment first, by saying it quietly or writing it down, so it is easier to recall later.

Keep it short

A few familiar words are usually easier to hold on to under pressure than a long explanation.

Expect it to wobble

The old story may come back mid-task. That is common; you can return to the new reading as often as you need.

Calming and reappraising can work together

Reappraisal is sometimes described as the opposite of calming down, but the two need not compete. Slower breathing or grounding can take the edge off very high arousal, and reappraisal can help with the energy that remains. For panic attacks or longstanding anxiety, it is best explored with your psychologist as part of a wider plan.

Anxiety Reappraisal

WORKSHEET · PLANNING AND PRACTICE LOG

Preparing for a situation, then noticing what happens

Use this page before a situation you expect to feel anxious about, and afterwards to note what you noticed. You can keep it general, and you can stop at any point.

08 Planning for a situation

The situation coming up: _____ When: _____

Signals I expect I might notice:

- ☐ Racing heart
 ☐ Faster breathing
 ☐ Butterflies
 ☐ Shaky hands
 ☐ Sweating
 ☐ Dry mouth
 ☐ Flushed face
 ☐ Restless energy
- ☐ Racing thoughts
 ☐ Tight chest or shoulders

The threat story my mind might tell

e.g. "Everyone will see I'm falling apart."

A believable, more helpful reading

e.g. "I'm keyed up because this matters. I can use this energy."

The first small step I will focus on: _____

09 Practice log

anxiety 0 = none, 10 = most

Situation	Signals I noticed	Reading I used	Before 0-10	After 0-10	What I noticed did it help, and how?
			_____/10	_____/10	
			_____/10	_____/10	
			_____/10	_____/10	
			_____/10	_____/10	
			_____/10	_____/10	

10 Looking back

What seemed to help, and what didn't?

To bring to my next session

GO AT YOUR OWN PACE

Writing about anxious situations can bring up emotions. You can pause, stop, choose a different prompt, or return to the exercise later. If you become significantly distressed, consider speaking with your psychologist or another appropriate professional.

SOURCES

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