FREE GUIDE

DBT skills guide to anxiety

Practical tools for the days your mind won't switch off, even when no one else can tell.

keep it for the next wobbly day

Raquel Ortega Amengual
Step Into Yourself · www.stepinto-yourself.com

WELCOME

Hi, I'm Raquel.



I'm the founder of Step Into Yourself, and I'm really glad you're here.

I've had my own struggles with anxiety. For a while it was a daily thing, and I felt disconnected from myself, as though the real me was just out of reach. It wasn't until a DBT (Dialectical Behaviour Therapy) training in graduate school that I began finding my way back.

DBT answered a question I kept asking in therapy: **"Okay, but what do I do now?"** I felt safe talking about my feelings, and I also walked away with real things to try. That changed my life and my work, so I wanted to share it.

I work with a lot of people who look completely fine from the outside: capable, reliable, the one everyone leans on. Inside, the mind is replaying, rehearsing and bracing. If that's you, this guide was written with you in mind.

Please treat this as a starting point. It isn't a substitute for therapy or medical advice, but it can help you feel steadier while you work out what comes next. If anxiety is getting in the way of your life, there is a lot more help out there, and you deserve it. You'll find where to look on page 15.

Thank you for trusting me with this part of your journey.

Raquel Ortega

Founder, Step Into Yourself

A note on where these skills come from

DBT was developed by psychologist Marsha Linehan. The skills here (TIPP, STOP, Check the Facts, Opposite Action and others) are well-known DBT tools. I've explained and laid them out in my own words, the way I teach them in sessions.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Start where you are

You don't need to read this front to back. Anxiety doesn't arrive on a schedule, so the guide is organised by what's happening right now. Pick the box that sounds most like today.

"I'm panicking, or about to."

Your body is in alarm mode and you need it to come down fast.

Go to page 5 →

"I can't feel the ground."

Racing, spacey or on edge, and you want to land back in the room.

Go to page 7 →

"My mind won't stop."

Replaying, predicting the worst, drafting conversations that haven't happened.

Go to page 8 →

"I'm anxious about being anxious."

You're hard on yourself for feeling this way, and it's making it worse.

Go to page 11 →

"It's just always there."

A low hum all week. Time to build the foundations that make it quieter.

Go to page 12 →

"This is more than a guide."

When to reach out for more support, and numbers to call if you're in crisis.

Go to page 15 →

What anxiety actually is

Anxiety is your alarm system doing its job: scanning for danger and getting your body ready to deal with it. The problem is an alarm that goes off at emails, silences, or *nothing at all*. You can't switch the alarm off by force, but you can learn to calm the body, check what the mind is telling you, and choose what to do next. That's what the skills here do.

The quiet kinds of anxiety

It isn't always panic. It can look like:

- Overthinking and replaying conversations
- Over-preparing, or putting things off until the last second
- Saying yes when you mean no
- Needing reassurance, or hating to ask for it
- Irritability, a tight jaw, a knot in the stomach
- Being unable to relax, even on holiday

If you recognise yourself, you're in the right place.

Take what helps, leave what doesn't. Every body is different. Some skills here involve movement, cold or breath, so please read the safety notes and check with a doctor if you're unsure whether they're right for you.

0 Notice & rate

before you try anything, take a quick reading

Every skill in this guide works better if you check in before and after. It takes ten seconds and it teaches you the most useful thing about anxiety: **it moves**. It peaks, and then it changes, even if you do nothing.

The 0–10 distress scale

0 calm	1	2	3	4	5 uneasy	6	7	8	9	10 unbearable

Say your number out loud or write it down. You're not trying to feel better yet. You're just noticing.

Where is it in your body?

Anxiety lives in the body long before the mind has words for it. Without judging, scan for where you feel it today. Tick any that fit:

- ☐ Racing heart
- ☐ Tight chest
- ☐ Shallow breathing
- ☐ Lump in throat
- ☐ Knotted stomach
- ☐ Nausea
- ☐ Tense shoulders
- ☐ Clenched jaw
- ☐ Restlessness
- ☐ Shaky hands
- ☐ Dizzy or foggy
- ☐ Can't sit still

Which gear are you in?

Too revved up

Racing, panicky, wired, can't sit still. Calm the body first: **page 5 (TIPP)** or **page 6 (STOP)**.

Too shut down

Numb, spacey, flat, frozen. Gently wake the senses: **page 7 (5-4-3-2-1)**.

Therapists call the zone where you can think and feel without being overwhelmed your **window of tolerance**. All these skills are ways of getting back into it.

Today's starting point

Date: _____ **Distress right now:** _____ **/10**

What's going on? (one line is enough)

1 TIPP

for when you need your body to calm down quickly

TIPP uses your body to change how you feel, **fast**. When anxiety is at 7 out of 10 or above, talking yourself calm rarely works because the thinking part of your brain is offline. These four steps work on the body first. Pick one. You don't need all four.

T — Temperature
Cool your face: hold a cold pack or cold, wet cloth on your cheeks and under your eyes for 30 seconds. Or splash cold water on your face, holding your breath for a moment.

I — Intense exercise
Burn off the surge: 20 jumping jacks, run on the spot or climb the stairs for about a minute. Anxiety floods the body with energy, so this gives it somewhere to go.

P — Paced breathing
Breathe in through your nose for **4**, then out through your mouth for **6**. A longer out-breath than in-breath tells your body it can stand down. Do this for 1–2 minutes.

P — Paired muscle relaxation
As you breathe in, squeeze one muscle group (fists, shoulders, thighs) for 5 seconds. As you breathe out, let go completely. Work from your head down to your toes.

Safety first. Cold-water and intense-exercise steps are not suitable for everyone. Check with your doctor first if you have a heart condition, low blood pressure, are pregnant, have a history of an eating disorder, or take medication that affects your heart rate. Paced breathing and muscle relaxation are gentler choices, and you can start there.

Try it now

Distress before: _____ /10 **I tried:** ☐ **Temperature** ☐ **Exercise** ☐ **Breathing** ☐ **Muscles**
Distress after: _____ /10

What did I notice in my body?

Which one will I reach for next time?

Why this works. These steps work with your body's own calming responses. Slowing the out-breath and cooling the face are well-known ways of nudging the body out of "alarm" mode, so your thinking mind can come back online.

2 STOP

for the moment before you react

Anxiety makes us fast: the snappy reply, the apology spiral, the 2 a.m. google search. STOP puts a gap between the feeling and what you do about it. It takes about a minute, and you can do it in the middle of a meeting or a conversation without anyone knowing.

1. **Stop.**
   Freeze for a moment. Put down the phone or take your hands off the keyboard. Don't do anything yet. Not acting is the skill.

2. **Take a step back.**
   Take a slow breath, or physically move away for a moment. Let the urgency pass a little. You don't have to answer or decide right now.

3. **Observe.**
   What's happening inside you? Name the thoughts ("I'm having the thought that I've upset them"), the feelings and the body sensations. What's actually going on around you?

4. **Proceed mindfully.**
   Ask yourself: *What do I want from this situation? What would help, right now?* Then choose, calmly, from what you now know.

Practise it in the wild

Think of a moment this week when anxiety makes you rush: a message you're dreading, a decision you keep postponing, a conversation you replay.

The situation:

What I notice when I stop and observe:

What I choose to do instead:

Your pocket reset

Screenshot this or cut it out for the next wobbly moment:

1. Stop. **2.** Breathe out slowly, longer than you breathe in. **3.** Name it: *"This is anxiety. It will peak and pass."* **4.** Choose one small next step.

3 5-4-3-2-1

to land back in the room

Anxiety lives in the future (*what if…*). Your senses live in the present. This exercise gives your attention something real to hold on to, which makes it a good fit for the spacey, floaty, "not quite here" kind of anxiety as well as the racing kind.

Look around you and name, slowly, out loud or in your head, preferably something new each time:

5	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
things you can **see**	things you can **feel**	things you can **hear**	things you can **smell**	thing you can **taste**

can't smell anything? imagine your favourite smell. that counts.

Hold something real

Press your feet into the floor. Hold a mug, a stone or a cold glass. Describe it: its temperature, weight and texture. Anxiety hates specifics.

After you've tried it

Distress before: _____ **/10** **Distress after:** _____ **/10**

What helped most?

> **Why this works.** It shifts your attention from imagined future threats to what's actually here. Your mind can't fully rehearse a disaster while it's carefully noticing the texture of a mug.

4 Check the facts

for when your mind tells stories

Once your body is calmer, you can look at what your mind has been saying. Anxious minds are brilliant storytellers: they take a small fact, add an assumption and deliver a disaster. This worksheet separates **what happened** from **what you're telling yourself about it**. Use it on a specific worry, not a general feeling.

1 · The feeling

What emotion do I want to understand?

_____ **Intensity before:** _____ **/100**

2 · What happened? (the facts only)

Describe it as if a camera had filmed it: who did or said what, and when? No opinions, no mind-reading, no "always" or "never".

3 · What story am I telling myself?

What am I assuming about what it means, or about what they think, feel or intend? Which of those are facts, and which are guesses?

Other ways of seeing it, as many as I can think of:

4 · What am I afraid will happen?

What's the threat I'm predicting? Then: what other outcomes are possible? What is the most likely one?

4 Check the facts

continued

5 · And if the worst did happen?

Say it plainly. Then ask: how would I cope? Who or what could help me? Anxiety often skips this step, but knowing you could cope makes the fear smaller.

6 · Does my feeling fit the facts?

Look at steps 2–5. How well do the size and the length of the feeling match what actually happened?

☐ **It fits** ☐ **It partly fits** ☐ **It doesn't fit**

If you're not sure, keep checking: ask someone you trust, or run a small experiment to test your prediction.

Intensity after: _____ **/100**

So... what now?

If it doesn't fit → Opposite Action

Anxiety says *avoid, hide, check, rehearse.* When the facts don't justify that, you do the opposite, in a small, doable way, and your brain slowly learns the danger was smaller than it thought.

One small step towards what I've been avoiding:

Example: *"I'm dreading sending this email, and the facts say it's fine. I'll send it today and not check it three times."*

If it fits → Problem solve

Sometimes anxiety is right: there is a real problem. Then the job is to act on it, not soothe it away. Start small.

The problem, in one sentence:

Three possible solutions:

The smallest first step, and when:

most worries are a mix of both. that's allowed.

5 Loosen the loop

small ways to step out of the spiral

Some thoughts won't be solved by checking the facts, especially the "what if" ones. For those, the aim isn't to win the argument. It's to stop being dragged around by it. Here are a few quick ways to do that.

Name the thought

Add four words: **"I'm having the thought that..."** *I'm having the thought that I'll fail.* A thought is something your mind is saying, not a forecast of the future.

Schedule the worry

Choose a 15-minute "worry window" (not near bedtime). When a worry pops up, jot it down and tell it: *"Not now, 6 p.m."* Surprisingly, many are gone by then.

Do the next right thing

Anxiety wants you to solve everything tonight. Ask: *"What's the one next step?"* Do that. Then stop.

Notice the urge

Reassurance-seeking, checking and over-explaining feel like relief but can feed the loop. See if you can feel the urge, breathe, and let it rise and fall before you act on it.

My worry window

Time I'll use: _____ **Worries I've parked today:**

When the time comes, look at each one and ask: is this something I can act on (→ one small step) or something I can't control (→ let it go for now)?

The "second arrow"

The first arrow is the anxiety itself. The second is everything you add: *"What's wrong with me? I should be over this by now."* You can't always stop the first. You can learn to stop firing the second. That's next.

6 Make room for it

acceptance and self-compassion, without giving in

Fighting anxiety usually makes it louder. Acceptance doesn't mean liking it, and it doesn't mean giving up. It means: **this is here right now, and I'll stop spending energy on wishing it weren't.** That frees your energy for what actually helps.

The self-compassion pause

1. Next time you notice anxiety, **pause**.
2. Place a hand on your chest or belly and feel your breath under it.
3. Say, silently or out loud: **"It's okay to feel anxious. I am safe in this moment. I can handle this."**
4. Take three slow breaths and let the words settle. Notice how it feels to meet yourself with kindness instead of criticism.

it might feel silly at first. do it anyway.

Talk to yourself like a friend

If a friend told you what you're telling yourself, what would you say to them? Write it here, then read it back to yourself.

Anxiety is not a character flaw

It often shows up in people who care a lot, who are conscientious and who have learned to stay alert. It's also very treatable. Many of the people I work with have spent years managing anxiety quietly while looking fine, and they are not weak or broken. They're tired. That's different.

Three things I did well this week

Even small. "I got through the meeting" counts. "I didn't send the text" counts.

7 Build the foundations

calm is easier when the body is looked after

A body running on four hours of sleep, caffeine and no breaks is more reactive, so the same worry feels bigger. These are the basics. They're unglamorous and they work. **Choose one** to focus on for the next week, not all of them.

Sleep

Keep a steady wake-up time. Screens down an hour before bed if you can. Write tomorrow's worries on paper before you turn off the light.

Movement

Short and regular beats occasional and heroic. A 10-minute walk outside, stretching or dancing in the kitchen all count.

Eating

Don't skip meals (low blood sugar can feel a lot like anxiety). Notice how caffeine and alcohol affect your body, and adjust if you need to.

Check in with your body

Ongoing anxiety can have physical contributors too. If something feels off, it's worth a check-up with your doctor.

My calm routine

Keep it so small it's almost embarrassing. Consistency matters more than ambition.

Morning (5 min)	Mid-day break	Wind-down

The one thing I'll start with this week

And when I'll do it (day / time / after what?):

> **Tip:** Attach the new habit to something you already do ("after I brush my teeth, I'll do 5 slow breaths"). It makes it far more likely to stick.

8 7-day anxiety log

patterns show up when you write them down

A minute a day. Each evening, note how anxious you felt at the highest point, what was going on, and which skill you tried. After a week, look back for patterns (certain days, people, situations, times, or a lack of sleep) and take them to your therapist if you have one.

Day	Peak (0–10)	What was going on?	What I tried / what helped
Mon date: ____			
Tue date: ____			
Wed date: ____			
Thu date: ____			
Fri date: ____			
Sat date: ____			
Sun date: ____			

At the end of the week

Patterns I notice:

The skill that helped most:

9 Anxiety check-in

the GAD-7, a quick, free screening questionnaire

Do this now, and again in a month. It's a snapshot, not a verdict, but it gives you something concrete to track, or to share with a doctor or therapist.

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?

	Not at all (0)	Several days (1)	More than half the days (2)	Nearly every day (3)
1. Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge	◯	◯	◯	◯
2. Not being able to stop or control worrying	◯	◯	◯	◯
3. Worrying too much about different things	◯	◯	◯	◯
4. Trouble relaxing	◯	◯	◯	◯
5. Being so restless that it's hard to sit still	◯	◯	◯	◯
6. Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	◯	◯	◯	◯
7. Feeling afraid, as if something awful might happen	◯	◯	◯	◯

Add up your score: _____ / 21

0–4	5–9	10–14	15–21
Minimal	Mild	Moderate	Severe

What your score might mean

A score of **10 or more** is a good reason to talk with a doctor or therapist. Under 10 doesn't mean your anxiety doesn't matter, so if it's affecting your life, it's worth getting support whatever the number says.

This is a screening tool, not a diagnosis. Only a qualified professional can diagnose an anxiety disorder.

The GAD-7 was developed by Drs Robert L. Spitzer, Janet B. W. Williams and Kurt Kroenke and colleagues, with an educational grant from Pfizer Inc. No permission is required to reproduce, translate, display or distribute it. Spitzer RL, Kroenke K, Williams JBW, Löwe B. (2006). A brief measure for assessing generalized anxiety disorder: the GAD-7. *Arch Intern Med*, 166(10), 1092–1097.

10 When it's more than a guide

there's no prize for doing this alone

Consider more support if...

- Anxiety is affecting your sleep, work, relationships or health most days
- You're avoiding more and more of life to stay out of its way
- You're having panic attacks, or fear of the next one is shaping your days
- You've been through something painful that your body still seems to be reacting to
- You've tried to manage on your own for a long time and you're worn out

Reaching out is not a failure of the skills. It's often the next skill.

If you are in crisis or in danger right now

If you are thinking about harming yourself or ending your life, or you're worried about your immediate safety, please contact emergency services or one of the free lines below **now**. You don't have to be sure it's "bad enough" to call. These services are confidential and they are there for exactly this.

United Kingdom

112
Emergency services

Samaritans: 116 123
Free, 24/7

Text SHOUT to 85258
Free, 24/7 text support

NHS 111
Urgent help (England: choose the mental health option)

United States

911
Emergency services

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
Call or text 988, 24/7

Crisis Text Line
Text HOME to 741741

Europe

112
Emergency number across the EU

Spain: 024
Suicide prevention line, free, 24/7

France: 3114
National suicide prevention, 24/7

Ireland: 116 123
Samaritans

Germany: 0800 111 0 111
Telefonseelsorge, free

Somewhere else? Find a helpline in your country at findahelpline.com. Please call your local emergency number if you're in immediate danger.

Step Into Yourself is not a crisis service, and Raquel can't respond to emergencies by email or message. Numbers checked November 2026. They can change, so please double-check if one doesn't connect.

WHAT NEXT?

You've already started.

Reading this, trying even one skill and noticing what happens in your body counts. Change comes from small, repeated practice, and rarely from one big breakthrough. Be patient with yourself. Progress that's slow is still progress.

If you'd like company on the way, whether that's learning these skills together, working through the things that keep the anxiety going, or just having someone in your corner, I'd be glad to help.

A THANK-YOU

10% off your first session

Book a free 30-minute call, no pressure and no commitment, and mention this guide to receive 10% off your first session.

Book a free call →

How I work

Online therapy in English or Spanish, at your pace. I draw on DBT, EMDR and Internal Family Systems (IFS), depending on what you need. Collaborative, jargon-free and never one-size-fits-all.

Keep reading

Free articles, quizzes and guides on anxiety, trauma and emotions at stepinto-yourself.com/resources.

With gratitude,

Raquel Ortega Amengual

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