



# EXAM ANXIETY – A PARENT'S GUIDE



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# EXAM STRESS

REMEMBER, IT IS NORMAL TO WORRY BEFORE AN EXAM – THE CHALLENGE IS HOW TO MANAGE THE WORRY SO THAT IT WORKS FOR YOU RATHER THAN AGAINST YOU!



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# Aims

- Understanding anxiety
- How anxiety presents in relation to exams
- What your child can do to help themselves
- What you can do to help your child



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# WHAT SOME YOUNG PEOPLE SAY EXAM STRESS FEELS LIKE



I am not going to get my predicted grades.

I just feel like crying all the time.

I have so much revision to do for my GCSEs.

My stress is causing me to have arguments at home.

The amount of work I have from school is piling up and I am finding it hard to keep up.



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# BARRIERS TO REVISING - WHAT GETS IN THE WAY?



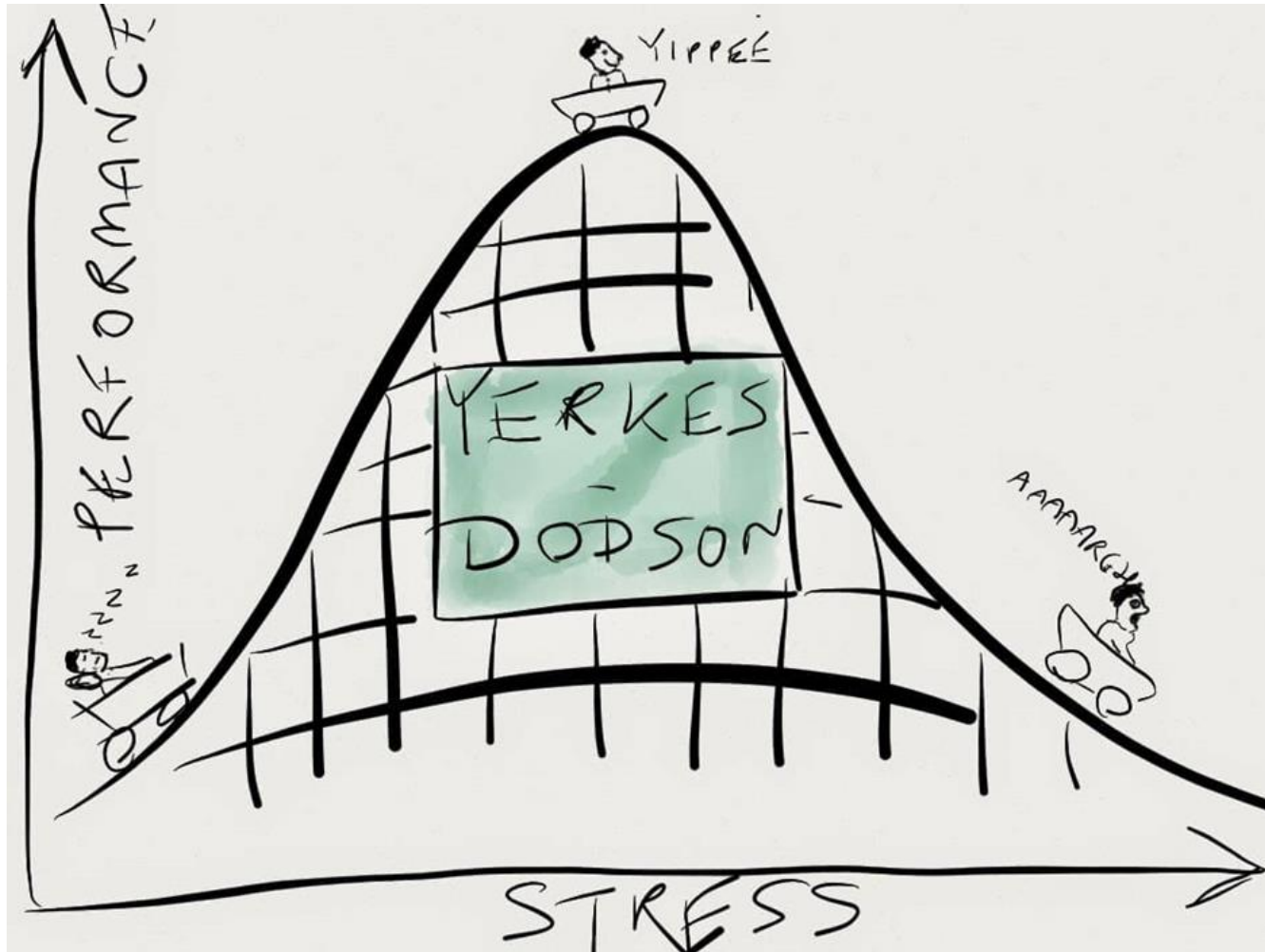
BARRIERS	SOLUTIONS
LEAVING IT TOO LATE	Act NOW! Set a day and time to get started
HATE REVISING	Try different strategies & materials, make it fun, revise with friends
POOR ORGANIZATION	Study timetables/lists
CONFUSING REVISION NOTES	Use BBC Bitesize/how to pass revision books/speak to teacher
NOWHERE TO REVISE	Find a small area that can be used as a small study space/local library
NOT ENOUGH TIME	Make time – plan time in your week
OTHER THINGS TO DO	How important is this? What's in it for you?
THINK YOU CAN'T DO IT	Reflect on positives/your strengths/past achievements
CRAMMING/TOO MUCH REVISION	Start early/use effective planning
NOT KNOWING HOW TO REVISE	Try out different methods taught at school/find one that suits you



# How might this stress present itself?

- Untidy bedrooms
- No time for chores
- Arguments
- Lack of sleep
- Not eating properly
- Stop attending extra- curricular clubs
- Avoidance

# WE NEED A BIT OF STRESS... BUT NOT TOO MUCH



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# FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE



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# FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE



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# ANXIETY

HAS THREE CHARACTERISTICS:

## BODILY SENSATIONS

- ❑ ASSOCIATED WITH ADRENALIN - PREPARING THE BODY FOR ACTION
- ❑ E.G. SWEATING, HEART BEATING FASTER, TREMBLING

## ANXIOUS BEHAVIOUR

- ❑ AVOID WORRYING SITUATIONS
- ❑ SO YOU DON'T GET THE CHANCE TO LEARN IF IT'S AS BAD AS YOU THINK IT WILL BE OR COPE

## ANXIOUS THOUGHTS

- ❑ OVER-ESTIMATE "DANGER"
- ❑ UNDERESTIMATE ABILITY TO COPE



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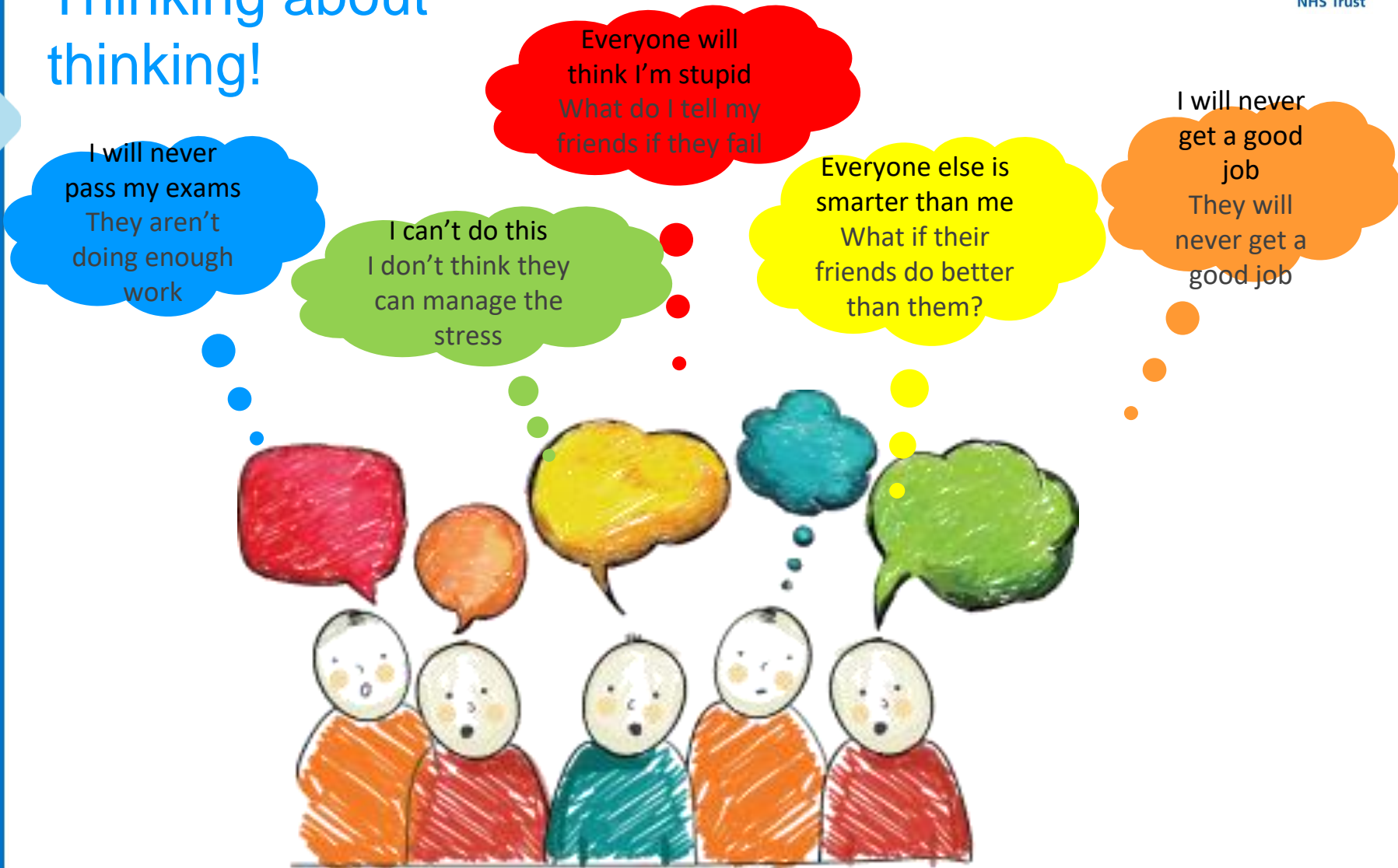


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# ANXIOUS THINKING



# Thinking about thinking!



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# UNHELPFUL THINKING STYLES... DO YOU CATCH YOURSELF USING THESE?



**All or nothing thinking**

Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'

*If I'm not perfect I have failed*

*Either I do it right or not at all*

**Over-generalizing**

Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw

*"everything is always rubbish"*

*"nothing good ever happens"*

**Mental filter**

Only paying attention to certain types of evidence

*Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes*

**Disqualifying the positive**

Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another

*That doesn't count*

**Jumping to conclusions**

There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:

- **Mind reading** (imagining we know what others are thinking)
- **Fortune telling** (predicting the future)

*2 + 2 = 5*

**Magnification (catastrophising) & minimization**

Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophising), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important

**Emotional reasoning**

Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true

*I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot*

**should must**

Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed

If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration

**Labelling**

Assigning labels to ourselves or other people

*I'm a loser*

*I'm completely useless*

*They're such an idiot*

**Personalization**

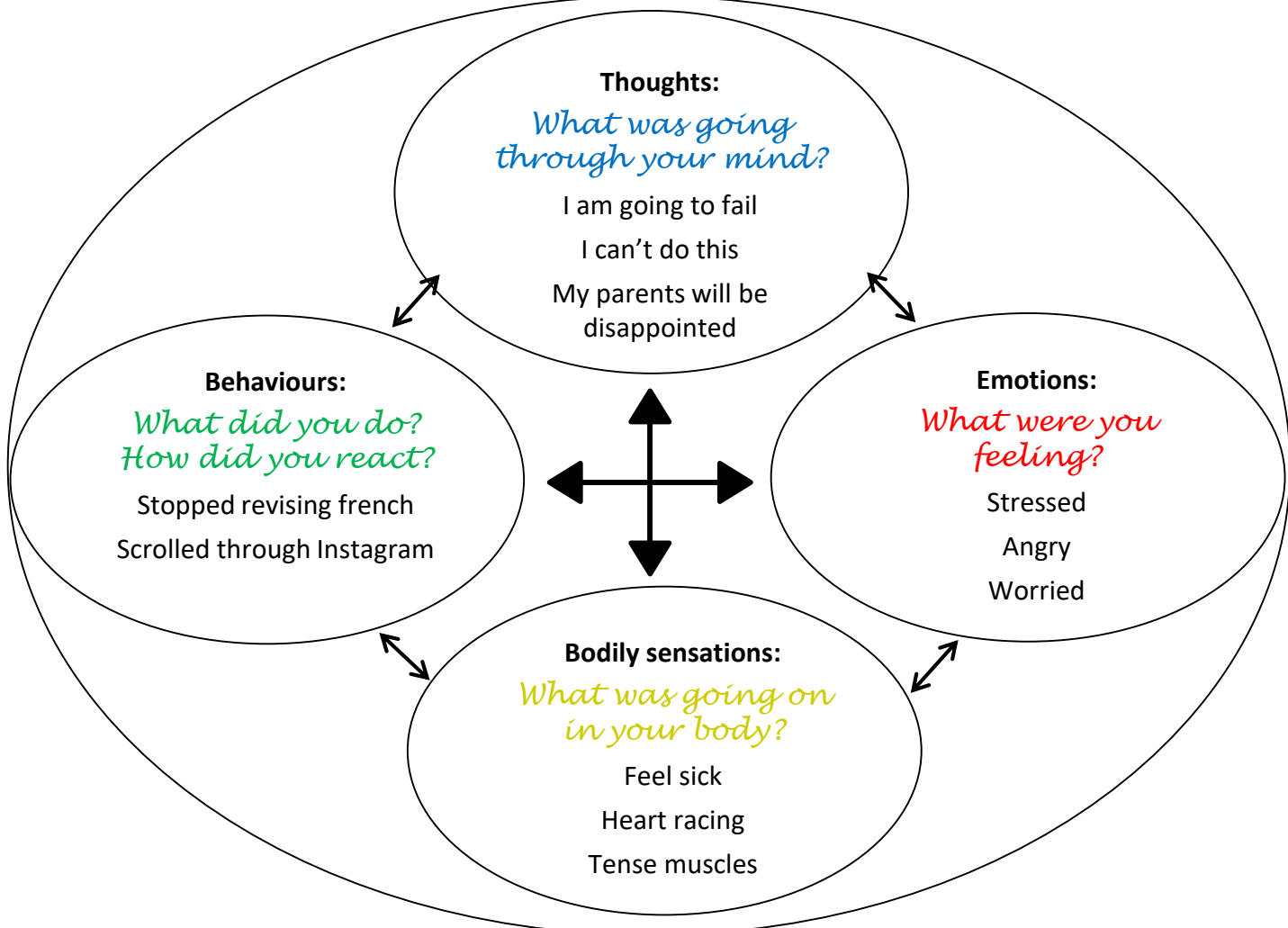
Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault

*"this is my fault"*

Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault

# WHAT DOES ANXIETY LOOK LIKE?

**Situation:** revising for a French test



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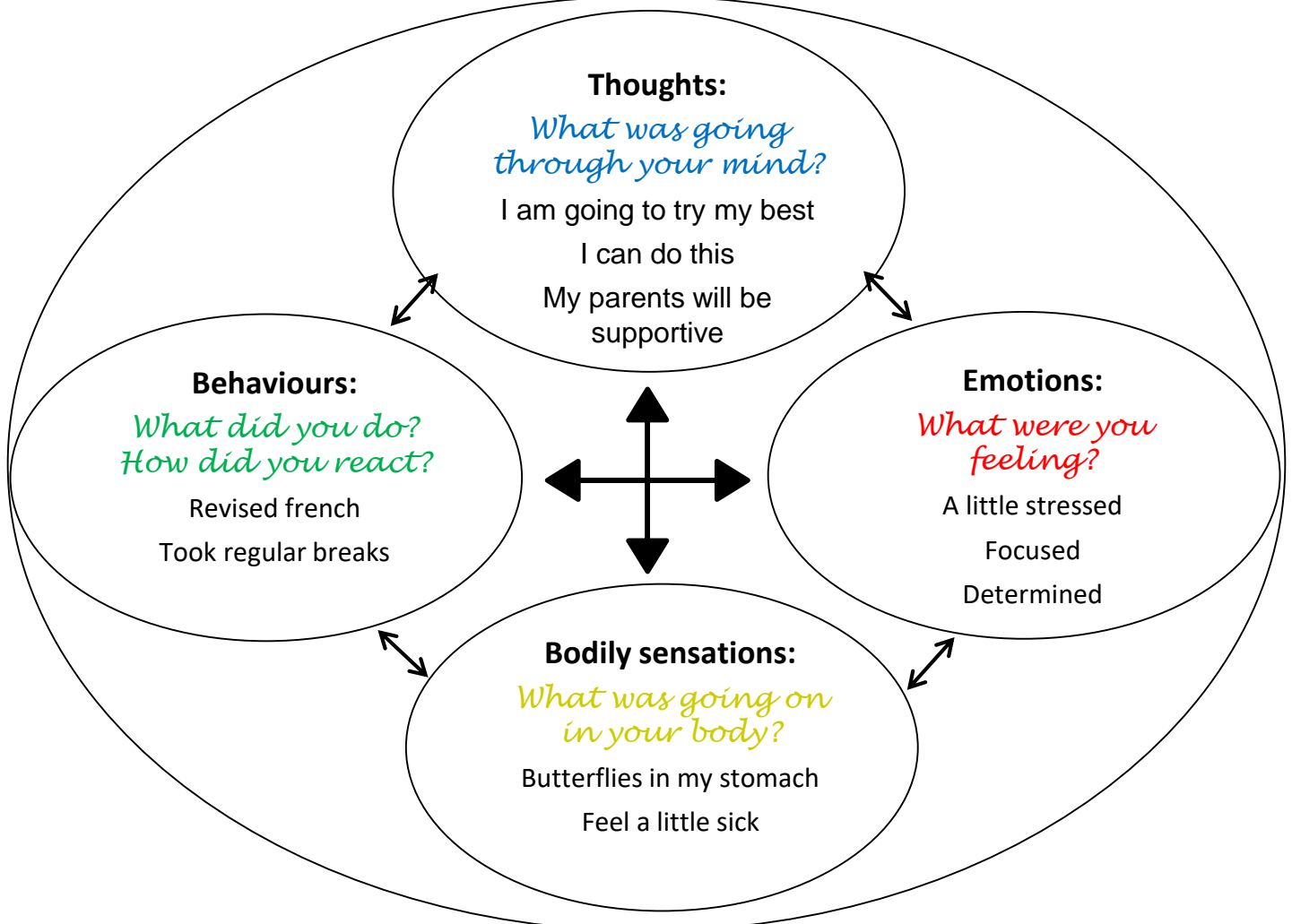


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# WHAT WOULD A LESS ANXIOUS PERSON LOOK LIKE?



**Situation:** revising for a French test



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# WHAT CAN WE DO TO MANAGE OUR ANXIETY?

## CHALLENGE OUR NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

### SITUATION: SITTING AN EXAM

#### WORST CASE SCENARIO

I won't know any of the questions, I will panic, I will fail the exam, I won't be able to get a college place or a good job

#### BEST CASE SCENARIO

I will get every question right, it will be a breeze, I will get offered scholarships, and the examiners will give me a round of applause

#### SOMETHING IN THE MIDDLE

I might not know all the answers, but I have revised, all I can do is my best, if I do badly it's not the end of the world, it is not the only exam I am sitting



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# CHALLENGING OUR UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

THOUGHT: *"I will fail my exam"*

RATE TRUTH OF STATEMENT 0-100%: **70%**

## EVIDENCE FOR THE THOUGHT

- I have so many subjects, and not enough time
- I do not have a revision timetable
- I find the subjects hard
- I do not know how to revise
- I failed in my exam last year

## EVIDENCE AGAINST THE THOUGHT

- I have a good amount of time for revision
- I can create a revision timetable
- I have asked for help during lessons when I didn't understand something
- When I study with friends it makes it more fun
- I haven't failed all of my exams

## UNHELPFUL THINKING STYLES:

Catastrophising, predicting the future

## ALTERNATIVE, MORE BALANCED THOUGHT:

Although I might not remember everything I still have time to revise for my exams. I can make the study fun with friends and continue to ask my teachers for support.

REVIEW TRUTH OF STATEMENT 0-100%: **30%**



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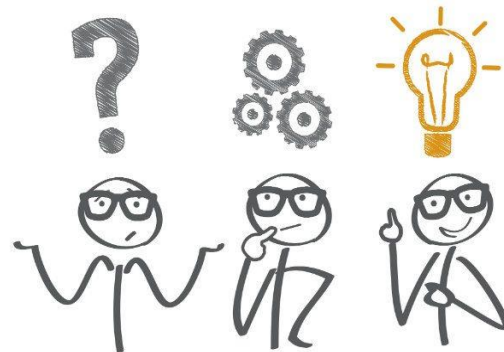
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# PROBLEM SOLVING UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

1. DEFINE WHAT THE PROBLEM IS.
2. LIST ALL OF THE POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS. THINK OF AS MANY WAYS TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM AS YOU CAN, EVEN IF SOME OF THEM INITIALLY FEEL SILLY.
3. THINK OF THE PROS AND CONS OF EACH SOLUTION. HOW PRACTICAL ARE THEY? HOW HELPFUL ARE THEY? WHAT WOULD THE LONG AND SHORT TERM CONSEQUENCES BE?
4. IS THE PLAN DO-ABLE? WHAT COULD GET IN THE WAY? WHO COULD HELP YOU WITH IT?
5. RATE EACH PLAN FROM 0-10 IN TERMS OF HOW GOOD YOU THINK IT IS.
6. CHOOSE ONE PLAN TO TRY AND SET A TIME TO DO IT.
7. REVIEW WHAT HAPPENED AFTER YOU DID IT. DID YOUR SOLUTION WORK? IF NOT WHICH OTHER OPTION COULD YOU TRY?



# WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?: I cannot motivate myself to revise for my English exam

LIST ALL OF THE POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	PROS AND CONS OF EACH SOLUTION	IS THE PLAN DO-ABLE? YES/NO	HOW GOOD IS THE PLAN? RATE 0-10	WHAT HAPPENED?
Create a revision plan	+ I can plan a balanced timetable.	Yes	8	
Don't revise	- I might find it hard + I won't do my best - I won't have to motivate myself	Yes	0	
Revise with friends	+ More fun - Might need to focus on different areas	Yes	7	
Take regular breaks	+ Rest my brain	Yes	9	
Reward myself	+ Increase motivation	Yes	9	



## TESTING UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

1. Think of a situation that you find worrying
2. Face your fears in small manageable steps
3. Put these steps in order from the least anxiety provoking to the most
4. Begin the first step on the ladder
5. Repeat each step as many times as needed until you feel comfortable with it



IS IT LOWER THAN  
YOUR ORIGINAL  
RATING?



WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED  
FROM CARRYING OUT  
THIS STEP?



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# REVISION... EVERYONE DOES IT DIFFERENTLY!

## Learning Styles

### VERBAL

Words are your strongpoint!  
You prefer to use words both  
in speech and in writing!

### VISUAL

You prefer to use pictures,  
diagrams, images and spatial  
understanding to help you  
learn

### MUSICAL / AUDITORY

You prefer using sounds or  
music or even rhythms to  
help you learn.

### PHYSICAL / KINAESTHETIC

You use your hands, body  
and sense of touch to help  
you learn. You might 'act  
things out'.

## WHAT'S YOUR LEARNING STYLE?

### LOGICAL / MATHEMATICAL

Learning is easier for you if  
you use logic, reasoning,  
systems and sequences.

### SOCIAL

You like to learn new things  
as a part of a group.  
Explaining your  
understanding to a group  
helps you to learn.

### SOLITARY

You like to work alone. You  
use self-study and prefer your  
own company when  
learning.

### COMBINATION

Your learning style is a  
combination of two or more  
of these styles.



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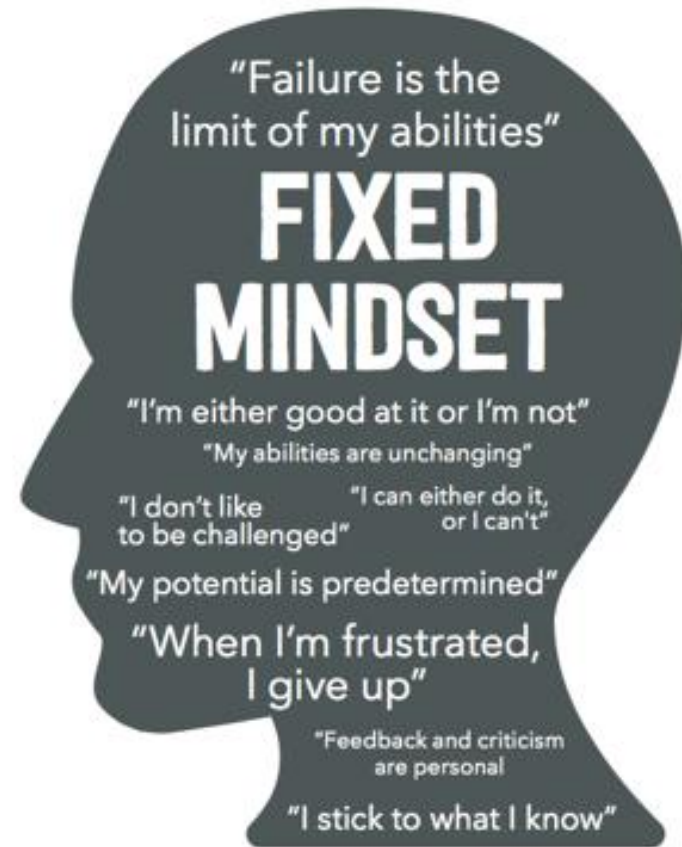


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# GROWTH MINDSET VS FIXED MINDSET



Abilities can be **developed**  
through effort and practice



Abilities are **static** and  
cannot be changed



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# How to help your child to develop a Growth Mindset?

## ✓ PRAISE YOUR CHILD FOR WORKING HARD

Say this: "You worked so hard on this!"  
Instead of: 'You are so smart'

## ✓ TALK ABOUT THE BRAIN

Your child's brain's pathways develop through effort and practise. They have control over growing their brain!

## ✓ ACCEPT MISTAKES AS LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Speak positively about mistakes and struggles with your child, and this help you and your child believe that making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process.

## ✓ UNDERSTAND THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS IN LEARNING

Our brains are wired to protect us when we feel threatened. Stress symptoms such as feeling sick, stomach aches, and the mind going blank are completely normal. Encourage your child to use relaxation strategies to overcome them!



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# How to help your child to develop a Growth Mindset?

- ✓ Acknowledge and embrace weaknesses
- ✓ View challenges as opportunities
- ✓ Know your child's learning style and use the right learning strategies
- ✓ Remember the brain has the ability to change throughout their life
- ✓ Focus on the process rather than the end result, enjoy the learning process.
- ✓ Create a sense of purpose. Make long-term goals
- ✓ Choose learning well over learning fast
- ✓ Reward your child for their efforts and actions
- ✓ Need for improvement does not mean failure.
- ✓ Help your child to reflect on their learning every day
- ✓ Learn from the mistakes of others
- ✓ Model making mistakes
- ✓ Think of learning as 'brain training'
- ✓ Never stop learning
- ✓ Remember it takes time to learn



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# COPIING STRATEGIES

- Catch the unhelpful thinking styles and reframe the thoughts
- Challenge unhelpful thoughts
- Problem solve
- Positive Thinking
- Relaxation Strategies
- Distraction techniques
- Doing things they enjoy
- Using those around them for support



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★ I CAN LEARN FROM THIS AND IT WILL BE EASIER NEXT TIME ★

★ SHORT TERM PAIN FOR LONG TERM GAIN ★

★ THOUGHTS ARE JUST THOUGHTS ★

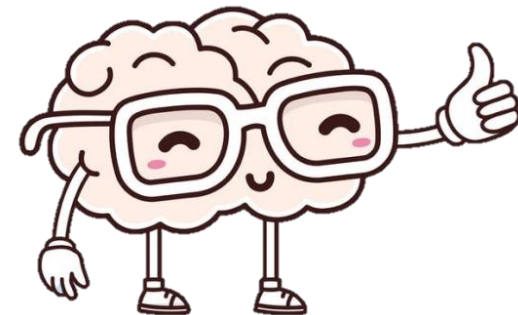
★ ITS OKAY TO FEEL THIS WAY ★

think  
POSITIVE

★ I CAN USE MY COPING STRATEGIES AND GET THROUGH THIS ★

★ STOP, AND BREATHE, I CAN DO THIS ★

★ I HAVE DONE THIS BEFORE, I CAN DO IT AGAIN ★



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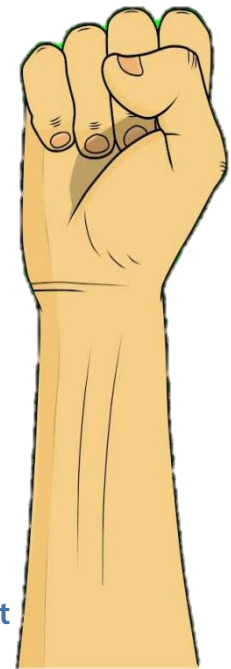
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# RELAXATION STRATEGIES



★ MUSCLE RELAXATION ★



★ CONTROLLED BREATHING ★



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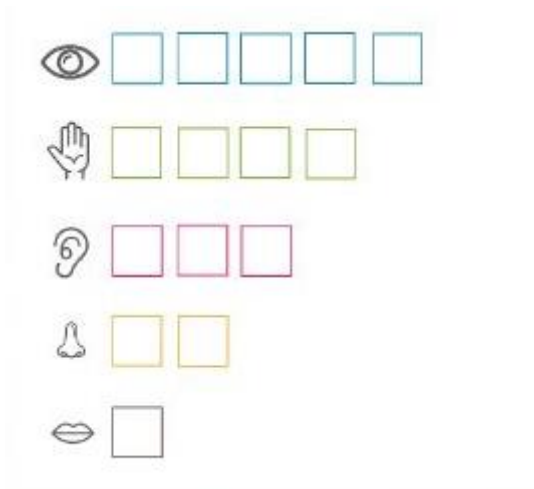
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# DISTRACTION TECHNIQUES



★ 5 COLOURS ★



★ 54321 ★



SHOPPING

DO SOMETHING CREATIVE E.G. DRAW,  
PAINT, MAKE, BAKE

PLAY ON THE  
PLAYSTATION/XBOX

HAVE A BATH

DO SOMETHING PHYSICAL E.G. GO FOR A  
WALK, PLAY FOOTBALL, GO  
SKATEBOARDING

# ACTIVITIES THEY ENJOY

LISTEN TO MUSIC – HAVE A “RELAXING”  
PLAYLIST



NAILS/MAKE UP/FACE MASK

SPEND TIME WITH PETS

WATCH TV/A FUNNY FILM/  
YOUTUBE CLIPS



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# THE BACK-UP TEAM

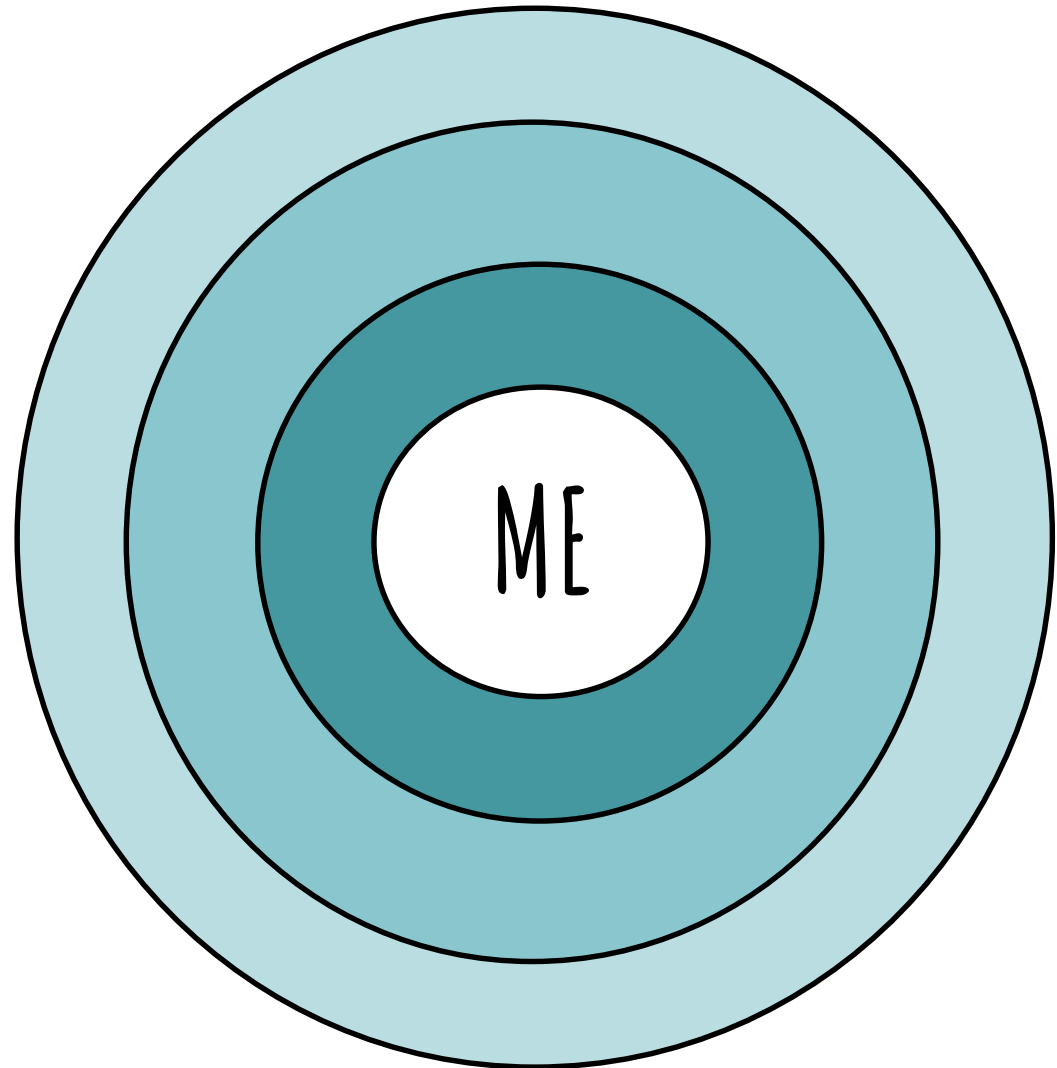
Who is in your back-up team?

What sort of support can they offer?

- Emotional
- Practical
- Motivational
- Companionship

The back-up team works better if the people who are in it, know they are in it.

How could you let them know they are part of yours?



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# In Summary

- ❖ They are putting enough pressure on themselves, reduce any additional pressure by offering support
- ❖ Help focus on the growth mindset through conversations you have to help encourage them during this difficult time and use it as a practice to learn from, for the summer
- ❖ Discuss the best ways of revising for them based on their individual learning style
- ❖ Help with any organizational difficulties, even if it just for them to talk it through to see if it sounds ok
- ❖ Encourage them to use strategies that help reduce any anxiety
- ❖ Remind them to problem solve or challenge unhelpful thoughts
- ❖ Encourage good sleep, exercise and diet, ensuring they take some time out and have regular breaks



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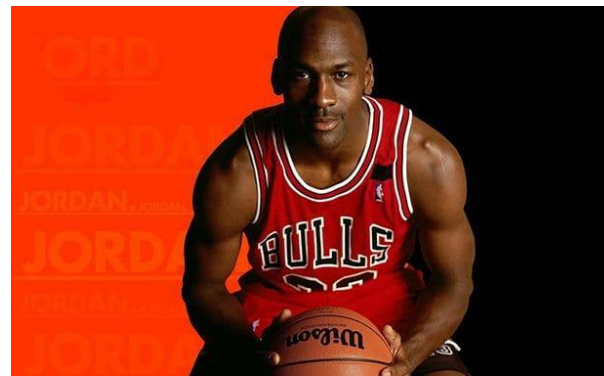


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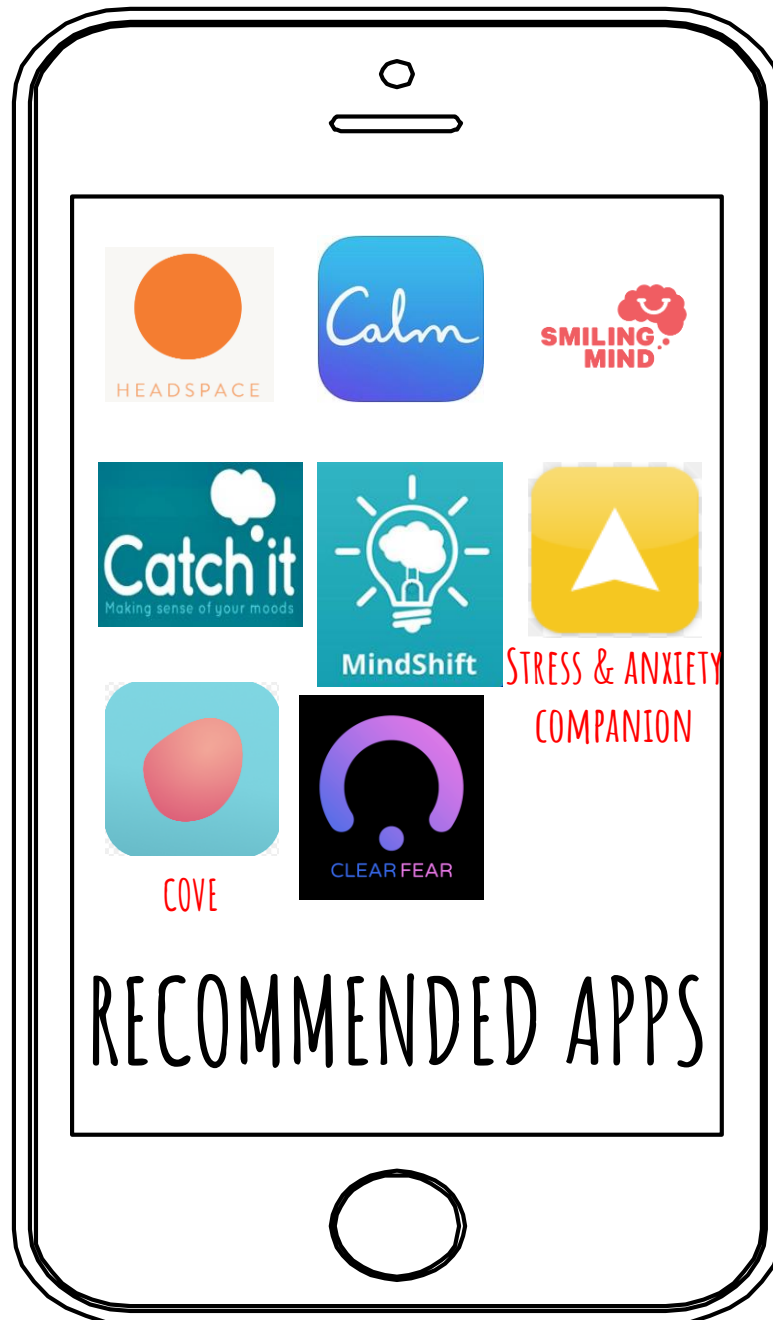




# WHICH OF THESE CELEBS EXPERIENCED A MAJOR FAILURE?







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# ANY QUESTIONS?



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