



Panic Stations

Module 6

Detective Work and Disputation

Detective Work and Disputation	2
Thought Diary Example	3
Thought Diary	5
Module Summary	7
About this Module	8

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: Detective Work and Disputation

Previously, we established that it is our thoughts that influence our feelings, emotions, and behaviours – the thoughts and feelings connection. We also discussed and identified some unhelpful thinking patterns and styles that we frequently use. Often, a person with panic will think negative thoughts that are characterised by these unhelpful thinking patterns, such as “catastrophising” and believing that physical sensations are dangerous. This leads them to feel even more anxious about possible future panic attacks. This, in turn, maintains and perpetuates the anxiety.

The aim of this InfoPax is to provide you with information about strategies that can help you challenge these unhelpful thoughts and thinking styles.

The key to changing the way we feel is found in challenging and changing our unhelpful thoughts and beliefs. This begins with you taking a good hard look at them. Imagine that you are a detective and a lawyer, and your unhelpful thoughts and beliefs are to be investigated or on trial.

To assess whether or not your thoughts and beliefs are valid, you need to gather and examine evidence. As such, we liken this process to that of being a detective. Therefore, “D” stands for “**Detective Work**” where you look for evidence that does or does not support your thoughts and beliefs. Like all good detectives, we need to find out the facts, and gather the evidence. Here are some helpful questions:

- What is the evidence (or proof) that my thoughts/beliefs are true?
- Is there any evidence that disproves my thoughts/beliefs?
- How do I know that my thoughts/beliefs are true?
- Are there facts that I’m ignoring or I’ve overlooked?
- What other explanations could there possibly be?
- How realistic are my thoughts, beliefs, and expectations?

D also stands for “**Disputation.**” Remember, you are also like a lawyer, asking questions that challenge your thoughts, beliefs and expectations, ultimately testing and challenging whether or not they stand true, and whether they help or hinder you. Here are some other helpful questions to ask yourself:

- What other ways are there of viewing the situation?
- How might someone else view the situation?
- If I were not anxious, how might I view the situation differently?
- Realistically, what is the likelihood of that happening?
- Is it helpful for me to think this way?

Detective work and disputation is about trying to be objective about our thoughts. It is about analysing them, assessing, and evaluating them to see if they are indeed valid and true, as opposed to accepting these thoughts and believing them without question.

In Module 4, an example of a Thought Diary was provided for you. We will continue with that example to work through the next steps of the Thought Diary, incorporating what has been discussed in this module (detective work and disputation) and the previous module (unhelpful thinking styles). In the example provided below, a section on Unhelpful Thinking Styles has been added, while sections A, B, and C of the thought diary remain the same as the example provided in Module 4.

Thought Diary (example)

A Activating Event

This may be either: An actual event or a situation, a thought, a mental picture or recollection.

Walking into the meeting room at work

B Beliefs

1. List all statements that link A to C. Ask yourself: "What was I thinking?" "What was I saying to myself?" "What was going through my head at the time?"
2. Find the most distressing (hot) thought and underline it
3. Rate how much you believe this thought between 0 to 100.

"I can't breathe - I'm going to suffocate"

I'm going to have an attack in front of everyone"

"I'll have to run from the room and they'll think I'm crazy"

Thought discovery question: "... and what does this mean?"

"I'm going crazy" (85)

C Consequences

1. Write down words describing how you feel.
2. Underline the one that is most associated with the activating event.
3. Rate the intensity of that feeling (0 to 100).

Panic (90)

Stressed (60)

1. Jot down any physical sensations you experienced or actions carried out.

- Heart pounding, lightheaded, dry mouth, fast breathing
- walked close to the wall
- left for some water

Unhelpful Thinking Styles

Do you recognise any unhelpful thinking styles you might have been using? (Mental filter, jumping to conclusions, personalisation, catastrophising, black & white thinking, shoulding & musting, overgeneralisation, labelling, emotional reasoning, disqualifying/ignoring positives)

- *Catastrophising*
- *Jumping to conclusions - Mind reading*
- *Jumping to conclusions - Predictive thinking*

Note that a section on Unhelpful Thinking Styles has been added to the Thought Diary. Look at what you have written in the **B** section and see if you can identify any unhelpful thinking styles you might have used.

The next step requires you to begin doing some Detective Work and Disputation. The example of the Thought Diary continues below.

D Detective Work & Disputation

My HOT Thought <i>"I'm going crazy"</i>	
FACTUAL EVIDENCE FOR MY HOT THOUGHT	FACTUAL EVIDENCE AGAINST MY HOT THOUGHT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>I feel strange, like I'm not connected to my body</i> - <i>I can't think clearly, my thoughts keep racing</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>The symptoms I have are due to the fight-flight response</i> - <i>I am still able to recognise how I am thinking</i> - <i>I have had these sensations before and it only takes a little while before they go down</i>

Disputation questions:

How realistic are my thoughts, beliefs, and expectations?

- *The symptoms I have are part of a normal fear response. Everybody has similar sensations when they are in fight-flight, so it's unlikely that I am going crazy.*

What other ways are there of viewing the situation?

- *I'm stressed about the meeting because there's so much to do before the end of the month*

Is it helpful for me to think this way?

- *Thinking this way adds to my anxiety and then I end up not concentrating on what people are saying.*

On the next page is a Thought Diary that incorporates all the steps up to this point. If you have completed Module 5, you might have filled out a Thought Diary. Continue with Detective Work and Disputation to challenge the unhelpful thoughts and beliefs from your thought diary. If you have not previously filled out a thought diary, this might be a good time to do one (see Module 5 for more details on how to start an ABC analysis).

Thought Diary

A Activating Event

This may be either: An actual event or a situation, a thought, a mental picture or recollection.

B Beliefs

1. List all statements that link A to C. Ask yourself: "What was I thinking?" "What was I saying to myself?" "What was going through my head at the time?"
2. Find the most distressing (hot) thought and underline it
3. Rate how much you believe this thought between 0 to 100

C Consequences

1. Write down words describing how you feel.
2. Underline the one that is most associated with the activating event.
3. Rate the intensity of that feeling (0 to 100).

Unhelpful Thinking Styles

Do you recognise any unhelpful thinking styles you might have been using? (Mental filter, jumping to conclusions, personalisation, catastrophising, black & white thinking, shoulding & musting, overgeneralisation, labelling, emotional reasoning, disqualifying/ignoring positives)

1. Jot down any physical sensations you experienced or actions carried out.

D Detective Work & Disputation

Detective Work: Now refer to the hot thought, and ask yourself, “What is the factual evidence for and against my hot thought?”

My HOT Thought	
FACTUAL EVIDENCE FOR MY HOT THOUGHT	FACTUAL EVIDENCE AGAINST MY HOT THOUGHT

Disputation questions:

- What other ways are there of viewing the situation?
- If I were not depressed, how would I view the situation?
- Realistically, what is the likelihood of that happening?
- How might someone else view the situation?
- Does it really help me to think this way?
- Think of some helpful self-statements

Module Summary

- Detective work is about trying to be objective about our thoughts. It is evaluating if we are tuning out valuable information that may help us feel better
- Detective work requires you to gather evidence for and against your unhelpful thoughts and beliefs, particularly your hot thought for every activating event
- Disputation is about asking yourself questions that will help you look for other information around you so that you can make an informed decision about your thoughts instead of just accepting them
- Here are some typical detective work and disputation questions:
 - ⇒ What experiences do I have that show that this thought/belief is not completely true all of the time?
 - ⇒ What is the evidence for/against my automatic thoughts?
 - ⇒ Are there other ways of viewing the situation?
 - ⇒ How might someone else view the situation?
 - ⇒ If I were giving advice to a friend, what would I say?
 - ⇒ Are there any strengths or positives in me or in the situation that I am overlooking?

In the next module we will look at how to create balanced thoughts based on your detective work and disputation.



About This Module

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Some of the material in this module was taken from

Nathan, P.R., Rees, C.S., Lim, L., & Smith, L.M. (2001). *Mood Management – Anxiety: A Cognitive Behavioural Treatment Programme for Individual Therapy*. Perth: Rioby Publishing.

BACKGROUND

The concepts and strategies in this module have been developed from evidence based psychological practice, primarily Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy (CBT). CBT for panic disorder is a type of psychotherapy that is based on the theory that panic disorder is a result of problematic cognitions (thoughts) and behaviours. There is strong scientific evidence to support that cognitions and behaviours can play an important role in panic disorder, and that targeting cognitions and behaviours in therapy can help many people to overcome panic disorder. Examples of this evidence have been reported in the following:

Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists Clinical Practice Guidelines Team for Panic Disorder and Agoraphobia. (2003). Australian and New Zealand clinical practice guidelines for the treatment of panic disorder and agoraphobia. *Aust N Z J Psychiatry*, 37(6), 641-56.

REFERENCES

These are some of the professional references used to create this module.

Barlow, D.H. (2002). *Anxiety and Its Disorders: The Nature and Treatment of Anxiety and Panic (2nd Edition)*. London: Guilford Press

Craske, M.G., & Barlow, D.H. (2001). *Panic disorder and agoraphobia*. In D.H. Barlow (Ed.), *Clinical Handbook Of Psychological Disorders, Third Edition*. New York: Guilford Press.

FURTHER READING

There have been many other information resources written for people with panic attacks and panic disorder.

Barlow, D. H., & Craske, M. G. (2000). *Mastery of your anxiety and panic (3rd edition)*. San Antonio, TX: The Psychological Corporation. (ISBN: 0127850783)

Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists. (2003). *Panic Disorder and Agoraphobia: Treatment Guide for Consumers and Carers*. Available: <http://www.ranzcp.org/publicarea/cpg.asp> (click on "Panic Disorder and Agoraphobia"). Accessed Feb. 2004.

Zuercher-White, E. (1998). *An End To Panic: Breakthrough Techniques For Overcoming Panic Disorder (2nd Edition)*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications. (ISBN: 1567313760)

"PANIC STATIONS"

We would like to thank Uta Juniper for the title of the InfoPax that this module forms part of:

Nathan, P., Correia, H., & Lim, L. (2004). *Panic Stations! Coping with Panic Attacks*. Perth: Centre for Clinical Interventions.

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