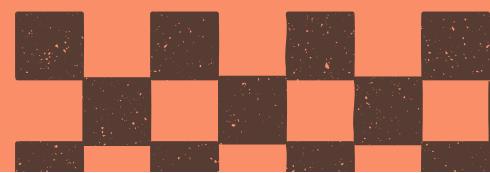


DURHAM MENTAL WELLBEING ALLIANCE
PRESENTS...

THE LITTLE BOOK OF ANXIETY



Some helpful hints from me to you.



INTRODUCTION

In celebration of Mental Health Awareness Week 2023 we decided to produce a little resource booklet about this year's theme - Anxiety. We wanted the information to come from people with their own lived experience. Most of us will experience anxiety in our lives but for some it can be a life long challenge. If you or someone you know is struggling, we hope this will give you some helpful hints and make you feel less alone.

The following responses have been kindly shared by service users from across the Durham Mental Wellbeing Alliance – a collection of mental health service providers, working together to make services and experiences better for those who use them.

We are passionate about our service users having a voice. We want to make sure that everything we do is underpinned by what is important to them.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this booklet. You are doing great things!

durhammentalwellbeingalliance.org





SO WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety is usually a natural response to pressure, feeling afraid or threatened, which can show up in how we feel physically, mentally, and in how we behave.

It's common to describe anxiety as a feeling of dread, fear or unease, which can range from mild to severe.

Anxiety can be triggered by difficult and traumatic experiences in our lives. It can happen at any stage of life and can be short term or life long.

It's usually when our anxiety feels really intense or overwhelming that it starts to interfere with our daily life or affect our relationships.

Anxiety can affect our mind, body and behaviour, for instance we might feel tearful, get stress headaches, or start avoiding things or people that trigger anxiety.

Common symptoms of anxiety include:

- feeling tired, restless or irritable
- feeling shaky or trembly, dizzy or sweating more
- being unable to concentrate or make decisions
- trouble sleeping
- worrying about the past or future, or thinking something bad will happen
- headaches, tummy aches or muscle pain
- dry mouth
- pins and needles
- noticing your heartbeat gets stronger, faster or irregular, or you get short of breath when you start feeling anxious
- Being sensitive to noise and sounds – particularly those which are loud or sudden.



WHAT IT FEELS LIKE.

It's a knot in the stomach. Tension in the shoulders. Pain behind the eyes.

I get it really bad. It's intense. It stops me thinking straight. I shut down. It's like a big black cloud has come from nowhere. I feel I need to be on my own. I don't want to be around people and this isn't me. Little things get magnified and on my nerves like someone talking or a phone call.

It makes me feel worried, panicked and rushed all of the time. I can't relax. I feel restless, I can't keep still. My sleep is disturbed. It makes me worry about how the world sees me. It makes me think I'm different. I forget a lot. It effects my appetite.

When I get anxious I get upset and chewed. I get emotional and it seems hard to stop.

I get confused. I believe I'm bad at everything. Can't think straight. It feels unavoidable these days. I question even simple things.



I feel dizzy and I hold my breath a lot. I feel a need to be out of the situation. It depends, people anxiety, health anxiety and general anxiety are all different. The more anxious I get the more depersonalisation and derealisation I experience. Skin burning (sensation of being on fire) blurred vision when anxiety is high.

I panic – it feels horrible – my heart races.

I feel shaky inside. My stomach feels nauseous. Nervous but amplified. I feel emotional.

Suicidal, lonely, scared. It's the head inside feeling buzzy.

I feel uneasy and panic. I have a lot of panic attacks, chest palpitations. I can feel physical feelings and I think I'm dying. Pains get worse. Have ended up in hospital. At its worst I wanted to take my life. My panic attacks are different to other anxieties. Its random and out of the blue and I get frightened so symptoms get worse.

Pains in chest, tightening across the chest, feeling chewed up and knots in stomach. More of a physical thing. More symptoms/side effects in body than in the mind at the time.



Sitting in room with lots of people – I just want to get out of there. The same on buses. Irritable, angry, tolerance of people is low. Fidget with hands and lanyard.

Physical feelings; I sometimes feel as if I am on a tightrope and I am wary of putting a foot wrong in case I say or do the wrong thing. I feel as though my stomach is “in knots”. Emotional feelings; I can feel jittery and have no self-confidence at all.

It can come on very suddenly. It feels like fear and is both physical and emotional. My heart races so fast that I sometimes feel faint. I can't think or concentrate. My thoughts are either muddled or amplified. Simple problems seem to become huge and unmanageable. It's truly horrible and frightening to feel this way. After an anxiety attack I feel exhausted. I want to curl up in a tiny ball, in a dark and safe space. I want to sleep and decompress.

My breathing becomes fast and I get chest pain. I've been to A&E twice because it was so bad. It can feel like you are dying which makes you more anxious.

I kind of go in a trance - I can hear people around me but they are muffled and distant. You are trying hard to look normal but it's hard when you are in new surroundings where you don't know people and how they'll react. This can stop me from going to new places and meeting new people. It can lead to being socially isolated.



I am diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). I believe that if I don't follow certain rituals, bad things will happen to the people I love. My rituals are not about cleaning or checking I have my keys - like some people think. I have to say phrases in a particular order in my head. If I make a mistake or get interrupted, I have to start again.

You don't have to understand the why of them, you just have to recognise they are real and important to me. Having to explain myself just makes me feel foolish - I know it's irrational!

A busy mind and difficulty concentrating.

Chest feels like a brick on it, can't breathe properly. Can't think straight, want to run away.

Anxiety feels like walls closing in, dry mouth, clammy hands, heart racing, sweats.

My brain feels like its malfunctioned. Half of it has all these thoughts whirling around and going off on a tangent. The other half can't remember my own name.

I think everyone must feel low level anxiety at times. I'm sure that's normal. But it comes and goes again. But when you feel like your heart is beating far too fast, and you feel so worked up and panicky, and it doesn't calm down for hours, even days, and you can't even work out why, I imagine that's real anxiety.





How does anxiety feel for me well how long have you got? A feeling of dread before leaving the house I can hear my heart beating really fast so I must have one break out in a cold sweat adrenaline rushing right through my body, brain fog and inability to talk, cohesively overthinking to mention just of few.

Like my brain is completely overloaded and I can't focus on anything and feelings/intrusive thoughts of being a failure.

Locked in a prison cell unable to get out. Afraid of the outside world. I feel on edge, can't sit still. I get panic attacks and start sweating.

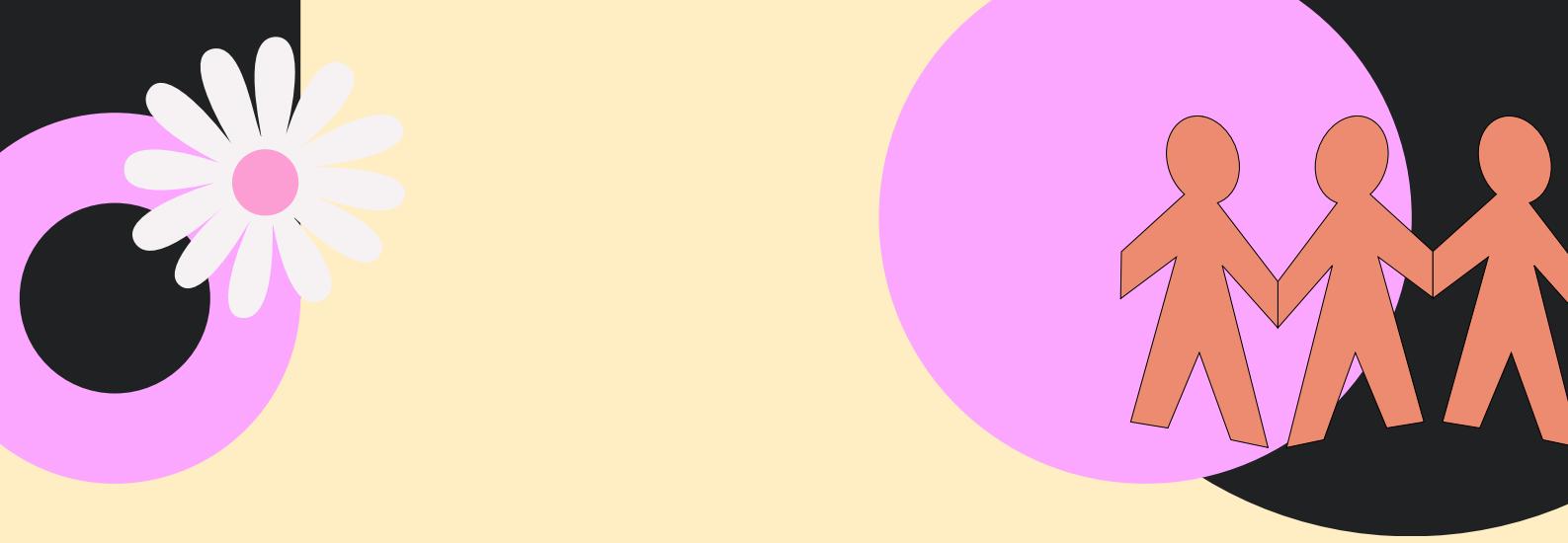
Makes me very tense, shallow breathing and scattered thinking.

Angry and upset. Worse when I'm on my own.

My anxiety feels like a sudden sense of urgency or a feeling of impending doom. It can sometimes lead to a panic attack.

It makes me feel stressed out and can't go out a lot and I can't do nothing.





WHAT HELPS ME?

Thinking of building a house – construction – step by step.

Foundations and laying brick by brick. It focuses my mind. Also build football stadiums and rocket ships. Helps let go of the anxiety and move on.

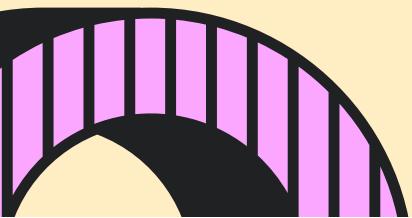
I go out of the house. Go to the river in Durham and feel a release getting out in nature and not trapped in the house. Need to fight through the barrier to get out the house. To take a break, step back for a day or two.

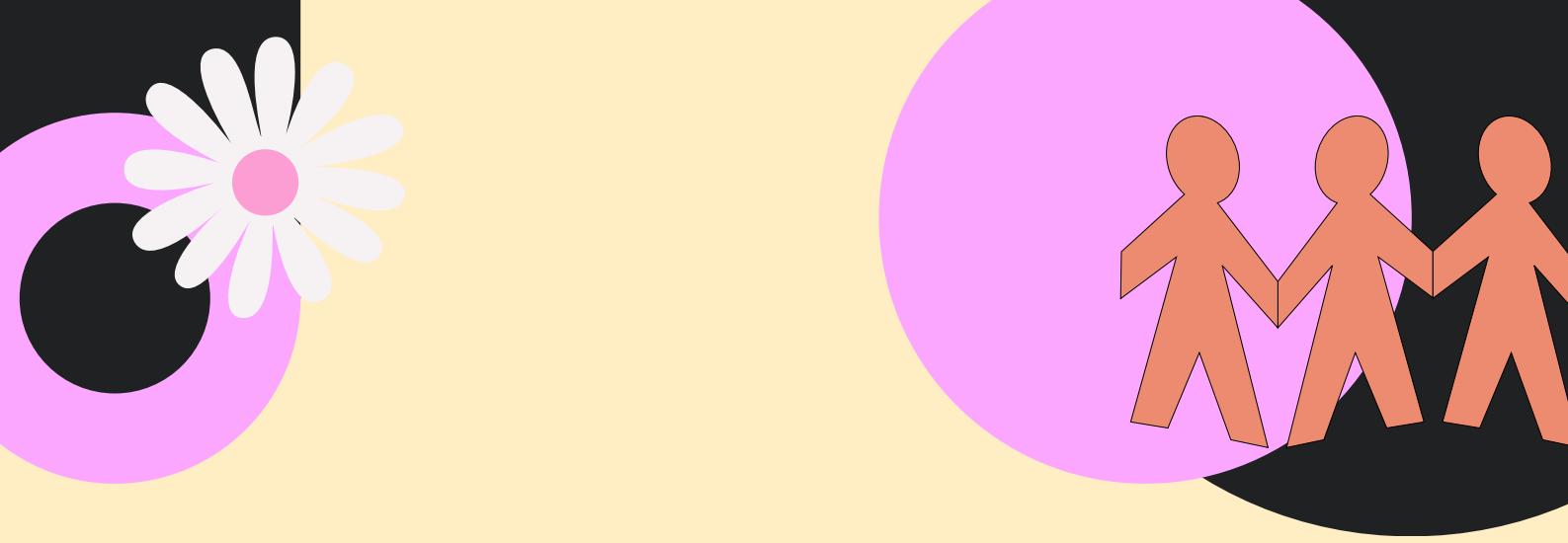
Walking and getting out. Being creative. Aids to distract me (eg fidget toys). Classes which help with the practical stuff and being creative.

Getting involved in activities. Speaking to someone about it – not bottling it up. Going for a walk, listening to music – using my tools. Ask for help.

Knowing it is temporary. It doesn't have to be this way. I challenge my thoughts and ask if it is necessary to be in this state. Confidence helps – look at attitude. Getting out of the house. Take deep breaths.

Cold things help me feel soothed. Fidget toys and fidgeting a lot. Safe people. Comfort items (eg jelly cats) personal items. Being around dogs and being able to stroke them.





keeping clean and tidy and getting dressed ready to face the day my go to is gardening and making Jewellery sometimes candles, soaps etc, it keeps my mind quiet and occupied. Crystals and Reiki. Healing is another one that I practice daily. I'm now a Reiki Master teacher, it works on mind, body and spirit, and yes it really does work.

Writing and making art work. Helps to concentrate and calm me. Also helps me to work through difficult feelings without shouting at people.

Walking in nature, the sounds of birds and the air on my skin. I like people but being away from people is absolutely necessary sometimes. Aiming for a balance of good social interaction and me time.

Reducing my caffeine, it was making me worse. It was a simple change but made a massive difference.

Being able to laugh at myself. I get in a tizz over nowt sometimes. I laugh at myself and tell myself you chill.
(you can't do that though :))

A cuddle with the cat.



Mindfulness as it relaxes me. I listen to music on my phone. Talking to friends and distracting myself.

Being on my own – allows me to be still. Curling up in bed – this relaxes me and makes me feel calmer.

Waddy. To feel safe, being around people like myself and staff – friendly which helps. I feel totally safe. Being active, badminton, curling, driving.

Medication when things are bad. Watch something funny to boost my mood.

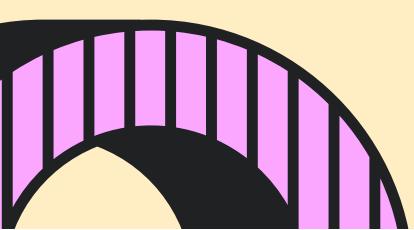
Keeping busy. Routine helps. Realising something is out of my control. Fight it and find ways that calm you down – deep breathing exercises.

Being in nature walking/sitting on a beach.

Talking to people. Coming to Waddy – helps me feel calm and happy. Colouring in – art and craft. Put on Alexa.

Coming to Waddy. Going outside – walk/bike. Waddy offers a safe space. Do something but not where there are a lot of people. Humour.

Ask how you can help when I'm not in crisis, asking during a panic is too much.



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OH SHE'S
SOOO OCD!



just snap out
of it !



WHAT DOESN'T HELP ME?

People saying 'cheer up it may never happen'

Getting sympathy for it. Sitting and dwelling on it. Negativity makes it worse. It drags you down.

Breaking my routines. Not doing anything – having nothing to do. Meditation – I can't close my eyes as it brings the darkness. Too much information at once to process.

When people let me down. When I feel no one cares. Things in my head. Hearing things I don't want to hear.

Letting it happen. Forgetting to do simple things (e.g. breathing skills)

Having to stay in anxiety inducing spaces. Being around people. Anything that leaves me feeling trapped.

Being on my own.

Not taking my time to do something. Being/feeling forced to do something that I don't feel able to do in the moment. Triggers – word/sounds.

Being around difficult people. When people cancel or the Centre is closed.





For those of us living with actual anxiety disorders such as OCD it is very annoying and unhelpful when people describe their normal love of tidiness or cleanliness as OCD. "Oh they are sooo OCD" It belittles a very real and very debilitating illness. Please stop it.

I hate it when people tell me "we all get anxious sometimes." I know but that doesn't help me when I'm struggling. It shuts me down and makes me feel like nuisance. Could you just allow me to talk and listen? That non judgemental support will make me bounce back quicker.

What doesn't help me is others telling me oh everyone is like that or ask your doctor for more medication others changing the subject when you need to vent or don't worry it will pass - yeah right! Put it this way if I won the lottery this week, my anxiety would still be there I would just have different worries.

Panicking. You have to learn to accept anxiety. Avoidance – not going to places had panic attacks this makes it worse.

If someone says get over it, stop being soft. Spending too much time online. Watching/reading the news. Being around aggressive or angry people.

When home alone.

Seeing people on their phones all day – irritates me.

Some people can be rather insensitive and say things such as "Pull yourself together" or "Things could be worse". They think it is easy to "snap out of it". Maybe they don't realise how unhelpful these remarks are, but they are!

Spontaneous activities or people telling me to calm down and relax.



Being in busy, crowded places. Paranoid about people staring.

Telling me to calm down, or saying I'm worrying over nothing.

People who are trying to be helpful might say "it might just be this ..." or "Oh, I feel like that as well" and at the time, it just makes me feel worse. Gets on my nerves and makes me want to be alone.

Get over it. You are not ill and you don't have anxiety.

Crowds rushing over to "help". Being told to "calm down" over and over.

Breathing techniques/meditation has the opposite effect and can make me hyper fixate on my breathing, leading to a panic attack.

Loud noise, new people sometimes.

Being outside and around people.

I don't like when people smoke around me because when I'm anxious I would like a cigarette but I quit. I don't like it when too many people talk at once.

Off hand comments – "you can do that!" or "what's the problem?"

WHAT OTHERS CAN DO TO HELP ?

Not to change the subject when I tell them how I'm feeling or just not giving me that pitiful look, or we all have to just get on with it don't we well not really you get in my mind and see how you cope in other words

JUST LISTEN. Oh and by the way my Google assistant I can't count on either. She doesn't listen to me. She has her own interests at heart like what are you buying from the Internet today and when should I turn all the smart plugs off?

Let me watch football – this is my emotional release

Offer support (not sympathy). Talk to someone who has been through it and can share coping strategies that they have found helpful.

People who can support me and help me explain things.

Give me guidance and what road to go on.

By acting normal – chatting about the weather can be calming. Being with positive people.

I'm unlikely to show it so people wouldn't know. It's more of an internal thing.

Talks through things with me.

Nothing – I just have to get out of it. Give me space.



Help me plan activities and keep to dates arranged.

Be calm and nice.

Understand mental health, supportive, cuddles.

Talk to me, help me slow down my thought process by helping me rationalise my worries. Remind me its ok to feel anxious sometimes and its no reflection on my abilities. It doesn't make me useless.

Respect my wishes if I want to be alone. Don't fuss. Make me tea. Give me a drink and have a laugh. Go out somewhere nice in the car and have a bit of retail therapy! Be there to talk to.

Being nice and caring and help me with some things.

Try and make me laugh. Sit quietly and rub my arms and back.

Leaving me alone to finish my walk/cleaning/gym, then offering reassurance.

Too be extremely patient with me, give me time on my own.

Don't talk all at once or crowd around me.

Give me time to process and think things through. Acknowledge the situation makes me uncomfortable. Don't draw attention to me in front of strangers.



Just be around when I need them – which Waddy does. Trusting people including professionals like my GP. Hugs off G and D.

Talking can help but can also trigger when they don't understand.
Getting stressful things off my chest.

Just listen. Share what helps them to see if it helps me. Being reminded you aren't the only one going through it. Ask me if I'm ok/send me a text.

People listening and talking about it.

Stay out of my way. Help me avoid confrontation.

Be non-judgemental. It is easy to think "oh, they are just a bit down at the moment, they are always a bit like that". Anxiety affects everyone in different ways and it would help if people would LISTEN and be supportive. Offer a few minutes to just sit and talk and listen.

Just recognise that we don't ask to be this way. Please be tolerant, we are trying our best.



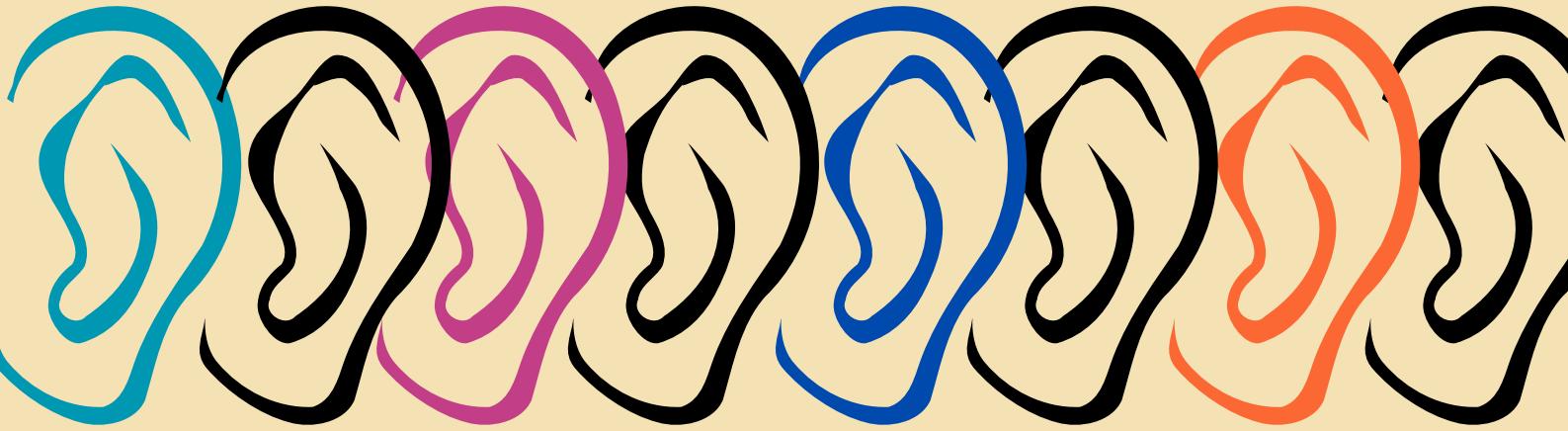
THANK
YOU

Facing Challenges

Firstly, my apologies to all who cringe at this,
But hand-on-heart, my worries are a part of being Chris.
Been asked to pen some honest words for Mental Health Week too,
And maybe, stuff affecting me could well apply to you.
Like waiting for a call or text, convinced there's something wrong,
Or when the issues haunt and they become extremely strong.
Next port of call must thank the friends for kind and faultless care,
- Sound advice throughout with reassurance always there.
Whilst in return, I'm here for you whenever you are lost,
May all your issues be short-lived and conquered fingers crossed.
For many years I've struggled yet hung on as I have fought,
Relying on diazepam, but that's my last resort.
An in-depth chat makes much more sense while sharing how you feel,
Reflecting on experience, these moments really heal.
I've come to learn from one friend gone that life's a golden thing,
If he'd just found the courage to pick up the phone and ring.
I would have given full support to help him on his way,
That's why I'm penning this here verse - I miss him every day.
Now when I am alone and lulling over life I know,
I often find that courage is a must when feeling low.
I've curled up far too many times in anguish on my bed,
Engulfed in scary episodes amassing in my head.
I've paced the floor in panic too, awaiting some relief,
Well-aware that complex fears aren't always small and brief.
Recently, was asked about the standard of my living,
"View my file", I thought because my woes are unforgiving.
At times I've sat in session, the objective clearly missed,
And felt like they're alleging that my issues don't exist.
Can't stress this sound advice enough - don't clam-up, choose to speak,
Asking for assistance doesn't mean you're soft or weak.
Don't think for one damned moment you can't overturn the hell,
The anxious vibes can haunt us but our strength can serve us well.
I hope I've reached you with these words, dig in and if odds seem steep,
Have faith in facing challenges, avoiding darkness deep.

Christopher Short,
May 2023





As you can see, everyone has different experiences but there are also many similarities.

Key themes are about listening without judgement. Recognising that there is not always a 'fix' but being around to support and encourage is important and beneficial to those struggling.

Speak to the person, figure it out together. Be curious and keep trying.

If you would like to learn a bit more you can visit the following websites for further information. If you are worried about the internet or don't have access, ask a friend to support you. If you attend a service, any staff member would be happy to help.

Knowledge is power!



www.mind.org.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.anxietyuk.org.uk







YOU ARE INVITED TO A STAMP IT OUT COMMUNITIES EVENT FOR MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK 2023

This is an opportunity to take part in discussing the theme for this year, which is '**Anxiety**' and to get together with other Anti-Stigma Ambassadors over some refreshments.

We look forward to seeing you there!

Saturday 20th May
Drop in between
10am-3pm
Waddington Street
Centre, DH1 4BG

ANXIETY

