

# Anouk's story

## 28-year-old White European woman who accessed support for anxiety

"Throughout my life, I've always struggled with anxiety, but it wasn't until a couple of years ago that I was actually able to name it as anxiety".



I was referred to Talking Therapies by a nurse after a difficult instance about a year and a half ago and I am so thankful to that nurse because it changed my life.

I was very nervous for therapy at first because I had therapy as a child for childhood trauma. This had helped a lot, but it was also intense. I also

thought, "I've done therapy before, what more can they do really?" The concept of CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) at Talking Therapies was introduced, and I thought, "let's give it a go". Once I started, I actually noticed changes quickly - I became more aware of my body and my physical feelings relating to anxiety and that was mind-opening to me. I always saw my anxiety as my thoughts, my worrying. I realised that for me, anxiety starts with a tight chest. I had never realised this before, and every session I was learning something new either about my body or about a different way of thinking that I could practice.

At the beginning, my anxiety responses just seemed so random - it felt like there were a million things I could be responding to, and I found it really difficult to be able to do the reflections properly. We worked through this, and I learned to differentiate my thoughts, emotions, and physical feelings more and identify when I was overthinking. What I found interesting was that the therapy I had as a child was very much about the past and processing what happened to me, whereas CBT is still about what happened to me, but also about how that influences how I am now and how I see the future. And while I can't change what happened to me, I can change how I respond going forward.

One of the things we realised through CBT is that I feel anxious when I don't feel in control or when I'm worried about disappointing people. I learned about this "rule" I

used to have, where if I don't perform well, then people will be disappointed in me and then they will leave me. That would then make me put a lot of pressure on myself and I would give 500% all the time. I learned to set a new rule for myself - that if I know that I've done my best, had the best intentions, then I am not responsible for how other people feel. If, for me, it feels like I've done 75% (which might be someone else's 200%), it is good enough. That led to my new "rule" of being "75% Anouk". It's not as simple as it sounds, but living with this new rule, my confidence has grown.

The last technique we went through was the hardest for me. One of my goals was to eventually be able to go to a smear test without too much anxiety or panic. I had to go to a smear test earlier than I expected during therapy. After talking through and visualising it with my therapist, it felt like a weight off my shoulders because it was almost like I'd basically gone through it, and this made me feel in control. I'm very pleased to say that I went to the smear test and didn't have to stop like the previous times I went. I still use this technique of visualising what might happen when I'm nervous about a situation.

The highlight of the therapy for me is just the confidence and hope it has given me. I've never been a very confident person. I used to think that me crying over everything is just the way I am and even though I don't like it, I will just have to accept it. But it doesn't have to be this way. Life will have ups and downs, but the way I move on from that can change and I can be in control of how I lead my life. I don't think I've fully "recovered", but I have the tools to move on and to keep improving. I still get anxious and nervous, but overall, I do feel like I'm a different person. I felt like I was working together with my therapist, and it wasn't just her telling me to do things. I never felt rushed to finish or pressured to get better and finish.

**To anyone feeling hesitant about therapy: I understand - I was hesitant too and I had already tried a lot of things. But just give it a shot. The worst that can happen is that nothing changes. But I promise you things will change because you will learn about yourself. It sounds cheesy but trust the process.**



**for anxiety and depression**

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