



Anxiety @ Work Toolkit

How to steady your body, quiet the spiral, and stay functional under pressure.



MINDSHIFTERS TOOLKIT

Anxiety at Work

Calm

Steady your nervous system

Clarity

Quiet the mental spiral

Practical Steps

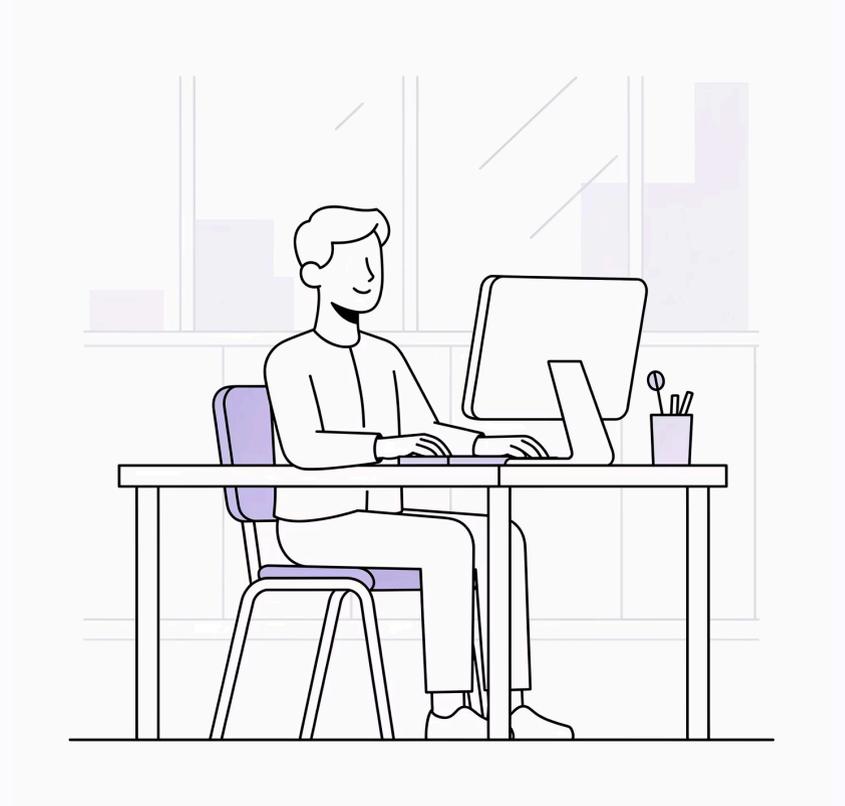
Tools you can use today

You're Not "Weak"

Work anxiety doesn't mean you're failing. It often means your mind and body are responding to pressure, uncertainty, overload, or conflict.

The goal isn't to "never feel anxious". The goal is to **stay steady enough to function and choose wisely.**

Anxiety is a signal, not a verdict on your capability. When understood properly, it becomes manageable rather than overwhelming. Your nervous system is simply trying to protect you — sometimes a bit too enthusiastically.



What Work Anxiety Can Look Like

Recognising the signs helps you respond earlier, before anxiety takes hold. These symptoms are common, normal, and manageable.

Physical Responses

- Tight chest, shallow breathing
- Racing heart or tension
- Fatigue or restlessness

Mental Patterns

- Racing thoughts, overthinking
- Dread before meetings
- Perfectionism and fear of mistakes

Behavioural Signs

- Procrastination, freezing, avoidance
- Irritability, snapping, shutdown
- Constant checking or reassurance seeking

- ☐ **Naming it reduces shame.** When you can identify what's happening, you shift from victim to observer — and that's where change begins.



First Principle

Regulate First. Then Respond.

When your body is activated, your brain struggles to plan, focus, and communicate effectively.

Calm your nervous system first — even for just 60 seconds. This isn't avoidance; it's preparation. A regulated nervous system allows access to your prefrontal cortex, where rational decision-making, problem-solving, and communication live.

Think of it like rebooting a computer that's frozen. You need to reset before you can function optimally again.

Quick Check: Where Am I Right Now?

Self-awareness is the foundation of self-regulation. Take a moment to honestly assess your current state.



Green

Steady, clear, capable

You're grounded and able to handle what's in front of you. Your thinking is clear and your responses are measured.



Yellow

Tense, distracted, reactive

You're starting to feel the pressure. Focus is slipping, and you might snap more easily. This is your early warning signal.



Red

Overwhelmed, panicked, shut down

Your system is in full alarm mode. Clear thinking is difficult, and you may feel frozen or desperate to escape.

Right now I'm in: Green / Yellow / Red

Just naming it helps. Acknowledgement alone can lower intensity by 20–30%.

60-Second Reset

🕒 DESK-FRIENDLY



The 4–6 Breath

01

Breathe in slowly for **4 counts**

02

Breathe out gently for **6 counts**

03

Repeat for **5 rounds**

Longer exhales activate your parasympathetic nervous system, telling your body: "We are safe enough."

Grounding You Can Do at Your Desk

When anxiety pulls you into the future (worrying about what might happen), grounding brings you firmly back to the present moment. This simple technique interrupts the anxiety spiral by engaging your senses.

1 5 things you can see

Look around your workspace. Notice details you usually overlook.

2 4 things you can feel

Your feet on the floor, the chair beneath you, your clothes on your skin.

3 3 things you can hear

Computer hum, distant conversations, your own breath.

4 2 things you can smell

Coffee, fresh air from a window, the scent of paper.

5 1 thing you can taste

The lingering taste of your last drink, or simply notice your tongue.

This exercise works because anxiety lives in the future or past. Your senses can only experience *now*.

"Name It to Tame It"

1

Feel the emotion

Don't push it away

2

Label it specifically

"I feel anxious"

3

Add context

"And it makes sense because..."

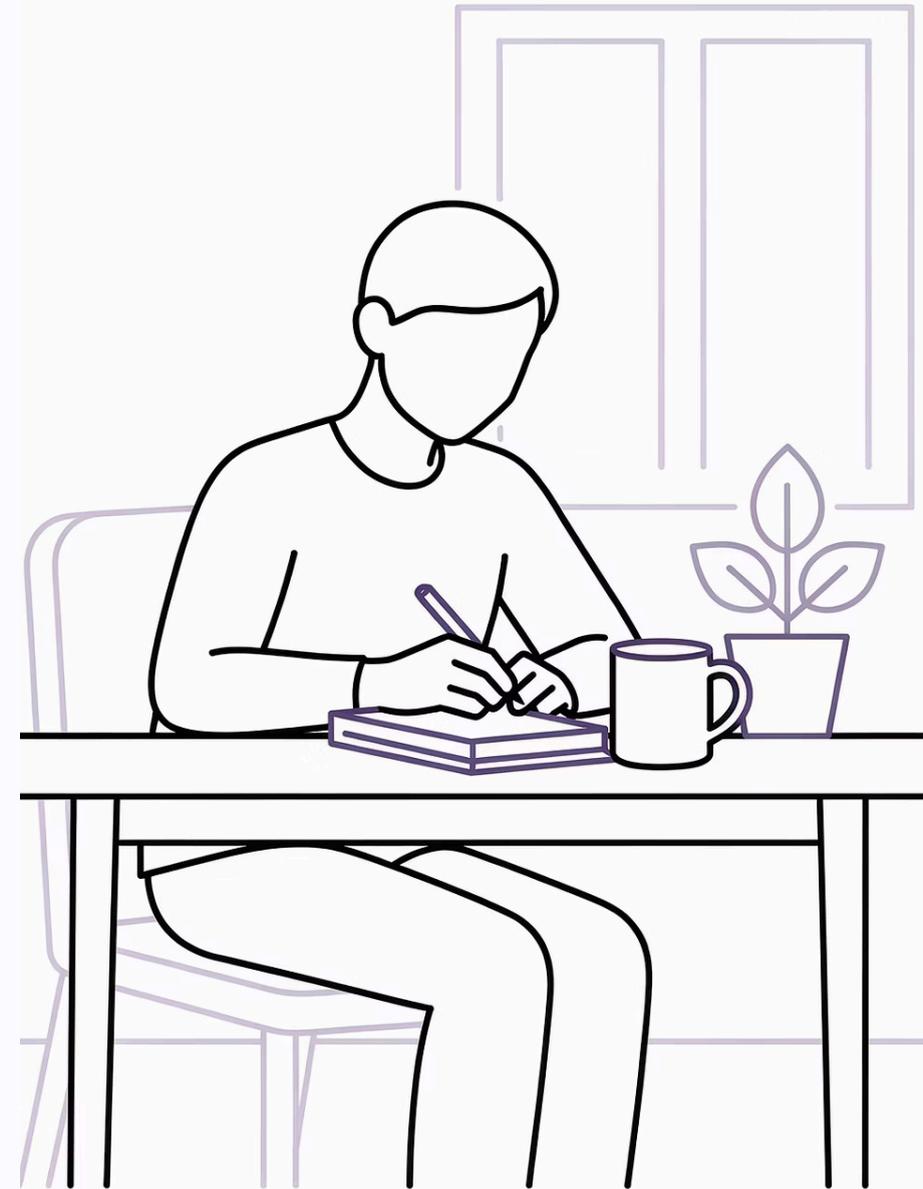
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Release the charge

Understanding reduces intensity

Say quietly to yourself, or write it down: "**I feel anxious.**" Then add: "**And it makes sense because [the presentation is high-stakes / I haven't heard back from my manager / the deadline feels tight].**"

Research shows that labelling emotions activates your prefrontal cortex and reduces amygdala reactivity. In simpler terms: naming what you feel actually calms your brain's alarm system. Anxiety becomes more manageable when it's understood rather than resisted.



HALT (Work Version)

Before you react to anxiety, check your most basic needs. Often, anxiety is your body's way of flagging a deficit in fundamental self-care.



Hungry?

Low blood sugar increases cortisol and mimics anxiety symptoms. Have you eaten properly today?



Angry?

Unprocessed frustration creates physical tension. Is something bothering you that needs addressing?



Lonely?

Feeling unsupported at work amplifies stress. Do you need connection or help from a colleague?



Tired?

Sleep deprivation impairs emotional regulation. Are you running on empty?

Sometimes the solution to anxiety is as simple as a snack, a conversation, or a brief rest. Don't overlook the basics.

The Anxiety Spiral

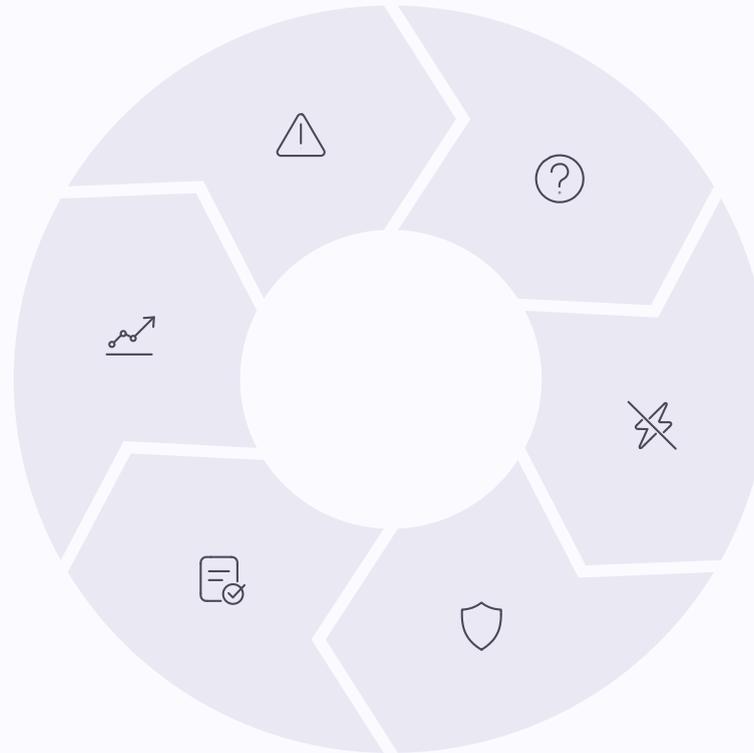
SPOT IT EARLY

Understanding the pattern helps you intervene before anxiety escalates into crisis mode.

Trigger
Something activates your stress response

Bigger Anxiety Later
The cycle intensifies over time

Temporary Relief
Brief calm, but the pattern reinforces



"What if..."
Catastrophic thinking begins

Urgency
Everything feels critical right now

Avoid or Overwork
You flee the feeling or bury it in busyness

Your goal: interrupt the spiral early. The earlier you catch it — ideally at the "What if..." stage — the easier it is to redirect. Every time you successfully interrupt, you weaken the pattern.

Thought Reset: Facts vs Fears

When anxiety takes over, your brain blurs the line between what's real and what's imagined. This simple framework brings you back to solid ground.

1

What do I know for sure?

Separate confirmed facts from assumptions. "My manager asked to talk" is fact. "I'm getting fired" is fear.

2

What am I assuming?

Identify the story you're telling yourself. Notice where your mind has filled in blanks with worst-case scenarios.

3

What is the most likely outcome?

Based on past patterns and actual evidence, what usually happens? Not the worst case, but the probable case.

4

What is one helpful next step?

Action breaks the freeze. What's the smallest, clearest thing you can do right now?

Replace "What if..." with "What's next?"

Micro-Plan

🕒 2 MINUTES

When you feel overwhelmed by everything on your plate, your brain shuts down. Creating a tiny, manageable plan restores a sense of control.

Write These Three Things:

Next task

One task only. Not three, not five. Just one.

Example: "Draft intro paragraph of report"

Next 10 minutes

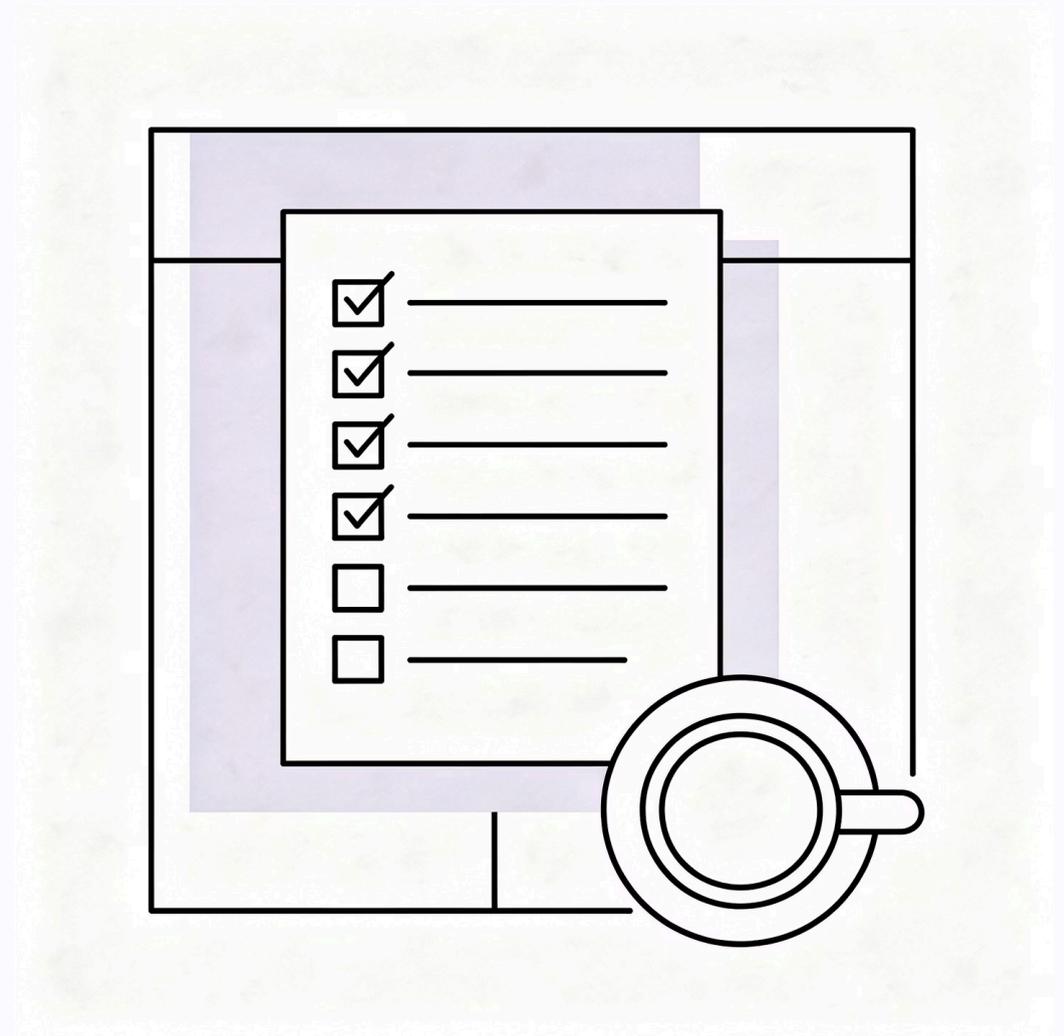
What will you do in this brief window?

Example: "Open document, write first two sentences"

If stuck

Plan your escape route before you need it.

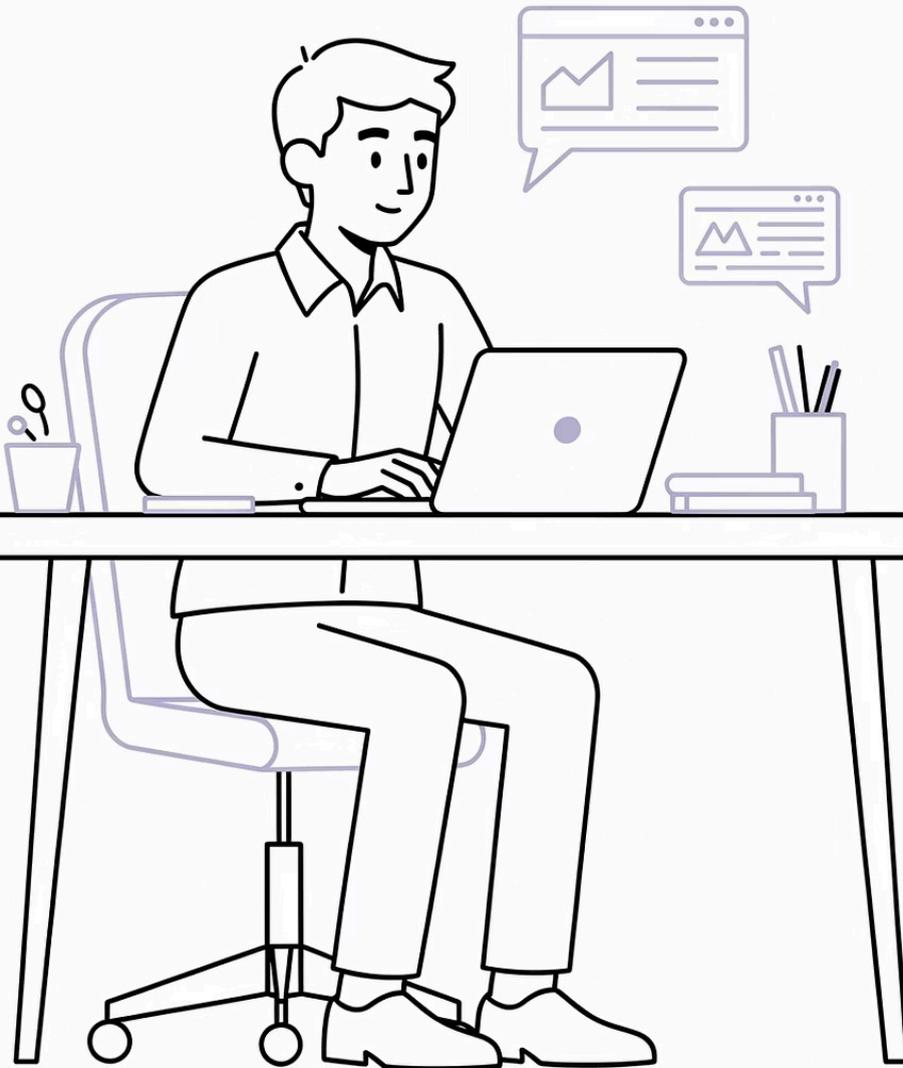
Options: ask, delegate, clarify, pause



- ❑ **Anxiety grows in fog. Clarity shrinks it.** Even an imperfect plan is better than no plan at all.

The "One Thing" Focus

Anxiety scatters attention across dozens of incomplete tasks, which paradoxically makes everything feel more urgent and overwhelming. The antidote is radical simplification.



What is the one thing I can complete next?

Not start. Not plan. **Complete.**

01

Choose the smallest completable task in front of you

02

Do only that task until it's finished

03

Notice the micro-win and the small relief it brings

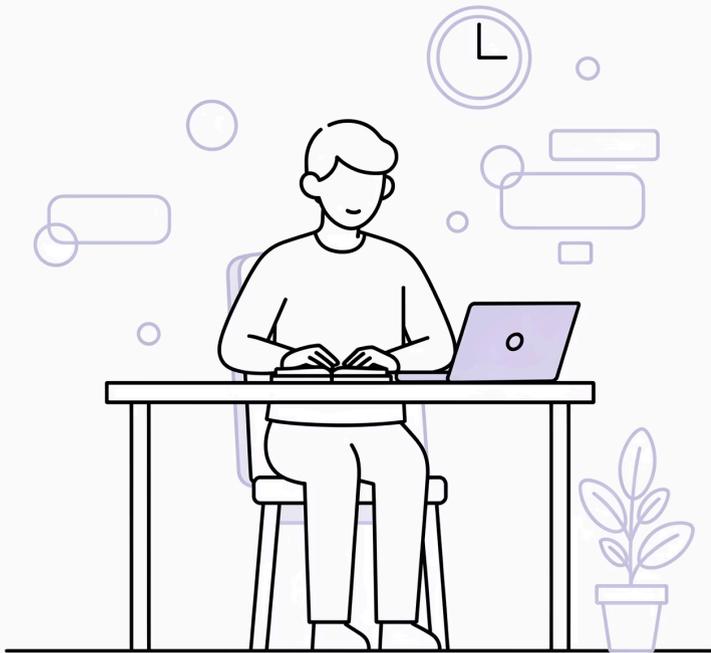
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Choose the next one thing

This isn't about being productive — it's about building momentum. Each completion, however small, signals to your brain that you're capable and in control. Progress, not perfection.

Meeting Anxiety: Before the Meeting

🕒 3 MINUTES BEFORE



Pre-Meeting Ritual

- Breathe

4-6 breathing for 5 rounds. This settles your nervous system and brings oxygen to your brain.

- Write 3 Bullets

- What I need to say
- What I need clarified
- What the next step is

Having a clear intention reduces uncertainty, which is anxiety's favourite fuel. You don't need to script everything — just anchor yourself with three clear points.

- ☐ Preparedness reduces panic. Even 90 seconds of intentional prep can transform your meeting experience.

Meeting Anxiety: In the Moment

When anxiety spikes during a meeting, your instinct might be to push through or hide it. Instead, give yourself permission to slow down.



Pause to Think

"Give me a moment to think about that."

Ask for Repetition

"Can you repeat that last part?"

Request Clarity

"Just to make sure I understand correctly..."

Buy Time

"That's a good question. Let me get back to you on that."

Slowing down is not incompetence. It's wisdom. Thoughtful responses are valued more than rushed reactions.

Remember: everyone in that meeting has felt uncertain at some point. Taking a beat to gather your thoughts signals professionalism, not weakness.

Boundaries That Reduce Work Anxiety

Much of workplace anxiety stems from overload and unclear expectations. Clear boundaries aren't selfish — they're essential for sustainable performance.

Common Anxiety Drivers:

- Overcommitment without capacity
- Vague deadlines or success criteria
- Saying yes when you need to negotiate

Try These Scripts:

“

"I can do **A** by **Thursday**. If you need **B** as well, what should I deprioritise?"

“

"I'm at capacity today. I can start this **tomorrow morning**."

“

"Can we confirm what 'done' looks like for this task?"

”

These aren't confrontational — they're clarifying. Most colleagues and managers appreciate transparency about capacity and timelines. It prevents last-minute chaos and reduces anxiety for everyone involved.

If Your Anxiety Is Conflict-Related

Conflict triggers anxiety because it activates our threat response. The key is to stay grounded whilst addressing the issue directly.

Aim for Calm Clarity

When tension rises, lead with intention rather than reaction. Use language that de-escalates and invites collaboration:

"I want to handle this well. Can we talk about the facts and the next step?"

This signals good faith and moves the conversation from emotion to solution.

If It Escalates

If emotions are running too high — yours or theirs — hitting pause is strategic, not cowardly:

"I need 10 minutes to settle, and then I'll come back to this."

Removing yourself briefly prevents regrettable reactions and allows your nervous system to reset. You can return to the conversation with more clarity and composure.

📌 Conflict resolution works best when both parties are regulated. Taking a brief break isn't avoidance — it's preparation for a better outcome.

A Daily Rhythm That Lowers Anxiety Over Time

One-off coping strategies help in the moment, but lasting change comes from consistent, small practices that build resilience over time.

Morning: 2-Minute Plan

Before you dive into email or tasks, write down your top 3 priorities for the day. This sets intention and reduces reactive mode.

1

2

Midday: 5-Minute Reset

Step away from your desk. Breathe, stretch, or take a short walk. This breaks the accumulation of tension and refreshes focus.

3

Evening: Shutdown Routine

At the end of your workday, list what you completed and your top priorities for tomorrow. This creates closure and prevents work from bleeding into your evening.

Pick 3 small habits — not 10. Consistency matters more than complexity. Anxiety reduces when your days have rhythm and predictability. These micro-routines signal safety to your nervous system.

When to Seek Extra Support

Self-support tools are powerful, but they're not substitutes for professional help when anxiety becomes persistent or severe.

Reach Out If:

- Anxiety is frequent and affecting your performance consistently
- You're losing sleep often or experiencing panic symptoms regularly
- Panic attacks are increasing in frequency or intensity
- You're using unhealthy coping mechanisms (alcohol, avoidance, withdrawal) to get through the day

📌 **Support is not failure. It's wisdom.** Recognising when you need help is a sign of self-awareness and strength, not weakness.

This toolkit is designed for everyday self-support at work. However, if you feel unsafe, are experiencing abuse, or are at risk of harming yourself or someone else, **contact local emergency services immediately.**

Professional Support Available

If you want personalised guidance, **MINDSHIFTERS** offers coaching and counselling support to help you build steadiness, boundaries, and healthy coping strategies tailored to your specific situation.

Reach Out — We're Here to Help