CODE Community Support Group – Paranoia

"Paranoia is just a heightened sense of awareness"

Let's re-set and refresh ourselves, carry out this simple task to bring you back into your body by carrying out this simple breathing technique:

- Focus on your breath – try to breathe as naturally and as steadily as you can.
- Now – count your breaths internally
- 1. Inhale. 1. Exhale
- 2. Inhale. 2. Exhale
- 3. Inhale. 3. Exhale
- Continue until you reach 10

Repeat as many times as needed to bring you back to centre, back into a state of calm and focus.

You can use this technique whenever you feel you need to stabilise your feels quickly.

The word paranoid is thrown around quite a lot these days, so we wanted to look at what this actually means.

So, what is Paranoia?

Paranoia is thinking and feeling like you are being threatened in some way, even if there is no evidence, or very little evidence, that you are. Paranoid thoughts can also be described as <u>delusions</u>. There are lots of <u>different kinds of threat</u> you might be scared and worried about.

Paranoid thoughts could also be exaggerated suspicions. For example, someone made a nasty comment about you once, and you believe that they are directing a hate campaign against you.

What kind of things can you be paranoid about?

Remember, everyone is different so you might have a different experience of paranoia compared to a friend. Here are some examples of common types of paranoid thoughts:

- ❖ **Being talked about behind your back** - or sometimes being watched by others, even organisations (either on or offline)
- ❖ **Others trying to make you look bad or exclude you**
- ❖ **You think you are at risk of being harmed or killed**
- ❖ **People are using hints and double meaning to secretly threaten you or make you feel bad**
- ❖ **Other people are deliberately trying to upset or irritate you**
- ❖ **People are trying to take your money or possessions**
- ❖ **Your actions or thoughts are being interfered with by others**
- ❖ **You are being controlled or that the government is targeting you**

You may feel these occasionally, or all the time, and they will likely be worse if you are in a stressful situation. They might cause a lot of distress or you might not mind them too much.

Most have paranoid thoughts about threats or harm to themselves, but you can also have paranoid thoughts about threats or harm to other, to your culture or to society as a whole.

But, what actually counts as a paranoid thought?

They are usually to do with your ideas about other people and what they might do or think. It can be difficult to work out whether a suspicious thought is paranoid or not, especially if someone else says your thoughts are paranoid when you don't think they are. This could be a friend, family member or even a doctor.

Ultimately, you have to decide yourself what you think is a paranoid thought, and what isn't. Some may think about risks in different ways and believe different things are good or bad evidence for suspicious thoughts.

Suspicious thoughts are more likely to be paranoid if:

- ➢ No one else shares the suspicious thought
- ➢ There's no definite evidence for the suspicious thought
- ➢ There is evidence against the suspicious thought
- ➢ It's unlikely you would be singled out
- ➢ You still have the suspicious thought despite reassurance from others
- ➢ Your suspicions are based on feelings and ambiguous events

Are paranoia and mental health problems linked?

In short, yes. But they are not a diagnoses for it.

Paranoid thoughts can be anything from very mild to very severe and these experiences can be quite different for everyone. It depends on how much:

- ❋ You believe your paranoid thoughts
- ❋ You think about the paranoid thoughts
- ❋ The paranoid thoughts upset you
- ❋ The paranoid thoughts interfere with your everyday life

Most people will experience mild paranoia at some point in their lives – maybe up to a third of us. This is usually called non-clinical paranoia. The thoughts often change over time, so you might realise that they are not justified or just stop having those particular thoughts.

How can paranoia affect you?

You might do or feel specific things as a result of your paranoid thoughts. These things can feel helpful at the time – but in the long term, they could make your paranoia worse.

- ✓ **Safety Behaviours –** You might do these to make you feel safe. E.G, avoiding certain people or places, staying indoors a lot or wear protective clothing.
    - o **Towards others** – you may act aggressively to those you feel threatened by, or you may push them away or decide you are better without them in your life. This means, that others might start to treat you differently and avoid you.
- ✓ **Isolation** – paranoid thoughts can make you feel alone and that no one understands you. It can be hard when other people don't believe what feels very real to you.
- ✓ **Worry and Sadness** – You might feel worried and anxious about your paranoid thoughts or even feel low or sad about what they mean and how they affect your life.

What are the causes?

No one knows exactly what causes paranoia. There are lots of theories and different people will have different explanations for their own experiences. It's most likely to be a combination of things.

Some general risk factors have been identified as making paranoid thoughts more likely:

- o **Havin confusing or unsettling experiences or feelings that you can't explain**
- o **The way you feel –** if you are anxious or worries a lot or have low self esteem and expect others to criticise or reject you
- o **The way you think –** if you tend to come to conclusions quickly, believe things very strongly and don't easily change your mind.
- o **If you are isolated**
- o **If you have experienced trauma in the past.**

There are also some more specific elements that may play a role in causing paranoid thoughts. This could be because they make you more likely to experience the risk factors above. Here are some examples of things that may contribute to paranoid thoughts:

- ▪ **Life experiences –** being vulnerable, isolated or in a stressful situation.
- ▪ **Experiences in your childhood –** may lead you to believe the world is unsafe.
- ▪ **External environment –** some research shows paranoid thoughts are more common if you live in an urban environment.
- ▪ **Mental Health –** if you experience anxiety, depression or low self-esteem.
- ▪ **Physical illness**
- ▪ **Lack of sleep –** can trigger feelings of insecurity
- ▪ **Drug and alcohol use**

How can you help yourself?

If you are experiencing paranoid thoughts, there are things you can do yourself to cope. You may choose to try them on their own or alongside treatment.

- ❖ **Keep a diary –** What are your paranoid thoughts? How do you feel about them? How often do you think about them? Note down your sleep pattern and any other life events.
  - o The app MoodPanda might help
- ❖ **Question and challenge your paranoid thoughts –** this can help you work out whether these thoughts are paranoid or justified.
  - o Would other people think they are realistic?
  - o What would my best friend say?
  - o Is it possible I have exaggerated a threat?
- ❖ **Look for support around you –** talk about your thoughts with someone you trust.
- ❖ **Learn to relax –** try mindfulness, CODE's meditation classes, or work to manage your stress levels
- ❖ **Look after yourself –** try to get enough sleep, think about your diet, try to keep active, spend some time in nature and try to do something creative

CODE have plenty of ways to help you keep healthy each week…

Zumba
Online
Every Monday at 6pm
https://codestudents.co/Fitness

Yoga
Online
Every Tuesday at 6pm
https://codestudents.co/Fitness

Core
Online
Every Thursday at 6pm
https://codestudents.co/Fitness

Meditation
Online
Every Saturday
https://codestudents.co/meditate

CODE Community Support Group
(limited to 15)
Every Wednesday
1pm – 3pm in the Communal Area
http://codestudents.co/support

Grab and Go table
Pick up snacks, food, drinks or a book from our motivation library
Every Wednesday – 1pm – 4pm
Block B Foyer