



ease your anxiety

How to Gain Confidence,
Emotional Strength and Inner Peace

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What You Say to Yourself, Matters
How to Change What You Say to
Relieve Anxiety, Diminish Doubt
and Experience Confidence and Inner Peace

What You Say to Yourself, Matters

How to Change What You Say to Relieve Anxiety, Diminish Doubt and Experience Confidence and Inner Peace

What if you could really get a handle on the anxiety you experience on a day-to-day basis so it was only occasional or barely noticeable? How would that change your life? What do you avoid because of the anxiety you feel? What would you do differently if you experienced far fewer worries or your anxiety was so significantly diminished that you lived each day with much greater ease?

Anxiety is rough! It conjures up danger and pain, whether it is physical or emotional. Not only are you tempted to give in to it, anxiety sure can take a lot out of you. Wearing you out either through constant worry about things you said or did in the past or what you believe you may have to face in the future. Your worries may involve: concerns over the safety and well being of your partner, spouse, child or children; going to work and having to deal with an angry and explosive boss or a co-worker with whom you disagree; too many demands and unreasonable deadlines; people that you think are talking about you behind your back; or difficulty speaking up to offer a suggestion, share your opinion, ask a question, or clarify a request.

Perhaps you experience anxiety or worry about the future that involves your sense of safety and security, including touching on issues such as access to clean air and water or the purity of our food. Maybe you worry about physical safety that has to do with fires, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes or any type of violent crime. Our worries can be heightened by random and senseless acts of violence or threats that punctuate our daily

lives and routines. This list could go on and on. Clearly we live in unpredictable and uncertain times.

And, it's not like these worries go away, instead they actually interfere with your everyday activities and drain your ability to enjoy life. Thoughts that seem to loop over and over with no end in sight is downright exhausting.

The thoughts running through your mind are difficult enough, yet, on top of those worries, you have to face all the bodily discomfort that comes with feeling anxious. Bodily sensations may include feeling agitated, jittery, keyed up or on edge; restless or easily fatigued; having difficulty concentrating or your mind going blank; irritability; muscle tension; and disturbed sleep, whether it is trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. Perhaps you experience sweating or stomach distress in the form of pain, nausea or butterflies. All of these symptoms are associated with anxiety.

ANXIETY AND BODILY SENSATIONS

Feeling agitated, jittery, keyed up or on edge

Restless or easily fatigued

Having difficulty concentrating or your mind going blank

Irritability

Muscle tension

Disturbed sleep whether it is trouble falling asleep or staying asleep

Sweating

Stomach distress in the form of pain, nausea or butterflies.

Your anxiety and worry need not emotionally paralyze you nor prevent you from pursuing your goals and the life you dream about. It doesn't have to contribute any longer to procrastination that stops you from getting stuff done and it doesn't have to maintain a habit of avoiding people, events or activities that interest you. It can be frustrating to think about social activities you have missed because of feeling flooded by worry and concerns about being judged by others. You can begin to change your experience right now by learning, understanding and using new strategies to handle your anxiety.

If you know anything about cognitive psychology, then you know that to reframe something means to look at it from a different perspective. And that's the goal - to help you understand worry and anxiety from entirely new perspectives.

Anxiety can be experienced in many different ways though the focus here is on what psychology and psychiatry more commonly describe as '*generalized anxiety*'. This type of anxiety involves multiple worries (e.g., how you might say the 'wrong' thing, be criticized for how you look, do something out of order, or anticipate that some event might go terribly wrong). And this worry cuts across a variety of different life events and situations. It could be about getting to work safely, or whether: you'll hit traffic or be late to work; the restaurant will prepare your food the way you like; the lines at the movie will be too long; your out-of-town guests will like your home, feel comfortable within it or enjoy their visit with you. You can generate an endless array of worries about any or multiple life events.

Think of worry anxiety as internally generated stress, as Dr. Bruce Lipton, a stem cell biologist, speaks about in his book *The Biology of Belief*. He describes the effects of such stress and the consequence of disease that follows, so being able to manage worry anxiety is very beneficial to your overall sense of well-being.

Events, issues and experiences involving past or recent trauma can be quite complex. Though you may find many of the suggestions helpful, the focus here is not on the type of anxiety linked with tragedies, traumas or post-traumatic stress. Nor is the focus on fear or on “hard-wired” fight / flight / freeze / faint reactions that occur in response to danger and life threat. The information contained here is intended to help you learn only about anxiety of the ‘worrying-kind’.

If your worry and anxiety are more general in nature or involve concerns with what others may think of you, then you will find several ideas here that may help diminish your concerns about being judged. If you face challenges with what is known as social anxiety, you may find the *Projection Correction*TM exercise at the end of my [Ease Your Anxiety](#) book even more useful for you.

How To Use These Ideas

While some ideas discussed here have the potential of shifting your experience of anxiety almost immediately, and permanently, there are others that will require repetition. People differ on the length of time it takes to engrain a habit, ranging anywhere from 21 to 66 days and there is other information that suggests it takes approximately 90 days before neuroscientists can detect new neuronal growth in the brain. That means that some of these ideas will take mental practice – not once or twice – but countless times over. Many times each day and over many days. As you practice, please consider journaling about your reactions and insights. It is well known that writing helps embed such learning.

So let's agree that you won't give up and throw in the towel after just a couple times or a couple days of implementing a new idea. Instead, please agree to stay with the new practice for a minimum implementation period of 66 to 90 days. Many times each day. Many days. Will you make a commitment to do that?

Remember, the information and material provided within this ebook is for educational purposes only and any one concept is not intended to replace the advice of your respective physician, psychiatrist, psychologist, therapist, coach or mental health provider. If you are receiving such assistance, you are encouraged to consult with that medical or mental health professional about the applicability of any idea with regard to your unique concerns, circumstance or condition.

Remember to let me know how things are going for you at: @DrJoanRosenberg on Twitter or at <http://www.facebook.com/Dr-Joan-Rosenberg>

Differentiating Fear and Anxiety

Fear involves *physiological, behavioral and emotional responses to a specific danger* . . . *fear is adaptive when there is a real threat* and your bodily reaction is one that signals you to escape or avoid that threat. *A response to fear is considered maladaptive when you have that same bodily reaction to escape or avoid and there is no real threat*. Riding in elevators, going over bridges, being in a crowd of people, being scared of insects, bugs or spiders are examples of common fears.

Understand your body's response to fear is something that is innate – if there is a genuine danger or threat present, then you're going to experience built-in feelings and reactions that are neurobiologically 'hard-wired' into you. Start by noticing what is happening around you. Is there a real threat? Is there a clear and present danger? Is it happening now? Or very soon? Well, then you should be having the reactions you have (fight, flight, freeze, faint). . . and it means your body's response system is working properly.

Often, however, people experience the fight –flight reaction at the wrong time . . . meaning that the stress reaction is happening when there is no real object of fear present. In this case, the person's response to fear is maladaptive. You can think of this maladaptive response as having the 'right reaction at the wrong time'.

Anxiety, on the other hand, is a *diffuse sense of apprehension about some aversive event in the future* that people believe they cannot control – so **fear** is distinguished from anxiety in that *anxiety is characterized by the expectation of a diffuse distress / danger in the future* and *fear is characterized by a clear and specific danger right now*.

Fear is characterized by a clear and specific danger right now.

Anxiety is characterized by the expectation of distress or danger in the future.

Anxiety and Mastery over the Future

In psychology circles, sometimes anxiety is called the “*memory for the future*” – mostly because of the way our brain functions. The brain is both an associational organ and an anticipation organ. Here’s how it works. Your mind searches the past (finding an old memory, an association to something you already experienced or something you already know) to help you anticipate or predict how things will go in the future.

Though worry or anxiety may be linked with future situations or events, consider the possibility that your worries and anxiety are really about experiencing and handling unpleasant feelings you are currently experiencing . . . in other words, ***when people experience anxiety, they are trying to achieve mastery right now over a feeling that they anticipate might happen in the future.***

Let’s see if that idea relates to you.

Are you frequently anxious? Do you worry a lot? What do you worry about, specifically?

Write your thoughts here:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Stop and reflect on that idea for a few moments . . . *are you trying to achieve mastery right now over a feeling you anticipate happening in the future?* Keep in mind the thoughts you wrote down, then ask yourself, *"what feeling or feelings would I rather not feel that I am actively preparing myself to experience later?"*

Note those feelings here:

1.

2.

3.

I worked with Stephanie, a 22 year-old woman who conjured up countless possible disappointing scenarios as a way to have mastery over any potential disappointed feeling she might experience in the future. She would literally think up events that had to do with experiencing disappointment in the future, then she would run them over and over through her mind until she would see herself figure out how to handle the future disappointment.

Her future focused thinking, regardless of the nature of her imaginings, kept her out of enjoying the present moment and being fully engaged in her life. She was not facing whatever disappointments truly existed for her already. She stopped creating future oriented scenarios involving disappointment as she became more adept and capable of handling the disappointments she experienced in her everyday life.

**ANXIETY IS AN ATTEMPT TO HAVE MASTERY OVER A FEELING,
OR FEELINGS THAT HAVE NOT YET OCCURRED.**

Breathe Deeply and Slowly

If you do something similar, start by **taking some deep breaths** and **refocus to the present** and **notice WHAT IS happening right now** so you can feel more centered and calm. Remind yourself that you have experienced many of the feelings before (like sadness or anger) that you are worrying about experiencing in the future. Just having the knowledge that you've handled these unpleasant feelings before can help you believe that you have the emotional resources to cope with future unpleasant feelings and experiences. Start to trust that you will be able figure out what resources you'll need to handle the new situation(s) you encounter.

TAKE DEEP BREATHS.

STAY FOCUSED ON THE PRESENT TO REMAIN CENTERED AND CALM.

I recently coached a man in his early twenties who complained of heightened anxiety and an inability to relax throughout each day. He described feeling edgy, that he was shaky, couldn't sit still and found that he had to constantly move.

Fast, shallow breathing contributes to the experience of anxiety, so he started with changing his breathing pattern from fast shallow breathing (which often feels located in

the upper chest) to deep, slow breathing all the way to the base of his diaphragm. He used a 6 count inhale, 4 counts to hold his breath and then a 6 count exhale to slow himself down. He felt much more relaxed after 15-20 of these breathing cycles and he continued to breathe in this manner the whole time we talked. He has consistently used this breathing approach everywhere he goes – while driving, walking to class, playing cards with his buddies and studying, especially since no one notices what he is doing. His long-standing edginess and need to move all the time has entirely gone away.

IT'S AN INTERESTING PARADOX . . .

SLOW DEEP BREATHING IS THE FASTEST WAY

FROM ANXIETY TO CALM.

Naming Strategies to Diminish Anxiety

Self-Affirmations

Who would have thought that self-affirmations could make a difference in easing anxiety given the tremendous amount of confusion and controversy about them?

Affirmations are the positive self-statements (e.g., “I am beautiful”, I am well liked and well respected”, “I am wealthy”) that have been consistently derided and satirized as downright silly and utterly useless. Yet, psychologists Clayton Critcher and David Dunning believe affirmations act as a buffer or cushion against outside threats . . . what some might call the bitterness or harshness of life.

Affirmations can help you broaden your perspective, diminish defensiveness, mitigate and defuse criticism, stand up to what you perceive as an outside threat, and persevere when facing challenges. It’s good news. If you use them already, science stands behind you. If you have never tried using them because it seemed so silly to do so, then know that they can help expand your emotional and cognitive flexibility so you can more successfully handle life challenges.

**AFFIRMATIONS HELP BROADEN YOUR PERSPECTIVE
SO YOU CAN PERSEVERE THROUGH CHALLENGING TIMES.**

Use Your Name to Talk to Yourself

What you say to yourself really matters. When you talk to yourself (and most people do), and you've done something you feel embarrassed about, do you say something like "I'm such a dummy." or "Idiot, you can't do anything right"?

You might consider your self-talk mindless chatter, yet a growing body of research suggests that how you talk to yourself can make a big difference in how you handle your anxieties and fears and even the compassion you show yourself. More specifically, psychologist Ethan Kross and his colleagues discovered that how people talk to themselves has a significant impact on their success in life.

Here is his most interesting finding. If you talk to yourself with the pronoun 'I', you are more likely to perform less well when faced with stressful circumstances (e.g. competitions, public speaking or asserting yourself). Yet, if you address yourself by using your first name, then you increase your chances of effectively handling whatever you pursue. Instead of saying "I'm such an idiot." you would say something like "Jill, that was such an idiotic move."

By switching back and forth between how you address the self – whether it is first person (I, me) or third (using your first name) – you either move closer to or further away from your sense of self and emotional intensity. Especially when you experience strong feelings, using your name allows you to take a step back and get a little emotional distance from whatever is going on. Just that little bit of emotional detachment can have the effect of allowing you to advise and reason with yourself in the same wise manner that you would counsel a friend. Let's be clear though – you don't want to use this self-talk approach to avoid your feelings. That can lead to a different set of problems.

Dr. Kross suggests this small shift in language from personal pronoun to first name can help minimize social anxiety. Overall, it leads to better performance, a more flexible thinking style and less rumination. This shift allows you to think through your own problems more wisely.

Just imagine what you can handle. Need to repair a conflict with a friend that you have been avoiding? Go into it saying *"Now, Abby, go ahead and call her. You've handled conflicts with friends before and had things turn out really well. Just stay calm. And if it doesn't work out Abby, you'll be able to deal with it. You're smart, likeable and have lots of friends that love you. Just do your best. Abby, you got this girl."* Or maybe you'd want to use this approach for a first date, making a speech, asking for a raise, or . . .

**ADDRESSING YOURSELF BY USING YOUR FIRST NAME
CAN HAVE THE EFFECT OF ALLOWING YOU TO ADVISE AND
REASON WITH YOURSELF IN THE SAME WISE MANNER
THAT YOU WOULD COUNSEL A FRIEND.**

Feeling . . . Something

People often wonder why the experience of unpleasant (negative) emotions is so strong and why there are so many painful and unpleasant emotions. It's tied to evolution. Your survival is far more dependent on being able to be aware of and experience 'negative' emotions than experience pleasant ones. The truth is, that at the most basic level, it is these 'negative' emotions or emotional states that are involved in protecting us and in helping us survive in the world. So we absolutely need to be able to access and make use of them. Which makes them not "bad", nor "negative" feelings because they are so necessary for our survival. See them as just unpleasant or unsettling feelings as opposed to bad or negative ones.

Along with control over your behavior, **you do have some control over *what* and *how* you think**, so one way to manage your feelings is to consistently and intentionally practice thinking about what you feel. That doesn't mean questioning and doubting what you feel. Instead, think of it as 'minding your mind' . . . as if you are watching a movie flash by on the screen of your mind. Developing this ability to notice what you are thinking and feeling can help you better choose how you would like to respond, no matter what situation you face.

However, you can't control *that* you feel or *what* you feel. Generally speaking, you are not in charge of the bodily sensations / feelings that you naturally experience in reaction to everyday life events. So you can't really 'control' your feelings – they are the surges of energy that let you know you're alive, allow you to experience a sense of aliveness and vitality, and they are elicited in response to your everyday life experiences,

whether big or small. Rather than exerting control, you can, however, manage, modulate or modify your feeling experience once it is in your conscious awareness.

What I find fascinating is that bodily sensations help us know what we feel emotionally. It happens so quickly and seamlessly that most of us don't even realize this connection exists. It is my belief that ***the bodily sensations that help us know what we're feeling is at the core of what makes it so hard to comfortably experience and move through feelings. It is the discomfort of these bodily sensations from which most people want to disconnect or distract.*** It's not that you don't really want to feel what is coming up for you when you are anxious . . . instead it is the bodily sensation that lets you know what you are feeling that you don't want to experience. This is where the real problem lies with anxiety. I talk about this in my TEDx talk. It's another resource that can help you understand this idea even more. Check out: [The Gifted Wisdom of Unpleasant Feelings](#)

How – What – Where of Feelings

What follows is an exercise that will help you understand how feelings are linked with bodily sensations. In a moment this is what you can do – find a comfortable position, take a few deep breaths – again, slowly take a deep breath in and then after a count of 4 or 6, exhale – and another deep breath in . . . and exhale . . . and one more deep breath in . . . and exhale.

Then, you'll close your eyes – and notice how, what and where you feel sad . . . angry . . . disappointed . . . content . . . deeply satisfied after successfully completing a

long sought-after goal . . . joy . . . and the feeling of excited, happy anticipation. Simply notice how, what and where you experience the feelings above.

For example, sometimes when I feel sad, I get a light sensation that runs up and down my cheeks, and just underneath my eyes right before I tear up and cry. Perhaps you'll feel sadness or disappointment as a heaviness or dull ache centered near your heart. One past client of mine experienced anger as heat in the back of her neck and another felt anger as heat running across the top of both of her arms.

Stop reading and take a few moments to slowly walk yourself through each of the feelings. If you link the feeling mentioned to your specific memories of having that feeling, it may help bring your experience right to the surface. Go ahead and do it now.

<p><i>Notice how, what and where you feel . . . sad . . . angry . . . disappointed . . . content . . . deep satisfaction . . . joy . . . and the feeling of excited, happy anticipation.</i></p>

Use this page to write down **how** (e.g. sharp, pointed, dull, pulsing, intense), **what** and **where** you felt the bodily sensation(s) attached to each of the feelings below.

HOW**WHAT****WHERE****SAD****ANGRY****DISAPPOINTED****CONTENT****DEEPLY
SATISFIED****JOY****EXCITED
ANTICIPATION**

Maybe you found that all your feelings were experienced in the same location in the same way or that it was hard to access any bodily sensations tied to any of your feelings. Perhaps you noticed each particular feeling had different bodily sensations linked to it. It's also possible that a few feelings seemed to be experienced the same way (like sadness and disappointment, for example) and the rest were more distinctly felt. Or that you experienced unpleasant feelings in your body as tighter, smaller or more constricting whereas the pleasant feelings left you feeling more relaxed, calmer, warmer, lighter or more expansive.

There is no right or wrong answer. How you experience a feeling is unique to you, yet it's important to understand the link between emotional feelings and bodily sensations. The '*How-What-Where*' exercise is one way to help increase your awareness of this link between the two.

If you completed this exercise, then you have a growing awareness of how you experience some pleasant and unpleasant feelings within your body proper. You can use this approach to notice how you experience other pleasant and unpleasant feelings. And, if you haven't completed the exercise, now would be a great time to complete it. Information that relates to this exercise immediately follows on the next several pages.

Labeling Feelings

Why is accurately naming or labeling feelings so important? Dr. Matthew Lieberman, a UCLA psychologist, suggests that labeling feelings has the effect of shifting the emotional state to a thinking state. The shift can even be observed in the brain. Once feelings were labeled, there was less activity in the amygdala (the fight/flight center) and more activity in the right ventrolateral prefrontal cortex. This prefrontal area is in the thinking part of the brain.

Here is what this research finding means. Thinking about or reflecting on emotion is a great way to modulate and handle what you are feeling. So naming or labeling feelings can have multiple effects including those of calming or slowing you down, centering you, decreasing the experience of being flooded with feeling, decreasing impulsivity, and increasing a sense of control. And if you are really accurate, it can change your experience entirely, leaving you feeling more empowered, emotionally stronger, more confident and experiencing a calm inner peace.

**LABELING FEELINGS HELPS CALM AND CENTER YOU,
WHICH INCREASES YOUR SENSE OF CONTROL
AND HELPS YOU FEEL MORE EMPOWERED.**

Fear or Anxiety?

Though people often describe feeling fearful or frequently use the word 'fear' to describe what they are experiencing, I believe the word is both over and misused.

Remember, the words you choose to use (e.g. fearful) can influence your decisions and actions. Stating you are fearful might lead you to withdraw rather than pursue your desired goal or goals.

Also remember that ***fear is characterized by a clear and specific danger right now.*** In contrast, ***anxiety is characterized by that diffuse sense of apprehension about an aversive and formless danger in the future.*** Similar to fear, anxiety* is known by bodily sensations such as a fast heartbeat, constriction in the chest, or a nervous feeling on the inside. Yet, it's important to determine: Is the danger or threat known and occurring right now, such that you are in immediate danger? Or is the danger or threat tied ambiguously to the future?

Choose which one you really feel by naming it more accurately. *Is it fear or anxiety? Are you fearful or anxious?* In most situations, it is much more likely that you will be experiencing anxiety rather than genuine fear. Use the more accurate word to describe what is happening. It can make a big difference. Borrowing a phrase from Dr. Daniel Siegel, "name it to tame it".

ARE YOU FACING A CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER RIGHT NOW

OR A

DIFFUSE SENSE OF APPREHENSION ABOUT SOMETHING IN THE FUTURE?

Except, you can also consider whether it is . . .

Anxiety or Vulnerability?

Perhaps you would feel better if you identified your anxiety as vulnerability instead.

Vulnerability, in this case, involves the awareness that you could get hurt. Feeling embarrassed or exposed is often linked with vulnerability and sometimes feeling vulnerable can leave you feeling “off center”. Think about it. How many times have you felt anxious when you were really feeling vulnerable instead?

You can experiment with how that changes your experience right now. Think of situations where you felt anxious. **Replace ‘anxious’ with ‘vulnerable’?** How does that change what you experience?

Do you have reasons to experience this diffuse apprehension known as anxiety? Absolutely yes! You are constantly faced with unexpected challenging, difficult, tragic or traumatic events that you cannot control, predict or prevent. And the world may be feeling a bit more uncertain and unsettling, especially in light of hostile, unpredictable and volatile intentional threats or acts of violence. The anxiety associated particularly with intentional terrorizing violence is quite obviously tied to concerns with physical survival and with the experience of being vulnerable.

Vulnerability involves the possibility of being hurt. When you consciously exert your choice to be vulnerable, think of it as *an openness and willingness to learn and/or to feel hurt*.

For some, just being able to face and live everyday life or talk to someone feels vulnerable enough. For others, it may include a variety of possible choices like public speaking, acting, drama, music, singing, entertainment, sports and displaying art as examples of “putting yourself out there”, thus leaving yourself open to criticism, ridicule or some

other manner of being hurt.

The truth is, at some level, we are always vulnerable – 24/7 – whether we are aware of it or not. So, there isn't a time when we aren't vulnerable – and this level of vulnerability is true for everyone. However, people who live in environments (e.g. war-torn countries, impoverished inner-cities, gang-controlled communities) and situations (e.g. domestic violence) where they constantly face dangerous or life-threatening experiences, live with a heightened consciousness and awareness of their vulnerability.

For those fortunate and privileged enough to live in safer environments, it is the ever-changing life situations or events (including natural disasters, unexpected tragedy, intentional threats or violence) that call into our awareness the experience of feeling vulnerable. If there is no danger or life threat present, and you are not being constantly reminded of it, then you tend not to think about, nor feel, particularly vulnerable. And, when trauma or tragedy happens – even at great geographical distance (floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, fires, oil spills, random workplace or school shootings, mining disasters, airplane crashes, unexpected and unanticipated sudden death or loss), then what changes is the degree to which we are aware we could suffer or be hurt – not necessarily the actual threat.

It's an important distinction. When tragic or traumatic circumstances arise, generally it is the degree to which you are aware that you could suffer or be hurt that has changed, as opposed to an actual threat or dangerous circumstance that you face. For instance, many Americans across the United States purchased survival related kits and supplies following the World Trade Center attack on September 11, 2001, despite the fact that residents of New York City experienced the greatest damage and were experiencing

the greatest threat.

The constant barrage of threatening and damaging news from multiple media sources doesn't help. It amps up our experience of threat. So, you feel more vulnerable mostly because you are more aware that you could be hurt. Of course, if you live in a dangerous or life-threatening situation, then you may naturally be more conscious of feeling vulnerable – otherwise, if you tend to live and work in generally safe and predictable environments, your awareness of feeling vulnerable tends to be in the background.

The goal, of course, is to turn your vulnerability into strength. First, remember that everyone else also feels some degree of vulnerability regardless of how conscious or honest they are about acknowledging this feeling. We never fully escape this experience. The challenge is to maintain a low enough level of awareness about your vulnerability to choose to live fully, without it either emotionally paralyzing you or preventing you from taking action in life.

**HOW OFTEN DO YOU SAY YOU ARE ANXIOUS WHEN YOU
ARE REALLY FEELING VULNERABLE INSTEAD?**

Anxiety or Un-experienced and Unexpressed Feeling

Many times people state they feel fearful or anxious in place of what they are really feeling or thinking. As above, when a person more accurately describes his or her thoughts and feelings, the experience of anxiety either significantly diminishes or it may go away entirely. It's quite likely you can benefit in a similar manner.

Parallel to the earlier strategies, this one also entails more accurately naming your experience. In this case, **think of anxiety as "un-experienced and unexpressed feelings"**. Here are some examples to explain the idea more fully.

One afternoon, I was sitting with my good friend Glenda, and her best friend, Danielle. Glenda, a successful saleswoman in the highly competitive fashion industry, was talking about her challenges with ongoing anxiety and jaw and headache pain and the many treatments she had pursued to experience consistent relief, though to little avail. She was anxious and in pain as we were talking and she wondered what I thought. I asked the first question that came to mind . . . how comfortable was she with sadness, crying and expressing anger. Her answer stunned me.

She was now 37 and hadn't cried since she was a teenager. And, no, she tended not to either acknowledge or express her anger. Given permission to ask more, I simply wondered what that was about. She answered with what most people say . . . she would look weak and vulnerable, she couldn't let her guard down, and she made references to the degree to which 'weaker' feelings were allowed in her household while growing up. They were not. And as she was talking, her lip was quivering to hold back tears.

We also talked about her reluctance to express her dismay and anger. With a little prompting she actually allowed herself to cry on and off for about twenty minutes. A few

short minutes after that Glenda said her jaw and headache pain had lessened and she felt calmer and more peaceful inside. She recognized in those moments that she had not been allowing herself to be in touch with nor express much sadness, grief, anger and need . . . mostly because she didn't want to appear vulnerable nor weak.

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DOES CRYING REALLY MEAN YOU ARE EMOTIONALLY WEAK?**

THE MINDSTREAM PODCAST

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When I hear the word anxiety, I pay very close attention. It's like I'm on a mission to reorient and change the way people understand, experience and express anxiety. A quick conversation with Derrick, a model and actor, led to a similar "aha" moment for him and a change in how he experiences his own feelings. We were immersed in discussing movies and he started talking about how anxious he feels at certain times.

In Derrick's case, I only asked a couple quick questions. First, how – what – where did he experience the anxiety in his body. He touched and circled his hand all around his upper chest. Then I asked: "if I took all the words relating to anxiety away from you, what would you really be feeling?" Immediately he recognized it was really disappointment – a

true “aha” moment. Days later when we talked, he described how he could readily attach his feeling of disappointment to a variety of experiences involving his father, that he had been sweeping under the carpet. He found that he could think about and make sense of those memories with much greater ease and was feeling less anxious and more empowered as a result.

Bob, a successful lawyer in his fifties, came to me initially describing fears that had started about two months before. He was now more concerned because they were persistent and unrelenting. One of his fears involved sleeping in the dark and the second was less clear; he just knew he felt afraid.

As we talked, he was able to shift his thinking from fear, to anxiety to his concerns about loss and loneliness. He didn’t like to cry and hadn’t really grieved the deaths of several family members and friends. When the lights were out at night, in the quiet of the dark, his thoughts would drift to thinking about those losses. In an effort to move away from that grief, particularly sadness, he would start to feel afraid and then insist the lights be left on so he could sleep.

He wasn’t really afraid of the dark . . . it was really much more about the “darkness” of his sadness and grief. As he allowed himself to experience his genuine sadness, his concerns about sleeping in the dark went away. And, he recognized his loneliness had something to do with his decision to dismiss a long time employee at his firm. Remaining aware of the feelings he had been ignoring and pushing aside helped his anxiety subside.

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**PODCAST #13
HOW TO EXPERIENCE AND HANDLE YOUR FEELINGS**

THE MINDSTREAM PODCAST

<https://geo.itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/the-mindstream-podcast/id1034587865?mt=2>

I was several weeks into listening to Sally and Jane, two graduate psychology students enrolled in a group therapy course, each discuss their experience of anxiety when I finally wondered out loud whether it was really anxiety they were experiencing. My statement stopped them cold and piqued their curiosity.

These are the questions I posed for them. First, I asked if they were both interested in diminishing their experience of anxiety. The obvious answer, yes. Second, I asked each to identify an experience or memory when they felt anxious and to allow themselves to feel it, stating it wasn't necessary for me to know what they had identified. They did.

Next, I said: "If I took all the words away from you that were suggestive of anxiety, what would you really be feeling?" Sally said apprehensive and Jane said fearful. Both were suggestive of anxiety, so they couldn't use those two words. Then, Sally said sad; Jane followed with anger. I asked each one to go back to the memory they identified, and for Sally to feel her sadness and Jane to feel her anger in their respective experiences. They did. Then, I asked if either one could experience the anxiety they had described

earlier. The anxiety was not present for Sally, nor for Jane, and they both found this change in experience quite surprising.

I asked if the memories they had chosen involved other people. Once again, they both answered yes. I followed by asking if expressing the sadness and anger, respectively, would have been appropriate in each of the situations. Yet one more time it was a yes answer for both. Finally, I asked Sally if she had expressed her sadness and Jane if she had expressed her anger to the people involved in the situation. Both replied no. Knowing smiles fanned across their faces followed by sighs of relief and laughter.

Here's how to understand what took place. Sally and Jane were trying to keep true feelings that were present for each of them, out of their awareness . . . sadness for Sally, anger for Jane. In psychology, the mental effort to not think what you don't want to think is called thought suppression. I describe it as "trying not to know what you know". Except, thought suppression doesn't really work.

If I asked you to try not to think of a giraffe with stripes, your mind would conjure up the image of a giraffe with stripes. In an effort to not think what you don't want to think, you have to think it first, to then not think it. It doesn't make sense and it doesn't work.

If true feelings are not being experienced and not being expressed outwardly where they belong (especially when it is called for), they have to go somewhere. They get transmuted into anxiety and go inside instead of out. Once you accurately identify, feel and express your thoughts and feelings, then your "inside self" experience changes. It did change, by the way, for both Sally and Jane. Three weeks later they looked and sounded very different, and were far more confident and relaxed women!

**IF I TOOK ALL THE WORDS AWAY FROM YOU
THAT WERE SUGGESTIVE OF ANXIETY, FEAR AND WORRY,
WHAT WOULD YOU REALLY BE FEELING?**

You'll see the questions I posed for them on the next page are. Try it out for yourself. Use these questions as a guide to reset your anxiety. It's called the "Rosenberg Anxiety Reset™".

Rosenberg Anxiety Reset™

1. Are you interested in diminishing or easing your experience of anxiety?
2. Identify an experience or memory when you felt anxious and allow yourself to feel it.
3. If I took all the words away from you that were suggestive of anxiety, fear or worry, what would you really be feeling? Apprehensive, fear, fearful, panicked and scared or any other similar words you can't use as part of your answer.
4. Go back to the experience or memory you identified and swap your anxiety or worry with this new feeling (from question 3) and stay with the experience for 5-10 seconds.
5. Can you feel or experience your previously described anxiety? (Most commonly, the answer is no.)
6. Did the memory/memories you chose involve other people?
7. Would expressing the feeling you identified have been appropriate in your situation?
8. Was this feeling expressed during that situation or a close time after the situation?

Anxiety as a Cover for Unpleasant Feelings

Many people describe “feeling anxious” or “having anxiety”, when, in fact, the anxiety is really other feelings that people have turned inward on themselves rather than express them outwardly to others. We saw that in the example above, particularly with Sally and Jane where anxiety was experienced in place of anger and sadness.

So anxiety itself, oddly, is used as a means (conscious or not) to distract or disconnect from something that is harder to bear, feel or know. Feeling anxious because you don't want to feel angry or sad? The feeling has to go somewhere so it becomes anxiety. It's all about disconnecting and distracting from those same unpleasant feelings. Another way, then, to think about anxiety is that it is either a cover over or a distracter from a variety of unpleasant feelings.

Think of worry / anxiety as a cover– much like an umbrella protecting something underneath. To see what I mean, put your left hand with a closed fist directly in front of you. That closed left fist represents unpleasant feelings. With the left hand remaining in position, put your right hand, curved like an umbrella, a few inches directly above your left hand. The right hand is what you call anxiety and is a cover for one or more of your unpleasant feelings. My goal is to take the cover away (your right hand) so you can be aware of what you are really feeling. Once you are aware and in touch with the real feeling, the anxiety dissipates or diminishes greatly and then it is a matter of “riding the wave(s)” of unpleasant feelings to make your way through them.

For instance, if I'm really angry and disappointed about something that my friend Chelsea did – perhaps something like sharing information with others that I asked Chelsea

not to share – and I’m the type of person who hates having conflicts with others . . . and I also have a hard time saying what I really mean . . . then I’m not likely to address the issue with Chelsea . . . preferring instead to shut out or let my feelings of anger and disappointment pass . . . and of course, acting like nothing is wrong between the two of us.

Haven’t you ever done something similar?

If I actually behaved just as I described above, then I start feeling uncomfortable or anxious inside – especially because I am trying to suppress my reactions (or “not know what I know”) . . . sort of trying to hide my own truth or my own experience of reality from myself . . . and . . . in this example, I am also hiding that truth from Chelsea.

To soften what I’m experiencing, so I can continue to be friends with Chelsea and not rock the boat – I end up changing my experience of anger and disappointment into feelings of anxiety. What would have been initially directed outward towards Chelsea so it could be discussed between us is now directed inward against me.

It’s almost like anxiety is the socially acceptable experience to have – versus the real feelings that are harder to bear that could potentially hurt someone else. It’s messy and uncomfortable. And what the anxiety umbrella is covering is the experience of unpleasant feelings like sadness, anger, disappointment or frustration.

The key is to become aware of the true feelings you might be experiencing in a situation, no longer use your anxiety as a cover or distracter, experience, and then, with discretion, express your real feeling(s) if it is appropriate to do in the given situation.

DO YOU TEND TO WORRY, BE ANXIOUS OR PREOCCUPIED?

WHAT FEELINGS DOES YOUR ANXIETY AND WORRY COVER UP?

Anxiety and Questions and Statements

Anxiety is a future-oriented feeling whereas most other feelings we experience are tied to the past. When people are worried and anxious, they are either anticipating a future event will somehow turn negative or they simply anticipate only negative events. But it doesn't end there.

Anxiety and "What If" Questions

My friend and colleague, Brendon Burchard, author of *The Motivation Manifesto*, likes to say that people feel anxious because they ask **"what if" questions followed by some negative statement**. If asking those "what if" questions is something that you do, here are a few more strategies that can make a huge difference for you.

Your brain will try to answer whatever question or problem you pose – so if you ask questions that elicit negative thoughts, well, your brain will be all too eager to oblige and come up with thoughts, feelings and memories that fit your question.

If you pose "what if" questions that are usually followed by a negative statement, now match that negative statement with a positive one. Better yet, ask positively oriented questions and make positive statements, then your brain will oblige just as willingly in that direction.

<p>MATCH YOUR NEGATIVE STATEMENT WITH A POSITIVE ONE.</p>
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You can ask your "what if" question and then follow it directly with a positive statement . . . like "what if this event turned out so much better than I expected?"

"what if I met someone here that I really connected with?" "what if something really good happened today that went beyond my wildest expectations?"

FOLLOW YOUR "WHAT IF" WITH A POSITIVE STATEMENT.

Change your "what if" questions to "what is" statements and then look at the evidence around you to decrease your anxiety. One person used this approach to decrease her fear of flying. Her worry was about a plane crash . . . "what if the plane goes down?" While on the plane and into her worry, she was guided to look around and describe to herself what she noticed. So she could say: "*what is happening right now* is that we're in flight and it's calm, people are reading and sleeping, the weather is good, my seat partners are interesting" - and on and on.

**CHANGE YOUR "WHAT IF" QUESTIONS TO "WHAT IS?" STATEMENTS.
LOOK AT THE EVIDENCE AT HAND TO DIMINISH YOUR WORRY ANXIETY.**

Anxiety and the "Can I, Will I, Am I" Questions

There are a number of other questions people ask themselves that maintain feelings of anxiety – questions that lead to and foster doubt. These are the ***"can I?" "will I?" "am I" questions***. "Will I be able to deliver a good presentation?" "Will I do a good job?" "Will they like me?" "Can I really pull this off?" "Can I achieve what I want to achieve?" "Am I okay?" "Am I going to be able to complete this project?"

These type of questions simply increase doubt and doubt increases the experience of worry and anxiety. Doubt leads to a loss of power and control. Doubt leads to believing you are less capable. Doubt leads to a lack of a sense of resourcefulness. Doubt leads to less confidence.

Remember, whatever you ask your brain, your brain will do its best to answer for you. *So, the strategy for addressing these anxiety-maintaining questions is to change your question into statements. Make declarative sentences and switch the order of your words . . .*

'can I' becomes 'I can'

'will I' becomes 'I will'

'am I' becomes 'I am'.

For instance, rather than asking "will I do a good job?", turn that question into a statement instead and say to yourself: "I will do a good job." And if you ask "how will I" then change that question into a statement of "I will find a way to . . .".

You can also say to yourself: "I am capable and resourceful." It may seem basic to say those words, yet making that switch from a question that raises doubt into a statement that conveys being grounded and confident really does make a difference in how

you experience yourself internally. Countless individuals have greatly benefited from consistent practice of this one phrase.

ASKING: "CAN I? WILL I? AM I? QUESTIONS?" MAINTAINS ANXIETY.

SAY INSTEAD: "I CAN . . . I WILL . . . I AM . . ." OR

SAY: "I AM CAPABLE AND RESOURCEFUL

TO DIMINISH DOUBT AND INCREASE CONFIDENCE.

Just try it for a few seconds right now. And with each new or difficult situation you encounter, keep reminding yourself of your ability to be capable and resourceful. Keep rehearsing this phrase over and over in your mind. Remember, you are shooting for 66-90 days of mental rehearsal. And, stay curious. Watch what happens as life opens up to you.

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