

Overcoming Anxious Thoughts

Date / Time

So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

Thoughts? Heart? Body? None of the Above

PURPOSE/EFFECTS

According to anxiety specialists Michelle Craske and David Barlow, when we are anxious we tend to overestimate the probability of something bad happening and underestimate our ability to cope with it. Learning to accurately estimate the real odds of a painful or harmful event actually occurring, and how to formulate a coping plan, can reduce the power of anxious thoughts.

METHOD

Summary:

Work with anxious thoughts by first estimating the real odds that your worry will actually happen and second, formulating a coping plan.

Long Version

Estimating the Real Odds

- One way to work with an anxiety-provoking thought is to write it down and then estimate the real odds that the event it refers to will actually occur.
- Estimating the real odds means ranking [from 0-100%] the likelihood that this event will actually happen.
- When estimating the real odds, treat your anxious thought as a mere guess, not a certainty.
- Ask yourself if the catastrophe you fear has happened before. If it has ever happened to you before, how often has it happened in the past?
- Consider the evidence that the feared event will not happen – such as positive factors that will prevent it altogether or minimize it.
- List some other possibilities that could happen instead of what you fear will occur.
- **EXAMPLE:** If you are worried that your presentation will not be well received, alternative interpretations or possibilities could include:
 - The audience loves the presentation.
 - Some members of the audience like the presentation and some do not.
 - You feel you did a great job and don't care about the audience's response.

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Decatastrophizing & Coping

- Assess what the actual impact would be if your feared event actually happened. Keep in mind that most people – and in particular, anxious ones – overestimate the actual impact, the real consequences, that occur if and when a feared event actually happens. In other words, it's usually not at all as bad as we feared: the consequences are briefer, milder, and have fewer lingering effects that we had expected.
- Then consider how you could cope if your feared event did happen. What practical steps could you take to reduce its actual consequences? What could you do to reduce its impact on your emotions? How could you increase positive influences coming into your life to balance, compensate for, or protect you from the negative event?
 - Remember that there are ways to cope with any event, regardless of its magnitude. Consider how people throughout history – and probably you, yourself – have dealt with difficult things, even awful things, and gotten through them and survived and moved on and flourished.
 - If you are at a loss for ways to cope, imagine any step that you could take, big or small, to help deal with the situation. Perhaps ask others for their ideas.
 - Remind yourself that everything is constantly changing, and that “This too shall pass.”
- Realizing that you could find a way to cope with even your most feared catastrophe can be both healing and empowering.

HISTORY

This method was adapted from multiple practices created by psychologists Michelle Craske and David Barlow in their book *Mastery of Your Anxiety and Worry*.

CAUTIONS

Do not vividly imagine your feared event occurring. If you become very fearful, anxious, or uncomfortable while thinking that your fear may actually happen, please discontinue the practice. Just brainstorming ways that you would cope with your feared event is effective.

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Please remember that just because you are imagining what would happen if your feared event occurred does not mean that it is now more likely to happen.

NOTES

If you tend to blame yourself for bad things that occur in your life, it is helpful to remember that there are many factors, many we are not even aware of, that contribute to the difficulties in our lives. Also, keep in mind that negative events happen to everyone.

thank you for your mindfulness practice

May I continue to look deeply into
my mind, my heart and body.

May I see things and meet things
AS THEY ARE

and may this clear and sustained knowing free me
**FOR THE SAKE OF
ALL BEINGS.**

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