

Managing Anxiety 4

Over the past few weeks I have been writing about anxiety management techniques for people who suffer from various forms of anxiety. Two weeks ago I discussed the need to not listen when “worry calls your name”. Last week I discussed a technique that involves learning to clear your mind of worry and negative thoughts with creative thinking and imagining. This week I want to introduce another simple technique:

LEARNING TO PLAN INSTEAD OF WORRY.

A big difference between planning and worrying is that a good plan does not need constant review. An anxious brain, however, will reconsider a plan over and over to be sure it is the right plan. This is all just ruminating worry disguising itself as a plan. Most anxiety sufferers tend to procrastinate plan making because of their anxiety that they will make the wrong decision.

People who ruminate about a worry always try to get rid of it by seeking reassurance that the worry is unfounded. They believe that if they get the right kind of solution to their problem then they will be rid of worry once and for all. They want to be absolutely sure, for example, that a minor mistake at work won't result in them being fired or that the holiday they want to book has to have all possible situations covered.

In reality, however, the brain of the persistent worrier will simply find some flaw in the most fail-safe reassurance and set the client off on the track of seeking an even better one.

One good way to get out of the reassurance trap is to use the fundamentals of planning. This simple but often overlooked skill can make a big difference in calming a ruminative mind. To replace endless anxiety with planning involves four steps.

1. Identify the concrete problem that is triggering the worry and anxiety.
2. List the problem-solving options and their merits.
3. Pick one option.
4. Develop a plan of action.

To successfully plan rather than obsessively worry means being able to stop the rumination and commit to the planning process otherwise it will become more fuel for the fire.

Typically, obsessive ruminators will feel better for a while after making a plan but then they will start to review the plan. This is one of the tricks of an anxious brain. However, the person in question must resist this process and reassure the self with a though-stopping attitude – “Stop! I have a plan” is the internal though-stopping needed.

Therefore you have to learn the difference between pointless obsessive worry and concrete planning.

Many people who suffer from anxiety are mentally lazy. Though they are exhausted from the constant anxiety they feel about a host of things, they are desperately inefficient in how they use their brain time. It becomes unfocused and generalized to such a degree that very often they feel worried but they no longer know what it is that is bothering them. If you are a bit like that you need to learn that you need to bring discipline and rigour to your worry and anxiety, to move from worrying to planning.

Very often if three of four issues in your life go unresolved, and remain a constant worry, the feeling of anxiety can seep into all areas of your life. Because your emotional anxiety has become unfocused it gets applied to everything. Your failure to make plans for managing your house and home, or dealing with our relationships, can overflow into the trifling areas of your life where deciding whether to go into town or not becomes a fretful decision.

So try to bring some mental rigour to your worrying. You might think that constant obsessive worry means you are taking your concerns seriously. Quite the contrary – it becomes avoidance. Your worry is a form of stage fright where you pace the halls trying to get your lines perfect before you go on stage.

One thing we know for sure, that when one commits to something, providence follows. Turn to your worry to planning. And then commit to action.