

Managing Anxiety 2:

Last week I wrote in a general way about anxiety. Over the next few weeks I will be introducing some anxiety management techniques, which have proved to be successful for many client's treated by psychologists.

Many people have what we call in the business Generalized Anxiety – that is a pervasive anxiety that occurs across a range of situations and just sits in the person's chest like a bad heart. People with this have high levels of tension and they search frantically for reasons behind their anxiety. They hope they can “solve” whatever problems seem to be causing their anxiety and thus relieve their symptoms.

But since much of their heightened tension is not about a real problem, they simply waste time and energy running around the inner maze of their self-perpetuating worry. And even if their tension is caused by a particular problem, there are ways to eliminate the symptoms of chronic worry before addressing the life problems. Let me introduce one simple technique today. The technique is based on recognizing that your anxiety exists *before you find something to worry about*. In other words anxiety can be triggered by the brain just firing wrong. Because this happens for many people, the technique to be used can be summed up in the phrase:

Don't listen when worry calls your name

For many people it's as if anxiety has a life of its own and just starts up for no specific reason saying “Worry now”, even when there is nothing to really worry about. But when you suffer from anxiety it is easy to start worrying about a hundred different things.

In recognizing the sound of worry, and its tone of voice, you might begin to get a grip of it. It is to recognize that physical pit-of-the-stomach sense of doom that seems to come for no reason, and then compels you to find a reason for why it is there!

What can be helpful to realize is that this dread is just the emotional manifestation of physical tension. The “DON'T LISTEN” method decreases this tension if it combines a decision to ignore the voice of worry with a cue to enter into a state of relaxation.

Don't listen when worry calls your name, and when it does don't fight it with words; fight it with a calm body. Anxiety finds no purchase in a body trained to relax.

Worry, like a mosquito bite, gets in under your skin and all it needs to get going is for you to start to scratch it to try and make it go away. Like the insect bite, the technique needed to counteract is learning to say no and to still the body.

In psychotherapy we teach relaxation training but for this article let me challenge you to see how lazy and undisciplined you are when dealing with your anxiety. How, when worry calls your name, you listen and start scratching away at it frenetically by trying to figure it out, solve it, or make it go away. And in doing so it escalates and gets worse.

To deal with it effectively one needs to learn the discipline of quieting the body. It is hard to realize that the anxiety starts in the body, but it does. So you must learn the discipline and art of changing your emotional state from one that is ready to start worrying to one that is ready to slow it all down. It is essential that you learn to still your mind with cues and triggers that stop the itch of worry.

How can you do this? Think of three triggers that evoke a sense of peace that reject the invitation to worry. Create something small to put in your wallet or handbag that can evoke these sensations. This could be a card with an encouraging saying on it.

With some clients I invite them to wear an elastic band around their wrist and to snap it every time they wish to snap out of a worry spiral.

The thing is that anxiety becomes an addictive habit. Even with nothing to worry about an anxiety prone brain can cause a hyper vigilance that prompts a person to invent the worry to accompany it. Its like the brain goes into radar mode scanning a person's life for something to worry about.

Remember; don't listen to worry when it convinces you that because you're feeling anxious there must be something causing it. There isn't. It is just your brain miss-firing. So, to reiterate:

Don't listen when worry calls your name. When he does, don't engage with him. It's what he wants. Rather, play dead by finding simple ways to relax. Soon enough he'll wander away. With practice he will learn that you are no longer easy prey.