

Managing Anxiety 3

Last week I presented an essential anxiety-management technique that encouraged you (if you suffer from anxiety) to learn to “Stop listening when Anxiety calls your name”. To understand that generalized anxiety becomes a habit and is triggered not, as you think, by some stressful thing in your life but by a brain that has been wired incorrectly. It becomes a brain-triggered habit because you notice that you start to feel anxious before there is even something worth being stressed-out about.

So you need to know that unless you learn how to resist the itch of worry it quickly turns into a scratching that tears at your emotional flesh. You do this best through distraction and relaxation.

This week I want to talk about another simple psychological technique aimed at dealing with what we call rumination. Rumination is that repetitive brain that just will not stop going over and over and over the same distressing thoughts. This continued rumination causes a lot of physical tension and fatigue. Like a black dye, it can seep into every corner of your emotional life and discolour it with negativity.

Research would suggest that this kind of rumination is not caused by deep psychological problems but by the functioning of the brain. What ruminators worry about are often ordinary day-to-day concerns. The thing is the brain just keeps humming along in the background, generating tension or sick feelings, interrupting concentration, and diminishing the capacity to attend to the good things in life. Ruminators can never get enough reassurance to stop worrying altogether. If one problem seems to be solved there is a whole host of other one's to pop up and take its place. There is always a “Worry of the Day”.

If you are a ruminator the trick is not to focus on the specific anxiety but on the act of worrying itself. So what the anxious person needs is to learn some technique to get into neutral, to turn the rumination tape off. Let me introduce a simple but challenging technique: This exercise may sound rather trite but it is actually quite profound because of the challenge it presents and the attentive discipline it requires.

To do this you need to learn to CLEAR SPACE in your brain using your creative imagination. Because the problem of rumination is the brain's ability to imagine all sorts of negative things, then one must use one's imagination to tackle it. Logic won't work!

So try this yourself: On a sheet of paper draw an image of an open container like a big bin ready to receive every worrying issue on your mind. Name each issue and write a word for that worry in the Bin. Write all of your key worries into the Bin. When you have identified the key ones draw a heavy lid on this container to close it and fold over your piece of paper. Your challenge now is to imagine that you have done exactly that – locked your worrying thoughts away for a while.

On the cover of this folded sheet now draw a large heart or circle, which is to represent the CLEAR SPACE that is left in your mind with all the other stuff locked away. Write into that space a simple peaceful thought that you would love to allow to

seep through your emotional life like clear cleansing water. Your thought could simply be “Today I know that everything is truly OK”. Or “Today I am free of having to sort everything out”. Or “For the next hour I am entirely free of stress – it is locked away.”

Or try this: Get a jar at home and call it your “God Box” and every time you find yourself having a ruminating worry write it on a piece of paper and drop it into the jar as a symbol of turning it over to your God. Learn to let it go.

We all need to do these things in whatever creative way we can find. We all need to give the ruminating mind a chance to rest and calm down.

The Children
Our finances
What X thinks of
me.
What I should do
about Y.
Whether to buy
Z.

YOUR WORRY

YOUR WORRY BIN