

Understanding Anxiety

Presented by Dr. Elect Star

Thoughts That Trigger Anxiety

Anxiety can affect your body, thoughts, emotions, and behavior, which makes your ability to cope difficult. Therefore, a complete program of coping with anxiety must address all four components. Learning to think realistically is a coping strategy for overcoming anxiety. First, we will begin with identifying your thoughts and determining whether it is realistic or based on assumptions. Secondly, we will identify the thinking error, stop the thinking error, and replace the thinking error. In other words, we will stop the cycle of “stinkin thinkin”.

Let us look at a real-life scenario -

Imagine two individuals sitting in stop-and-go traffic at rush-hour.

- One perceives himself is trapped and says “I can’t stand this. I have got to get out of here. How did I get myself into this mess?” What he feels is anxiety, anger, and frustration.
- The other perceives the situation as an opportunity to sit back, relax and put on some music. He says to himself “I might as well just relax and adjust to the pace of the traffic,” or “I can unwind by doing some abdominal breathing and listening to the music.” What he feels he is a sense of calm and acceptance.

In both cases, the situation is the same but the feelings in response to that situation are vastly different due to their internal monologue or self talk. The truth is what we say to ourselves in response to any situation mainly determines our feelings.

People who suffer from anxiety are especially prone to engage in fearful self-talk. Anxiety can be generated on the spur of the moment by repeatedly making statements to yourself that begin with these two words “what if?”

The real change occurs when you begin to counter and replace negative, “what if” thoughts with positive, self-supportive statements that reinforce your ability to cope.

The following three steps are essential for challenging negative self talk

- Identify the distorted thoughts
- Question their validity (fact or assumption)
- Replace them with more realistic thoughts

Examples of distorted thoughts:

1. *Black or white* – viewing situations, people, or self as entirely bad or entirely good – noting in between.
2. *Exaggerating* – making self-critical or other-critical statements that include statements that include terms like *never*, *nothing*, *everything* or *always*.
3. *Filtering* – ignoring the positive things that occur to and around self but focusing on and accentuating the negative.
4. *Discounting* – rejecting positive experiences as not being important or meaningful.

Understanding Anxiety

Presented by Dr. Elect Star

5. *Catastrophizing* – blowing expected consequences out of proportion in a negative direction.
6. *Judging* – being critical of self or others with a heavy emphasis on the use of *should have, ought to, must, have to, and should not have*.
7. *Mind reading* – making negative assumptions regarding other people's thoughts and motives.
8. *Forecasting* – predicting events will turn out badly.
9. *Feelings are facts* – because you feel a certain way, reality is seen as fitting that feeling.
10. *Labeling* – calling self or others a bad name when displeased with a behavior.
11. *Self-blaming* – holding self responsible for an outcome that was not completely under one's control.

Source: 10 Simple Ways to Relieve Anxiety, Fear and Worry, Edmund Bourne, PhD