

Working with Anxiety

Understanding anxious patterns, regulating the body, and reclaiming a sense of safety.



Anxiety is not a defect of character. It is a nervous system doing its job too well, with information that is often out of date. Before any technique will help, it matters to understand what your anxiety is actually trying to do for you — and what it has cost you to keep listening to it without question.

This guide blends what we know from interpersonal neurobiology, ACT, and CBT. The goal is not to eliminate anxiety. The goal is to change your relationship with it — so that it can inform you without governing you.

PART ONE

What anxiety actually is

Anxiety is the body's anticipation of a threat that hasn't happened yet. It is future-tense fear. Your amygdala is not malfunctioning when it lights up — it is running a pattern that once kept you, or someone you love, alive.

Most chronic anxiety is less about the situation in front of you and more about an old situation your body never got to finish. This is why logic so rarely calms it. Logic is addressed to the wrong floor of the building.

PART TWO

The body comes first

You cannot think your way out of a dysregulated nervous system. You have to speak to it in its own language: breath, posture, temperature, weight, sound.

- **Long exhale.** Breathe in for 4, out for 8, for two minutes. Lengthening the exhale tells the vagus nerve the danger is past.
- **Orienting.** Slowly turn your head and name five things you see. This is not a distraction — it is a signal to the brainstem that the environment is safe enough to look around in.
- **Weight and cold.** A heavy blanket, a hand on the chest, a cold glass against the wrist. The body trusts sensation before it trusts thought.

Use these first. Cognitive work lands far better in a body that is no longer convinced it is being hunted.



PART THREE

The pattern beneath the panic

Anxiety almost always travels with a quiet belief. Catch it by finishing this sentence out loud:

“If this fear came true, what it would mean about me is...”

The answer is rarely the surface fear. It is usually some version of *I would be alone, unlovable, exposed, or unable to handle it*. That sentence is the real work. The presenting worry is the smoke; the belief is the fire.

PART FOUR

A framework most clients haven't met

The 90-Second Rule. Neuroanatomist Jill Bolte Taylor observed that the chemical cascade of an emotion moves through the body in roughly ninety seconds. What keeps anxiety going past that window is the story we tell about it — *this shouldn't be happening, something is wrong with me, this will never end*.

Try this: when a wave hits, set a quiet timer for ninety seconds. Do not try to fix it. Breathe. Let the wave move. Almost no one finishes the ninety seconds with the same intensity they began. What remains afterward is workable. What you were fighting was not the wave but your refusal of it.

PART FIVE

Living well alongside anxiety

- Move daily. Anxiety is partly stored energy that needs somewhere to go.
- Sleep is not optional. One bad night doubles the next day's reactivity.
- Caffeine and alcohol are not neutral. Both rent calm at the cost of more anxiety later.
- Tell one person. Anxiety shrinks the moment it stops being secret.
- Watch the input. Doomscrolling is anxiety practice. Choose your sources carefully.



*Your anxiety has been trying to keep you safe. You are allowed to thank it,
and then to teach it that you are no longer eight years old.*