

MIND OVER BRAIN

4 Books in 1

Overthinking, Change Your Brain, Master
Your Emotions, Declutter Your Brain



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OVERTHINKING

CHANGE YOUR BRAIN

MASTER YOUR EMOTIONS

DECLUTTER YOUR BRAIN

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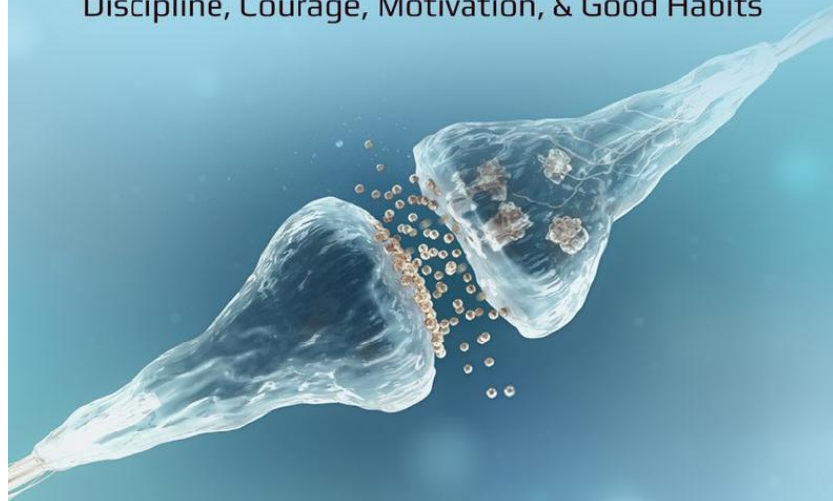
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CHANGE YOUR BRAIN

Using Neuroplasticity to Retrain Your Brain for
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INTRODUCTION

What if I told you that you can change the way your brain functions? No, you don't need to undergo any crazy surgery for it. In fact, you can start today!

You've met those people who can walk into any room and fit in. They strike up a conversation with anyone and become fast friends with them. Taking on their habits is actually quite simple. When you look at how successful people get that way, it all lies in the way their minds work. Whereas those who do not succeed tell themselves all the reasons why something could never work, a successful person visualizes where they want to be and plans out the steps to get there.

Our brains dictate how we respond to the outside world, thus creating the outcome for our lives. Unfortunately, sometimes our brains do not behave in our best interests. This is when we need to resume control over them. Yes, you can do this. It has become an established practice that you can learn and perform from the comfort of your home.

You can reach the success you want to, in your social life and your career. Over the past years, techniques have been created by psychologists to change your brain's thinking patterns by essentially rerouting the neurons within it. All of this might

seem complicated at first, but it really all comes down to the way you think.

We all have an inner voice. It can either build us up or bring us down, and you have the power to decide which way yours goes. As you read this book, you will be taken through the steps to do so.

WHAT IT MEANS TO CHANGE YOUR BRAIN- SUCCESSFUL VS. SELF-SABOTAGING MENTALITY



WE ALL HAVE things we would like to improve about ourselves, whether it is a physical matter or about our personalities. What if I told you that you can change the way your brain works, meaning you can become whoever you want to be? If you want to become a public speaker, you can gain the confidence to do that. If you can name a trait that you want to take onto yourself, it can be done.

In the past few decades, there has been a strong push towards self-help and improvement. You see it everywhere- change your life, become your best self, boost your confidence. It sounds like a great idea, but then you start to think, how is that possible? Even if it is, where do I start?

To answer the first question, yes. All of those things and more are completely within your reach. You have begun the process now by picking up this book. You could have put it aside and decided that it is not worth it to try, but instead, you are willing to try, which means you are capable of doing it. As for the how, the answer lies within where every thought, feeling, and action begins- your brain. Let's say you get nervous whenever you are going to meet new people, and it often gets in the way of making friends and speaking in front of other people. This means it is getting in the way of you forming relationships,

which is detrimental to both your social life and success in your career.

To break down what happens when you are hit with this form of social anxiety, talking to others has become a trigger for the negative thoughts that induce the process. The anxiety, or fight-or-flight response, kicks in because of a thought that comes in and upsets you, such as “I’m going to say the wrong thing and then everyone is going to make fun of me.” Then you have mental images of this happening, causing you to have an emotional response to something that has not even occurred yet and might not ever. Your brain is giving you false information that it has interpreted as true. It is a thought pattern that has become automatic over the course of what is most likely a span of years. What you would need to do to begin the process of fixing this problem is to change the way your brain interprets interaction with others so that it does not see it as a danger anymore.

Changing your brain might sound like a concept straight out of a futuristic fiction movie when you first hear of it. However, it is quite simple, so much that you can do it from the comfort of your home. Have you ever had to learn something a different way, whether it was because you found out you had been doing it incorrectly or your current employee wanted you to do it a different way from how your past one did? When you did that, you were altering the way your brain is wired. That is how simple it is, and while it may sound like a daunting process, it does not have to be one. Think about how you climb up a ladder- at first, you are on the ground, meaning you have yet to start your journey. You do not try to reach for levels above what you are at. If you tried that, you would run the risk of falling or even bringing the ladder down with you, and you would certainly not make the progress you wanted to.

You would need to start on the first step and then work your way up. If you kept this up, you would eventually find yourself standing at the top of it. Even if you think you are too far away from what you want to ever reach it, take a moment to think about where you are now. Say you just graduated college and are nervous that you will not be cut out for what comes after. When you are getting into these thoughts, I want you to go back to your first day at the university. You were out on your own for the first time. Even if your parents were paying your expenses, you still had to figure out how to go through your daily routine on your own without any supervision or help. You probably came to realize it was a different experience being in charge of your schedule- no reminders from parents and your professors took a much farther step back from the way you handled your work. Your success relied on your work ethic alone now, and that is not something everyone can handle. However, you showed that you were able to adapt to this new environment, and you made the choices that would get you to the day that you were walking across the stage with a diploma in hand.

I want to go back to the word “adapt.” This is an essential part of changing the way you live your life. You grow and adapt. Think about the things you thought five years or even one year ago. It is probably vastly different from the way you think now. Your ideas and beliefs evolved into ones that are more insightful. The fact that you can learn to do better means you have what it takes as you are today to change your brain.

I want to introduce you to the concept of self-improvement without the misconceptions that often come with it. For many, their first thought is that to accomplish it, you must become something other than who you are. This is not true. It is amplifying the strengths you already have while minimizing

your weaknesses. In the case of becoming a public speaker, the idea would not be to change who you are, but your approach to being on a stage in front of an audience, learning to look forward to it instead of dreading it. Self-improvement is about making yourself into someone successful, and this is not about being glamorous or able to put out an image of yourself that is perfect. I am going to show you what truly goes into a mindset that leads to success.

First off, I am going to talk about the fact that two people can have the exact same experience and interpret it completely differently. Here is what I mean by that. Let's say two people audition for a role in a theater production, and neither of them gets a callback. The first person throws their hands up and decides they are not cut out to perform, but the second looks over their audition and realize they did not come off as being well-prepared, so they go out of their way to do research for their next audition and get the part. The first person saw the event as a permanent defeat, but the second person took it as a learning experience and tried again, and that is how they were able to obtain their goals. It had nothing to do with them being "better" than the first person. They simply had a successful mentality instead of a self-sabotaging one. There is a distinct difference between these two thinking patterns of these two types of minds and the outcomes of their interactions.

A person with a successful mindset builds themselves up. They take pride in the things they do well. They look back fondly on the good things they have done and use this feeling to continue to do similar things in the future. When they do something wrong, they reflect on it to the extent that they now understand why they behaved in such a manner and resolve to avoid that in the future. However, a self-sabotaging person will use their mistakes as ammunition against themselves,

which will block any further progress; in fact, they will likely slide back into worse habits because they do not think they are capable of better.

When you think in a self-sabotaging way, you talk yourself out of things. This causes a person to become stagnant in their life. For example, a person who has recently become unemployed sends a handful of job applications that are declined, and soon they are not sending them out because the internal dialogue has been established- “No one will ever hire me.” This leads to them putting off sending applications because they do not think there will be any payoff for it, meaning they will let days go by without working on a solution to the problem. This invariably makes the problem bigger.

The self-sabotaging mentality uses extreme language. “I always fail.” “No one likes me.” “I never say the right thing.” They make general, sweeping statements that are not based on evidence. Because their thoughts are negative, the inconveniences and setbacks that come with life will be a confirmation that the odds are stacked against them.

This, in turn, causes self-sabotagers to take on a victim mentality. This means they do not take accountability for their own unhappiness and instead choose to blame other people and outside circumstances. Let’s go back to the example of the college graduate who has stopped sending out job applications. It is not a victim mentality to be upset about not getting what you wanted. Everyone responds to disappointment that way. What makes it victim mentality is that this person did not take any time to reflect on this and see how they could have improved. Maybe the dialect on their resume needs to be tuned to suit a more professional setting. They might not be elaborating enough on their accomplishments and therefore selling themselves short. Whatever the problem is, there is

something in their application that is lacking right now but could be improved so that the next time, they are accepted. However, someone who takes on the role of a victim will concede that the world has something against them- “There’s just something about me that nobody likes and so; therefore, I will never get ahead in life because there is some force that does not want me to.”

In that statement, they are placing all of the responsibility for their lack of success on someone else without considering for a moment that their application could have been improved. This causes them to have a dislike for others. What would you think if I told you that thinking more lowly of other people was simultaneously placing a lesser value on yourself? When you do not think anyone’s intentions are good, you will also not think you should receive good treatment. People are also inclined to avoid what they dislike. If you avoid others altogether and never trust their intentions, you will miss out on all of the social experiences and networking that can come with it.

People with a successful mentality see a problem as a prelude to a solution. This isn’t to say that they never feel annoyance at an inconvenience. That is a natural response for anyone. However, a successful person will come to accept things as they are and look for a solution. They realize what is causing the problem, and they know that things will get better if they take action about it, so they do.

Let’s say they have started a business and have not gotten a lot of customers. A self-sabotaging person would be inclined to make decisions that would be for the detriment of the already struggling company. They would either decide this was never going to work and close up shop, or they would place the blame on those working for them. They would berate them for

not doing a good enough job and threatening them with losing their employment. Meanwhile, a successful person would take a long and hard look at why they are not getting business. They would think, “Where am I falling short? Do I need to reach out to more people? Am I using language that would resound with or be comprehensible to my target audience?” Instead of turning straight to anger and looking for people to take that feeling out on, they invest their time and energy into something productive. This is at the core of a successful person. They make sure what they are doing is worth their time and leading up to something, and they believe they can make a difference, both in their life and the world around them. They see themselves as a force that has the power to move things rather than a twig caught in a tornado, forced to go wherever they are thrown to.

This sense of power and confidence is also known as optimism. To change your brain, this mindset is not optional. You must take it on. Now let’s talk about what it really is because its meaning is often misinterpreted. An optimist is not someone who is happy all of the time. They go through the same emotional patterns as everyone else does, and not all of those are pretty. There are times that they get upset, frustrated, and even discouraged because they are human. However, the difference between their behavior and that of a pessimist is that this feeling eventually begins to pass for them, and then they pick themselves off of the floor, ready to face their problems head-on and with the belief that they will be able to handle whatever comes their way. They are not blind to the fact that not everything will work out exactly the way they want it to, but they do believe things will always work out in some way in the end. They do not subscribe to the belief that things are hopeless or that they cannot come back from their

mistakes. Even when things are going poorly, they have faith that things will get better- if nothing else, they will be able to get through this day.

A pessimist never gets up off of the floor. They are often stuck in the past because they do not move on from disappointments and mistakes. They mull over things that have already happened and do the “should’ve, would’ve, could’ve regimen.” What I mean by that term is the process of going over a situation that has already happened and how you handled it long after it is over.

Whatever mistakes you made in the past, you cannot do them over. Whatever you did not get from someone, you are never going to get. If you missed out on an opportunity in the past, you will have to take the next one that comes along because that one is gone. I am not telling you these things to be discouraging. It is to drive the point home to keep your eyes on the future.

Most of us go through cycles of having a self-sabotaging mentality at certain points throughout our lives. Whenever life knocks us down, it is completely normal to feel discouraged. It is not being defeated to feel sensations that are natural responses to certain situations. There are certain feelings we cannot help but have because they are a natural response to disappointment. When something upsetting happens to you, you will feel a mixture of unpleasant emotions. However, you do not need to let these sensations control you. Think about a time where you had a lengthy project to complete. You were at the end of it. You had been through a lot, and what you really wanted to do was give up and take the grade that would result from not doing whatever you left undone. Those feelings did not last because, after this, you reached into a part of yourself that wanted to succeed in what you were doing. You wanted to

turn in good work and get a high mark, so you ignored the fact that you were feeling tired, annoyed, and any other sensation, and you pushed through to make it so that you got the results you wanted. This is proof that you do not have to do whatever the feelings inside of you would rather you do. They are merely messages. They are not instructions.

Remember that your brain is a part of your body, just like any other organ. When it comes to your digestive system, you can control what goes into it. Exercising and medications can help your heart function to the best of its ability. You can preserve the health of your lungs by refraining from smoking, making it so that they do not breathe contaminated air. It is a slightly different concept, but you can essentially do the same thing with your brain. You can control what kind of information goes into it from outside forces. You can make it stronger by challenging it in new ways, such as writing with your other hand and completing a crossword puzzle.

You need to keep your mind in good health so that you will make decisions that are good for your body. For example, when we are stressed, we might drink more than we should, leading to poor decisions and dealing with a hangover the next morning. We might also make a post on one of our social media outlets that we will end up regretting after the fact. When you are angry, you are more prone to saying things that do not reflect your true feelings and strain your relationships. When you are feeling morose, you might throw away a project you have put a lot of time and effort into because you do not feel like you will ever finish it and even if you do it will never mean anything, and then later on, when you are no longer feeling this way, you will wish you had not done that and could reclaim the progress you had made.

When you are feeling an intense emotion, just stop for a moment. Do not make any major decisions. Any impulses or urges you have during this time should be ignored. If some time has passed and you still want to do it, then you can entertain the possibility that it is a good idea. However, nothing has to be decided or done immediately. You need to think it over. When you stress yourself into taking action right now, you run the risk of impulsively doing something that you regret later on.

Throughout the course of this book, you will learn all sorts of methods to become the one in control of how your brain functions. Some of these concepts are ones you might have already heard of while others may be now or not what you would conventionally apply to this concept.

To change your brain, you must come to believe down to your core that you can do this. I know that you can because you have already proven many times that you can. The fact that you are reading the words on this page is solid and undeniable proof. When you were first born, you did not know how to do a single thing. You were dependent upon your caregivers and the people around you to give you what you needed to survive. You did not even know how to walk at one point, but you learned, partially from being taught and the other part being instinctual. Think about how you learned to fluently speak the English language. There are so many words in it, and sometimes one word carries an entire multitude of meanings, and yet you learned all of them. You were able to figure out how to construct all of these different syllables into one sentence. You were able to draw connections between pictures and words.

Think about how in early education, you were probably given flashcards to memorize. Let's say you were trying to learn all

of the colors. You did this by looking at pictures of them and coming to associate them with their correct names. This was difficult at first, and you probably got at least a couple of them confused with one another. Those were the ones you had to practice the most. There is an entire scientific and psychological concept behind this, which we will go over in greater detail as we go on.

Another quality that those who self-sabotage have is that they do not live in the present. They are either lamenting about the past or dreading the future. You will often hear them say, “no one set me up to accomplish that.”

While there might be people who have advantages that you do not, no one has it so that the entire world conspires for them to succeed- or fail. Also, think about the fact that while there are certain demographic groups that can give a person advantages in some areas if they fall into them, it can also work to their disadvantage at the same time. No one is born holding all of the cards. Developing a successful mindset is about finding out where your strengths lie.

People waste many years thinking about what should and should not have happened for them. This increases their sense of hopelessness and depression, and this is what keeps us stagnant in our lives. When we do not have any hope that things are going to get better, they will not. This is because it is the responsibility of each person to make their own lives better. When you choose to let go of regrets, anger, and other negative feelings that stem from the past, you free yourself.

All of us can agree that we want something more out of life, but many times, we leave it at that broad, sweeping concept with a vague meaning. You might say, “I wish I had more and was happier.” This could mean just about anything and doesn't

give you much to go on, and this will cause you to be stagnant. When we have a grand idea but do not know how to approach it, we tend to avoid it. To relieve yourself of this tension, ask yourself what you can do at this moment. Remember that you do not need to take on every part of a goal immediately. It is better to focus on one part of it at a time, so you do not become overwhelmed.

Begin to pinpoint exactly what area in your life that you are dissatisfied with and want to improve. When the feelings of unhappiness come on, what area of your life comes to mind first? Let's say it is because there is something you want to create that you have not done yet. You want to learn to paint but do not know where to start. You dream of having your own creations hung up in various parts of your house or even about selling them and having your art shared with the rest of the world.

Let's go over some of the things you feel are holding you back from doing this. You might think you do not have time or would not be able to sell anything. You might doubt yourself and your ability to ever get the hang of it. This makes it so that there is nervousness surrounding starting out. Now you know what is behind your hesitation to start, you can work towards getting to a point where you no longer are held back by those barriers.

You have gone over the reasons you should not try to learn to paint. Now let's try to flip those arguments over and find reasons that you should. For one, if you have an inclination to paint, it means there is a willingness to learn. This means it is possible for you to become proficient in it. If you do not give it a try, you will always wonder what could have become of it. There is certainly some disappointment involved when you try something, and it doesn't work out, but true regret, the kind

that eats away at your mind, comes never giving something a try. That will be the type of disappointment that you will truly never get over. If you don't manage to make a career out of painting, you will eventually move past it.

Changing your brain is about bringing something out that is already within you. You probably do not realize how much untapped potential you have. For example, you might not think you have what it takes to develop math skills, but think about the fact that there was a time that you did not know how to add or subtract, but now you do. This means you have the propensity to learn equations if you want to, and all other manners of skills that come with this.

There is a power we gain the moment we recognize that we can either hold ourselves back or push ourselves forward. You are the only one who can truly stop you from doing what you want to do. We can create reasons in our minds that we cannot do something. You might think there is a force that will not let you. We settle into frustrating but still comfortable ideas that we are not in control of our own lives. For some people, this becomes a safe haven.

The upside to letting others control your life is that you do not need to hold yourself accountable if you are unhappy with your life because the culpability for this lies with other people. The person can then think about what they could have been if other people, circumstances, and an assortment of factors had not held them back.

However, it is a double-edged sword, because in exchange for that lack of accountability, you will have to sign up to always feel miserable. When you let go of the controls in your life, there will come the point where they really are out of your hands. Think about when there is a sale going on at a store. It

will only go on for a certain amount of time. If you wait until after the time has passed, the opportunity to take advantage of the sale will no longer be in your hands.

If you want something, you need to go after it with everything you have. You might need to carve out the time for it meaning other things will need to be sacrificed. Other expenditures might need to be cut for it. There could be things you need to sacrifice for it. If you want something, there are things that will need to be given up to get it. Wanting a music career means weekends will need to be filled with auditions instead of spending time with friends. If you want to write, you will have to set aside the time to do it instead of other pastimes. Getting ahead in your career will require a sacrifice of time.

Changing your brain is not about pressuring yourself to become a distinguished genius. It is about doing the best you can every day. Sometimes it will be a little more or less than others, but when you feel like you have taken every measure possible to be an effective force in your life, you will find yourself able to sleep much easier because you will be free of anxiety or regret.

Think about that coworker who is always on top of things. He or she walks in every day looking put-together and with a smile on their face. They go through every assignment with apparent ease and even seem to enjoy doing it. They never seem to be affected by stress or have an off day. I can assure you that neither of those things is true.

If you are wondering how those “super-employees” do it, the answer is simple. They put their work first. One of the most important things they do is leave their problems at the door when they walk into the workplace so that they do not have an impact on their work. I know this can be hard to do, especially

is the said personal problem is a big one, but also think about this. When you are at work, there is nothing you can do about your personal life. If you try to sort things out with a friend or significant other while you are still on the clock, your boss will notice this, and it will not impress them. You will also get behind on your work because your time will be consumed with this, and this will lead to you having more problems than you started the day out with. Whatever else you need to catch up on, causing that same situation for what you are currently doing will not help.

Another thing successful people do is take things upon themselves, otherwise known as showing initiative. Think about how that person reacts when the boss says there is someone who needs to take on an extra task. While others groan and hope that they are not the ones who are called upon, they raise their hand and volunteer to do it. They do not see these things as a burden but as an opportunity. If they pull this off and do it well, they will have proven themselves to be a valuable asset because it says a lot to a business manager when an employee of theirs puts out good work and goes the extra mile. When they do not have to drag work out of someone or chase them for it, and they know that there are people who they can just rely on to do what they said they were going to do, they remember that. Of course, there are some employers who will take advantage of that, and you need to be able to spot them out so that you can begin crafting your exit strategy, but the majority of them do not do that. This is how successful people make good things for themselves. They craft a reputation for themselves as being reliable and kind, and therefore they become liked by others. They are trusted with bigger responsibilities and, therefore, are placed in higher positions. This is why you have to take it with a grain of salt

when a person tells you that hard work and putting in effort gets you nowhere. For one, they might not have tried as hard as they think they did because we do have a tendency to tell our stories in a way that paints us in the best light. Those who get ahead by cheating and cutting corners are often found out, and then they lose what they had.

You may not be able to change your brain overnight, but you can start the journey today. You can say, “I am not going to engage in thoughts and behaviors that are harmful to my health, success, and relationships anymore.”

Whenever our brains work in a way that harms us instead of helping us, one of a number of things can be at play here, or a few of them are working together at once. You might not have found the means of learning that best suits you yet. Maybe there is a negative belief you hold about yourself. You might need to let go of some things from the past that you feel poorly about when you look back on. Whatever the problem is, the answer is in your brain. You might think this is not true because that seems to be what has been causing so much trouble for you all this time, but remember that your brain belongs to you, not the other way around. Picture a car being taken to the wash after a long time of being neglected in this department. The wash takes in a vehicle that is covered in dirt and an unpleasant sight to see. After the car has been worked on, it comes out looking shiny and new. I am going to show you how to do the same thing with the vehicle that drives your thoughts and therefore influences your actions.

NEUROPLASTICITY



WHEN I SAID, you can form, break, and alter connections in your brain, that was no exaggeration. You can alter the way thoughts enter your mind and how you interpret them. This is because as powerful of an organ as your brain is, it is also pliable. That is why our sets of beliefs have a tendency to change over time. Even if not entirely, you begin to think of exceptions to rules you once thought were steadfast or be able to understand where the other side is coming from. All of this is evidence that the brain is not meant to be fixed.

It is necessary for the way you think to be pliable. Of course, this does not mean you are able to be led any way someone else would want you to, but you do want to be able to see things from another standpoint than your own. You will need it to communicate effectively with others. Your interactions with them will be much more successful; they feel like they are being heard by you. When you have conflict with those close to you, both of you need to be able to understand why the other feels the way they feel so you can reach a compromise. Also, as time goes by, the social climate changes. Think about how there is a tone for every decade. Even within the past couple of years, the population as a whole has changed the way it thinks, and as a result, you must keep up with the social climate of the current times so you can avoid awkward

situations or appearing tone-deaf. This is how people avoid voicing their opinions in a way that comes across as insensitive so that you can navigate through your social life and interactions in your career with ease. Over time, we need to learn different kinds of verbiage to communicate in a way that we will be understood, which means our entire speech patterns will undergo changes.

This might sound contradictory to what I said before about not needing to change as a person, so I will clarify. I am not talking about changing your entire personality or belief system. You can present the exact same personality and belief system that you always have, but word them in a different way to match the socially acceptable vocabulary of the time.

Another way that changing your brain is important to your success is that you will continue to need to learn new skills. Not only that, but what you have already learned to evolve over time. Think about how when you were learning certain concepts in school, such as algebra, it was sometimes difficult for your parents to help you because the way you are being expected to learn it is different from the way it was taught to them back when they were your age. There is also the fact that there are many jobs that are not in demand or even do not exist anymore because technology has evolved past the point where they are necessary, or at least in the way that they were operated at the time. This means those who were once in those career fields will need to adjust to this change and move on to a field that is currently more palatable.

Finally, the ability to change the way you think is necessary for your own personal development. Say you want to become a person who knows how to play an instrument or steer a boat, or do anything else that would increase your happiness and make you into a more well-rounded person. It is easy to laugh

those thoughts off, thinking it could never happen for you. “How could I ever learn to play an instrument like my favorite musician?” The answer is exactly the way they did it. No matter which legendary musician you think of, there was a first time they had picked that instrument up, meaning they knew no more about it than you do right now. After they rehearsed it enough times, it got to the point where they did not mind getting onto a stage in front of an untold number of people, and they did not have to consciously think about which keys to press or which chords to strum as it came to a point where it was as intuitive to them as walking or talking, both of which are things we had to learn as well.

This leads to a concept known as neuroplasticity. You are probably already beginning to make connections between this term and the words “neurons” and “plastic.” If so, you have hit the nail on the head. Neurons are the nerves in your brain that carry messages to its various parts. They are the reason we have coherent thoughts and are able to make connections between them. If we are exposed to information enough times and take it in, we can retain untold amounts of it in our minds. Of course, plastic is a material commonly used in the creation of something that is meant to be bendable. Together, the two words add up to the idea that it is possible to ply our brains to work in the way we want them to. If you did not know of this word before, but now understand what it means, then congratulations! You have already begun to practice the concept. You read a new word, processed it in your mind, and attached a meaning to it. You have strengthened your brain and increased your knowledge.

If you do not think your mind is an amazing thing that has the capacity to grow into something more powerful than you could imagine, think about this. Everyone has that one movie that is

near and dear to their hearts, and they could never watch it enough times. If you had to, you could recite the entire thing off the top of your spot with no need for notes or reminders. That is about an hour and a half or maybe even closer to two hours worth of information that you have memorized perfectly. Think of all of the songs you know by heart, to the point where you can recognize them on the first note. Go back to those cartoons you watched in your childhood and how you managed to memorize all of the different kinds of made-up animals and monsters featured in it, even if there were hundreds of them.

How many times have you dreamed of picking up a new hobby that sounds interesting, but did not give it a try because you did not know if you could ever get the hang of it? Now is the time to give up that thinking. It is not about having a talent level that is beyond you. It is about the ability to commit to learning something new. Any time you think you cannot learn a skill that you want to have, revisit those memories and think about how much brainpower those feats took. When you were learning the names of those cartoon monsters, that was neuroplasticity. Any time you learn or unlearn something, again, you are practicing neuroplasticity.

Unfortunately, there is a downside to all of it, and it is crucial to learn what it is and how to combat it. I feel that it is important to address this aspect of it quickly because it is the source of most people's hindrances that keep them from becoming the person they want to be. Those insecurities and personality quirks we wish we did not have do not appear randomly- we learn them. You might think that is a crazy idea. Surely if we had to practice and learn how to become the way we are, we would not consciously choose to take on behaviors that have an ill effect on our lives. The answer is that we are

not entirely in control of what we learn. There are other factors, people, and circumstances that come into play when we are shaped as people.

During our upbringings, we learn and discover many amazing things. However, there are also lessons we are taught that are inaccurate, and if we carry them into our adult life, they will negatively impact the way we interact with the world and the people around us, which will hinder our success. It is no secret that children take problems in their families onto themselves. For example, a child has parents who argue much more often than a couple should. The child often hears this discord and notices that their name comes up regularly in their parents' arguments. This causes them to think, "I'm the reason Mom and Dad do not get along. That means I am a bad child." This pattern of thinking results in their self-esteem plummeting. Because they do not place a high value on themselves, they are willing to accept bad treatment from other people and do not expect much out of them. They have learned to think this way over a long time of conditioning.

Now let's move on to the bright side. The person in this example has come to dislike themselves because of a series of thoughts that have played in their minds repeatedly throughout their life. Those thoughts are bits of information, which are what keeps this unhealthy mindset going. This means if they were to make an effort to place new thoughts into their mind- "I was not at fault for my parent's arguments, and I am not a bad person"- they would be able to gain confidence. As a result, they would require better treatment from other people, and in turn, the quality of their interpersonal relationships would increase dramatically, resulting in a better quality of life for them. If the way you see yourself has led to low self-esteem, that means you can reverse this effect.

While events in our life can rewire our brains, we have the power to do the same thing. This means you can literally make your brain work the way you want it to. Yes, it is true that when something bad happens in your life, it can rewire your brain. This is why outside forces so often play a large role in how we feel about ourselves. The environment around us affects our internal process. It explains the tendency for people to take on what they were told during their childhood into their adult life. It is extremely easy for a person to become insecure about an aspect of themselves due to it being instilled by someone as they become older.

Keep in mind that this does not have to result from a major trauma. Let's say a person was made fun of in school for some aspect of the way they look, such as their choice of clothing. As they get older, they might find themselves calling every outfit they put together into question because they do not feel like they know what looks good and what does not. They are basing their opinion of themselves on the words of others. They are not taking into consideration the fact that children can be cruel without provocation at times- people, in general, have the capacity for this. They also are not considering the possibility that the other child might have felt jealousy toward them for being able to afford clothes that they could not, so they felt a need to tear their self-esteem down.

It might seem far-fetched to imagine that you taught yourself to engage in negative self-talk, but that is what happens when our thoughts are allowed to run unsupervised. Here is what all of this negative thinking ultimately traces back to- there was one thought that came through your mind, and you paid too much attention to it. Let's say a child is trying to learn how to ride a bike, and they just can't seem to get the concept of it. They keep falling over. This causes them to think, "I can't do

anything right, I'm stupid, so I shouldn't try to do new things." They latch onto that thought using their struggles with learning to ride the bike as evidence for this statement. This pattern of thought goes on because it is not stopped, making it so that when they get the thought of picking up a new hobby or activity, they talk themselves out of doing so because they do not believe they will be able to do it right. In this case, neuroplasticity has happened, but it was used in a negative way. The thoughts and actions were repetitive until they created an automatic result.

Neuroplasticity can be used to work either in your favor or against you. In the example above, let's say the alternative happens- the child questions themselves because of their difficulties with the bicycle. Instead of succumbing to the part of their mind that tells them they are incompetent, they instead decide to think, "So what if I'm having a hard time learning something. This doesn't mean I can't learn it or that I'm not smart. Everyone struggles with something. This is just what I personally will have to put a little extra time into." Notice how this child does not personalize their previous failure. Just because something goes wrong does not mean you need to attribute it to yourself. Let's say you watched a video of your favorite singer missing a high note that they usually soar over. Would this make you think less of them or take back your regard for their talent? You would understand that they made a mistake and move on from it. Show the same kind of courtesy to yourself.

Changing your outlook on yourself and learning new thought patterns is going to take commitment. You will not be able to say, "I'm going to stop doubting myself" one time and then be able to walk into any room like you own the place. When you first begin this journey, every step will be difficult. You will

have to talk yourself up to greet new people, and sometimes you will have setbacks. This will require tenacity. If you want to increase your confidence and social skills, you will need to work on them daily. This means making as many conversations as possible, which is going to be daunting at first. I am not going to lie to you. You are going to get tired of all of this practice. It will become boring and frustrating. There will be a period of time where you are putting in a great deal of work but not seeing the results you want to. However, there is no shortcut to self-improvement. There is no such thing as having one big breakthrough and then never having another problem again. The moment when you are feeling like this is the big “make it or break it” moment for whether you are able to go through with these changes or not because this is the true spirit of accomplishment.

When we see another person’s success, we only get a small glimpse of the story that does not go over any of the buildup to it. When you read a bestselling novel, you are reading the final product which is now being celebrated by the masses. You did not see the rough drafts that were ripped apart as the person tried to conceptualize the setting, characters and story, or the number of rejections that they got along the way. When you see an Olympic athlete accept their award, you do not see where they began at, the rigorous exercise routines they had to go through just to get into the kind of shape that those sorts of athletic feats were possible. After that would come the trials and errors of trying to complete them. There was without a doubt, lots of falling down and perhaps even sustaining injuries.

With this in mind, do not feel discouraged if you do not see results for your efforts. It is not because you aren’t as capable as other people. It is not the world trying to tell you that you

are not cut out to do this. You are just at the beginning of your journey to success. When you look at those people who “made it,” many of them went through everything you are going through right now and then some. When you are putting forth effort, whether you believe it or not, you are conjuring up results. Imagine someone practicing archery. Even if they did not hit the mark they wanted to, they are still gaining experience when they practice. As time goes on, they will notice they are making it closer to their target every time. Eventually, their aim will be exact. It will take more than just a few major practice sessions. There will need to be many practice sessions.

Keep in mind that where you are by the end of today is not as far as you are going to get. A common thing for people to do is to feel like they have to get something done in a very fixed and rigid amount of time, even if that is not the case. With these imaginary deadlines set, they place a tremendous amount of stress onto themselves and if they do that meet that deadline, they will become very discouraged. This is why you need to recognize every bit of progress you make and give yourself a proper reward. Think back to when you were given a gold star or a piece of candy in class as a reward for behaving well or getting a good grade. This spurred you on to keep going. You liked the positive affirmations you got for these things, which caused you to do them more often, so that became the behavior you naturally gravitated towards.

You might have noticed by now that I am continuously bringing up examples that have to do with early childhood and school days, and there is a reason for this. The shaping of our brains begins when we are first born. In its first moments of life, a baby is taking in and interpreting new information even with the limited skill sets that it has. Neuroplasticity is a

lifelong process, which means you have been doing it all along, even if this is the first time you have ever heard of the concept. Sometimes we need to revert back to things we learned and discussed many years ago to understand something that is happening to us now. Any time you were trying to learn a new skill and transferred your knowledge of one you already know to it in order to figure out a solution to the problem, you were using this concept.

Just as connections strengthen with use, they weaken when they have been neglected. This can also be used to your advantage. There are going to be things you do not want to remember as clearly, or that you do not want at the forefront of your mind all of the time, such as a pattern of talking badly about yourself. To stop having a recurring thought, we need to essentially “forget” about it. Whenever we stop thinking about something, it no longer becomes such a large presence in our minds. Take the ebb and flow of your social circle, for instance. The people you talk to every day are the ones you are going to think about the most. If you have not seen someone in a long time, you are going to start forgetting things about them because they are a part of the past, and your mind is preoccupied with what is going on in the present. Whenever your current circle of friends has a poor influence on you, it is time to find a new one. Similarly, sometimes we need a new circle of thoughts because the ones you have are bringing you down.

It is important to talk about how to control one of the most unpleasant aspects of having the ability to remember, and that is being reminded of something you want to forget. It can be as big as having said something very hurtful to someone or as small as tripping over in public. If you have ever relived an embarrassing memory, I do not need to tell you that it is an

unpleasant experience and one you feel like you cannot get away from. Telling it to go away is going to have the opposite effect. That is why you need to distract yourself from it. You might need to say a phrase out loud to break the spell. You know that feeling when you have all kinds of thoughts running around in your mind, and they seem to be battering your head? That is a clear sign that you are becoming overcome with anxiety.

Imagine a teacher who has let their students have control over the classroom for too long. They have not set strict rules in place, and therefore the students know they can get away with anything. The teacher will have to know that it will take more than just one intervention, where they announce that things are going to change in this classroom before they see actual improvements in their students' behavior. They will need to make good on this resolve. The children will need to know that if they disrupt the lecture, they will lose privileges such as playtime. You will need to apply the same concept to your brain and the unhealthy thoughts that are currently circling through it.

In the previous chapter, we talked about learning how to paint. Now, I'm going to explain to you how neuroplasticity would apply to it and therefore expanding the capacity of your brain. When you first begin a tutorial, it is probably not going to look much like the example. The first attempt rarely goes well, so do not get discouraged or feel like you are not cut out for painting. Remember that the first painting of a famous artist was not the one they are the most renowned for. It took them years of practice to get to that place. Keep a sense of humor about this. Laugh about your mistakes, and don't take this stage of your work too seriously. The next time you try, there are still some mistakes but you notice some improvement-

there were fewer times where your brush strokes fell out of line and your coloring was more effectively done. As you practice more, you will get the hang of it more. If you keep going, you will get to the point where you have created a coherent picture. Let's say you figure out you like to paint flowers. At first, it might be difficult to integrate the petals together to make a believable looking flower, but as you go on, you start to find little shortcuts and techniques. You find that paintings that were once very difficult to replicate have become simple to do.

This is neuroplasticity in action. That is how people who are proficient in their work make difficult jobs seem effortless. When you see a professional painter create a masterpiece, they have gone through this process so many times that they do not even have to think about it consciously anymore. They have completely learned the mechanics of painting so they can just focus on the creative aspect of it. That is why singers often find that they can hit the more complicated notes to a song when they could not previously because they knew the lyrics. Now that they know what to say, they can focus on the notes. In neuroplasticity, as you go on to learn more, you can take more on. When you gain knowledge, you expand your knowledge.

When skills and talents are not used, they will fade away. Think about when you are trying to recreate a dance routine that you previously knew by heart because you practiced it every day. Now a few years have passed, and that has caused your memories of it to be fuzzy, and as a result, you have a hard time going through it.

It is more than just mentally recollecting events. There is a physical aspect to it. Thinking back to the dance routine, your body itself knew what to do. In this way, we are changing our

makeup down to our bodies. That is how much control we have. This is why I earlier compared our minds to a car. It may be the force that drives you where you want to go, but you have the steering wheel in your hands. It cannot go anywhere that you do not urge it to. You can decide what you learn and what you unlearn.

Now let's talk about ways to keep your mind in top condition. Did you know doing something as simple as reading a book can be a part of using neuroplasticity? You should spend at least half an hour every day reading to keep your brain active. It doesn't always have to be the most cerebral of books. In fact, it can be a silly story. As long as you are immersing yourself into a book, you are giving your neurons the workout they need and deserve. If you think about it, reading takes a great deal of mental force. Broken down to its basics, a book is a string of words jumbled together to form some kind of message for the reader to discover. It could be a fictional tale or a means of informing others about true events, but either way, several parts of your brain must work together to process these messages. You must use your sense of sight to collect the information, and then you have to create a mental picture of what is going on.

When you are reading, take your time and challenge yourself to make the image you create very vivid. Let's say you are reading about a young girl who lives on a farm and is going out to feed the chickens. Try to imagine what the girl looks like, what color her hair is, and other details until you have imagined a person's face. Picture her walking out the front door of her house and imagine the layout of the place. Think about whether it is a big or small farm. Imagine the chickens running to get their share of feed. This is how reading can keep your mind sharp.

In the first chapter, I mentioned the possibility of a person not having yet discovered their optimum learning style. Now I am going to tell you what I was talking about. As of current times, the art of learning has been broken down into four subsections. Each type has its own set of strengths and weaknesses, which means there is no one type that is better or worse than the others. It does not mean any one learner is smarter, or that one is below.

The first type we are going to talk about is those who are visual learners. These are the type who benefit the best from things like flashcards and anything that requires you to see the information drawn in a picture. When their eyes take it in, they can understand what it means.

The second type is the auditory learner. They remember the things they hear the most. You can either hear the information from someone else or yourself, which is why if you need to remember something, you should say it out loud the number of times that it takes to memorize it.

Third, we have the reading and writing learners. The name explains the concept- these people need to write something down to memorize it. For them, they need to go through the motion of putting something down on paper to soak it in. It is a means of practicing, and if they read something, they are much more likely to remember it than the other categories of learning.

The fourth and final type of learner is the kinesthetic, or hands-on learner. This means they need to do it themselves to learn how to do it. If you are going to explain to them how to make a certain recipe, they will need to be the one to do it while you stand behind them and talk them through it. The experience of having done it themselves solidifies the memory.

Discovering which type of learner you are will go a long way in changing your brain. You will now have more power than you ever have before, because you will now know what you need to do when you want to learn something new. You will not waste time trying to learn new things in a way that does not suit you and then feeling bad about yourself because of it. Audios will not help a hands-on learner. A reading and writing person will become confused by hands-on techniques. When we figure out who we are, we find out how to do the best for ourselves.

Last but most certainly not least, you need to hone the power of mindfulness. To explain this concept, think about when you were given an assignment that needed to be handed in quickly, and so the person giving it to you said: “you need to be mindful of your time.” This meant you needed to keep a clock nearby so that you could be aware of how much time has passed so that you do not let it get away from you. This is the ultimate theme of mindfulness- being aware of what is going on around you. When you focus on what is taking place in the present, you make it so that your attention is focused on things you can have a direct impact on. You do not lose track of time, and therefore, you use the moments you have in a day in the most productive way possible.

You cannot work on your present and future if you do not remain in it. Whatever you are doing, make it the center of your world at this moment. This is especially important when you are doing work that you are not excited about but is important. Imagine you have a long college paper to write about a subject that does not interest you. It may not be your ideal way to spend your time, but it is necessary that you put work into it because you need to get a decent score on it to pass the class and therefore get your degree. This means when

you set aside time to work on it, you need to eliminate distractions. If you have the TV going on in the background that is not bad, as some need some sort of noise to do their work, but it is a good idea not to choose something overly riveting, otherwise it will steal your attention from what you are trying to do. If you want to do this, try putting on something you have already seen before. Therefore you already know what is going to happen and you will not be as tempted to watch instead of work.

Only surround yourself with things that will truly contribute to your ability to think and learn. To immerse yourself into something, you must eliminate all distractions that could pull you out of that. This means we need to get a handle on how we use our technology.

To learn, simply take in what is around you. Stay in the moment you are in right now and on the task at hand. When you do this, it is a guarantee that you will learn anything you want to and become whatever kind of person you dream of being.

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH, HOW THEY RELATE



IT IS impossible to be feeling poorly physically but not mentally, or the other way around. All aspects of our health tie together. It makes sense when you compare it to a hive of bees. If one function of them are struggling, it will have an impact on the entire hive's ability to produce honey. Also, think about how within our own bodies, the different systems are connected with one another. Every system contributes to the foundation.

Taking care of yourself physically is a way of practicing the art of placing value on yourself. For many of us, we need to be reminded to do that every so often. We want to try to be everything for everyone at all times. We want to always be there when our friends are having a problem and need someone to talk to. Parents have a near constant worry in the back of their minds about not being able to fulfill all of their children's needs. In turn, children feel the pressure of getting good grades in school and behaving in a way that makes their parents proud. For those in the workforce, a thought that takes up a great deal of their day is wondering what else they could have done today to make themselves valuable at work and staying in their boss's good grace. People who are currently unemployed have a lot of guilt because they feel like they are not pulling their weight in the house, and so the job hunt

becomes a stressful event for them because they are under pressure to find work to help support their family. Where, in all of this, do you come in?

You might think you can maintain physical health without monitoring your mental health, but I want you to imagine this. You have made a resolution to exercise more. You start out feeling great about it. You have more energy and see differences in the way your body looks. This spurs you to go on. Then a disappointing event happens in your life. Let's say you go through a breakup. This is depressing and has an impact on how much you value yourself because many times, people think they must have done something wrong if they have been broken up with. On the day of the breakup, the last thing on your mind is working out because you just want to go home and go to bed. The next day, you tell yourself you are just going to take the day off because of everything that happened yesterday. Then you decide you need just one more day. This pattern keeps up until a week has gone by. At this point, you do have the energy you once did. Your mind is wrapped up in the breakup, and this, in turn, causes you to feel depressed. When this all comes together, you neglect working out altogether, which causes you to go right back to square one. At this point, it is needless to say that physical and mental health are closely related. To maintain one, the other must be kept in working order.

As is depicted by the example above, we do not have an urge to do things that are for our betterment when we are feeling depressed. In the most recent example, the person might think, "What is the point of working out? There's no one to look good for, and no one would want me anyways at this point." This type of thinking is flawed for a whole set of reasons. We will never uphold self-care and improvement

whenever our motivation is outside of us. These sources are not constant. If you are getting into shape as an attempt to preserve a relationship and it does not last, you will have lost the foundation upon which you built your drive to keep it up, which means it will quickly fall apart. There's nothing wrong with wanting to attract a partner, but you must take this one step at a time. We have to become something that the things we want gravitate towards. If you feel negative about yourself, you are not going to attract the kind of partner you want. This has to happen from the inside out. You start working out so you will be healthier. When you start to like the way you look, your self-esteem will increase and as a result, you will be happier. When this happens, you will exude positivity and that will make positive people want to meet you.

Your physical health has a direct and deep impact on your mood. Think about when you have not had something to eat in a long time. You are feeling irritable, and this will not change until the next time you eat. When you have not gotten enough sleep, it will be easier for you to make mistakes because your brain will not be operating at its full capacity.

Your physical and mental health are life partners. When one goes, so does the other. I am not saying this to scare you. I am saying this so that you will take it seriously. Too often, we push ourselves past our limits because we feel like we need to. We will be feeling tired and overspent, but still think "if I could just get this final project done" or "my friend called me, and they really sounded desperate. I know I'm feeling tired, but I should go over there and help them because it's the right thing to do."

Earlier we talked about those facing unemployment and the psychological effects that tend to come to them. They are probably feeling downtrodden, and it is hard for them to have

a sense of pride. When we do not feel good for ourselves, it is easy for us to become lax on brushing our hair, being selective about what we wear, and other things that promote hygiene and taking time for yourself. You might be convinced that there is no point in doing these things because you do not feel successful.

When you are trying to get to the next point in your career is exactly when you should take the most care of yourself so you can put your best foot forward. If you do not keep your mind well, you will not present yourself in a way that tells potential employers that you are a good candidate for the position. If you go into the interview looking haggard, your first impression will already have suffered. You want to walk in looking your best and putting forward an image of confidence so that they like what they see. Do not feel discouraged if you think your resume looks sparse. Even the most prolific businesspeople in the world had to have a first job.

Consider self-care as an aspect of your job hunt. Do not think of beauty regimens and clothes that flatter you like things that you do not deserve. You do not like where you are now and want to get to a different place in your life. Depriving yourself is going to keep you right where you are. Doing things to enrich yourself will help you make the changes you want to make in your life. Place yourself into the perspective of an interviewer. The first person you meet walks in with their eyes cast down and looking downtrodden. Their clothes are mismatched, and they look like they got ready at the last minute. They talk about themselves in an unfavorable manner, pointing out how much of an employment gap they have and how they are not sure if they have any valuable skills. They keep looking at the clock, obviously wanting this to be over. They leave, and the next person who comes in is dressed

professionally and obviously picked out their outfit well in advance. They walk with their head held high and look the interviewer in the eye. They seem to be excited to answer the questions they are asked and have creative ways of describing their contributions to previous companies, and they are not afraid to give themselves praise. This would be the person you would be more likely to hire.

I also painted that example to demonstrate that no good comes out of spending time feeling ashamed about what you have not yet accomplished. To preserve your mental health, I urge you not to compare your progress to that of other people in your position as you search for a job. Their set of circumstances are completely different from yours. For some people, they know what they want to do and find a way to it quickly. For other people, it takes them some time to find their footing. Consider where you live compared to where your friends do. If they are in a large city, but you live in a more remote area, it will only be natural that they will have an advantage because there are more buildings and therefore more job opportunities. There are also times where people just happen to come across the right thing when they first come out of the gate. They might have a parent who is a prominent figure in a company or have some other social luxury that you have not been afforded. However, if you just keep on in your search, there will be a breakthrough. There will be something on your resume that catches someone's interest. It isn't possible to put forth consistent and quality effort towards something and not get anywhere with it.

If you have recently become unemployed in the midst of a global crisis, you cannot blame yourself for it. Sometimes unfortunate things just happen. It is not because you did not try hard enough to keep your job. It is not the end for you. You

will find employment in the future, and your life will reach stability once again.

Let's talk about one of the most integral parts of physical health, which is diet. For one thing, make sure that what you are eating puts actual nutrition into your body. Sometimes we will grab whatever junk we can find because we do not feel like we have the time or energy to have a substantial meal. You need to make time for your health because it is more important than anything. Your life depends on this. There is only a fixed amount of time that you can refuse to take care of yourself and not have consequences. When you change your diet, it is tempting to arrange it with weight loss in mind. This is a bad idea because you cannot expect yourself to keep on going even if you do not give yourself things to sustain on. Instead of eating less, think about choosing better foods. I can assure you that when you start habitually eating foods that contain less fat and more nutritional value, weight loss will occur, and it will be in a better way. It isn't as much about lowering the number on the weight scale as it is about toning up.

Self-care is something you will need to make a commitment to that you reaffirm whenever you slip up. Life can get in the way of putting yourself first, but when this happens, you need to gently take yourself back to that place. You should put yourself first. It is not a bad thing. If you do not, your entire foundation will be shaky.

When you pay attention to your body's needs, you will find yourself getting sick less often. More often than not, whenever we get sick, it has at least a little bit to do with not properly taking care of ourselves. This is because illness has the most opportunity to get to us whenever our immune system is weakened, and our body is not strong enough to fight

infection. Usually, this means we have been working too hard, staying up too late and not giving back to ourselves.

There are times you need to give yourself a lighter workload than you usually do out of consideration for the fact that you are not feeling your best. Obviously, there are areas of life that you don't have the option of faltering in- work, family responsibilities, etc. However, there are some things you can say no to. If someone asks a favor of you, and it would put you out and make you unable to complete your most pressing tasks with the dedication and attention they need, you must say no to this person. It is not being inconsiderate to them. Actually, it is the opposite. That way, they will not be given work that was done in a rush by someone who never had time for it. You will be doing right by yourself as well.

Another reason you need to pay attention to what is happening in your body is that your body is trying to tell you something about your mental health using physical signs. Think about all of the physical symptoms involved with a panic- erratic heartbeat, sweating palms, shaking limbs, some people even deal with chest pains. This is why sufferers have checked themselves into the emergency room before because they legitimately thought they were having a heart attack. That is how closely an affliction of the mind can mimic a physical disorder.

Let's go back to the example of feeling tired. It may be true that not every time you are tired does it mean you are feeling depressed, but whenever that is the case, you will invariably be hit with fatigue. You might have bought some plants that you planned to put in pots to decorate your house with, and then when you get home, you do not feel the energy to it. This isn't because you are unable to plant some flowers. It is a psychological issue. Problems within your mind will set

physical limitations on your body. When you are feeling unwell in your mind, you will be wondering why you never have enough energy to do anything. You might begin to wonder if you have some variation of chronic fatigue or something even worse. You begin to type in any symptom you have into an internet search engine. Before you do this and read something frightening, consider the idea that you need a mental health day.

You have probably often heard people talk about needing mental health days in a joking fashion, but they are something everyone needs once in a while. In fact, when you can manage it, you need to make a point to make at least one day out of your week a mental health day. Do not let too many weeks go by in a row without one.

Every once in a while throughout your day, do a physical check-in. Make sure you are breathing deeply and evenly. If you have been holding your breath, change that. Check on your jaw, which many people clench when they are feeling nervous. Relax it and think about your energy levels. If they are feeling low, you might be feeling a little spent. Take just a moment to lean your head back, take in a deep breath, and close your eyes. Remain like this for a moment or so, minding your breath and systematically relaxing all of your muscles. Allow your mind to wander off somewhere else that is pleasant and does not require the spending of energy. Where is the best place you have ever gone as a vacation? It might have been somewhere with a beach. Think about the color of the water and remember the way the waves hit the shore. You might have been lying on a hammock or sitting on a chair underneath an umbrella, sipping on a fruity beverage. Maybe you were listening to music or reading a book. Did you go out to the water? If so, remember the way the sand felt between

your toes and when you were immersed in the water. Think about the decadent food you ate there and the fact that you were able to set aside any burdens that were weighing on you right then. Think about any aspect of that trip that was endearing to you and conjure it up.

When you ease yourself back to reality, you might notice a distinct difference in the way you feel- considerably more tranquil within your mind. That was the main purpose of this exercise, to shut down the excessive noise that goes on in a mind when it is under stress. This means your depleted mental resources were given a chance to replenish, which is why you feel rejuvenated and like you had a nice power nap even if you did not go to sleep. Your brain was able to relax and reset, and now you will be able to return to your work with a mindset that lends itself to the type of productivity that leads to putting out good work.

I want to really drive the importance of getting a proper sleep home. Did you know that getting poor sleep makes your brain shrink in size? This is why you are forgetful when you slept fitfully. When a person is tired enough, they will have a hard time even remembering their closest friends' names. It sets the tone for your entire day.

There will be times that sickness is spreading around more often than usual, and the severity of it is more. It can be easy to become afraid during these times, and your instinct might be to panic. However, you do not need to do this. Stress makes you more susceptible to sickness to begin with. For one thing, it compromises your immune system, and for another thing, it often influences you to neglect your self-care regimen. This might seem strange because the sole focus of your worries is about your health, but the irony of obsessing about possible illness is that when we do it, we are not actually doing much to

prevent it. When we are extremely distressed about something, we tend to be inactive. We will lay awake at night, disturbed by our thoughts and imagining everything that could go wrong. You might cough, sneeze, or repeatedly press your hand to your forehead to feel for warmth and this tendency of counting and monitoring your symptoms will cause you to feel things that are psychosomatic- meaning you can actually have symptoms that mimic the disease you are fearful of.

There are alternatives to gaining energy when you need it. It can be tempting to have an energy drink for quick results, but over time, these can have a harmful impact on your body. Namely, it takes a toll on your heart. A better way to boost your energy levels is by taking B12 tablets. The effect is less noticeable, but it is longer-lasting, and you will not have to deal with the “crashing” effect later. B12 is a natural chemical produced by the body, so you will not be taking something artificial that forces a reaction.

When you make the commitment to go to bed, you will need to hold fast to it. If someone tries to call or message you, it can wait. There is nothing you can do for them at this point. When you pull yourself out of sleep mode, it is extremely difficult to get back to that place. This is why when you get there, you must see it through until you are asleep.

It is a wonderful day when you make the decision to invest in your emotion and/or physical health. You understand how interconnected they are, and as you begin to work on one aspect of your overall health, you will start to notice improvements in other areas. You made decide to wake up each morning and go for a walk or do some exercise, and you cannot wait to start reaping the results. It is your first day, and you are excited, but while you want to make fast progress and start seeing your body change in a positive way, you need

temper your zeal deciding how much to start with. While increasing your routine over time is good, there is no short cut to good health.

Anyone who has ever let their ardor get the better of them when starting an exercise routine and woken up the next day barely able to move because they are so sore can attest to that. There are many types of exercise programs out there, but perhaps you choose one that involves weight training. It is very advisable to do the routine for the first couple of times with very little weight or no weight at all to acclimate your body to the movements you will be doing before adding weights. Once you have the motions down, you can start to add light weights. When you first begin a routine, particularly if you are attending a class with others who may be very experienced, you see that they move easily through the routine, and they are using more weight than you are. Try not to compete with that person, adding more weight than your body is ready for. Try to consider them as more of a mentor who you can watch to make sure you are using proper posture for your lifts and a goal for achievement.

In your first couple of weeks, you will start to notice that natural movements you do every day become easier. It is little things, like when you sit, you will feel the increased strength in your legs, and as you sit, your muscles engage, making you appear more graceful and in control. You might be tempted to start increasing the weight you use, but try to resist that urge and work on your form. Once you have your form down very well and you have an increased awareness of your movements, you can start to use more weight, little by little.

It will not be long before you start to notice your clothes are fitting you better with less binding areas. At first it will be hard to get up and go to your class, but soon you will hate it

when you cannot do it. Since you have taken your time and let this new and positive behavior become a habit, it has taken root in your life.

Think about that statement, “take root.” You cannot hurry a plant along in its process of growth though you can do things that promote it. by planting it in good soil, making sure it has plenty of water and sunlight as well as giving it plant food you are aiding it in the process of growth.

You can think of your own endeavors for health in that way. You can do things that advocate for your own health, such as getting plenty of sleep, eating better, drinking plenty of water and exercise, as well as cutting things like sweets and too much salt or alcohol out of your diet. However, you need to have some patience and stick to your budding healthy habits because while it cannot be rushed, your continued dedication to your health will bring you the outcome you desire.

The same can be said of emotional and mental health. Once you start on the journey to improve yourself in this way, you need to learn to be realistic as well as kind and respectful to yourself by not expecting too much too fast.

Start to support yourself the way you would for any friend by setting attainable goals and doing things that will make your goals attainable. Think about behaviors you can start that will help you deal with your stress better, like beginning or resuming a hobby. Stress can make us stop doing things that we love to do. Perhaps you enjoy photography or sewing, but you find quite a bit of time has passed since you did those things. Think about things you have been doing instead; are those things increasing your stress? Maybe you want to learn something new, like taking a cooking class or learning a language. The time that you invest in yourself will pay

dividends in your emotional and mental health. You are meditating regularly and giving more of yourself to people who are positive and can share good energy with you.

You will start to feel better soon, but remember quiet your mind if you start being overly critical or putting yourself on a time clock because there is no quick fix. However, strength builds in increments, so enjoy that feeling without letting your pace become a stressor.

Everyone needs someone to talk to during difficult times, so be sure to reach out if you need help. This might be friends and family, a religious leader, or a therapist but seek out the help you need to improve your mental health. Try not to approach it with a feeling of stigma. Remember, you are being kind to yourself, so think about how you would respond to a friend who stated that they needed emotional support. You would want any friend or family member to get the help they need, so allow yourself this help and resist feelings of shame.

Stick with it as you take the journey to better health and tolerate the time it takes to make your improvements with a vision of yourself living better and feeling well with a vision of yourself enjoying the success that will absolutely come.

MANAGING ANXIETY AND/OR DEPRESSION



CHANGING your brain means you need to keep your stress levels under control. This is because not only does it impact our health in both senses of the word, but it also takes up space in your mind. There are a number of reasons it inhibits your brain from functioning at its highest level. For one, it steals your ability to concentrate. You will not be paying attention to what is going on around you because your attention will be directed at whatever the source of your stress is. When you are feeling the effects of stress over a long time, it becomes the most active presence in your mind. It will take the wheel away from you if it is allowed to. It can even debilitate you because you can feel so much pressure that it is literally like a weight pulling down on you. You will feel unable to handle your daily life because doing anything will seem like too much. All you will want to do is lie in bed, and even then, you will still feel the symptoms- heart-pounding, limbs shaky, feelings that your world is going to implode at any second. You will not be able to eat or sleep. It will take over your life if it is not stopped.

There's no denying it- our lives are stressful. So often, we're on our way to work, getting prepared to host a family event, or cleaning a house that never seems to stay that way for an entire day. We're always on the go, which can lead to complications. There are also a lot of times where things

happen that disappoint us. You might find out someone you thought was your friend was secretly talking badly about you or that you didn't get your dream job. The never-ending load of pressure can make us fearful about if we do not live up to the expectations placed on us by others and ourselves. When we feel rejected or betrayed, it can make us lose hope.

I can imagine that you have heard about anxiety and depression quite a bit lately, but what are these things, exactly? You might feel afraid at first when I tell you these are emotional disorders. I am not implying that people with them are crazy, or that if you have either of them that you are at risk for doing something drastic. These are both extremely common conditions to have, so much that most people struggle with them at least some point in their life. There are times where life brings more stress than our threshold can deal with. You might be dealing with a family crisis or the end of a long-term relationship. Sometimes it isn't even one big tragedy, but a culmination of smaller stressful events that add up to overload.

Having a problem does not make you crazy. It makes you self-aware. Everyone has met a person who does not have this quality. Think about a person you have known who never held themselves responsible for anything. Any time something goes wrong for them, they blame it on the shortcomings of others, and therefore, they never get better. What you are doing does the opposite. You will begin to get a handle on this problem. It will start the moment you admit it is there.

Anxiety is often equated with feeling afraid. This is only a basic understanding of this condition. Even though they often fear outside circumstances, what they have the most dread about is being inside of their own mind because it comes up with all kinds of crazy and scary situations.

When people hear about depression, they usually think it means being sad all of the time. However, this is not really what it is about. Depression is about a lack of motivation. It is not about feeling sad as much as it is about the notion that things will stay exactly as they are, which the person with the disorder is not happy with. “Nothing will ever change or get better.” That is the sentiment that is constantly taken on by people who are suffering from depression.

While these disorders might seem like very powerful beings, they do not have to keep you down. I will show you how to keep that from happening. You are capable of combating these issues so you can be the one in control, not them.

Herein lies the major source of power that anxiety and depression hold. The sufferer does not feel like they have any control over the way they think or feel. To an extent, this might be true, but only on a surface level. We all have thoughts and even impulses that come to us out of the blue. We do not know how they got here, and they do not line up with what we want to feel or do, and that is precisely why they have so much power over us. To get a better understanding of how this is possible, imagine a child who has always gotten very high grades in all of their classes. Then they get into a class that they do not excel in. They are having a hard time comprehending the information they need to learn, and the grades they are getting are not what they are used to. This causes them to become fearful. They worry that they will not be able to move on to the next grade because of this class. Then the thought comes into their mind- maybe I am just stupid and that is why I am failing this class. What if I was only doing well in the other ones because they were easy and now I see how stupid I really am! All of their life, they have

thought of themselves as a good student and now things are happening to them to make them question that.

When someone is not happy with their life, a common response is that they should look on the bright side because other people are struggling with worse problems. This is not a fair thing to say to a person with this disorder because they do understand that their situation could be a great deal worse than it is. You know that others have it worse than you, but that doesn't mean your problems aren't significant.

In the case of both anxiety and depression, you will feel the urge to stay in one place that feels relatively safe all day, and you will not feel like doing anything. For depression, it is a special case, because the entire mission of this disorder is to make you feel drained of all energy. One of the biggest misconceptions about depression is the idea that it is about feeling sad all of the time. In reality, depression renders a person feeling emotionally bankrupt- meaning they have a hard time tapping into any sort of feeling. This creates a sense of numbness, which is the crux of the sufferer's internal turmoil. As humans, we want to feel emotions.

A strange thing happens when we are overstimulated. Let's say there is a worldwide crisis going on that has created a lot of changes in the daily lives of people as well as a sense of fear for their safety. There can come the point where you start to feel nothing. You have no motivation to do anything because it seems like too much work. What is happening here is a defense mechanism. You have been feeling a high range of emotions for an extended period of time, which your body knows is not good for you in any aspect of your health. As a response to this realization, your emotions shut down. In a way, it is your brain's means of forcing relaxation onto you

because it does not see stress relief happening in the foreseeable future.

In times where you do not know what is going to happen next in your life, you need to take special care to keep a level head and stay calm. I know that this is especially difficult during the most frightening eras of your life, but if you do not do this, you will suffer from an overload of stress, which is a slippery slope to fall into.

During times where our conventional ideas of social interactions cannot be done, try to broaden your definition of that. Contact your friends and loved ones through messaging and texts. It may not be the same as seeing them in person, but it will be interacting with another human being, which is what you will need during this time more than ever.

In the management of both anxiety and depression, you must keep one important thing in mind- whatever is going on, no matter how troubling it is, it is not going to last forever. It might come back, but this episode is going to pass, and you will find relief.

One of the most crucial steps to overcoming anxiety is to accept it. You might think that sounds strange, but here is what I mean by that. A great deal of that distressed feeling comes from the feeling that you need to make it go away now and that something terrible will happen if you do not. It will cause you to feel abnormal. You will become afraid of losing control of your own mind. Let me tell you now- that is not going to happen. People feel anxious every day and do not lose their minds. Think of how many times you personally have felt that way and still managed to bring yourself back.

When you learn to ride out the feelings that come with anxiety, they will no longer be able to prevent you from living your

life. Even if you are suffering from an episode, you will still be able to do whatever you want or need to do. This means there will be no more canceling dates or going home early from events because you are feeling overwhelmed. You will have the ability to tolerate the disorder, and that moment will be the end of you feeling debilitated by it.

Things are not hopeless. You are still here, and nothing bad terrible is really happening to you. The sensations inside of you might be very frightening, but they cannot do anything to you that they have not already done. You aren't helplessly at the mercy of other forces.

When you are feeling depressed, there will come points where you have to literally drag yourself out of bed. This will be the most difficult thing you have ever done or ever will do because whenever the will is not present, it is hard to find a reason to do this. To do this, refrain from giving yourself a long to-do list that will only make your desire to remain in bed all day long even stronger.

In the morning, don't go through your entire day in your mind. Don't try to guilt yourself into getting up because this will backfire. Give yourself one task to do at a time. Let's say you have a special fondness for coffee with sugar and creamer. Start out with something that simple- "You need to get out of bed so you can fix yourself up some coffee." In this way, you are convincing yourself to not only begin a morning routine, but you have given yourself something to look forward to. That is essential in fighting depression because it thrives on the idea that you have nothing going for you in your life, and hence nothing to look forward to. You might find that your senses begin to perk up when you smell the coffee. You might even be excited to pour yourself a cup. When you do, do not think about anything else that needs to be done today. Give

yourself some time to just enjoy your coffee. Maybe you should sit outside so you can watch the sun come up and hear the birds singing. Give yourself a moment to enjoy the morning. Once you have done this, you might have some energy to do some beautification of your living space. At first it might just be taking out the trash, but when you do this, it will have a positive impact on your mood because some of the energy that the overflowing trash can was taking up is free. You no longer look at it and see that unattractive sight and have the knowledge that you couldn't throw anything away if you wanted to.

Getting your inspiration back is a matter of gradually bringing it into your life again, one little step at a time. It will not happen overnight, and it isn't something you will get just by wishing you had it.

You want to be understanding and fair towards yourself, but the gentle hand will not always work. You owe it to your wellbeing not to let yourself be with everything, and when you see yourself sinking into the negative feelings, you need to call yourself out on it so that you can get back on the right path. Depression inspires unproductive cycles of feeling pity for oneself. It's natural to have the occasional pity party whenever you have had a bad day, but you can do it to an extent where it renders you paralyzed. Excessive self-pity is also self-defeat. This is because the entire message of it is, "I wish I could do something about my problems, but I can't, and the ones I have are insurmountable." This is why you cannot blow problems out of proportion.

Even if you are struggling with these feelings, you can still find pleasant moments during your day, and once you can do that just once, the chance for it happening again will become greater. To fight feelings of anxiety and depression, begin by

waking up earlier than you usually do. It will have a much stronger impact on your mood than you would think at first. In the case of depression, waking up to see that it is almost or even past noon will be disheartening because you will know that you have slept half of your day away. You will not feel encouraged to get up and do anything because you will think it is too late to start anything. This adds up to a day wasted.

To illustrate how waking up earlier will help to ease anxiety, imagine you have been given the span of a weekend to complete a writeup. This means not only does the necessary amount of words need to be written and all of the assigned subjects covered, but it needs to be edited, checked for grammar and overall sentence flow, and be ready to go by Monday. Now let's say you stay up late and do not wake up the next day until the afternoon has rolled around. You would wake up with a start because you know you have lost your morning, which adds up to a lot of hours that you could have used to work on your project. When we go to bed late, no matter how long we stay asleep, we will still feel tired the next day because that is not how the human sleep schedule is supposed to work. This means you will not feel like getting to work.

We put things off whenever they are a source of stress. Knowing you have a writeup to complete and your brain is too tired to be creative counts as stressful. This will cause you to avoid it, saying you will get to it in an hour. You start this cycle at one in the afternoon, and by eight in the evening, you are still at the same place you were in the beginning and saying you will get to it in an hour. Then it gets close to midnight, and you finally decide that you are going to give up on the idea of working on it today, promising to yourself that you are going to get a good night's sleep, wake up at six in the

morning and spend the entire day as a writing machine. When this does not happen, and you wake up at the same hour as yesterday (or maybe even later) and feeling the exact same way you were before, you will go through the same ordeal as you did the previous day. Eventually, you will realize there is no more putting off your project, and you will finish what should have taken days to create and finetune within a couple of hours. You will get worse sleep than usual that night because you know tomorrow you will be handing in work that you are not proud of. You will also realize that your supervisor will be able to tell that this was thrown together at the last minute. This means you have piled as much anxiety onto yourself as possible over something that could have been a low-stress activity. This is what I mean when I propose the idea that we have a great deal of control over how much stress comes into our lives.

When you are feeling the effects of anxiety, it can help to call what is happening by its name. Then you will be less inclined to sink into the distressing beliefs that are being brought on by the disorder, such as “I am going to die.” Or “I am going out of my mind.” Say it out loud to yourself. “This is an anxiety attack. These fears are just figments of my imagination. They can make me feel frightened, but that is the full extent of what they can do to me. I am not going to die right now, no matter how much I feel like that might be the case.”

The worst thing you can do in response to anxiety is to try to reason with the distressing ideas that come into your head. Right now, your brain is wired to gravitate towards the worst-case scenario style of thinking. This means you will not be able to come up with an argument against the thoughts. The thing is, you do not have to. You do not need to respond to these thoughts because they are not worth the effort. They are

not real entities. You can do whatever you want without the approval of the anxiety. If the disorder had its way, you would not be comfortable doing anything. You would be confined to your room, and even then, you would feel the symptoms increasing more and more with time.

The moment you get through an anxiety attack and return to a tranquil state, you will learn that you can see through the sensations and that they really are transient. They cannot and will not cause anything to happen to you by manipulating outside forces. When you come to the realization that you can get through panic attacks, you will probably notice that in the future, they do not feel as overwhelming as they once did. This is because you have become familiar with them. You understand where they come from, so they do not get the power of being unknown. When you learn to detect the early warning signs of panic, it loses the element of surprise, so you cannot be caught off guard by it. Something that is able to ambush you will always be more powerful because you have not had the opportunity to prepare for it.

Sometimes lifting your spirits is not about a grand gesture, but the small things that can make you feel just a little bit better. Take a look around your house. If the decorations are sparse, you might want to consider investing in a houseplant. Did you know that plants have actually been recommended to patients suffering from depression by licensed psychologists? For one, it will help to beautify your place, and the physical look of the environment around a person does play a role in their mood. Also, it will serve as something in your house that is alive. It breeds a sense of companionship even though it is in many ways an inanimate object- you cannot have a conversation with it, but it still is there and brings energy to the house. This can be extremely beneficial to people who live alone, which

can cause feelings of loneliness and, therefore, depression, especially in times where leaving the house is not possible.

Another fixture you might want to consider having in your home is a pet. Many people have pets because it is like having a companion, but without the conflict and stress that comes with other relationships in our lives. Spending time with an animal can automatically lower your heart rate, which will give you a reprieve from one of the symptoms of anxiety.

During times where it isn't an option to go to the park or some other outing, we have to make do with what is possible. Just because you cannot go to the place you ordinarily go to does not mean it isn't an option to leave your house at all. Spend some time out on the porch. Bring a chair and a book or something else that entertains you. Stay out there for enough time so that you no longer have the feeling that you are trapped. During times like these, it is easy to develop that feeling. People are creatures that value their freedom to a high degree. We like to be able to go where we want to and not have anything holding us back from that. When we are confined into one space, we lose that sense of freedom. You do not have to be literally locked into a space to have that effect. This is why you need to give yourself the means of feeling free during these troubling times. Go out for a walk.

Another reason anxiety is dangerous is the fact that it can lead to paranoia. When someone suffers from paranoia, they do not trust anyone or anything around them. They question the motives of other's actions and doubt their words.

Paranoia develops as an attempt to keep oneself safe. They feel like if they are eternally vigilant, they will be ready for any type of danger, and they will not be fooled. You would

think that by holding everyone at arm's length and you would never run into trouble, right? Wrong.

For one, as much as you want to protect yourself, your mind will be working against you. The one you really end up not trusting is yourself. It can even cause you to miss out on danger that you would have otherwise seen. How, you might ask, is that possible? As I said, you doubt yourself when you are paranoid. You begin to invalidate your opinions because you think you must be going off the deep end again. You might be tapping into something that is serious; for example, you meet someone who really is giving off signals to suggest that they do not always say what they really think and might tell other people things you told them in confidence. You notice that the questions they ask are too invasive for the short time you have known them and that there is something about their smile that looks forced. When you start to think about these things, you also think about the fact that you tend to jump to conclusions about people. Therefore you dismiss your valid concerns as just being the paranoia talking.

Of course, it is smart to keep your guard up and not let other people in too much in too short of a time. However, on the other hand, it will have a negative impact on your well-being if you never trust anything that anyone says, and you will also miss out on opportunities to get to know people who really are trustworthy. The type of person who habitually says things that are not true is rare. We have to go on the information we have at the time. A good rule of thumb is to take people for their word until they have proven themselves not to be trustworthy. Once they have done that, do not believe what they say. The best thing to do when you find out a person has been lying to you is to cut off contact with them. Then their behavior will no

longer affect you, and you will not have to try to figure out what someone really means by what they are saying.

We all get iterations of paranoia at some point in our life. It can come in the form of thinking everyone is staring at a blemish or that they secretly do not like our company. These beliefs are very destructive because then we will go out to try to find out whether or not they are real. This leads to needing to have proof that our fears are not true. You might ask your friend if the blemish looks too bad, and they tell you they did not notice it before you pointed it out. You think they must be lying to spare your feelings, so you ask more people. No matter how many confirmations you get that it is not that noticeable, you still feel like it is.

The good news is that many of the things that will help relieve anxiety will have the same effect on depression. They share many similarities, and they often are coupled with one another. The hopelessness and lack of feeling will cause you to be fearful. Whenever we cannot connect with our emotions, it is natural to respond to that with fear. You do not want to become a person that cannot feel emotions. Let me tell you right now that numbness resulting from depression is entirely different from a lack of feeling that stems from a personality disorder. You are feeling emotionally bankrupt.

This is why clearing your mind is such an important part of relieving anxiety and depression. There are positive emotions such as happiness and excitement, negative ones such as sadness and anger, and then there is the neutral state of being. When you are in this state, you are calm. You are free of tension. Sometimes neutrality is a place you much reach if you are to ascend to positivity.

Instrumental music is recommended in the process of relaxation because it does not force you to feel any particular way. It is not meant to evoke emotion, but to help you clear your mind.

People who have anxiety and depression often think too much. They worry about everything that can possibly go wrong. When you feel the walls closing in, you might even need to do a physical symbol of pushing them away. Take a breath and know that you are alright at this moment. Push the doomsday thoughts away. They have not happened yet, and the likelihood that they will is too small to count. Don't waste time on thoughts that offer no value.

CHANGING YOUR HABITS



WE'VE all had some form of bad habit before- biting your nails, etc. In turn, we all have at least one that is beneficial. If you think about it, our entire lives are made up of habits. If a person's body is in good shape, it is because their habits surrounding their diet and exercise are conducive to this. On the other hand, if a student receives a poor grade in one of their classes, it is because they have not instilled habits into themselves that would get them good grades, such as studying and paying attention in class. In our adult lives, the ones who get promoted at work are more often than not the ones with a superior work ethic. On days that everyone else slacks off, they go the extra mile. With this in mind, changing your habits will change your life. They are at the center of what happens in it.

Everyone is composed of habits that are both good and bad. These can be created and broken. Here, I will show you how to cultivate ones that are positive while throwing the negative ones to the wayside. Some of them are worse than others, but it also cannot be ignored that one bad habit tends to beget another one. Think about how the cycle of getting poor sleep tends to start and progress. One day you stay up until midnight when you have work the next day. The same thing happens for the next couple of nights. Eventually, it gets to the point where

you are saying, “it’s just two in the morning, that isn’t too bad.” You find yourself sleeping later and later, missing out on your day and therefore letting your life pass you by.

So here’s the million-dollar question- What makes a bad habit?

It is something that brings harm to you or someone else. You are still harming someone even if it is just yourself. Even though it might not seem like as bad of a thing as if you bring harm to someone else. In fact, whenever you do not treat yourself right, there is someone who suffers. Whoever cares about you is going to go through pain as they watch this. When you are bringing harm to yourself, the people who love you will begin to worry about you. They will call themselves into question about whether they have been an adequate friend. I can assure you that there are people who love you. They might be the people you least expect. No matter who you are, there is someone who would notice it if they did not see you today. In that way, when we make a commitment to be kinder to ourselves, we are doing the best for everyone around us. We help everyone in our circle when we treat ourselves well.

So now you might be thinking about your own habits and no doubt you’ve thought of something you would like to change. To get rid of a bad habit, one of the things you will need the most is willpower. This is self-explanatory. It is simply saying no to an urge, and yet it is extremely challenging for all of us. Take heart, though, each day that you resist doing something, the less hold it has on you and the results you achieve by not making a bad habit will spur you on. The dedication will pay dividends for you.

I’ll give you a less emotionally charged example. Many of us have had the issue of biting our nails at least at some point in

our lives. In the process of quitting, there would need to be times that you felt the urge to it but did not. Maybe you would need to turn your attention to something else. Rerouting your mind is an effective tool. Some people decide to take up a hobby that makes their hands busy such as knitting. You might decide to go for a bike ride because who can bite their nails while riding a bike, and instead of engaging in a stress-inducing behavior, you'll relieve stress with exercise. There can be no doubt, however, that there would also need to be a part of you that simply said: "no, I am not going to do that."

Poor habits often spring from stress, and it's in those moments when we concentrate on the problems that urge us to engage in them. That is why staying busy is a good idea. Not only does stress hurt us by creating involuntary behaviors in our body like clenching our teeth, or labored breathing, but it also contributes to habits from nailbiting to excessive drinking to self-medicate.

However, there are going to be times that your mind wants to wander off to worry, and you have to resist that urge. You decide that you are not going to go there right now. Just as there are times that we want or need to talk to someone about an issue, but it must be delayed because the time is inopportune, we need to do the same with ourselves at times. Thinking about something in a constructive way with solutions to improve things is beneficial, but just worrying about something in a tangential way skipping from one possible unpleasantness to the next is not. Be a friend to yourself and do not allow yourself to concentrate on something you can do nothing about at the moment.

This goes to show that it is a conscious decision to turn away from the negative and focus on the positive. That is not the same as implying that you can flip a switch and choose that

nothing is going to ever bother you, and you are going to find happiness out of thin air.

When you choose happiness, you choose to let the good things in life be the things that affect you most, and you are not going to be destroyed by the negative. This does not mean you are being ignorant of reality; it is simply shifting your perspective, which is at the core of changing your habits, especially when the habit involves the way you think.

I'll show you how this comes into play in the real world: Let's say you have had a bad day, as we all do from time to time. You woke up late, and as a result, you had to take a reprimand from your boss because you were tardy to work. You got into a disagreement with your coworker, and everyone took their side. It doesn't take long for a few upsetting events to become a bad day. When you get home, how you interpret this day will have an impact on how the next one goes.

Here is what I mean by that. You might be tempted to say something like, "that is just my luck." This will beget another bad day because you feel like this is how your life is supposed to go. Try to take bad days into another perspective. Even though you did not perform well or have good luck today, that does not mean there isn't a chance of you having different luck tomorrow.

When you get back home and have time to unpack your thoughts about the events of the day, make a commitment to consider what happened as a learning or enlightening experience but also that you will not beat yourself up. You missed your alarm clock because you stayed up too late the night before, so you might decide to go to bed earlier after a nice hot cup of tea with honey to relax you. Listen to some music that makes you happy or a sleep story.

Consider the situation with your colleagues, were you irritable because of poor sleep the night before or was there a way you could have presented your arguments that would have met with less friction?

These are positive ways to think about a bad day that will allow you to learn from experiences. Once you have considered the incidents and learn from them, put them away. Do not allow yourself to obsess about it.

I want to place emphasis on replacing habits. It is not enough just to break them. If that is all you do, you will feel a compulsion to fill your time with something, which is an opportune time to either slip back into old patterns or pick up a new unhealthy habit. This is why you need to have a clear plan of what you are going to do besides indulge in your previous habit.

Say you want to eat healthier so that you can look and feel better. Simply saying, “I’m not going to eat junk food anymore” is a good start, but you are going to need a plan to make sure you do not go back on this. Think about what you are going to eat instead. This is a good time to stock your pantry with better food choices and discard things that do not fit into your new plan. Writing a plan might be helpful, including breakfast, lunch, and dinner as well as snacks during the course of the day. Include beverages because they can be laden with sugar, which will not help you in your endeavor to eat healthier. There are many foods “free foods,” which are very low in calories and fat that you can eat quite a bit of without adding much to your caloric intake for the day but do have large contributions in the way of vitamins. These include beans, peas, and lentils as well as fish and boneless skinless white meat chicken – not fried, of course!

Habits are not always something we physically do. Sometimes they are rituals we perform inside of our minds, or to put it simply, thought patterns. Whenever these are negative, they can inhibit your life as well as make you an unhappy person. This is how people end up shooting down their confidence. This will cause the person not to talk to others because they assume they will not like them. They may question why would others like them since they do not like themselves. It is a vicious cycle and an unwholesome practice that can only bring pain.

These are intrusive thoughts, and they are like weeds in a garden or tree limbs that need to be trimmed because they will brush against your house. Intrusive thoughts are far too negative to be helpful and can only bring pain. Pruning them is essential to your emotional health. If someone who loves you heard those thoughts, they would be upset and hurt. If you heard a friend say anything like that about themselves, you would stop them from saying those things around you.

It takes effort, but pushing those thoughts out and replacing them with more accurate descriptions of yourself is important. There are things you do that are kind, generous, and smart. Think about those things instead. If there is nothing you can do about a situation at the moment, worrying about it or self-defamation because neither of those things helps.

Life is more enriching when you spend more time with positive people. That includes yourself as well. Being positive yourself will attract people who are like-minded. Life feels more worthwhile with a better outlook. Recreation and fun with other people are essential for a happy life. Your friends and family will seek you out more often when they know that the tone will be good.

Your interactions with other people will become more enjoyable for both parties when you make your mental processes become healthier. For one, you will not hold back when you are in social events. People are not social butterflies because they are somehow better than other people. They simply place themselves in situations where they will have the chance to interact with others. As a result, they get to practice, and any time you practice something, you will become better at it over time. They do not fill their heads with worry about the wrong thing and paralyze themselves as a result. Rejecting negative self-talk and replacing it with positive will free you from a crushing weight, which can lead to depression.

To break a bad habit, you must come to a point where you are comfortable seeing it for what it is. Keep in mind that by recognizing that you have a flaw does not mean you are deeming yourself a bad person. Actually, the true “bad” people are the ones who refuse to admit that they ever do anything wrong. When you think about it this way, you are proving to be a good person when you have the strength to admit that there is something about you that has room for improvement. You are showing that you want to make yourself into something better instead of staying stagnant. No one is perfect; however, what makes people good is the fact that they recognize this and resolve to do better.

Before you do this, I want to make sure your mindset for this is correct. Self-improvement should be an act of self-love. If this is not the place it comes from, it will never work. You will just beat yourself, and when you do this, it often becomes a substitute for correcting the behavior. This is because you are too ashamed even to look at said behavior, so how could you expect yourself to be able to do anything about it?

We've talked before about how habits tend to have a domino effect. This is why it is so important to start the morning on a positive note. Make a rule for yourself, and anyone you are close with that heavy topics that require a lot of brainpower to work through or will bring a solemn mood to the room are not going to be tackled early in the morning or late at night.

Whenever you feel yourself slipping away from the habits you are trying to establish, this is not the time to beat yourself up. It is time to take a moment to remember why you want to keep this habit up anyways. If you are trying to exercise daily, it is probably not the actions themselves that you want to do. It is the result that you want. You want to be active and healthy. If you resolve to drink water instead of soft drinks, you are trying to put things into your body that will help you instead of harming you. It is the end goal that makes you put in the effort.

Good habits are supposed to make you feel healthy, which means sometimes you will need to choose whether or not what you are doing will actually help you on this particular day. Say you are feeling very ill today, to the point where you can barely get out of bed. You feel nauseous, and it has gotten to the point where you feel like you could get sick. This is not the day to work out. You might feel uncomfortable with missing a day, but if you try to go to the gym today, you will risk getting yourself sick as well as spreading the infection to others. You must know when you need to take the day off. When you are feeling better, you can go back to your old routine.

There is a reason people put commitments down in writing. For one, it makes it so that it is easier to remember. However, the major reason is that it is harder to break because it makes the commitment official. This is why you need to get a calendar to hang up in your room or somewhere that you will

consistently see it. Write down the things you are trying to make a habit of on them. Let's say you are trying to become more social, and you hear that there is a neighborhood party going on next week. You will be much more likely to go there if you mark it down on your calendar. Then, each time you go into the room you keep it in, you will see the reminder. This will help you build and solidify the resolve in your mind to attend the event. This is especially necessary if you are an introvert. If this is so, I know that it is not that you do not want to see people- you just need to have recharge time in between bouts of doing so. You also need time to mentally prepare for times where you are going to be around a crowd.

This is why I say you need to accommodate your personality rather than try to change it. We cannot decide whether we are introverts or extroverts. This means if you are an introvert, simply trying to take that trait out of yourself and take on the habits of an extrovert will not only not work, but it will backfire on you. You really will get to the point where you never want to see people if you try that. If you are not a morning person, work that into your schedule. Maybe that means you need to exercise in the afternoon. Otherwise, you will not feel in the mood to do what you are trying to. You might set your alarm for a very early hour in the morning, and then when it goes off, you disable it and then fall back asleep, defeating your purpose, and you have to reschedule time for your workout.

When you make adjustments for your personality traits, you will stop feeling ashamed of them. You will no longer see them as deficits that are keeping you from what you want to accomplish. Everyone needs some kind of help. Think about how some people need glasses so that they can see clearly or a hearing aid so they can hear what other people are saying.

There isn't a sense of shame surrounding a physical need, so why should you feel bad about needing a little extra time to get up in the morning or to prepare to spend time with people?

Whenever you are trying to take on a new habit to replace an unhealthy thing, you must keep in mind the importance of staying away from things that will tempt you to fall back into old patterns, otherwise known as triggers. It is not enough to simply change your behavior. You need to also change your environment. You have probably heard about when people have been struggling with any form of addiction; they must clean out their circle of friends. If they are around a person who still chooses to take part in substance abuse, they are treading on dangerous ground. This is because they are in the same environment they were in when they were using.

This person may be a close friend or family member, but you are setting yourself up for failure if you continue to spend time with them. You will re-offend because many of your experiences with each other revolve around drugs or alcohol. Particularly in the beginning, when you have not yet built up your resolve, your resistance may not be sufficient to keep you from reoffending.

It does not have to be this extreme of a situation for this to apply. Imagine that you were taking a medication that dictated that you could not eat sugar for the day. When you are at the store, this would not be the time to buy your favorite cake. Having it sitting in the pantry would be too much temptation. You would be creating a no-win scenario.

You might be able to be around your triggers sometime in the future without it having an adverse effect on you, but that can only happen when you have the fortitude for it.

Now, let's talk about an unpleasant aspect of breaking bad habits that no one likes to think about, and that is having a relapse. Not only is it possible, but it is common. Most people backslide at least once when they are trying to improve themselves, no matter what that means for them. It is important to discuss what to do when this happens.

When this happens to you, there will be a sense of shame involved. This is when you will need to get to know something about yourself. Some people can let go of a mistake with relative ease. Let's say they went off of their resolution to stop biting their nails, and then during a particularly stressful week, they have an episode of it. There are some people who will be able to shrug it off. They decide it isn't the end of the world and that they just need to recommit to leaving their nails alone, and then they move on with their lives. However, for other people, they go through an extreme bout of guilt. They cannot get the thought out of their head that they did something terrible. This feeling plagues them, and it gets more intense with time.

If you are more prone to do the latter, I want you to stop for a moment and think about whether or not this pattern of thought will truly do you any good. The longer you feel bad about relapsing, the longer you put off getting back into the good habit. Regret is essentially wishing we could go back in time and handle something differently from how we did at the time. It would be great if that was possible, but once something is in the past, it is there permanently. This means you need to think about what your next step is. The longer you throw your precious time away thinking about the past, the bigger that unpleasant feeling will be. Regret will grow if you feed it.

Try to shift your thoughts about falling back into an old habit from "I'm so horrible for doing that, I can't believe I failed so

miserably” to “I wish I had acted differently back there, but what’s done is done. I want to do what it takes to make it so that my behavior is better from now on.” This can be a small event if you make it one.

Another thing we need to do when we are trying to change our habits into good ones is to remember that we have control over our urges, and that feeling the impulse to do something does not require you to do it.

Think back to lectures you had to sit through during your years at school. There were probably somewhere you could not wait until your time with that teacher was done because they did not present the class material in any kind of way that would be entertaining for the listener. A fantasy might have even come into your mind of telling them something very abrupt and curt, like “Can you just get this lecture over with so we can leave? This is boring.” However, you did not go through with it because you knew you would have been asked to leave the classroom, meaning you would have missed valuable information that could show up on the test later. Not to mention, you did not want to be disliked by your professor, who could hold the decision whether or not to bump your grade up just a couple of points if you need it. This means you valued your education over whatever momentary satisfaction it would have given you to have that outburst.

This also indicates that you are completely capable of resisting an urge even if though you feel a strong pull. Let’s say you are trying to cut back on how much caffeine you take in, so you decide you are going to limit yourself to a maximum of one soda per day. After you have had your daily soda, you feel a craving for another one. You start thinking things like “just one more wouldn’t hurt, and I’ll only do it today.” This is a

dangerous thing to do because using the phrase “just this one time” tends to lead to more instances of it.

Another concept that has recently come along is the 21/90 rule. First, you need to resolve to take on this new habit for 21 days. One of the ideas behind this is that it will be much easier to hold up to a commitment to do something for three weeks than to pressure yourself about changing your entire life. There are times that we have to trick our minds into working for us. When a person is trying to quit smoking, it can feel overwhelming to hold themselves up to the idea of never touching another cigarette again. These kinds of changes in habits need to happen one step at a time. Then, by the time they had three weeks without smoking a cigarette, they would not feel as much of an urge to have a cigarette as they did at the start of the challenge.

The art of breaking a habit is making it so that you no longer feel a craving for unhealthy behaviors. At first it will be all about resisting the urge, but I promise you that no matter what the habit is if you just think about making each day a step away from the habit, there will come the point that you do not feel such an overwhelming urge to partake in it. You can decide that you will not smoke today and make the same decision every day.

When you have successfully done something (or not done something) each day for 21 days, it will have become a habit. If it is about exercise, there will start to come a time when your body is asking for its daily workout. Not doing your exercise fills you with regret, and you cannot wait until you are able to again. You will find enjoyment in doing healthier things rather than indulging in things that you shame yourself about later.

The whole point of changing habits is to look and feel better as well as living a healthier life. You will have more energy and reach the potential that you could not have imagined otherwise. Begin today; you can do this!

THINKING POSITIVELY



IT MIGHT SEEM cliché at first to turn to the idea of “you just have to think positively!” However, it is one that has stood to the test of time. When we believe in ourselves, we keep going. When we don’t, we give up. That is what it comes down to. Perhaps positive thoughts do not magically shift the elements of the universe around to work in our favor, but when you keep your spirits up, you do the same for your momentum.

*I*t is easy to take on this mindset when things are going well, but what about when they are not? One of the most important parts of thinking positively is learning how to accept criticism gracefully. This is a hard lesson to learn because even if it is presented gently and in a constructive fashion, it is one of the most uncomfortable feelings for anyone to be given criticism. People who say it never bothers them, and they just laugh when others show disapproval about them are often the ones who are the most affected by it.

There are going to be times where you are the one in the wrong. There will be people who just do not like you, and there will be nothing you can do to change that fact. Everyone faces this. Think about how many people criticize even the

most widely beloved public figures very harshly, or how even bestselling novels are thought of by whole clusters of people as the worst book ever written. People are entitled to their opinions, and it would be an overstepping of boundaries to try to change someone's mind about their personal opinions. This is why you need to learn to exist peacefully, even knowing that there are people out there who do not approve of you.

*A*sk yourself this question- why do you need their approval? What part of your life changes based on their opinion? Is there a difference in your health? Does your income increase or decrease based on what they think of you? When you are not around them, is there any way they impact you? If the answer to all of these questions is no, it becomes difficult to figure out why it is important for this person to like you.

*U*nderstand that it is difficult to accept when someone does not like you because it goes against something we all want, which is to be thought of as a good person and accepted by others. However, you can still be all of those things, even without a particular person's approval. Think about a person who regularly gives to charity, always stops to help a person in need, and overall, does all of the things that constitute a good person. There will still be people who call their motives into question, saying they only do these things for popularity. Others will try to dig into their marriage and claim that there is something wrong with it. People are going to say what they want to, but it can only hurt you as much as you let it. Think about the fact that you can still have

a life that is going well even with them having the thoughts they do about you. What they think is not necessarily true.

Upsetting things can happen to you without ruining how your life is. You still have everything you need. You can feel the hurt of the disappointing event while still remembering what you have that is good. Your accomplishments do not change. The people who care about you and make you feel good about yourself are the ones who really matter. Do not place importance on things that do not deserve it. You still go to the comfort of your home in the evening, where you are safe and free to do whatever you want to. When you are in the place that makes you feel the most comfortable, take a look around you. Do you see the person who is causing you stress? No, they are nowhere to be found. They are off wherever they are, doing whatever they want. Give yourself the freedom to do the same. Do not give them the power to change the quality of your life.

A big part of thinking positively is simply thinking that there is a possibility for good things to happen. Negative people have resigned to the idea that good things just aren't meant to happen for them, and therefore they do not attract those things in life.

I'll illustrate this concept with an example. Let's say a person does not believe a person could have a motive that was not selfish when talking to them. Another person sees them and likes their style because it resonates with their own, and they think they have the potential to be friends. They approach this person, who is cold to them because their first thought is "this

person must be trying to manipulate me into giving them money,” so they show disinterest in what they are saying until they get the hint and leave. The mind-boggling thing is that people with this mentality also tend to complain about being lonely and wishing that there were people in their life. However, as the example portrays, they drive anyone who tries to get close to them away because they are suspicious of them.

The take-home message is that you should not decide what a person’s story is without getting any input from them. There are times that you should use your instincts because someone or a situation seems questionable, but for the most part, people do not mean any harm. They are simply trying to live their lives just as anyone else is. Sometimes, people even have good intentions towards you. Give that idea a chance before writing someone off, and you will have a lot more good things in your life. Of course, this means you will be deceived at times, and you will know some heartbreak, but if you really think about it, does a lifetime of isolation mean you are avoiding getting hurt? You will long for relationships with the outside world, and that will cause you pain. If something goes wrong with that person, as will inevitably happen at some point, you will still be okay. It will hurt for a little while, but you will get over it and once you have, it will not seem so bad in the rearview. That is something you will need to repeat to yourself until you believe it: “I am going to be okay.” It is a simple sentence, but it is sometimes one you will need to tell yourself because it is easy to forget when you are being hit with distressing situations and you are responding to them with all of these thoughts in your mind that usually tend to go off in all different directions. You are not sure how

you feel and how you don't feel at some point. However, sometimes just the simplest reminder can pull you back down to earth for a moment. Even if the affirmation does not immediately solve all of your problems or correct the anxiety completely, you will still have that moment of relief, which is important when dealing with negative thoughts. Any period of time that they do not have control, no matter how small, takes away some of their power. You have begun to challenge the negative thoughts and if they won, even for just a second, it means that the positive thoughts are beginning to gain some ground.

Speaking of not knowing how you think, the state of confusion is detrimental to your well being. This is why if you want to start thinking positively, you must figure out what it is that you want. Everyone has self-interested desires, and these are not bad things. These do not always have to be wicked schemes that involve hurting other people or walking over them to get your way. In fact, it is very rarely about that. The desire to write a book is a self-interested one, and you will not hurt anyone by doing this, but you will need to make time for yourself if you plan to accomplish this.

To have good things in your life, you must create them for yourself. You cannot expect to have them come to you if you have a negative attitude about life and do not take steps to create a better situation for yourself. Negative people have a tendency to complain about the way their life is but make no effort to obtain the life they say they want. For example, they say they want a circle of friends but never go

out anywhere, and if they do, they do not talk to anyone. They will often speak of how they did not get the same opportunities that other people did, and they have spiteful feelings about people who were, as they describe it, “born on third base.”

*A*nyone can ruin a great opportunity. On the flip side, a person can also create one for themselves even if they were coming at it from a disadvantage. Think about how there are students who earn themselves a full ride through a prestigious college based on their marks. Meanwhile, there are some with wealthy parents who paid for their child to go to the same school, who lost this chance by not taking their studies seriously and prioritizing other things.

*T*his ties into something you must always keep in mind in order to make good choices. It is true that no one can choose where they come from. However, everyone can make a decision about what they make as their priority. Thinking positively is ultimately something you will need to decide that you are going to do and stick with. Choosing happiness is not being ignorant of your problems. It is recognizing that you do have them, but instead of wallowing in them, you are going to look ahead.

*I*f you want to change the way you think, you must understand the concept of something known as “mindset mastery.” There are several aspects to mindset mastery. One of the most commonly mentioned and most significant ones is the development of a “winning mindset.”

Winners believe they can overcome whatever obstacles they need to so that they can reach their goals. Those who tell themselves they are losers and could never accomplish anything are setting themselves up for failure.

To have a winning mindset, you need to have a healthy level of self-esteem. It is not a sign of arrogance to think you are highly qualified in a subject if it is the case. It means you know the areas you shine in and use them to succeed. Think about when you are at a job interview. No one has ever been hired by saying, “Well, I guess I can sometimes make a halfway decent writeup on a good day, but I’m terrible with deadlines, and I don’t have a creative bone in my body.” A person who did that would never be considered by anyone.

To practice building self-esteem, you need to learn how to sell yourself to an interviewer as if you were applying for your dream job. Talk about what you do well and give yourself the proper amount of praise that these talents warrant. You might not think you have any skills that are noteworthy, but take a look at yourself with a moment of introspection. You might find that there are things you did not think of at first.

Let’s think up a list of possible marketable skills.

- Being able to hold a basic conversation in a foreign language

- Any form of computer skills. This means it can mean anything from troubleshooting to proficiency in common workplace apps such as Excel. If you have any knowledge about computers, put it down.
- Social media content creation. Almost every company is looking to build an online presence to match the social climate of today.
- Leadership or diplomacy. This means if you had a position where you were in charge of anything at all, write it down.

*Y*ou will want to list any activities you were a part of during your university years if you are a recent graduate. You might not think that information will do you any good, but for potential employers, it will let them know that you did more than just go to class and then back to your dorm room, that your life was fuller than that. Having taken on extra-curricular activities also tells them that you will do more than just the bare minimum. Even beyond that, anything you could have possibly done will show some form of skill associated with it. Even if it was the knitting club, it will suggest that you can come up with a plan and follow through with it. Also, to knit an article of clothing, you need to be able to manage your time and keep yourself motivated. No matter how meaningless you might think it is, I can assure you that it is not. Take a closer look at it and see how you could talk about the skills involved with it. If you were in the gaming club, it shows you have both a strategic mind and an ability to work as a team, seeing as many games involve incorporating a variety of skill sets into one team that can successfully complete a challenge. Also, many times in

gaming scenarios, things do not go as planned. Someone misses their cue, or a skill doesn't work, and yet you have to improvise and make a new plan quickly while you are in the middle of a heated situation. Do you now see how much these supposedly little things can mean?

Also, you never know what they could see on your resume that could be a conversation starter. Being hired and succeeding in the work environment is not always about your qualifications. It is also about making a connection with other people.

*N*ow let's talk about what is considered one of the most necessary things to do in order to think in a way that leads to success, and that is to simplify your life. That might not be the answer you were expecting to hear, but that is what needs to happen for any of the other building blocks of changing your brain to become possible. There are many people out there who are highly intelligent, but they struggle to understand certain concepts and tap into their creativity because they make things much more complicated than they have to be in their minds. Because they want to make great accomplishments in a short amount of time, they start projects with their focus going all over the place as they think of more and more points to make. Before they know it, they are overwhelmed by all of this information and the never ending list of things that need to be done. The mixture of feeling daunted and frustrated causes them to neglect the idea for the day, and it is easy for this to evolve into consecutive days until the idea has been completely abandoned. This is why the person who is able to break down what they are doing into one smaller and simpler task at a time is the one who will be able to follow through with it and see it through to the finish line. It

goes along with the age-old concept of choosing to work smarter instead of harder.

*K*eeping it simple is a huge component of changing your brain. This involves resisting the urge to overcomplicate things, which creates stress in your life. One of the biggest buzzwords over the last decade is the concept of “multitasking.” It is arguably the most misguided misconceptions out there. It makes me think of the caricature of a person on a unicycle surrounded by musical instruments and playing them all with a frantic look on his face, a “one-man-band.” No one can hold this up.

*O*ne can only do one thing at a time. During a business meeting with your team about a project, we talk about what tasks should be done, and you ask what you should focus on first. We have all had that supervisor who says “all of them,” which really isn’t possible. You are asking for help in prioritizing so that you can start on the most important things first. You become frustrated and have that feeling of panic wash over you.

*T*hat’s because your natural first instinct is to simplify things because setting priorities and expectations keep you on track with a calmer demeanor. The good manager will look at the tasks and help set priorities, and if there is too much work for the allotted time, she will pull in more resources to get the job done. The less effective manager

will dump it in your lap and expect to have it all done at the same time.

Be that good manager for yourself in your personal life too. You look around your home and recognize things that need to get done. The sheer number of projects seems overwhelming, and you get that exasperated feeling and just walk off, decided to do nothing. Wrong answer!

You can, instead change your brain and look for ways to organize your day into a laundry list of tasks. Write them down and really scrutinize the list. Make a list of things you will need for the projects and an estimated potential cost and length of time the task will take. Once you have done that for each of the projects, look at the list weighing which ones should be ranked higher on the list. Prioritize them, even writing numbers for them. Of course, as you progress along the list, you can re-sequence it as you wish. However, as you do this, you probably feel calmer.

Another point to consider is perfectionism. Perfectionism is a double-edged sword because, on the one hand, it can make you strive to do your best. However, it can also inhibit progress while we strive for lower error margins than we need to. Learn to accept a job that is “good enough” from yourself because if you think about it, you will see that a job must be good to be considered good enough. The stress of wanting things to be perfect is a very destructive

force that can keep you from doing all the things you want to and increase the cost for things needlessly.

*T*he other side of the coin is another “p” word, procrastination, and it’s a real stressor. It is possible to create a situation that should be all about pleasure or rejuvenation, like taking a vacation. A little planning about what to pack and things you might need can declutter your thoughts about it and make you feel more relaxed.

*I*f the source of your procrastination habit is nervousness about the project you are taking on, this is a sign that you need to change your outlook on it. For example, when you are about to give a presentation for work, what are the thoughts that are going on in your mind? What are the sensations that you are feeling? What kind of environment is your headspace right now?

*I*n many fictional stories, a person’s mind is portrayed as a room or landscape of its own, and the look of this place depends on the individual’s thoughts, emotions, personality, and state of mind. Metaphorically speaking, there is a grain of truth to this idea. Think of the term “a cluttered house means a cluttered mind.” Your mind definitely has an environment, and what comes into it has the power to change it, whether it is in a positive or negative way. Imagine a house that has been abandoned for some time. It is going to have a withered and haggard look. The windows will probably be cracked or broken. The things it brings in will not

be good. Now imagine that a group of people came along and cleaned the house up. Then some more people repaired the damages. They decorated and painted the house, and before you knew it you could not recognize the place from before. It has become not only a livable place but a hospitable one. It is a house you could imagine buying and living in. You could see yourself being comfortable there as well as finding inspiration and creativity in it.

*W*hen you are giving a presentation, think about what your house looks like. Does it look uninviting and cluttered because you are having thoughts about how well you will perform or fears that you will not be able to remember what you were supposed to say?

Before you begin, clean up your house. Think about a piece of your performance that you especially like and figure out why that is so. It could be as simple as the level of confidence you said something with.

*A*nother piece of thinking positively has to do with being able to keep moving forward even if something doesn't go as planned. So you say something out of order or realize later that there was one little detail you forgot to cover. Let it go and give yourself props for what you did do well. If your audience gives a positive reaction and tells you that you did a good job, take this at face value. Remember that your audience does not have the inside information you do about the presentation; therefore, they will not be able to tell that you made a mistake unless you make it obvious.

When you are presenting anything to a group of people, never point out flaws in it. This will cause their attention to be drawn to it, whereas they might have never known it otherwise. It also makes it apparent that you are not confident in your ability to present this topic. They might even get the impression that you did not do the research beforehand and, therefore, do not know the facts. This means the information you present will not appear as credible.

This is another reason you must learn to have and exude an aura of self-confidence. Often, people who are shy think that they have trouble making and keeping relationships comes from there being something unlikable about them. This is not the case. Often, they are very kind and considerate people, which increases their frustration about having social difficulties. The actual problem lies in the fact that they come off as unsure of themselves. We have the benefit of knowing our own motivations for behaving in the ways we do, but we do not have the same kind of abilities when it comes to other people, as we cannot tell what is going in their heads. Because of this, the only information we can have about someone that they do not share with us is what we decipher. When someone avoids other people, we can only interpret that they do not want to be talked to, and therefore most people will leave them alone because they do not want to overstep bounds. When someone acts nervous, it can be interpreted by other people that it is because they have something to hide. It can come off as being insincere. This is where the struggle with social interactions comes from.

*Y*our personality is a good one that should be shared with the world. Trust in that fact and learn to show your real self to others. The same concept applies to meeting people in social situations as with a job interview. You never know what might start a bond between you and other people. Do not write off all of your personality quirks and interests as things that are bad and should be kept hidden. Perhaps you have an interest in collecting stamps, and when you mention it in a group, there is someone who shares that passion with you. This makes you strike up a conversation, and before you know it, you have become friends with that person all because of that one little bit of information you let out about yourself.

*W*henever we have trained our brains to think negatively, we will think that everything we do will have a negative outcome. When we do this, we do not give anything good a chance to happen. If you do not think positively, you are not likely to accept offers that could change your life for the better, such as invitations to social events, dates, or job offers. You will think about how you will probably fail or make a fool of yourself, or think the other person will disappoint you. With all of these things in mind, you will shut out anything that brings a possibility for something new to come into your life.

There is a commonly held idea that in order to never be disappointed or hurt, you need to lose all expectations, and therefore you will never be hurt. This is a flawed way of thinking and a dangerous one at that. It can lead to a person

inviting negative forces into their lives. The treatment we receive from other people is based on the expectations we set for them. It isn't that people are evil, but we are creatures that like to find out where the limits lie. Even the kindest person is going to see what all they can get away with. As a harmless example, employees will figure out which supervisors will allow them to listen to music while they work and which ones will not.

Let's say your friend does not come over when they said they were going to. You cleaned the house and got it looking and smelling nice for them. You waited for them to arrive and tried to call them to figure out what was going on, and then hours later they apologize and say they could not come over and have a reason lined up for why they could not call you to cancel. Following the rule of not having any expectations, you tell them it is alright and when they ask you if you have a dollar because they need one, you give it to them. You have taught this person that not only can they waste your time, break commitments, and leave you hanging in the lurch not knowing what is going on, but now they can come to you and ask you for something and you will give it to them even though it takes something away from you. They have learned that they do not have to treat you with an ounce of respect. If you have no expectations out of people because you do not think any of them are any good, the part of you that should be outraged at this kind of behavior will be muted.

You are going to be disappointed in life. I know it hurts to feel this way, but you cannot lose that ability. Not only is it unavoidable, but it is necessary. Being disappointed means you are incensed about the way you were treated, which is indicative that you do not feel that you deserved it. It will make you distance yourself from this person, which you need

to do as an act of self-preservation. This will not happen if you do not allow yourself to react properly. Think about how a certain amount of anxiety is good to have because it makes you able to spot danger where it exists. Disappointment is also a protective feeling in its own right. It lets you know when someone has done something to you that you should not accept.

Now that we have established that, I need to discuss the opposite end of that. Sometimes we fall into a pattern where we feel disappointed too often, which can lead us to feel hopeless and therefore not take part in our own lives. When you get to this point, you need to count your blessings. All of us could use a lesson in gratitude sometimes. I know what it's like. You see others who have more than you do or have done things you wish you had. You look at your own life and see all that is not present in it. However, when you slip into this pattern, it will lead to feelings of spite.

Think about how you have a house to live in. Maybe it is not big or glamorous, but you are sheltered from outside elements. You might wish your social life was something more, but take a look through your contacts. I can assure you that among them, there is at least one person you could call with a problem and they would answer.

Neuroplasticity comes into play when you are trying to learn to think positively. Remember that the thoughts you spend the most time are the ones that come up the most frequently. When you often think negatively, you are training your brain to put all of its focus on the unpleasant things that happen in life while filtering out the positive. When something bad happens, we often remember every detail of it- what date it occurred, what kind of day it occurred, what we were doing when we got the bad news, and probably even what the

weather was like. Now just think of what it would be like if you paid that much attention to the details of a positive event.

Eventually, you might get to the point where you are able to filter out the negative event. Let's say you are driving and you start to switch lanes, not seeing that there is someone else there. They honk their horn, and you move back to your lane to avoid them, and instead of just letting it go they give you a dirty look and a rude hand gesture. You do not need to take this onto yourself. This is their behavior, and it has nothing to do with you. You do not need to memorize what they look like or what kind of car they have. It is not a good idea to remember these details because then it makes it easier for the event to make a place for itself in your long-term memory.

We all make mistakes. It is a part of being alive. Some will be minor, while others will have more serious consequences.

Sometimes we get into a mindset where we feel like it is the right thing to do to not move on from the parts of our past that we do not like. It can feel like you are holding yourself accountable and making sure that you do not do it again. While both of these things are good as concepts, we need to take a look at what actually happens when you go about this by holding your mistakes over your head.

People do not improve when they are constantly reminded of their past. Imagine a student who has been struggling over the past year to meet deadlines but has made a resolution to turn over a new leaf and be more vigilant about turning in their work on time. Every time they hand a paper to the teacher that has been completed within the time constraint, the teacher says, "Well, do you remember how late the last assignment was?" It would not take long for the student to lose interest in trying to improve himself because he would not see the point

in it if he was going to be treated as if he were still doing the same behaviors he was before.

Learning to think positively is a step-by-step process. There will be times where things are going well, and it will be easy to look on the bright side. Other times you will have to work at it. You will need to count all of the good things that happened today, no matter how small they were. If you went through an upsetting ordeal, think about the fact that it is over now. It is behind you, and when you get home, you are away from it, and therefore, it is time to turn onto something else. Think about what you are going to have for dinner. Spend time with your family and keep your mind where your body is, at the dinner table and talking with them.

You have to make a conscious effort to think positively. I'm going to draw from a previous chapter for this. Thinking positively is just another habit, and habits are something you have to work towards. You cannot just wish you could be more optimistic and that the negative thoughts would go away. You have to make that happen for yourself. Nothing is going to come along in your life that you do not make an effort to bring into it. Every time you think, you need to choose to keep the positive thoughts and make the more unhealthy ones go away. Think about your life, how it is worth more than to spend all of it worrying and making yourself upset. There is so much more that is supposed to happen for you, and will happen if you let it.

CONCLUSION

Changing your brain isn't an overnight process, but it isn't as difficult as you might think at first. At its core, it just means you need to reach for what you want, not just in thought but in action.

Don't overwhelm yourself with this task. Whatever moment you are in, think about making the best choice in it. When you get up and make yourself breakfast instead of sleeping in, you are choosing to promote your health. When you are at an event, and you say hello to someone as opposed to hanging back in the corner, you are already becoming a more social person than you were before.

Anyone can say, "I wish I had more friends/money/etc.," but no one gets anything they do not reach for. This includes negative things. The people you spend time with and the things you invest in are going to be the strongest forces in your life. If you want good things, you have to become a person who attracts them- this means you need to invest in and give to yourself. Think about how a painting that was finished in five minutes looks compared to if the artist took five hours to complete it, paying attention to the details- where it is lacking in color, where it needs a change in hue, etc.

In short, changing your brain begins when you first wake up in the morning and ends when you go to sleep at night. You have that much time to change how you think, feel, and act, which is going to ultimately decide how your life goes.

DECLUTTER YOUR **BRAIN**

Retrain Your Brain & Organize
Your Life




Justin Moore

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INTRODUCTION

“I forgot about that meeting, I have to run to get there. I’m going to be late paying that bill. Where did I put my keys? Why can’t I remember anything these days? I feel like I’m going crazy!”

Does this sound familiar? If you, you have the symptoms of a cluttered brain. This means you are juggling a lot in your life and it is pulling you in a lot of different directions. This leaves your thoughts jumbled up into an incomprehensible mishmash. This will leave you stressed and exhausted, which will keep you from putting your best foot forward in your daily life.

You don’t need to worry. You are not going to go crazy. Nothing is horribly wrong with you. You just have too much noise playing in your head right now, and some of it needs to be shut off or quieted down. It will be easier to do than you might think.

To make your thoughts come to you in a more organized way, you need to create order in your mind. This means you need to reduce your stress, which is the major force driving your brain to the cluttered state it is in now. This might seem like a

daunting task, but this book is going to take you through the process. You will find out why this happens to you and how to make it stop. If you commit to it, before you know it you will find a sense of inner peace.

WHAT IS BRAIN CLUTTER?



Do you ever have those days where you feel like you cannot put two thoughts together? You have a lot on your mind and are trying to fulfill all of your responsibilities, and it does not seem like there is any way to accomplish everything you need to. You might have some problems in your interpersonal relationships and you are worried about whether or not you are going to be able to find a solution for them. Something might have slipped your mind and you are trying to figure out how to correct that mistake. You feel like a million thoughts are running around in your mind at once and you cannot keep up with them. You are stressed to the high heavens and you feel like your mind is a car that is driving straight off of a bridge at a hundred miles per hour.

*I*f this is happening to you, it means you are suffering from a cluttered brain. You might have been worrying that you are losing your mind and are going to have an inevitable breakdown because that is what prolonged stress does to your mind. That is the source of all of your troubles- a term you have probably been hearing your entire life. It is one of the most common problems in the world and yet it still has a way of sneaking up on people, and that is

understandable. Everyone feels pressure from society to always have it together. Those who seem like they do are lauded for doing so. Picture that “supermom”- she goes to work looking perfectly put together every morning and is the most productive member of the team, and then she goes back home to cook dinner for the family, and even then she still has the social life and energy to go out with friends. Everyone wants to be that person. Unfortunately, they are aspiring to live up to an impossible standard. That person is a fictional character. You are not always going to be at your best. Stress gets to the best of us. Many times we do not share when we are feeling overwhelmed because that comes with a sense of shame. You might think you have failed and have concerns about others not thinking you are mentally stable.

*T*he fact that you worry about this proves that you are sane. You know that there are limits to what you can give out per day. The mentality that is actually “crazy” is when someone thinks a constant fast-paced lifestyle is sustainable. Think about a time when you had to exert a great deal of physical or mental force for a long period of time, such as renovating a room in the house or staying up all night working on a project. It takes every ounce of life force you have to complete your task, and all you want to do afterward is go to sleep. When you wake up, it will probably be late in the morning and even after sleeping for a long period of time, you will still not feel like getting up, probably feeling tired or sore. After you finally manage to get out of bed you come to the realization that it is going to be a slow day. You need to have time to recharge. If you do not rest, your body’s immune

system will be unable to fight infection and your mind will be vulnerable to stress.

*Y*ou might think it's strange when I tell you stress is not actually the big bad monster it is made out to be, but it is true. Life naturally comes with stress. Everyone deals with it on a daily basis. There are things we have to do that we would rather not do. You will have a lot of expectations placed on you at once. You will run into unexpected problems. Our relationships are not always harmonious, and when they are not it is an uneasy time. How we respond to stress is the key. It becomes overwhelming when we internalize it, which is why it is so important to learn how to handle it in healthier ways.

*P*rioritize Your Mental Health

You need to prioritize your mental health for many reasons. First, you want to do this for yourself. A person with a cluttered mind tends to loathe to put themselves anywhere on the priority list because they fear being selfish, so just humor me for a minute and think of it in another way. You are helping the people in your life when you prioritize your mental health. We only give what we can. It is a romantic thought to believe we can give everything we have and then still find a way to give some more, but it is not realistic. When you are low on fuel, you will feel tired. This means even small donations will seem like too much.

Imagine a printer that has run out of ink. You can order it to print out well-defined pictures all you want, but it is only going to produce less colored and more faded content until eventually, you will not be able to get anything from it. That is because something that has not been given good things cannot be expected to put out good things. The same thing goes for yourself. When you are overwhelmed by stress and do not feel like you could ever get everything done that you need to as you come up with more responsibilities to pile onto that already impossible list, there is no way that you are going to be giving your best performance.

There is a common misconception that a higher level of stress will lead to increased productivity. Actually, the opposite is true. Some people will even go as far as to say they work the best pressure, not realizing that what that really means is that they procrastinate, meaning they have to put everything together at the last minute, and because they did a lot in a short amount of time they confuse that for motivation. The two could not be any more different. Motivation is what will cause you to go the extra mile in your work life. There are stimulated nerves involved, but that is different from anxiety, which comes out when we feel like we need to fight for our well-being on some level. This means you are in survival mode. This does not bring about the sort of creativity and feeling of freedom needed to be productive.

When you are feeling stressed, you will actually be much less likely to do the things you need to

do. We do not like feeling negative emotions and will avoid them if at all possible. That is what causes you to put off a big project until the last minute. You look at it as this impossible task and this is how you end up discouraging yourself from working on it. This is because the project is a source of stress, so you would rather look away from it and take part in something that does give you joy. You tell yourself “I’m just going to take this one night off, and then tomorrow I am going to power through the entire thing. However, when tomorrow comes, you feel no better about taking on this challenge than you did yesterday. In fact, you probably feel even worse, so you tell yourself you are just going to give yourself one more day off. The cycle repeats itself until there are not any more days to put it off and the deadline has arrived. Any task that is done in a rushed and panicked state is going to be riddled with errors.

*T*his means while you created a lot of content in a short amount of time, you were not productive. True productivity comes from a place of caring about your work, putting thought and effort into it, and considering the best possible way to present your idea. You do not have that option when you are throwing something together at the last minute. You will not remember much of what you did because you were just trying to achieve the bare minimum in a strict time constraint.

*W*hy You Should Declutter Your Brain

There are a lot of incentives for decluttering your brain. It is integral to becoming a happier person. You

need to be relaxed in order to be happy. People who have inner peace are able to accept themselves and their lives for what they are. They allow themselves to get the most out of what are supposed to be the good times in life- quiet evenings with one's family, celebrating holidays with friends, etc. Their time is not consumed by going over their thoughts. How many times have you been up much later than you should be, going over a checklist of worries? How many times have you felt a thudding in your chest that made you feel like the walls were closing in? Do you find that you forget things more often than usual?

This is not because you are a forgetful person. You have too much going on in your brain when it is cluttered. It would be if a bundle of items that were more than your arms can hold fell from the ceiling and you tried to catch them. You might catch a couple of things, but most of them would hit the floor. When your brain is cluttered, you will be more forgetful. Imagine you were trying to listen to one person, but different people kept pulling you aside and talking over that person. You would not be able to keep up with what anyone was saying. This is what your mind does to you when it is full of clutter. You are unable to focus on anything.

When you have a million things going on in your mind, you are prone to neglecting your health. You can be tired and coming down with a cold or other illness, but ignore and suppress your symptoms because you do not feel like you have time to be sick. There is only so long that this can go on. Eventually, your body will wear out and you

will get much sicker than you would have if you had recognized that you are sick and taken some time off. When you are lost in your thoughts, you might even fail to recognize what is going on in your own body because you are placing anxiety at the forefront and yourself on the backburner.

*T*here is light at the end of the tunnel, though, if you are willing to reach it. You can clear out all of this clutter from your mind so that your stream of thoughts make sense and lend themselves to your success rather than holding you back. When you do this, you create a solid foundation for yourself. This way it will not matter what is happening outside of yourself. You will still be doing well inside.

*D*ecluttering Your Brain During a Crisis

It is especially important to maintain peace within your mind whenever there are times in the world where there is a crisis going on. It will be hard to do this because you are being told one frightening story after another. You are being reminded every second of the day that you could become a victim of the crisis at any moment, which causes you to feel unsafe. You are unsure that your future is going to be sound. You fear for yourself and your loved ones, and the overflowing of bad news and scare tactics can make you feel like you are seeing the beginning of the end.

*W*hen all of this is happening, you will find it hard to put two thoughts together. It is also

easy to become morose because you are being led to believe that your life is going to be changed forever, and that all of it is going to be for the worse.

When you are in the middle of times like these, you need to keep your mind decluttered so you can keep your spirits up. One thing you must do is give yourself some sense of normalcy. This means you cannot spend all of your time with your headspace being consumed by the crisis. Even though it might not feel right at first, you must do things that remind you of a time that does not have anything to do with it. Make a few rules for yourself. While your family is having dinner together, do not use that time to talk about morbid things that will either inspire fear or make tempers run high, which is especially easy during troubling times. Use this time to talk about a TV show everyone likes, or for someone to share a funny story, or anything that brings about good feelings instead of just more worry. Play a board game together and only talk about the game.

Sometimes our minds fool us into believing that by obsessing about something and worrying about what it is going to mean for the future, that we are doing something about it when nothing could be farther from the truth. We are keeping ourselves stuck in a place that causes us pain and fear. That will translate to the rest of the people close to us who will be able to sense our tension which will go on to amp theirs up, eventually leading to discord.

A Scattered Brain is Unrelated to Intelligence

When you have a cluttered mind you might feel like you are behind everyone else, that they have it together and you are just barely hanging on. For one, their lives may not be as stable as they are trying to make you believe. For another thing, you have untapped potential that is being suppressed by the anxiety that is causing your mind to be so scattered. You need to think better of yourself if you ever hope to reach this.

Many times people resign to the idea that they are scatterbrained or do not have a good memory. They have learned to call themselves unintelligent, which is another way they engage in negative self-talk. This is just as the name suggests- when people talk badly to themselves. Many times people will describe it as a voice that makes them feel bad about themselves. It might feel like a separate entity, but you have to remember that this is going on in your mind, so this talk is an aspect of you. This is not meant to discourage you at all. In fact, it should give you some hope because this means you can stop this from happening. If negative self-talk comes from you, it is not like a physical illness where you can only take the treatments that are available and hope for the best.

What you need to keep in mind is that you when you talk about being scatterbrained, what you are really describing is the effects that the stress has on their mind. No one's brainpower is at its best when they are suffering from prolonged anxiety. It is a distraction and, as you

have probably noticed, exhausting. That is because it consumes not only mental energy, but also physical energy to be stressed. Your heart rate and blood pressure are in an elevated state, which means your entire body is working twice as hard as it usually does. That is why you feel tired after you have been through an extremely stressful event.

Declutter Your Brain to Improve Relationships

Let's talk about the positive impact that decluttering your brain will have on improving your relationships, both in a work and social sense.

Now that you've been examining yourself and your behavior you may find that you are beginning to reap benefits such as calmness and greater clarity. You're doing the work, starting by creating order in your surroundings and getting rid of things that do not serve a purpose. You are taking time for yourself and acting with slower, more deliberate movements. Your thoughts are clearer as you approach your day.

You notice yourself becoming more productive and that your work product has an increased quality. You may notice yourself being more dedicated to your daily tasks. It may not take so much effort to begin because you are feeling overwhelmed less often.

our approach to people is probably changing as well. You are probably less anxious when your boss comes to speak with you. Your work has been on time and accurate so, of course, you no longer have that tightness in your chest and churning in your belly. You feel more comfortable and can be more sociable because you are not busy chastising yourself for what you have not done or done well. You may have an increased awareness of your colleagues as well. With a less cluttered mind, one can “see past his own nose” and have more healthy interactions with others in your life.

It’s almost like blinders are being taken off and you can better see and evaluate what your colleagues do well, maybe better than you do. You can also see areas of improvement and perhaps do so with less judgment because of a lessened need to self-protect.

For example, you notice your colleague always finishes his reports faster than you do. With a clear mind, you feel more comfortable asking him to show you his process. You observe with an open-heart learning that he has found a way to export information from the database so that he does not need to retype it which also increase accuracy. Instead of holding onto clutter and jumbled feelings, you have just allowed yourself to be taught something that will lighten your load, allowing you to take on more strategic aspects of your job.

his can start an exchange and you may ask your colleagues if they would like to do a “brown bag lunch” to create a place where you can each share areas that are giving you problems and tricks & tips that each person finds helpful. All this adds up to an enhanced work culture.

Your personal life is not neglected in this process either. You probably come home from work or school less tired and with a feeling of accomplishment, which is energizing. When you do not feel like you have performed well at work, you may subconsciously punish yourself by deciding you cannot go meet your friends for dinner and to play cards. Instead, you stay home and stress out.

With the improvements you have made, you feel freer to allow more good things into your life. You come home, freshen up and maybe you even make your special guacamole dip for the occasion. Instead of a mind full of projects you haven't completed and deadlines you are behind on, you are able to focus on your relationships. Since you have been working with your colleagues to streamline your processes and you no longer need to stay late every day to finish your work, you do more in your personal life. Your outlook is more positive, so you find yourself connecting with your friends on a more personal level. You contribute more to the conversation than you had before. You get more out your relationships when your contribution to it increases, too.

ou have clearer thoughts and can see where your friend needs help and you're more observant so you can tell when they have had a bad day. Uncluttering your mind helps you to see outside of yourself, helping you to connect with others in a more productive way making your relationships deepen.

You Are in Control

You are in control of your thoughts, actions, and therefore your life. You might not feel like you have had any power up to this point, but consider this. You have been able to stave off feelings of panic so you can get through your day probably for as long as you can remember. No weak person could manage that. On the contrary, it means you are much stronger than you give yourself credit for. Whenever you are feeling those anxious sensations and your mind is racing, I know that you would much rather stay in bed and avoid the world, but instead you make the conscious decision to get out of bed and take on whatever the day has in store for you, even if it is unpleasant. That shows you have what it takes to regain control over your mind and what is allowed to go through it.

In this book, I will take you through the process of organizing not only your brain, but your days, and this will lead to peace in your world. This is when you will be the most effective. Your confidence in yourself will grow when you are no longer afraid of what could happen and embarrassed about what already has happened. You will gain an understanding of what it really means when all of that noise

is going on inside of your head and how to make it stop. I know that you have some faith in yourself that you can make this happen, otherwise you never would have clicked on this book in the first place. Everyone gets one life, and every life gets a finite number of days. I am not saying this to scare you, but to motivate you not to waste any more days. This is why it is so crucial to make your thoughts your own and not the product of fear, stress, and anxiety.

SLOWING DOWN



It's no secret- we live in a fast-paced world. Everyone is connected to multiple forms of social media, and those are often incorporated into your job. This means you have to constantly keep up with all of them, making sure you do not miss one call, email, or message. On top of that, our lives are often a series of one thing after another. Right after school is an extra-curricular activity. You get off from work and then you need to pick the kids up from school and take them to their rehearsals. After that, you need to go home and put together a presentation that your boss will be witnessing. You are moving onto one thing after another. Before you can stop and process the most recent event you have to move on to the next one.

Change the Pace of Your Life

The first step to decluttering your brain is just to slow down. I'm talking about every facet of your physical and mental state when I say this, down to the most basic vitals. In fact, that is precisely where you need to start. Remember to breathe, because you might be holding your breath. Slow your thoughts and even your body movements down. This will help your thoughts to do the same thing. Think about it this way.

When you have lost an important item and you feverishly go through all of your possessions, dresser drawers, and other places in your room trying to find it, your search will probably not reach a conclusion. This is because you are not actually looking for the item, you are just panicking. As a result of this, you will only cause everything in your room to be strewn about, making what you are looking for even more lost than it already was. What you would need to do is slow your search, bringing a method to it. If you stopped for a moment and thought about the last time you knew you had it, you would begin to retrace your steps, your first course of action being to search in the most likely places for it to be. As you began to search this way, memories would start to come back to you about what you did with the item because there it is now silent enough in your mind that you can hear and are in a state to receive important information that it is trying to convey to you.

*W*hen we dial the pace at which we live our lives back a notch, we will find that not only will we find our days more enjoyable, but we are more effective in everything we do. You've probably heard the old saying "slow your roll" and you can imagine a person doing some ordinary tasks like working on their car or gardening when their friend runs up panting and hysterical talking fast and hard. The first person tries to understand the furious and jumbled up talk and suddenly puts up his hands, saying "slow your roll, I can't understand you" because they cannot keep up with their friend's rapid speech and frantic gestures.

ou can see how cluttered the second person's mind is and, in his haste has rendered himself unintelligible to the other. His words cannot be deciphered and he's probably waving his arms around using them for emphasis with a little too much gusto. His friend can only comprehend his message when he slows down. Along with being a cue to speak slower to others yourself, you can also interpret this lesson as a reminder to slow down when communicating to yourself, or thinking.

This is a powerful message and can be used for a person who wants to declutter their minds. This takes focus and dedication to the point of resolve. If you have made the commitment to yourself to clean up the living space of your mind, you might try some techniques to consciously slow yourself down. When you are doing ordinary tasks, reign yourself in from going too quickly. Walk a little slower, you're not in a competition.

Talk less rapidly when you are explaining something to someone and see if this aids in getting your point across. You might have an elaborate idea that you are trying to convey to someone and you want to cover every part of it, but if you try to do that you will not be able to create a message that can be understood. It will also cause you to trip over yourself trying to figure out which aspect of the message to talk about next.

Imagine you are trying to recount the events of a movie you just saw to someone. You might wonder where to begin.

Should you tell them what it is generally about or start from the beginning? Maybe you should tell them the piece you think will make them become interested in hearing about it? Your brain is jumping around all over the place which can cause you to become paralyzed in your speech. To avoid this or risking it becoming convoluted, handle this one step at a time. What is the first thing you want the person to know about the movie? Why do you want them to know about it? This will give you a clue as to what to discuss next. Maybe the movie takes place in a time period that you know your friend is very interested in. This means that fact should be what you lead in with. Also, remember that you do not need to give them a recap of the entire story in one sitting. You will not have failed if you do not. If they understand the gist of it, you have communicated successfully.

Slowing down means taking time for yourself. There are things we all need to do to preserve our hygiene and cleanliness, but they should also be seen as a service to yourself. Have you ever noticed yourself performing self-care tasks too quickly and Recklessly? Think about how you brush your teeth and hair. Perhaps you find yourself, pulling the brush through your hair a little hard and very quickly. If you were brushing someone else's hair, would you do it in this way? Perhaps instead, you would move the brush more slowly and gently through the hair, take your time and make sure it was a pleasurable experience for them. You deserve that treatment too. What about your teeth, do you find yourself using too much pressure and rushing through the process?

Take it slower, ease up on the pressure and be aware of your strokes, making sure they are circular and that you cover the whole surface of your teeth and not neglecting any. Rinse longer, you deserve the time it takes to care for yourself. When you slow down the physical motions of these actions, you force yourself to focus on them. It is easy to go through these motions quickly and carelessly while using the time to think about all of the responsibilities piled onto you, causing you to feel stressed about your day before it even begins.

Start Your Day Earlier

Are you waking up too late to make yourself a beverage like hot coffee or tea and a little breakfast? Do you find yourself pushing the alarm too many times and racing through an abbreviated morning routine and feeling like you're running behind all day? Tomorrow, wake up the first time the alarm sounds and give yourself time to show yourself some consideration in the morning. Make breakfast for yourself, do a little exercise like yoga or a little walk or run, even for just 15 minutes. Perhaps instead you prefer a moment to sit outside and meditate or read the newspaper or a book you've like to read. Spend some time with your family in the morning connecting instead of barking orders and being in a hurry. When we are stressed internally, we also have a tendency to become short with others. You have placed yourself in the mindset that you need to take action now or something terrible will happen, which means you are going to place the same pressure on your family so that they "do their

part”. When we rush, we place imaginary consequences on ourselves for what will happen if we slow down- for example, “If I lounge around before I go to work, I will become demotivated and not put out good work.” Actually, the opposite is the case. It takes a lot of energy to rush through your morning routine. This means by the time you get to work, you will not be starting fresh. When you begin your morning slowly, you will gradually build yourself up to a state of being bright and alert. Think about how when you work out, you do not jump straight for the most intense activity. You warm up so you will have more energy to spend instead of wearing yourself out in the first few minutes.

*A*t work, do you find your mind leaping ahead to the next task you have planned and that what you are working on now becomes an afterthought? Perhaps this is creating a condition where you are making too many mistakes, thus increasing your stress level. Just for today, try this, focus instead on the paper you are writing currently. Take a few deep breaths letting them out slowly and, if you can while at work, put on some instrumental music at a low volume. Take the time to look over your work and fix anything you find that could be improved at the time. Consciously move a little slower.

*A*t the end of the day, evaluate your productivity and the quality of your work. It’s better, isn’t it? Think about when you are reading a book. You do not try to absorb the content of both of the pages laid out in front of you at once. You focus on one and then shift over to the other once

you are done so you are taking in this large body of information one bit at a time. This makes it so that it is possible to take it all in. When you try to skim through brushing your hair or teeth, you will not have benefitted much from it. However, when you take your time, the job will be done more thoroughly, and not only will you avoid health risks, but you will find rewards for this little extra bit of effort.

*I*f you try these suggestions for a week, you will likely want to keep going. It might be difficult to pick up a new habit that you are not accustomed to, but once you begin to enjoy the benefits of it you will want to do it more often so as to take even more advantage of the good feelings they create. You will find your stress level relieved quite a bit and you'll be feeling better day to day. I'll bet you end up feeling less tired during the day and it's easier to fall asleep. Without so much stress and with greater productivity, you will find the relationships you have with coworkers more enriching.

*O*ther people will want to know your secret! They will want to be in on what is making you more relaxed and confident. They will notice the boss is pointing out your work as best practices or that your grades have improved. It's okay to share this information too and you'll want to because of your awareness that it will improve the workplace overall. You will enjoy being in a cleaner and more relaxed workspace and on a team of winners.

You will reap rewards when it's time for your annual review as well. With a less cluttered mind, you will stand out as a leader

and you will enjoy hearing good things spoken about you. This is how making your mental space healthier is helpful for your productivity as well as your peace of mind.

*I*t is not just at work where slowing down will benefit you by uncluttering your mind. You will also find your interpersonal relationships both at home and with friends to be improved. When you are with your circle of people, take time with them more slowly. Your communication doesn't have to serve a purpose and can be purely for enjoyment. Ask about their day. Really listen when they tell you. It will make your relationship with them better if you learn what they like to do and do it with them. You will learn things about yourself and create a stronger bond.

*B*e Present

Be present for yourself, your family, friends, and colleagues. Slow down and do not miss your life as it passes by while you hurry through everything with a mind full of clutter and stress wearing away your health. Listen to what the people around you are saying. Take a look at what your environment looks like. Do whatever you need to do in order to process the present as opposed to the past, future, or a fictional scenario.

*R*emember this- the past cannot bring you any more harm than it already has because it has passed. The future has not happened yet so it would be illogical to try to

react to it. A hypothetical worry is not worth spending one second of your time on because there is only a small chance that it will happen. What is happening in the present is what can truly impact you. You need to devote all of your energy to it because it is what will become your past.

*B*reathe and remember that there is a definite connection between your breath and movement. As your breath becomes slower and deeper, your movement will be deliberate. Think about the motions you are going through. When you take a breath, consciously inhale and exhale. This will go a long way in decreasing your anxiety. This is because we do not think about breathing properly during times of great stress. This will increase the stress by making you feel like you cannot catch your breath, which exacerbates a common sensation for people when they are struggling with the feeling of being overwhelmed by panic- that the walls are closing in. This verbiage is often used by those with anxiety to describe what a panic attack feels like. Of course, the room is not actually changing in size, and they understand that on a fundamental level, but this does not stop the emotional response from happening as the result of the illusions that their mind generates. The room starts to feel smaller and smaller, causing you to feel trapped and like you cannot run from where you are at.

*R*ight now, you do not need to run. Sometimes our minds can cause us to perceive danger where there is none. You do not need to need to respond to a crisis where there is none. That seems like a simple concept when you say

it out loud, but it is harder to put in practice when you are in the moment and all of the symptoms of an attack are hitting you at once. Just remember that sometimes your mind creates scenarios that do not actually exist. It does not mean you are going crazy. It happens to everyone. Think about when someone tells you “we need to talk,” and you automatically feel a sense of panic as your mind goes to all of the worst things this could possibly mean. In just a few seconds, you have imagined the end of a relationship or some other extremely unpleasant discussion. Then it turns out that they just want you to pick which colored toothbrush you would prefer. This means you needlessly caused yourself stress. You are still not abnormal even if this happens to you. It just means you need to recompose yourself and commit to not going into this mode if it is not needed. If you do this too often, it can lead to an anxiety disorder.

*W*hen we move through our actions too quickly, we will often have overreactions to things. This is because everything hits you at once and you act based on your initial emotional response to something. To paint a picture of this, think about when you first saw the death scene of your favorite character on a show. You might have cried as if you had just lost your best friend because at that moment it really feels that painful.

*H*owever, later on, you do not have that visceral feeling anymore because you realize the impact that event has on your life isn't actually that much. It doesn't cause any harm when you overreact in that kind of

circumstance, but there will be ones that come along that need to be properly reacted to. For example, your small child tells you they got a bad grade. You might be concerned, upset, or whatever else they might feel, but this is a crucial moment for not only your relationship, but for their development. They are coming to you for help and they feel ashamed along with fear about what you will do. If you control whatever you are feeling at the moment, assure them that you will help them with the class material and tell them everything will work out alright, this will be a moment that you come closer than ever, all because you just stopped, got your breath and emotions under control, and responded in a collected and logical manner. On the other hand, if you yell at them or go into panic mode and say, “How are we ever going to bring this up in time?!” They will learn a very dangerous lesson from this experience- that they should never ask for help and that you will react poorly when things go wrong. As a result of this, in the future, they will keep it from you whenever they have a problem, no matter how serious it is.

***N*ot Everything Warrants an Immediate Reaction**

Just because something happens, does not mean you need to react to it immediately. Sometimes our minds can fool us into thinking everything warrants an immediate response. There are only a handful of things that fit into this category. When you are driving and you see someone veering too close to your car, you need to take immediate action. However, when it is not an emergency such as this, you have the luxury of taking some time to consider what you are going to do next. This saves you trouble in a few ways. For one, you do not have to

feel the pressure of coming up with a response all at once. You can have some time to think about it with a clear mind. You also will not have to correct yourself after speaking or acting when you are in a place in your mind to where you are thinking irrationally.

*H*igh emotion is the equivalent of irrational thinking. You might be convinced that you truly believe something because of an emotion. That is how people snap over something small due to pressure that has been building up within them for a long time. They have had one of those days where nothing goes right and you cannot catch a break, and someone does something that should be mildly annoying and this ends up being what causes the person to explode. This is not good for your physical and mental health or your relationships.

*S*tress, frustration, and depression tend to come as a package deal. Even if one is dominant, you feel the others to some degree. If you are constantly feeling anxious, you will see your environment and future as grim, and when you do not feel like things will ever get better, you will become angry. These emotions will poison not only the mind, but your physical body over a long period of time. With clarity, you will find many health benefits including digestion, respiratory and mental all because of your reduced stress level. This is because stress can contribute to, prolong and even bring on health issues.

On the other hand, being relaxed can alleviate them. Whenever you have an injury or other complication that causes pain, take a note of how when you are feeling distressed about it and your mind is saying “please make the pain go away” repeatedly, you will feel it more strongly. However, if you calm yourself, you will find some relief. This is because in a way, when you are stressed your body fights the body’s natural healing process.

When your mind is calm, so is your body, and vice versa. When you have a quiet mind, you will experience a large number of health benefits. You will be able to go to sleep faster, which will mean you will wake up in the morning feeling refreshed. Your heart will stop beating so quickly, lessening your risk for blood pressure problems later along the way.

Rest and Check for Tension in Your Body

As you go through your day, check in on how you are postured. Stress causes us to slouch over, causing neck strain. You will also notice that your muscles are tight. Take a moment to relax them, letting your arms fall to your sides and breathing in deeply to release the pressure in your chest. Also, and maybe most importantly, check your jaw and make sure you are not clenching it. It is not uncommon to do this in the middle of the day when you have the most calls and customers. If you are not careful about this, you will run the risk of doing damage to your teeth because they are not meant to handle the strain of being ground together for longer periods of time. If this is a problem for you, make a point throughout the day to separate your top and bottom teeth and relax your jaw. This only takes a few minutes.

Sometimes we refuse to slow down because we do not think we have the time to. What if I told you that you don't have the time not to? Pushing yourself isn't always the answer. Know when it is time to rest. If you think this will take time away from doing your work, try to put another spin on that thought. Let's say you are trying to create a PowerPoint for a presentation. Consider the quality of work that you would do on it if you are feeling tired. Your performance will not be up to par. You will not be as vigilant about checking for errors and making sure your sentences make sense, and you will work more slowly than usual. You are not going to be motivated to do anything, and no matter how hard you try to hide it, a lack of enthusiasm about a project will show in the quality of it.

Whenever we are overly tired, we will often feel resentful of anything we have to do and therefore you will feel like you are just enduring one thing after another. This is not a way to create a healthy and productive life for yourself. When you get into these modes, there will be times that you need to crack the whip and keep going, but this is not always the way to go. Throughout our lives, we run into times where we need to be kinder to ourselves. We are more than willing to give other people a break, even when they have done something that caused us harm, understanding that they were going through a hard time. However, when it comes to us, we hold ourselves to a standard that could never be reached. People also have a tendency to push themselves to give more, but then neglect to give back to

themselves. That would be like expecting your phone to keep running but never put it on the charger. You have to allow yourself some recharge time and treat yourself to some things that replenish your reservoirs. It does not have to cost money. You can just draw yourself a bath and take time to savor how your skin and joints feel immersed in the hot water. These simple comforts sometimes give you the strength you need to keep going.

*W*hen you are in the middle of all of the chaos your days can throw at you, it is easy to underestimate the toll that mental and emotional clutter combined with stress can have on you. It is the way of most people to just keep going on about their day, ignoring their problems and resolving that they aren't that bad because they can still go through all of the things they need to do every day.

*J*ust because you are not visibly distressed, doesn't mean your mental well-being does not need tended to. The longer you put it off, the more of a mess you will have to deal with. It's like when you let the dishes pile up in the sink and you look away from it because you do not want to deal with it. Eventually, they will be overflowing. The sink will not be able to hold one more dish, so when you finally go to clean it out, not only will you be there for a long time because you have such a hefty job to do, but you will also be trying to maneuver around the precariously-placed dishes so that they do not fall and break. When we ignore a mental health struggle, that will not make it go away. This will only make it get bigger until it is something

that is impossible to ignore, and you will likely have effects from it that you did not expect or want.

Whenever you feel yourself thinking too fast, just remember to stop for a minute. You do not have to completely pull yourself out of whatever you are doing or make a scene. You just need to take a moment to pull yourself together. Take note of the muscles in your body that are tight so you can relax them. Get your breath under control again. Breathe slowly and deliberately. Take a substantial breath in, hold it inside for a second, and then let it out slowly. Slow your roll. Your internal dialogue is probably making about as much sense as a person who just had surgery and is still under the effects of the anesthetic.

Our Brains Are Like Computers

There are similarities between the way our brains work and how computers operate. Think about when you have too many programs being run on a device. A number of games are all logged into at once. A large number of tabs are open. At some point your screen freezes. You wait a few minutes for the situation to work itself out, and your only recourse is to turn the computer off, wait for ten seconds, and turn it back on again. You might be worried that your device has broken and that you will not be able to use it anymore, but when you log back on it is business as usual. What happened in this situation is that your device became overstimulated and needed to be reset. It was performing too many tasks and therefore did not have enough energy to do everything it was being asked to do. We can do the same thing with our brain. That is how you end

up living with that strange phenomenon where you have so many thoughts going on but you cannot focus on a single one of them. You cannot handle everything that is being thrown at you so you become numb.

*I*n order to slow down, remember this- there is nothing that needs to happen right now. There is no emergency. You do not have to do anything except bring yourself back to a state of mind where you can actually think. Don't let your mind jerk you in any way it wants to.

I am going to ask you a question that is going to sound out of the blue at first but will make more sense as I explain it- what makes you happy? What do you look forward to? I am not asking this in a deeply philosophical sense. There are things in this world that give us warm feelings inside while others bring our mood down. What does the latter? It might be something as simple as playing with your pet. If this is so, then for just a moment, go to a place in your mind where you are with your pet. Think about what it looks like and how it feels to touch its fur. If there is a person you feel a lot of affection for, whether you know them personally or they are a famous person, or even if they are a fictional character, picture this person in your mind. Think about things they did that were endearing to you.

*E*mootional Crutches

These are what can be referred to as good crutches. In the past, the concept of emotional crutches has garnered up a bad reputation because when people hear of them their mind often goes to abusing alcohol or even an illegal substance. However, this is not an accurate representation of what that concept means. A crutch does not have to be destructive, nor does it need to take over your life to the exclusion of everything else. It also does not have to cause you to avoid life. Think about what physical crutches are meant to do for a person. It is not to prevent them from walking, but to help them do so because they cannot do it on their own right now due to an injury, illness, or another issue that is causing one of their legs to be weaker than it usually is. When we use emotional crutches, we keep good things that bring us happiness close to us while we get through things that are not as pleasant. Think about when you listen to your favorite music while you are doing a writeup. It is never fun to write for work, and you would rather be doing something else because the content of this is boring. However, it is something you must do for work.

*I*f you do not have something to look forward to, you can change that. You might not be able to purchase tickets to your dream concert or go on a getaway to a fancy resort, but this does not mean you cannot give your life some more glamor. This might come in the form of making yourself a nice dinner. It does not have to be for any special occasion. Just make it a time where you can afford a meal that is a little more expensive than what you usually get. Light some candles and put music on that pleases you. Get dressed nicely. This might seem silly to do at first, but everyone needs

to stop the pace of their life for a moment to do something nice for themselves.

*T*ake some time to get to know yourself. Think about how when you like someone, you try to find out their interests so that you can do things for them that will make them happy. Give yourself the same consideration. Our minds can become consumed by trying to figure out how we can help others, but if we ever want to do that we need to be in a position where we can afford to be emotionally charitable. When your mental bank account is full, meaning you feel calm and content, you will be able to give more to others than if you let self-care go to the wayside and therefore your account is running on empty. Don't make life just about fulfilling responsibilities and completing tasks others assign to you. Be a little selfish and take time just for yourself.

RETRAIN YOUR BRAIN



THE ACTIONS THAT AFFECT YOURSELF, the people around you and the course of your life begin from an internal place. It has long been said that what you think becomes what you do. People who do not think they are good people are going to have lapses in judgment in their dealings with others. If you don't think you are an attractive person, you are going to avoid social situations because you do not want to be seen by others. The way you think dictates what you do, which is why you cannot take your hands off the wheel when it comes to how your brain operates. You have probably heard the saying that you teach people how to treat you- if you show someone that they can talk to you poorly without any repercussions, they will. Take this mentality with your own mind. For many of us, this is the entity that says the cruelest things to us. Why does this happen? Are we really just bad people and we have only taken it out on ourselves so far? Is there something even worse at work here?

*Y*our Brain is Trained

I am here now to tell you that you can relax because this is not what is going on. Your brain has been trained to speak this way to you. How you might ask, is that possible? The answer is that you have been training your brain all of your life, and will continue to for the rest of your days. Think about when you learned how to write. That was training your brain. The same goes

for when you were figuring out how to walk and everything you learned during your years in school. By the end of those lessons, you were probably able to name all fifty states and practically recite the United States' Constitution off of the top of your head. After you were done with school and some years went by, your memory of these lessons became increasingly fuzzy. As you took and left jobs, the same thing happened. All of this adds up to the fact that your brain is not locked into one form. It changes with the new information we take in and the habits we pick up- or cease to do. This ties into why our brains can become cluttered. When you mentally go through your ever-lengthening to-do list, develop fears for the future, and entertain other thoughts that creep into your mind to disturb your peace of mind, these thoughts make their permanent home here because of how often you have reviewed them. When a person faces any form of emotional upset, even if it is not one of the most mentally destructive traumas, it can still impact the way your brain works, even creating neurological differences in your brain from before they were there. At some point, the cycle of thoughts and emotions becomes just as automatic of a process as the light turning on inside a refrigerator when it is opened. This leads to a circular internal conversation that does not go anywhere, which closely mimics a couple of common disorders that affect one's emotions as well as the way the mind works.

*W*e cannot bring up a cluttered brain without discussing anxiety and OCD. Before you start to worry, let me assure you that I am not trying to diagnose you or even imply that you have one of these disorders. However, while not everyone with a cluttered brain has an anxiety disorder, everyone with the said disorder- down to a person- has an abundance of brain-clutter. Even if you do not actually have either of these disorders, a cluttered brain inherently mimics the symptoms. This means learning about them will give you direction in helping yourself no matter what.

*A*nxiety Disorders

In anxiety disorder, you are constantly in fight-or-flight mode. The feeling itself is helpful at times, such as when you are dealing with a dangerous situation that requires immediate action and you need to rely on adrenaline to get yourself out of it. However, it becomes a problem when you constantly have this feeling. It chips away at your confidence, sense of stability, and feeling of independence. It makes you call every aspect of yourself, everyone else, and the world into question.

*O*CD, contrary to popular belief, is not about cleaning one's room with a toothbrush or needing pencils to be perfectly parallel. It could take this form, but it would need to be motivated by something internal. For example, the sufferer has convinced themselves that they will be responsible for a death in the family if they do not arrange the pencils just right. Your brain makes connections between events that are unrelated. They have assigned themselves the power to impact the world outside of them with their actions and even their mere thoughts- "If I get annoyed at someone and then something bad happens to them, it is my fault." This is known as magical thinking.

*P*eople with OCD also often have an innate fear of finding out everything they thought was true about themselves was not. They question basic facts about them, even down to their religion or sexual orientation. This is not at all to say a person with these thoughts has a problem with any form of an alternative lifestyle. This is the true source of their anxiety- imagine thinking all of your life that you were attracted to one gender. You have become comfortable with this idea and it is a part of your

identity. Then, one day, out of the blue, a thought invades your mind- “What if I really like the gender other than the one I thought I did?” You would feel your entire world crumbling down. You would feel like your whole life had been a lie. If you were in a relationship, you would be scared that it was not right for you. Your entire world would feel like it was crumbling underneath - why is something that was once inherent about me suddenly changing in my adulthood?

*I*f you are affected by OCD and you are feeling this way about any aspect of yourself, let me assure you now that your entire world is not suddenly changing. All that is going on is that you had a thought that was jarring. It made you doubt yourself and conflicted with your sense of self. This made you go crazy with the thoughts. Sometimes the thoughts of sufferers cause them to fear that they could be “bad” or dangerous people and they did not realize it. These people never have and never could harm anyone, but because the image comes up in their mind of doing something morally unacceptable, they think they are capable of doing it and punish themselves as if they were. They also will constantly check themselves to see if they feel any response to the thought of committing a violent or otherwise immoral act, and that is when they go into very dangerous territory. If you try to look for a thought inside of your mind, you will find it.

*Y*ou might even cause yourself to create the sensations you are fearing to have and then when this happens, you confuse it for the intrusive thoughts being true. Let me try to explain what is going on in a way that gives you another perspective on it. Whenever you are reading a story about someone suffering a severe injury that the writer describes in graphic detail, you might find yourself cringing and feeling a sensation in the place

in your body that mimics their wounds so strongly that it is like you feel what they went through. That is how far the mind will go to paint a picture of something to make it real to you if that is what you want to believe.

Even if the intrusive thought is not as traumatic as the ones we have discussed, we all sometimes get stuck on thoughts that bring us discomfort. It can be as simple as driving to work and thinking “what if I get caught in a traffic jam and that makes me late, and then my boss no longer trusts me?” Because of this one thought, you spend the entire drive to work anxious, and even when you turn your car off it does not subside until you have walked into the building.

Anxity Disorders vs Everyday Stress

The similarity between these disorders and everyday stress is that they can cause a person to give thoughts more credence than they deserve and hold themselves accountable for things they have not done or were not their fault. They also try to reach conclusions for things where there is none to be found. For example, in the case of OCD, the sufferer often tries to find reassurance that their intrusive thought is not true, causing them to ask others the same questions repeatedly and needing to do a set of rituals every time the thought comes back to them. This takes time away from them and impacts their relationships because those in their circle will not know what to do to help them, as they have reassured their loved one of the same thing countless times but things always seem to end up back at square one. Clutter can do the same thing to your mind. How many nights have you stayed up trying to pull yourself out of a thought that makes you anxious but finding no way to do so? For example, you fear not completing a project in time. You try to tell yourself that you have the time and resources to do it and that

everything will be fine, but then you think “but you could lose it or it breaks right before you present!” At this point, you are suffering over imaginary scenarios. The project has not even been completed, so there is no way that it could get damaged. If you have partners you are working with and are anxious about whether or not they are going to pull their weight, call them at a reasonable hour to have a conversation with them. Set up a system where each member of the group reports their progress and presents proof of it. That way your mind will be put at ease and you will feel like you have some control over the situation.

This is when you need to train unhelpful behaviors out of your brain. Psychology has brought about things such as neuroplasticity and cognitive behavioral therapy. I will show you how you can learn what these things are and how to use them to help you. These might sound like intimidating concepts at first, but you can trust me. When you break them down to their basics, they are simple ones that can be mastered within just a few months. That is how little time it takes many patients to see dramatic improvements with anxiety and OCD-related issues. It will definitely sort out the thoughts in your mind so that they will not all come to you in a rush that you cannot handle.

Therapy for Anxiety

Cognitive behavioral therapy is the most widely-used model for therapy in modern times. Its idea is that self-destructive behavior patterns stem from a cognitive distortion- to put it simply, your mind upholds a belief that is inaccurate. You are looking at the world through a set of lenses that do not offer a correct view of the world.

A cluttered brain counts as a cognitive distortion because it impairs your ability to think in a logical way. Essentially, these are the

moment that you feel like you cannot think straight. It has long been thought that there are certain mental states that can cause a person to do things they would not ordinarily think of, and it has been proven countless times to be true. Have you ever gotten angry at someone over a minor issue because you had a lot on your mind and thought later about how you overreacted and that they did not deserve that treatment? On the flip side, let's say you are a person who does not cry easily. Then a member of your family falls ill and you notice that lately, you cannot go through a day without crying at least once. Emotional distress can cause you to become confused about what you feel.

This is why you always need to analyze your thoughts as they come into your head to see if they are accurate. For example, you are at the grocery store and someone bumps into you. This causes you to have an impulse to say something rude to them. At that moment, you are convinced that you have an intense dislike for that person. However, when you break that idea down, it does not hold up to logic. You have never met this person before and they did not mean to run into you. They were just not paying attention or did not see you. You then think about the kind of person you are and realize that you are not the type who would get angry at someone simply for making a common mistake.

Transient Feelings

In order to make your emotions more congruent with your true self, you need to realize that there is such thing as transient feelings. The meaning of this term is in the name- they are thoughts that come and go. A parent will feel a moment of frustration towards their child when they walk into the room and realize that they have not cleaned their room like they said they would, but this does not mean they hate them and want them to

move out. People can have grievances with their romantic partners without wanting to break up with them. Once it leaves, you can tap back into what you actually feel. When people in a relationship have had a quarrel, they need to keep in mind that they love the other person.

*T*ransient feelings also play a role in our success in our careers. Say you want to publish something you have written but are afraid of being rejected. That feeling of nervousness can only have the control over your actions that it is given. If you truly did not want your work to be read, you never would have gone through the trouble of writing, editing, and looking over it. You created it for a reason. This is why you need to ignore that temporary feeling of nervousness and pursue what you really want to do. You might be thinking, “how can that feeling be transient? It’s happening all the time!” What I mean by using that term here is that you are only going to have that feeling for as long as you put off showing others your work. When you get feedback from someone, you will see that the possibility of them pointing out an area that your work could see improvement is not the worst thing in the world and should not stop you from placing it in a position to where others will read it.

*T*hose who have any level of anxiety are notorious for thinking ten steps ahead. It comes from a need to be prepared for any possible situation. They cannot stand the thought of a problem hanging in the balance for a while and waiting to solve it. This is because the problem is causing them a great deal of stress and they feel like by sorting this particular issue out, they will get rid of and find relief from their stress, not realizing their brain will only come up with another source shortly after. Many times, when a person’s brain is cluttered, a contributing factor is a person’s need to

solve all of their problems overnight and the feeling that things are horrible if they cannot manage this. We are taught that we should not go to bed with a problem standing in our relationships or other aspects of our lives. While it is true that you should do everything you can about a situation before you go to bed, once you have done that, you need to let it go for the night.

The concept of “don’t go to bed angry” can have a detrimental effect on your life and mental health. There are times where you are having a conversation with someone and it is going nowhere. Both parties are tired, stressed and frustrated. This means they do not mean to say anything productive. They will be drawn to saying things that feel good in the moment but have a negative impact on the relationship in the long run. You will also stay up for a long time having this circular conversation.

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy and Neuroplasticity

Now we are going to get into cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT, neuroplasticity, and figure out how they can be used with one another to achieve the outcomes you want to see. CBT and neuroplasticity are closely related and they lend themselves to each other when a person is trying to change the way they think. CBT emphasizes the theory that people can change their thinking patterns even if they have held these beliefs for most or all of their lives. Neuroplasticity states that if someone repeats the same lesson over and over again, it will become the dominant practice, taking over the one that is left behind.

When we are thinking about the connections in our brains, the term “use it or lose it” becomes relevant. The ones that are used repeatedly are strengthened and become a

part of your long-term memory while the ones that are neglected deteriorate and eventually die out, causing you to forget information. This is why we do not remember lessons we learned in school that we once knew off of the top of our heads. We have talked about cognitive distortions being learned. This is from- you guessed it- neuroplasticity. If someone believes they are not intelligent, it is because that intrusive thought has gained access to their mind repeatedly until it eventually became the way they naturally think.

*A*nother way that neuroplasticity impacts our behavior is that it can be used to influence which emotional response we gravitate towards. This plays a considerable role in a cluttered brain and an instinct to go into panic mode. People who tend to have abnormally high-stress levels jump to the worst-case scenario as a default reaction to events in their life. For example, they haven't been feeling well for the past couple of days. Their mind jumps past the possibility that they just haven't gotten enough rest or have a case of the common cold. They go immediately to a life-threatening illness. The entire time that leads up to them going to the doctor involves them imagining a health crisis that they might not survive. By the time they get to the office they beg the doctor to just give them the news that they are dying and get it over with. If you live your life this way, you will be in a constant state of unrest. Every time you run into an inconvenience, even a minor one, your instinct will be to panic. It will get to a point where you do not have the ability to stay calm because your brain has been trained otherwise.

*I*f you relate to this concept, do not lose hope. You do not have to stay this way forever. Just because you learn an unhealthy pattern of behavior, does not mean you cannot unlearn it. In childhood, we all do things that are undesirable in society-

running around in the house, tracking mud onto the floors, etc. However, when a child's parents tell them that what they are doing is not acceptable and remind them of this fact whenever the behavior takes place, the child will begin to leave this habit behind. Eventually, they will get to a point where they are checking their feet for mud before they enter the house on their own. In the example of panicking at the doctor's office, get into the habit of holding off your thoughts just for one minute to give the doctor time to explain to you what is really happening. It will likely take them at the most thirty seconds to do this. You can put anything off for thirty seconds.

*T*hink about what the other possible courses of action are when you are faced with a crisis besides worrying. Instead of doing that, think about why you are in this situation and how you are going to get out of it. For example, if your performance in work has been suffering because you spend too much time surfing the internet while you are at the office, the solution here is to rededicate yourself to your work. You might want to look into why you are avoiding it. It might just be a simple case of going lax. You may not be getting enough sleep. There could be a problem with a coworker. Let's say that is the problem. Once you have realized this, you can then resolve whatever problem is going on with them so you can have a healthier work environment, which in turn will allow you to go back to your normal levels of productivity.

*W*hile your mind may be the one that takes in, processes, and distributes information, you are the one in control. You cannot always let it have things go its way. Whenever we have developed thinking patterns that are harmful to

us, our minds develop an urge to go to them even after we have decided that we want to stop them.

When applying CBT to a real life concept, let's imagine a person with stage fright whose career revolves around public speaking. This seems like quite the dilemma, right? The person might even start wondering if they cannot handle this job and should find another one, even though they are passionate about this one.

Do not decide not to pursue something you want to do based on fear. This will cause your life to become dictated by forces in your mind that do not have your best interests at heart. This problem will not alleviate itself because you give in to what the anxiety tells you to do. In fact, this will cause things to become worse. You will teach yourself that the feeling of distress means you need to run, and soon that will always be your response to it. Anxiety might serve the purpose of helping a person manage a crisis, but that is not what is happening in this case. You are responding to sensations in the mind and body. Your mind has conjured up a situation without any evidence to back up its existence. In reality, you might just be driving to a grocery store when you are suddenly hit with visions of a tragedy occurring at that building. This causes you to choose not to go to the store and drive home. The next day, you come to find out that nothing out of the ordinary happened there and you are without the things you wanted to have, all because of a hypothetical situation.

We will now go back to the example of using CBT to get over a fear of public speaking. Using this psychological model, the person has a resistance to being in front of a crowd because of the idea that doing so will put them in a bad position. They might imagine themselves getting on the stage and

doing something embarrassing themselves somehow, such as tripping over the steps or jumbling up their words while addressing their audience. Then their mind plays out a scene where everyone points at and mocks them for what just happened to them and no longer being taken seriously by their peers. They might even conjure up images of being recorded and the video going viral, meaning they are doomed to spend the rest of their days as a laughingstock. Before it is even time to perform, they have decided how it is going to go. They are responding to fears about the future as if they have already happened. They feel real because they are so intense.

*H*erein lies the cognitive distortion- “bad things will happen to me if I get up on stage. I know this is exactly how it will play out because I thought of it. There is no other possible outcome.” The person has closed themselves off to the prospect of succeeding. They have made a prophecy about their future that causes them distress, and they are doing what they think will make them able to avoid that. If this scenario sounds familiar to you, the good news is that it proves that you think rationally. How, you might ask? Even though these acts are misguided, they do come from a place of self-preservation. What would be irrational is knowing what you were doing is not good for you, but doing it anyway out of a need to self-destruct. You are avoiding public speaking with the mindset that you are going to prevent pain or misfortune from happening to you. This means you want to care for yourself. When the willingness is there, anything is possible.

*T*he first step in the CBT route would be to figure out where this fear came from. Maybe you did have an unfortunate incident in the past with public speaking. You got tongue-tied during a presentation and some people laughed. Before

anything else, you would want to look over that memory again and see if you are remembering it accurately. You might imagine all of the other students cackling at you and whispering amongst one another about how badly you failed, but take a moment to consider that wasn't the case.

*M*aybe they thought what you said instead of what you intended to was genuinely funny.

Perhaps they even thought you intentionally said that and admired your comedic abilities. Even if they did laugh at the fact that you misspoke, it was only for a moment. It does not mean they formed an entire opinion on you from that experience.

*O*nce you figure out the origin of the fear, you have the means to make it start to crumble, because now you can slowly build up to confronting your fear. If you are afraid of speaking in front of even small groups of people, this can be a good place to start. At first, make it people who you know very well and trust, and therefore you will not feel such an immense pressure to impress them. This could include a close group of friends or family. When you present to them, you will look back on the experience and realize nothing terrible happened. Now you will have had an experience speaking in public that was not bad. You will also have taken away a portion of the fear surrounding it upon the realization that you can do it.

*W*hat you have done is subject yourself to exposure therapy, a very commonly used technique in CBT. The idea is that the more contact you come in with the source of something that is causing you distress, the less power it will hold over you. Partially, it then no longer gets to be this big, ominous

presence that looms threateningly over your head. For another thing, once we have faced our fears find that no terrible thing happened to us, there is nothing left to fear. You have worn it down until it is manageable. This is when you can develop your true feelings about something. In this case, as you grow confidence speaking in bigger crowds, you might find that you actually enjoy public speaking because you like to present information to people in a way that they might not have thought about it before. The fear of it was clouding your thoughts so that an inaccurate version of yourself was portrayed. Don't get caught into those spirals where you are lost in your thoughts but none of them can reach a resolution. At this point, you run the risk of developing anxiety. When you feel one of these phases coming on, take a breath and sit up with your shoulders back. This will serve as a physical symbolism of pulling yourself out of it.

Dissociation

Commit to being fully in whatever moment you are in right now. When you do not do this, you will become distracted. You are at a meeting or in a conversation with a friend. You start thinking about something that happened the other day, a bill you are worried about, or something you want to get done next week. You look up and realize you have not heard a single word the person speaking in front of you has said in the past five minutes.

This is known as dissociation, and we are all guilty of it from time to time. However, if you do it chronically, it will negatively impact your life in more ways than one. For one, it will be more difficult to form close relationships with others. People like to feel like they are being heard, and if you space out while they are speaking to you, it is going to make them feel like what they are saying to you does not matter to you, especially if they are

trying to open up to you. It also means you will not hear them tell you things you need to know- “there’s going to be a mandatory meeting tomorrow.” People who do not take in what others say often miss out on important events and ask why no one told them about them. It is likely that someone did, but their brain did not receive that information.

That being said, it will be easy to miss things that happen around you. Sometimes when people are driving and they know where they are going, they will go into “autopilot mode” and think about other things. When they get to their destination, they do not remember anything from the drive. This is dangerous because, on the road, unpredictable things happen. Someone might run a stop sign or fail to yield. If you are not paying attention to the road this can result in a car accident.

Dissociation causes us to miss out on important information. Your physical body is there, but you are not a part of what is going on. Say you are behind on a project and right now you are at a meeting. If you spend that time worrying about the project and how much catching up you had to do, you will then miss out on what is being discussed at the meeting, you will be even more behind.

Sometimes we can also cause ourselves to dissociate when we are listening to negative self-talk. This is because you have to stop what you are doing and give all of your attention to it, meaning it will hold you back from growing as a person. Again, you think badly of yourself because you have learned how to do it and it has become second nature to you. Talking to yourself in a more positive way is something you will need to train yourself to do

if you have a propensity for negative self-talk. At this point, part of the reason your brain does this is that it is the routine.

Praise Yourself

Give yourself credit whenever you do something well. You would take all the time in the world to point out a mistake you made, so show the same level of commitment to congratulate yourself. When you get no rewards for good behavior and disproportionate punishment for doing things wrong, you have made it so that there is no carrot in the “carrot and stick” dynamic. This means there is no incentive for trying to do better for yourself, and when this happens you will remain in the same place.

Do not save praise for the great accomplishments, as we never save the negative self-talk for especially big failures. If you make a dish and it tastes especially good, give yourself credit for your skills as a cook. If you help a friend through a rough time, take a moment to acknowledge that you were a good friend to them. If someone drops something and you pick it up for them, you are being considerate, which is an admirable quality. By the same token, get out of the habit of talking badly to yourself. A big part of this is finding new ways to word it whenever you are thinking about something that did not go well.

Let’s say you had a job interview that did not go over well. Instead of berating yourself and saying things like “You’re so stupid! You blew it! Can’t you do anything right?” Try saying something constructive, like “I didn’t present myself to the interview with the right level of professionalism. Next time, I will be more well-versed in the proper etiquette for a job interview before I go in.” The next time might be the one where you do get

hired, but not if you just beat yourself down and therefore become demotivated. Instead of negative self-talk, try constructive criticism. It will work much better in getting the results you want from yourself.

*I*t might feel like you are not going to reach a better thought pattern, but I can assure you that you will. It will take time and practice, and a commitment from you, but just as both neuroplasticity and CBT promise, you can instill or break any habit you want to if you repeat it enough times.

FOCUS AND FIND YOUR CENTER



ONE OF THE biggest challenges those with a chronically cluttered mind can be summed up with the two concepts mentioned in the title. I like to compare it to a pair of earphones that have been carried at the bottom of a bag all day long. They have been getting tossed around and tangled up with the other contents of the bag. When they are taken back out at the end of the day, they will be wrapped around each other and maybe even around another item, and you will need to take some time to untangle them before you can use them properly again. This concept goes with your mind as well. We stuff our thoughts, feelings and experiences throughout the day because we do not have enough time to look at them, so this leaves our minds in a mess, which can make it difficult to figure out how you actually feel and make sense of your thoughts.

Do not feel alone in this. Even the supposedly most well-adjusted person has to make a conscious effort to wind down at the end of the day. With everything going on in our daily lives, it is easy to lose your mental balance. This is why I am going to teach you how to clear out the unnecessary noise in their mind so they can discover their true selves.

The most integral part of finding your center is coming into yourself. This means you are not thinking about anything except what you have felt today and what you need in this moment. When I say “need”, I am not talking about your responsibilities. I mean what it would take to bring you to a state of tranquility. To do this, there needs to be a retreat. That is why many people shut all of the blinds and curtains in their house at the end of the day. It is meant to be symbolic of shutting out the day. The world outside is happening away from you and you are here in the comfort of your home, recharging yourself so you can approach tomorrow feeling fresh instead of trying to draw strength you do not have to get up.

Protect Your Energy

To get your mind into a peaceful place, you need to push anything unrelated to you away from it so as to free yourself from distractions and prevent your energy from being spent on something that is not worth it. It is our natural instinct to hold everything close to us and analyze it as much as possible. However, this is not going to do anything except make you feel more upset. Earlier in the book, we talked about times of crisis. When you keep going over them in your mind you will find more about that you cannot control, which will go on to make you even more frustrated. When we do not feel like we have any say in anything that happens around us, our anxiety will be at a higher level than ever.

When you develop a chronic feeling of anxiety, it is easy to begin to think everything that happens around you is a direct response to you. You might see some people talking and think it must be about you, and if they have singled you out it must be a bad thing. You look at yourself in search of a huge flaw they could be pointing out. You become self-conscious about something that likely did not even happen.

When you take things personally, you create scenarios in your mind and act based on them instead of on reality. We discussed that in a brief example above but sometimes these situations can become even more extreme. This means you put it onto yourself when terrible things happen to other people and make yourself answer for it. On the other hand, let's say someone goes out of their way to act rudely to you when you are in private with them. For an anxious person, this will often cause them to think "What did I do? I must have done something wrong to make that person behave this way, because they do not do it with other people." (I can assure you that this is not true. People who inflict emotional damage on one person does the same thing to everyone else who spends too much time around them. It is never just you, no matter what they might try to get you to believe.)

It is strange how most people call their own behavior into question whenever someone is rude to them. This is because they are going on the assumption that people never treat others badly without any reason to do so,

leaving them with the idea that they must have brought this behavior out in the other person. This mentality is dangerous to one's well-being because it will cause you to become a person that is easily taken advantage of. People will know that all they have to do is put some base in their voice and that will put you on your heels trying to placate them, meaning they will be able to get anything they want out of you. When you think about it this way, casting other people's actions back to them is a means of self-preservation.

*Y*ou see a lot of people throughout the day and you do not know the state any of them are in. You do not know what kind of news they might have gotten or what circumstances they are going through. This is not to say their behavior towards you is excused, but that it is very unlikely that you are at responsible for someone you have never met. Even if it is a close friend who has been acting differently lately, keep this same thought. If they are ignoring or being rude to you, do not interpret this as something you did wrong. Do not chase them for attention or apologize for something you did not do. They are the ones who have changed. They might have started associating with a person who brings out an unflattering side of them (however, they are still the ones culpable for their behavior. Don't get me wrong. This is not to let them off the hook. It is to show you how unrelated their behavior is to you).

*L*eave the things other people do where they belong-with them. They are why they took the actions they did and if they ever want to see improvement, it is

going to need to come from them. That is all there is to that story.

A **nalyzing Criticism from Others**

Now we need talk about when you receive criticism that is personally directed at you and might hold some weight to it. That is hard to take. No matter who you are and how thick you think your skin is, we all want to be well-liked by others. At the very least, we do not want to have problems with anyone. To hear someone criticize you personally causes you to doubt yourself.

*W*hen this happens, the first thing you need to do is check what they told you for accuracy. Consider the source. Some people are negative and behave this way with everyone. There is also a chance that they are projecting. This is when a person attributes their own flaws onto someone else because they do not want to face them. Say you have a friend who you rarely talk to. They say you should call them more often but when you do they do not answer. You message them and they use one-word responses that do not provide any conversation material. This causes you to stop talking to them, and later they tell you that you are bad at keeping in touch. In this case, your friend does not want to own up to their part in the two of you growing apart, so they are putting it all off on you.

ow, if there is truth to what they say- for example, you interrupt people in the middle of their sentences- you need to

Nlet this hit you only as a constructive criticism. Know that the person who told you this isn't saying they do not want to be your friend anymore. If that was the case, they would have just left. However, in healthy relationships, each person needs to feel like they can voice a grievance they have with the person in a way that maintains the dignity of both parties. They do not dislike you as a person. They dislike that particular habit. If you work on it and the problem is resolved, you will be able to enjoy a closer relationship with them. People with high levels of stress can be sensitive to criticism because they interpret it as rejection. Just remember to take it in the spirit it was meant to be. You can probably name a behavior you would like to see them change, and yet that is compartmentalized from the love and care you feel for them. If they really are your friend, it is the same way for them.

Coping With Stress at Night

Let's talk about coping with stress when it hits most often, which is at night. This is because you do not have anything left to do, which means you have a lot of time to think. This makes it so that your sleep is delayed and interrupted. If you cannot turn off the dialogue in your mind, you will be unable to sleep. This is unfortunate because nighttime is when you need to find your center so that you can get a good night's sleep.

hen we fail to do this, we do not think or perform well. Therefore, learning how to distance yourself from upsetting thoughts and stimuli from the outside world is what your health depends on. This means you must get a handle on those sneaky nighttime worries. You know the ones I'm talking about. Your eyes are getting heavy. You are just about to drift off when all of a sudden, a thought comes to you so abruptly you swear you can hear it out loud—"Did I pay my light bill?" At this moment, you sit up, wide awake now, and go to check it out. You find out that you did, and while you feel relieved, you no longer feel like going to sleep, and it could take hours for you to get back into that state. When this happens, you were bated into disrupting your own sleep. Now we are going to talk about how to refrain from taking the bate in the future.

You might need to do something that represents putting your worries away before you go to bed. For example, you might keep a journal specifically for this purpose, preferably one that can be sealed shut. Every night, write down everything that is troubling you. When you are done, close the journal and put in a drawer. The closing of it symbolizes cutting yourself away from it. The book is shut so you cannot look at the content inside of it. Putting it somewhere that you cannot see it means it is out of reach for the night. You might look at them tomorrow, but for now you need to let go of anything that is not conducive to sleep, which is one of the most important aspects of maintaining a healthy mental state.

fter a person goes a certain amount of time without proper sleep, most of the time only being a few days, a person will begin to deteriorate. For one, your cognitive function becomes compromised. This means you cannot think critically or remember information, or in some cases even taken it in. Your mood will be affected. You will become more irritable and overall emotional, which makes you more likely to make rash decisions that can affect you permanently. For example, you might say some extremely harsh words to a valued friend over a minor annoyance, and in the long run it deals damage to your relationship with them. If the lack of sleep goes on even longer, a person can start to mimic signs of insanity.

Before you go to bed, eliminate all possible distractions. This means putting your phone and computer away. The cycle begins when you lie in bed with your phone telling yourself you are only going to respond to this one text and then go directly to bed. However, one text leads to another. You might look something up in the internet. Someone could call and you decide you are just going to talk for a few minutes, and a few minutes become a few hours. In short, electronics and sleep deprivation go hand in hand. Lie down and make sure you have nothing to do. This is also not a time to think deeply about anything. Whatever has not been fixed yet is going to have to wait until tomorrow. Do not start any new trains of thought. Visualize things that help you clear your mind, and make sure all of these things are pleasant.

here is a dark underbelly to taking medication to get to sleep. If you do this for a prolonged period of time, you will become dependent on it. If you do not have it you will be unable to sleep. Also, as you go on using the medication, you will build up a tolerance to it. The amount you took before will no longer put you to sleep. This means you will need to take increasingly larger doses of it to achieve the same effect. It will get to the point where every time you go to the store you will need to buy more of it. You will start to buy multiple containers of it so you can make it last throughout the week, meaning the amount of money you spend on this will rack up. As you amp up your dosage, you will find that you feel groggy in the mornings. If you are having problems sleeping, there are many healthier and more natural means of fixing this problem. You can listen to a relaxation audio or practice a guided meditation. As an alternative to the medication, you can also take tablets of melatonin, which is a natural substance that helps the body fall asleep. You will wake up the next morning feeling rested and ready to get up.

M **anage Your Stress, Even Amidst Chaos**

There will be times that there is a lot of chaos going on in this world and around these times, your life will naturally be more stressful than usual. This is why you will need to firmly establish the idea that your home is a safe haven that you go to at the end of the day to escape anything going on in your daily life that is troubling you.

here needs to be a cutoff time for thinking about heavy subjects. For one, there is nothing you can do about them right then. For another thing, you will be unable to sleep if you are plagued with worries and other negative emotions. This will cause you to get poor sleep so that the next day, you are tired and therefore unable to take on the challenges of the day as well as you would have if you had been rested enough to do so. You will never feel as exhausted as when you are trying to get up in the morning after having stayed up all night under extreme stress.

You must put a hard stop to researching morbid issues and thinking about something that brings you pain in the evening. There are bits of information that you do not need to know. As people, we are curious. When we hear of a story that captured our interest, we can quickly spiral down into a pattern where we are trying to figure out every intimate and often gruesome detail about it. These details have no worth because you get nothing good from knowing them. It will not help you to have it and in fact you will hurt yourself by finding them out. While it is not the majority, there are some things in this world that are purely painful. There are stories that only tell of horrible things with no happy conclusion. If you let those sink too far into your mind, it can have an effect on your psyche.

You Create Your Own Reality

In order to gain control of your thoughts so you can organize them, you need to eliminate the idea from your mind that you cannot bring your stress down or that

it will not allow you to turn your focus away from it. Think about how many times you have felt an urge to do something but did not. This goes to show that feelings cannot control your actions even if they are intense. You can make your own reality.

A major similarity controlling your stress has with raising a child is the fact that there will be times that, like a child, your mind will try to assert more power over you than it should have. Think about the parent who never tells their child no. They do not set limitations on them, or if they try they soon give in if the child starts to throw a tantrum.

*W*hen they do this, they are rewarding bad behavior and this goes to have devastating consequences for a young mind. They learn that they can get anything they want if they just push hard enough. The parent is allowing themselves to be bullied in their own home and they are setting the child up to have a tendency towards bullying others.

How this relates to your mind is that if you follow the rules the anxiety sets for you and give in every time it tries to pull you into an overthinking cycle, you might think you are getting it off of your back for a little while just as a parent thinks they are buying themselves sometime of relief from their child's tantrum. However, what you are really doing is making it so that the anxiety will hit you twice as hard the next time you try to deny it attention. It knows it just has to find the pitch that it has to hit to make you crumble.

*Y*ou can resist anxiety and get unpleasant thoughts out of your mind. Think about an instance where you saw someone wearing a very nice piece of jewelry that you loved the look of. You might have felt a moment of envy about it and wished it was yours, but that feeling came and went. It did not cause you to try to take the jewelry away from them. You can do the same thing with any other feeling. You have been angry at someone before without slapping them. You have been sad but resisted the urge to cry because you did not deem it an appropriate time or place to do so.

*T*hink about what you had to do to stop yourself from crying. First, you set a ground rule for yourself and your mind- “We are not going to do this right now. It is not going to happen and that is final.” You were firm and did not leave room for doubt about the way things were going to be. The next thing you probably did was look for a way to distract yourself from the upsetting stimulus. You might have searched the room for something to read or a picture to focus on the detail. Maybe you remembered a story your father told you that made you laugh. No matter what it was, you shifted your focus to something more pleasant, or at least that did not make you want to cry. After a little while, you got to the point where you were able to think about the story or picture instead of whatever was upsetting you until the effect wore off and you were either at a place where you could show your emotions or a time where its emotional effect on you wasn’t as great.

Whenever you feel stress coming on and its impact is becoming too much, remember that technique. You may not be able to change your circumstance, but you can mentally pull yourself to another place. As a disclaimer, this is not the same thing as dissociation. Actually, learning how to do this will help you prevent yourself from it. Thinking about unpleasant things and getting caught up in the emotions associated with them will cause dissociation. In the study of trauma, that is essentially what happens to an afflicted person when they have a flashback. It is more than remembering the event. They are reliving it as if it is happening all over again.

This same process can happen even if what the person is remembering isn't as extreme as being in a life-threatening situation. They might have had an intense argument with their significant other. Their boss might have told them they were on notice for showing up to work late. It can be something as simple as having spilled red wine onto their favorite outfit that they were planning to wear for an important event and now they have to figure something else out at the last minute. Whatever it was, it upset them and it has caused uncertainty about the future.

Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms

A common but unhealthy way of dealing with stress is through food or alcohol. You've probably heard someone say they need a glass of wine because they have had a long day. Everyone has something to drink once in a while to

take the edge off. Alcohol is not bad- alcohol abuse is. It is meant to make you loosen up some and liven up a social event.

*H*owever, when it is used as a substitute for dealing with one's problems, an entire set of problems will surface from this. For one, everyone knows when you drink too much alcohol, the next morning you wake up the next morning with a hangover, which feels very unpleasant. When a person reaches a certain point of drunkenness, they become out of control of what they say and do because the filter in their head is gone. This means along with feeling physically ill in the morning, you will be dealing with feelings of shame and guilt about things that happened the night before. Often the said sense of shame will emphasize the person's urge to drink more. There is a misconception that the consumption of alcohol will help you not think about something upsetting, which is not true. In fact, it will have the opposite effect. Any emotion you are feeling, especially an unpleasant one, will be magnified whenever your mind is influenced by alcohol.

*T*here are also those who are self-proclaimed stress-eaters. This means instead of eating because they are hungry, they are using it as a means of dealing with their problems. One of the most commonly used phrases by Dr. Phil is that "you should never treat psychological problems somatically. What he means by that is that if you have an emotional upset that is affecting your daily life, you cannot expect to alleviate with something that has to do with your physical state. When people turn to "comfort food" as an

answer for their problems, the relief will only last as long as the dish does, and after that the stress comes right back to where it was before. Then they have to face the decision of being in a state of distress or eating something else. If this pattern keeps up, the person will be burdened with a number of struggles, including becoming overweight and the health issues associated with that. Liking food is one thing, but using it as a crutch is another. The same concept can be applied to any habit. To deal with stress, you must find a productive way to do so. If you feel pain or discomfort while doing it, that is a good indicator that it is not.

*M*editation for Stress Relief

Meditation has been talked about extensively over the past couple of decades as a stress relief method. It is favored because not only is it perfectly, but you do not have to pay a dime or go anywhere to do it. To get the best effects, make sure the room you are meditating in looks nice and put together. This activity is meant to make your mind calmer and more orderly, so it wouldn't make any sense to expect yourself to be able to do that in a cluttered room.

*Y*ou will want to do this at a time where you can sink into your own mind without any distractions. This means unplugging from your technology devices and putting any work you have to do out of your sight for the time being. You do not want to have anything around you that could ask for your attention, because this time is all about you. There are different ways people meditate, and they are all valid. There are some people who prefer to do it in total

silence, while others like to put on instrumental music. If you are going to use music, it is preferable that it does not come with words. This is because if it does, your mind can be lead a certain way by them.

Do not be afraid of making time for yourself. Everyone needs some “me-time” so that they can recharge. If you are always being pulled off in one direction after another, how can you expect to be able to focus? Mental health days are necessary for maintaining one’s well-being. It is hard for people with cluttered minds to give themselves a break because they place a pressure on themselves to always be “on”- ready to help and take action or working on something. They do not know what it is like to have silence within their minds.

You have to make some parts of your life fun. Your psyche will not survive being without any enjoyable moments. Even if you are low on cash for this week or cannot go anywhere, you can still find ways to put some pleasure into your life.

All Forms of Stress Relief Matter

Not all forms of stress relief are conventional. Your first thought might be about a quiet activity, but it does not have to be. Going out for a run or kickboxing count as managing stress because it provides a release of negative emotions, which you need to have. While you are doing

whatever you do to destress, imagine the weightlifting and the negative energy that has built up over the day dissipating. Our minds are powerful enough that sometimes if we just visualize something, we can make it come true for ourselves. Think about how many times your mind has managed to ruin entire days over a single thought. That means you can turn that on its head.

Do not have the end result of something played out in your mind before it actually happens. This is how people create a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is not because you are singled out. It is because when we feel like people do not like us, we will grow a dislike for people that shows in our actions. If you do not think you will be good at anything, you will not try anything because you think you will fail.

Finding your center means you need to remodel the space in your mind if it does not help you succeed. To succeed, you must have confidence in yourself. You cannot expect to have no faith in yourself and then do well. Gather things that represent the various talents and skills of yours. Maybe your boss had something good to say about you on your end of the year review. If you sew, take a picture of something you have created and post it onto your social media so you can receive positive feedback for your work. This will give you a sense of accomplishment and make you feel purpose for what you do.

MANAGING YOUR THOUGHTS



IF YOU HAVE A CLUTTERED BRAIN, it is easy to look at others who do not seem to suffer from this and think they must just be lucky and not have the same problems with their thoughts as you do. It can make you feel inferior to them and like they have a secret that is lost on you. The truth is, other people only look like they have it more together than you because you do not know what is going on inside of their minds. If you did, you would get a very different story. There is no such thing as a person whose thoughts do not come to them in a rush. What keeps their brain uncluttered is that they actively sort out their thoughts as they come. Imagine a person who takes their clothes out of the laundry and throws them all into their dresser drawers as they can be fit instead of taking the time to fold and put them away.

Get Your Thoughts Under Control

Organizing your thoughts is something you have to put effort into. It has to be a consistent thing because there will never come a point where your life stops being exposed to new chaotic events. Everyone has had moments where they wished they could go back to “simpler times”. However, while they were living said times, there were things

that were bothering them. The reason those problems feel so insignificant now is that you are not currently experiencing them. You can easily forget how they made you feel. On the other hand, you feel the full effect of the problems you have now, so you think of them as the worst ones you have ever had.

*H*owever, if we spend every second of our lives thinking things are the worst they have ever been, we will live in a constant state of distress. This is why you need to get your thoughts under control. Think about how when there is a traffic jam or other crisis on the road. When this happens, there will be traffic cops on either side of the road, signaling to drivers where they need to go, when they can move forward and when they need to stay put. They are directing the flow of traffic so that no one gets into an accident, but everyone gets to go where they were intending to.

*U*se this mentality when you are dealing with your thoughts. The thoughts that bring harm to you have to take a road that leaves your mind. This includes you talking down to yourself- dredging up an old memory of something you feel you did wrong, a past embarrassment, or anything to make you feel ashamed of yourself. Any form of insulting yourself is unacceptable. They cannot stay in any form.

p next, you need to figure out which thoughts are about something that will eventually need to be addressed, but not

right now. Think about when you are baking a cake. You do not try to put the frosting onto it before the batter has even been mixed together. Therefore, you put the frosting aside and wait until the cake has been baked and cooled down enough that it will not be damaged by the friction.

Then, finally, there are the thoughts that can proceed. If you are taking a test, thoughts about the subject material are welcome. You might wish you were at the pool or able to think about something else, such as when you will get to go out with your friends, but that leads to another section of traffic flow- the ones that will be tempting but are not suited for your current activity.

There will be many times in your life that you will need to get a thought to leave, whether that is a temporary or permanent thing. Let's say you are having worries about the state of your employment because there have been a lot of layoffs lately. Without a doubt this is troubling thing to have to think about. If you are giving your best performance during your work hours, there is nothing else you can do. At that point, it is beyond your control. Make preparations so you will be able to recover from it if the worst case scenario comes to life, but do not let it become an all-consuming force in your life. If it does happen, you will not be able to react to it with proficiency because you will have worn yourself out already. It would be like a boxer training for hours right before he had a match. He would be completely

ineffective because he would have already used up all of his strength.

Role Conflict

When you participate in your life, there is a certain level of wearing a mask that you have to do. It does not mean you are being dishonest. You just need to blend to a certain theme. You are not the same person with your boss and coworkers that you are with your family. There will be times that contradicting expectations are placed upon you. This is referred to as role conflict. Sometimes this goes farther than simply having to assume a more professional and serious personality than the one you normally have. The most common form this takes is when a person is forced to make a decision between work and their family. When you have role conflict, it is easy to feel overwhelmed. You feel like you cannot make the right decision.

The harsh truth is that there is no perfect decision. No matter what you do, there will be someone who thinks you did the wrong thing. This is why when you have to make tough decisions, you have to learn to have faith in the one you made. Say you took time off of work because your child is sick. There might be a few people who say this is being an unreliable employee. However, if you were to make the opposite decision there would be people who thought you did the wrong thing by not being with your family. This is when you need to make the choice you can live with. This means either you can stand to miss out on family or work.

*A*fter you have made a decision, there is often a new source of stress that replaces the one that comes from not knowing which path to take. You then will have some doubts about whether you made the right decision. In this circumstance, you need to make a point to let these thoughts go. They are only hurting you. You might even need to verbalize this- not pleading with them to leave but making the resolution that they are not welcome in your mind, just as you would tell someone that had showed up uninvited at your house that they cannot stay overnight.

Prioritize Thoughts

You need to recognize when you are giving a thought more time than it deserves. It will seem impossible to abandon a thought that is troubling you at first, but I can assure you that you can and you will. The first thing you need to do is release the expectation on yourself to do so. This will make it so that there is stress surrounding the thought. When we do this to a thought, our brains will automatically become more drawn to it. It becomes a sore that you cannot stop picking at even though you know doing this will only make it worse. When you have such a wound on your skin, what you need to do is put some ointment on it and then leave it alone. If you do this, before long it will disappear.

*T*o manage your thoughts, you need to be mindful of what information enters your brain. When you get on a roll of thinking about negative things, it can take on a life of its own until that becomes the entire content of your brain. You cannot let it get to that point because that will color how

you feel in your daily life. Since this is so often a source of both information and anxiety for many, I will discuss the news first.

Media Management

Keeping up with the news is a good thing because it will allow you to stay up with the times and respond to information that you need to know. However, there is only a certain extent to which you should do this. When you have gotten the gist of what is going on, it is time to switch the channel away from the news. You will feel tempted to go through every single story and all of the theories behind them. You spend hours at a time watching videos and reading articles about it, probably losing sleep in the process. Before long, you will look up and find that it consumes your every thought. Since the big stories on the news are typically negative ones, such as a murder or serious illness, your mind will solely focused on something that brings you down. This will cause you to go through your day with a cloud hanging over your head. You will not be able to interact with your day because your thoughts are with something morose.

Social Circle Management

Another source of information you need to manage is your social circle. Yes, the people in our lives flood us with information constantly. It is in the stories and jokes they tell you. It happens when you are discussing your opinion about current events with them. Even when they are showing you a song they like, they are giving you information that will have

an impact on your brain. We become the people we surround ourselves with. This is because when you spend enough time with a person, you become consistently exposed to their ideas. You will repeatedly hear them voice their opinions, and this will have an effect on how you feel. It is true that moods are contagious, both good and bad. However, the thing about a bad mood is that it is almost impossible to pull someone out of it, especially if that is where they want to be. There will be people you meet during your life that are consistently negative. They do not have anything good to say about anyone or anything. Your conversations with them will always have a borderline angry tone because any time you try to get excited or talk about something you like, you will be shot down. They like to watch your face fall when they tell you that they do not like or care about what you are talking about. They do this to feel a sense of superiority over you.

There is also the person who always has a conflict going on with someone else. The conversation can never be about something besides their latest drama. You might even make an effort to veer the conversation away from that and onto something else, but they will not have that. They want to pull you into it and give your input, putting you at risk because they might tell that person what you said.

Then there is the user. This person only calls you whenever they need something. The favor tends to be big and costly to you, whether it is monetary or simply taking up a lot of their time. Once you have given them what they want, you will not hear from them until the cycle repeats

itself. The roles will never switch in this relationship, where you are the one receiving help from them, no matter how much they declare that you are their best friend and that they will give back to you later on.

*Y*ou will feel exhausted after talking to any of these people. That is the one common trait between them. This is because they are something known as an emotional vampire. This kind of person gets their name because like the mythical creature gains life force by draining living people of theirs, this person does the same thing with your energy. You cannot give enough to them, and you will never get anything in return from them. It is an abusive relationship because they do not take you into consideration and you often feel bad about yourself after your interactions with them.

*D*o not wait for a time where things change with this person. There will not come a point where they realize everything you have done for them and show gratitude and reciprocation. You will only waste your time with them. It does not have to be a big, eventful scene for you to cut them out of your life. Simply do not talk to them- this means answering their calls and text messages. When they try to pull you into an emotional argument, stick to whatever you need to talk about and stick to the facts- a technique often referred to as gray-rocking. Do not have conflict unless you need to. You've probably heard the term "pick your battles." This is because they cause stress and you have to invest a lot of time

and energy into them. You might never even see a resolution to it.

Environmental Management

Along with managing your relationships, make sure you are also placing yourself in a good environment that will give you more positive thoughts. These changes do not have to be extreme. If you generally keep your blinds closed, open them up for a change. Exposure to natural light will have a surprising effect on your energy levels and mood. When you spend too much time in an enclosed space with the lights off, you will begin to feel depressed about it. You will feel contained. Even though you are physically free to leave this room, you will start to feel like you are trapped in it because the space outside of it is so unfamiliar.

Much of the clutter in our minds comes from concerning yourself with what is going with other people. You do not need to take on the problems of everyone around you. This will be difficult being the empathetic person I know you are, but to try to pull an emotional vampire out of their slumps is impossible. What they really want to do is feed off of you and bring you down with them. You cannot help them any more than they want to be helped, and if they really want to see a change in their life, it is up to them to do the legwork. You can send positive thoughts their way, but after that you must let go. It is not lacking compassion to do that. It is an act of self-preservation.

Complainer Management

Limit the amount of time you spend listening to someone else talk about a problem. It is one thing to be there for a friend who needs to vent. However, the difference is that there comes an end to the discussion about the tough times. Eventually, they find a solution to the problem and then you move on. If they cannot do that, they will become a burden on you that is too heavy and consistent to carry long-term. It is true that with every close connection we have with others, we will deal with a certain amount of drama, but it cannot be the only thing that comes out of the relationship.

We've all had that person in our lives who just wants to complain. They'll be talking about the same friendship, relationship, or other problem that they were six months ago, and nothing has changed. They claim to wish things were different but make no move to make that so. You will spend endless hours and evenings on this, but they will never do anything about it in the end. When this happens, it is not friendship. You are being used. They don't want to change their situation but they do want to complain about it. You do not owe it to anyone to listen to something you don't want to. It is stressful to be that friend who is always there. It is also unlikely that they will be there for you in your times of need.

You might think someone is making a poor choice, and you might be right about that, but it is not something you can impact. It is not your place to say what they do, and if you try to insert yourself into the

situation it will do more harm than good, and you risk creating conflict. Do not waste time and energy worrying about things you cannot control. The choices other people make fall into this category.

*W*hen you think about the people you associate with, you need to pay special attention to your romantic relationships. This person could potentially become the one you live with, marry, and have a family with. If this happens, you will spend every day of your life with them. This means they will have the biggest impact on your life, so you want to make sure you are entering a relationship with someone for the right reasons. The media is infamous for making emotional pain seem romantic. Two people have a relationship that is filled with pain but they cannot stop pining over one another, and this is depicted as a great love. It is one thing to enjoy a story, but you need to make sure this stays fictional and does not become a fixture in your real life. If something feels hopeless, more often than not that is because it is.

*R*elationships are difficult by default, but this comes with a caveat- they should not constantly be this way. There should be sometimes where you just have a nice dinner or enjoy an afternoon together. If it is always a life-or-death struggle with one another just to keep the relationship intact, this is only hurting you. If you find that you are always thinking negatively about yourself, it is time to look at the relationships in your life with a more critical eye than you have before.

Replace Negative Thoughts with Positive Ones

It is not enough to just try to stop unpleasant thoughts from entering your mind. You need to replace them with positive ones or they will just come right back to you. Try to think of what the opposite of this thought could be. For example, you are going out with some new friends. Your mind might be conditioned to think “what am I going to do to embarrass myself this time?” This will cause you not to look forward to the event and maybe even cancel. Instead of this, try thinking of what could go right. Get dressed up nicely and imagine them complimenting your outfit. Maybe they will like your sense of humor.

One of the secrets to decluttering your thoughts is to not have so many of them. You might be thinking right now “How do I do that? You can’t stop thoughts from coming into your head!” To an extent, this is true. However, people with anxiety tend to think about things from every negative angle possible. Try letting life happen a little. Have you ever gripped onto something extremely tight with your hands? Did you notice they were red and even stung a little afterward? When you try to keep such a heavy hold on the way things happen, it will cause you harm. If you are going out with someone for the first time, you do not need to think about whether or not the relationship is working in just one date. Think of it this way- you are first getting to know them. This is to see if you have any common interests. If you end up going on a second date, you do. If you do not, at least you got

some social experience and you may even gain a friend from it.

To manage your thoughts, you must keep a handle on your emotions. This does not mean holding them in—the opposite is so. You need to express them in a healthy time, place, and way. If you have clutter in your brain, it invariably means there are feelings you need to get out. Emotions that have been bottled up over a long period of time will come out in a rush. Think about how when a container of soda is opened after it has been out in the sun for a long time and shaken around. It will overflow, spraying around everywhere and you will have absolutely no control over where it goes. Our emotions mimic this. You might not know how to express something that is bothering you, but if you wait too long to do so you will cause that choice to be taken away from you. Humans are emotional creatures, and when we are highly charged in this area, we lose the filter in our head. We will say whatever comes to our mind in exactly the way it first come out, meaning we will not take any time to see if there is a better way to word it.

Don't Bottle Up Your Emotions

You are not doing anyone any favors by holding all of your emotions in. First, you are harming yourself. Emotions like anger, sadness and fear are poisonous to keep to yourself. In the short run, you might be sparing them hearing something they don't want to, but in the long run, you will hurt them just as much as you have hurt yourself up to this point.

Both fear and sadness will evolve into a more volatile form over time. You might think you are doing your friend a favor and salvaging the relationship by not letting them know that something they do hurts your feelings, but when you think about it for a moment, it doesn't hold up to logic. When we feel like someone is doing something to harm us but does not care, it will eventually equate to anger. Even if we do not tell someone about an issue we have with them, we can often feel like they should have picked up on what we are feeling through our facial expressions, tone of voice, body language and way of wording things. When they do not, our brain will give the message that the person does not even care about us enough to notice. This will cause the resentment to build up even more. If this keeps up, it will not take long for you to develop a deep and seething anger toward that person, and meanwhile they will not have been given a chance to defend themselves or change their behavior so that it creates a better relationship.

When it does finally come out, it will be too harsh. You will likely use terms like “you always” and “you never”. There will be more force in the message than necessary and pieces of it that are not meant to get your point, but to cause emotional pain. You might feel vindicated for a little while afterwards and glad that you have finally been able to get that big weight off of your chest, but that feeling will be short lived. Pretty soon, you will start to feel guilty and wish you could take your words back, which is impossible. Your relationship with that person will be strained.

Direct Communication

In order to effectively communicate with others, you need to get out of the habit of trying to “say it without saying it.” If you want to go to a certain sandwich shop, say that explicitly. Don’t just say something like “It would be a good day for a sandwich” and then assume the other person does not want to do that or does not care what you want if they do not respond. You need to let them know that is the type of sandwich you are thinking of as opposed to just making one at home and that you have an active interest in going out to get it. Otherwise, they might think you are just having a passing thought about it. When you are conveying a message, you need to say exactly what it is. People are wired to think there is no problem if you do not bring one up. They also do not respond well to finding out there was something wrong after the fact and then being told something like “I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want to bother you.” Even if you genuinely mean that you were trying to preserve their well-being, they will think this means you do not trust them or that you are implying that they do not do their part in the relationship.

Also, when you try to go for the “beat around the bush” type of communication, you will be consistently upset. Your words will be vague and therefore misinterpreted. For example, you tell your partner you want something red for Christmas, and you are expecting them to think of the type of perfume you like. When they get you a red locket, you will be disappointed and it will show on your face, so they will know. You will feel like your needs are not being met, and this will

continue if you do not ask for what you want. Think of the saying “the squeaky wheel is the one that gets the grease”. This means if no one will think you need anything if you do not say so.

Now that we have discussed the thoughts that need tended to, let’s talk about times where a thought needs to be ignored. In order to keep your mind healthy, you must not hold yourself to every thought that passes through your mind. If someone does you wrong and you have a momentary wish for them to have misfortune, you do not need to punish yourself over this. We are only humans, and we have more thoughts per day than we can process. There are going to be times where you have thoughts and impulses that do not sit well with you.

Bad Thoughts Do Not Make a Bad Person

Not every time you have a bad thought does it mean something is wrong with you. What is wrong is holding onto anger and ill wishes toward others. It would be great if we could never think anything unpleasant about anyone, but that is not a realistic thing to expect of yourself all the time. When we are disappointed by and angry with people, we are going to have some rogue thoughts fly through our heads. They come and go, and then it is as if they never happened. You do not have to disclose or confess to everything you say and think. I can assure you that for everyone in this world, down to a person, if you were to have access to every thought they have ever had, there would be things you would find that would shock and disgust you.

*A*lso remember this. Thought does not equal action. That is what separates civilized people from the uncivilized ones. You may think to throw your drink at someone because they said something rude to you, but the important part is that you do not actually go through with it. It may feel like you have done something whenever you have a thought or fantasy because the image of it plays in your mind, but in reality nothing has happened. This is because our thoughts are only as real as we make them. I make this point because people with anxiety often suffer from immense guilt. You consider yourself to be a bad person because you hold yourself to a morality that cannot be attained. There is no such thing as that hero on the cartoons that always makes the right decision, battles evil, and wins. You need to rid yourself of the notion that you are never going to do anything that causes harm to anyone. Of course, you would not seek to perpetrate violence or other serious harm to anyone, but there will be times that you lose your temper and say some choice words to someone. You will not be as emotionally available for someone as they need you to be at times. You will continue to suffer immensely for as long as you place the pressure on yourself to not ever make a mistake.

*A*llow yourself to have a thought come and go without thinking it needs to be placed under scrutiny or thinking there must be some big hidden truth, whether within yourself or something or someone else, that you need to figure out because of it. When you have a thought that is intrusive and unhelpful, such as one that puts you down or makes you

think you might be a bad person, it is time to tell that thought that it is silly and holds no weight.

Turn dissociation on its head. Tune out the unhealthy thoughts with things you would rather think about. Dissociate from the negative self-talk and intrusive thoughts by keeping your eyes trained onto the task at hand, even if it is small. If your task is to go to sleep because you have a long day ahead of you, that is where your thoughts should be. If you have a performance, focus on having fun, not what others might say or all of the mistakes you might make. Only humor thoughts that are useful or give you comfort and happiness, and throw the rest of them away.

LIVING AN ORGANIZED LIFE



YOU HAVE PROBABLY HEARD the idea that a cluttered house is a good indicator of a cluttered mind. This is true because we tend to replicate what is going on inside of our minds in our surroundings. In times where you are too busy to have much register in your mind, it is likely that your living spaces will have that chaotic look- dishes not put away, clothes in places other than the laundry bin, the surfaces dusty, and overall an unpolished look. This will be unpleasant to look at, which will go on to increase your stress. On the other hand, when your living space looks nice, you will feel a sigh of relief whenever you open your front door.

*T*he Tranquil Type vs The Anxious Type

Also, think about the way people with a tranquil mindset live their life as opposed to people who are constantly anxious. The anxious type invests in relationships that are volatile, whereas people with organized lives gravitate away from people who are causing them too much stress. This does not mean there will never come a point that they reconnect with that person, but it will have to be when some changes have been made and a conversation with them can be productive. When a tranquil person is hit with a setback, their

mind goes to how to get to a solution rather than wallowing in how severe the problem is. When they take on a project, they take it on in smaller, more manageable bits. When your life is organized in other aspects of your life, your mind will fall into the same pattern. You have to begin this in your daily ritual.

I imagine a person that wakes up every morning in a bedroom with sheets that were not made the night before, and they look around at a room that has trash strewn about it. Things are piled haphazardly on top of one another and the surfaces have various food containers and glasses sitting on them, leaving nowhere to place anything. Their laundry basket is piled up to the top and starting to brim, causing some dirty clothes to fall onto the floor. They are trying to find their keys and something acceptable to wear, which takes a while because of the disorganization of their possessions. They realize there is a paper that they cannot find and it is only five minutes until they have to leave for work, so they realize they are just going to have to explain to their supervisor that they do not have it and hope for the best while they rush out the door without having any breakfast. They are feeling groggy because they were up until a disturbing hour of the morning finishing a project that had been assigned to them a long time ago and they are hoping it will be deemed acceptable.

*T*here is no way this person would be able to draw any organization into any aspect of their life, especially not within their mind, if they kept going on a pattern

like this. When we put out chaotic energy, not only will we not attract things that are positive, but we will repel them.

*W*e all have stressful lives that are filled with demanding daily schedules and responsibilities that clash with one another. There is no getting away from that. If you are waiting for a time that this comes to an end to have a less stressful life, that is not going to happen. You need to become responsible for your own stress relief. You may not be able to anything about how heavy the expectations placed onto you are, but you do have the power to decide what your experience with these tasks are.

*P*lanning Ahead vs Dreading the Future

There is a difference between planning ahead and dreading the future. It is good to be prepared for what bumps in the road would come along. For example, if you are going outside and the sky looks cloudy, it is wise to bring an umbrella. This is proactive. However, it would do nothing but cause you distress if you were to board up all of your windows even though the weatherman had given you no indication that a storm was coming. You would be putting a great deal of work into something that turned out to be pointless once the storm was over and it turned out that there was never a need to do such a thing.

*Y*ou can choose to make your life less cluttered. At the beginning of each day, figure out what tasks you are going to need to take on. Living moment to

moment puts you in a position where you are always uncertain and feel like you are just about to fall behind. This means you need to prepare for what could happen (realistically, not reaching for a hypothetical situation) in advance instead of not doing so and then becoming frantic when a situation comes up. As I said before, you do not want to cause yourself undue stress, but you also do not want to avoid reality because you do not want to experience unpleasant feelings. When we let life happen to us without us, we will never feel like we are keeping up.

Organize the problems in your life. If you do not do this, everything will feel like a crisis. This means you will spend your life in a constant state of anxiety. The top of the list is emergencies. Very few things in life will live up to this category. Someone's life typically needs to be in danger for that to be so. Below this are the very significant responsibilities that cannot be shirked- taxes, work, and so on. Then there are things that you need to do but can be put off a day or two if you need to- extra credit projects, changing your bedsheets, etc. Finally, there are the things that do not matter at all, and will not make one bit of difference in your life. The most common thing in this category that people of the anxious sort worry about is what other people think of them.

Learn to Say No

If you have a cluttered mind, there is a good chance that doing too much for others plays a role in it. You must learn to say no to people. You are not putting them out. In

fact, you are passing their request off to someone who does have the time and means to do it.

*P*eople who cannot say no will often find themselves having to explain why they could not get done what you promised that you would. This is an embarrassing and uncomfortable situation to be in. You will have to deal with others being frustrated with you because things they are coming to find out that they still need to worry about what they thought would be taken care of. This is why turning down a request you know you cannot fulfill is the actual kind thing to do.

*I*t is easy to get the wrong idea of what it means to be a good person. There is such an emphasis on being “nice”- if you are nice, it means you never disappoint anybody. If you tell them no, you are giving them bad news, and therefore you are being mean. You need to do whatever they want, even if you do not want to or have time for it.

T rue kindness is giving to others and yourself what you can realistically do. It is telling them the truth even if it is hard to hear. Say your friend asks you what you think of their outfit and you notice that the patterns they are wearing clash. If you nod and say you like it, you are setting them up to go out in public looking bad. Therefore it is telling them what you think they want to hear. The true kind thing to do would be to suggest a different shirt that is a better fit for the pants they have on.

*Y*ou also back yourself into a corner when you try to always please others with your answers. If you pretend to like a TV show that you really do not for their sake, they are going to start constantly playing it. You will be bored and feel yourself becoming upset with them for always wanting to watch it. You will eventually have to do the uncomfortable task of telling them how you actually feel and deal with the discomfort they feel about that knowledge. They will be upset to hear that you never really enjoyed this activity that they thought was your thing, and that all of the time the two of you were having fun in their mind, you had a very different perspective. You will have to live out consequences of being insincere. Your life will be chaotic on both an internal and external level. You will have emotional turmoil from not being honest with yourself and have conflict with others because there will be a lack of honesty as well.

*I*nformation Overload

Let's talk for a minute about a couple of things you need to watch out for in your work life. You've probably heard the term "information overload." You go to a business meeting or lecture, and the speaker fills an entire hour with facts, information and other things they want you to remember. By the end of it, you can barely name one thing that was mentioned during the entire discussion even though you were listening. This is because you did not get enough time to process anything, and it is why we cannot procrastinate and then expect to jam-pack a large amount of information into a short period of time. Think about a time you had slacked off on

studying for a class, and then tried to study and learn all of the material the night before. You were lucky to remember anything. Often, procrastinating becomes a habit that spreads into everything one does, which is how they get the idea that they can pull everything together at once by multitasking. There is no such thing as true multitasking. Something will have to be neglected. Have you ever tried to talk on the phone while writing something else down that was unrelated to what you were talking about? You cannot concentrate on two things at once.

Declutter Your Space

I cannot stress enough how important a clean house is to decluttering your brain. You cannot expect to have a cluttered living space and an organized mind. Disorganization around us naturally causes anxiety because it creates the feeling of being out of control. You also know that if you had to find anything, you would need to sift through a jumbled mess of junk trying to find what you do need.

Get rid of things you do not need anymore. Letting old, used and unnecessary things pile up will lead to hoarding. You need things that either currently serve a purpose or that make you happy to see in your house. This means decorations. It doesn't need to be anything elaborate. Artificial flowers that cost a couple of dollars at your local store counts as a decoration. It may not be much, but just a little item here or there can go a long way in beautifying your house.

Make little changes to your house depending on the season of year. If you don't like to completely deck your house out, you do not have to, but get some Halloween-themed cups near the end of October. Put up a tree and stockings for the holidays. Send someone a card on Valentine's day. When days that are supposed to be festive pass by and you do nothing, this will cause you to become depressed. Also, participating in these events will make you feel more connected to the outside world and you will be putting your energy into something positive.

We all have energy and inspiration. It is just a matter of where we channel it into. Some people do not tap into it. Others pour it into something that will not be good for them. You need to look at what you are putting first in your life with a critical eye.

Adopt a Routine

One thing you need to adopt is creating a routine for yourself, meaning things you do on a daily basis. They should include self-care and enrichment. People with such routines live more organized lives and have a clearer mental space because these habitual practices create a solid ground for you to stand on. This way, even if something unpleasant happens to you, there is still something good waiting for you at the end of the day.

These routines also serve as a positive force to drive you. To declutter your brain, you need to be able to recognize when

*T*you have something in your life that is only causing you stress. It could be a friendship with someone who starts arguments with other people on a consistent basis and drags you into them. It could be a relationship that is always hanging on by one finger.

*I*t is important to figure out what you do not need anymore. Old receipts, candy wrappers, assignments from years ago, and things that are cracked or broken are all junk. They do not serve any purpose for you at the current time. They just take up space.

You need to be careful when you are judging what is a sentimental item because this can lead to its own form of hoarding. If you feel the need to keep everything that ever once carried some meaning, you will never be able to throw anything given to you by anyone. You will pile up every card you've ever gotten for any occasion- holidays, birthdays, etc.- no matter how many years ago they were given to you. Your friend gave you a trinket that was beautiful at the time, but now it has age on it and it does not look the way it did when it was first given to you.

*T*hink about the intention from the person who gave it to you. They wanted you to have something that looked nice and gave you joy. If they found it in the condition it is in now, they never would have thought of giving it to you. They thought this trinket would make you happy for a little while, and then when it no longer did you would pass it on. It was not their intention to make you feel beholden to keeping something even though you no longer like the way it looks. If

you indiscriminately keep anything that might be sentimental, that means nothing is special.

There are very few material things you will keep throughout your entire life. For the most part, they will come and go, and that is the way it should be. Things break down over time and then they are no longer useful. When it comes to inanimate objects, you are allowed to be cold.

There will be times that you are sure you will not have enough hours in the day to complete everything you need to. Say you have a lot of things you need to get done this week because there is a big holiday event happening in the company soon. When you initially look at it, it can seem daunting and this will cause you to put it off, but that doesn't do you any good. That just causes you to have more to do in a shorter amount of time.

Create a Task Hierarchy

Focus on one task at a time. What is the most important thing to do? That is the one you should tackle first. When you have made this decision, let thoughts of whatever else you have to do go for the time being. When we put all of our energy into something, not only will it turn out better, but it will get done in a shorter amount of time. For one, your thoughts and actions are aligned and linear. This means you have a direct stream of energy flowing into one task. You will

not have to pause, turn your attention to something else, and put yourself into the mindset fitting for that one.

*A*fter you have completed all of these tasks is a crucial time. Your body and mind will be telling you not to do anything heavy-duty for a little while, and it is right. Everyone needs downtime. You cannot constantly go on full speed ahead with no rest. It will not take long for you to become burnt out if you do this. We hear that phrase so often but rarely think about the true meaning of it. Burnout is much more serious than just being tired. You have been tired for a long time but ignored it to keep moving forward. It is a physical, mental, and emotional state because you have been giving too much on all fronts.

*I*t is dangerous to let yourself get to this point. For one, you will become ineffective. You might be denying yourself breaks because you want to be the “special, secret weapon employee” who always goes the extra mile. However, if you are drained, the work you put out will not be good. It will be sloppy because when you are tired and your brain is frazzled, you are prone to making more errors. On an emotional level, you will not be able to tolerate much. This will cause you to become irritable, which will make you prone to snapping at others. You cannot hide when you are in a bad mood. It will show in your mannerisms and tone. You know what it is like to be around someone who clearly does not want you in their presence and sees you as a bother. This will not have a good effect on your relationships. You will find it difficult to retain new information. A flash drive can only hold so much data. Our brains operate in much the same way. Take

just one day to yourself. You need to rebuild your defenses and energy levels.

*W*hen you feel yourself getting to this point, you need to take immediate action- or rather, inaction. You are in desperate need of a restorative day. This means not responding to any more social media than is absolutely necessary and doing what you need to do. When we feel like all we ever do are things other people want us to do, we will become both frustrated and unmotivated.

A free day like this is also a good time to eliminate smaller tasks from your docket so you do not have to think about them anymore. This will actually be beneficial for your memory because then other information can take its place. When you want to place something onto a flash drive that is full, you must make room for it. This means deleting old files that are not needed anymore and data that is just taking up space. When our brains are cluttered, there are at least a couple of things we could shuffle out of it. When you get a free day, take a look at your to-do list. Is there anything you could take off of it? Maybe you have wanted to clean out your fridge because it is in need of it. If there is some paperwork that needs to be done, do it. These things will not take long to do or require a great amount of energy, but they still will take up space in your drive for as long as they go unattended. Sometimes we put things off because they are tedious to do, such as housework and errands. However, as time goes on, more and more of them will pile onto your plate. No amount of dreading it is going to take your workload away from you. It

will only cause you to pile up more anxiety. When you are thinking, “I need to do this, I need to do that, I have a million things to do!” See if there is anything you can tackle at that moment.

*I*nventory of Your Brain

Take inventory of your life. Before, we discussed cleaning out your physical living space. Now you need to do the same with your mind. You are likely carrying things that should not be there anymore. This is why you have to find a way to stop worrying about things that are out of your hands. It is a completely unproductive investment of time. It creates clutter in your mind that does have to be there. However, we all do it. When you go through the things you are worried, you will likely find that most of these things are either beyond or control, impossible to predict, or both.

*I*t is easier than you might think to develop a consistent fear of something unlikely. Throughout the day, you hear horror stories on the news. This can cause you to think the world is a violent and dangerous place. We are often exposed to people coming to public places and doing violent acts, which can warp the way you view strangers. You see a picture of the perpetrators of these vicious crimes and their faces are not grotesque. They do not have the “look” of someone who could do that. That strips us of the security in the idea that you would be able to spot that kind of person immediately and know to stay away from them. To an extent, this is a good lesson because you want to only give people the trust they have earned. However, you do not want it to escalate

to the point where you are paranoid. This will be extremely limiting for your life and can even escalate to a disorder.

Be Mindful of Your Mental Health

Keep a vigilant watch on your mental health. This is something that can easily slip through the cracks because it does not show up in obvious ways like coughing or a headache. You can repress emotional struggles and keep going- but not forever. There will be little signs that all is not well which will actually often manifest as physical symptoms. One of the most common ones is fatigue. You feel tired no matter how late you sleep in or how early you get in bed. However, when you try to sleep at night when you are supposed to, your mind will not slow down. This is a heavy indicator of anxiety and depression, and these symptoms can escalate over time into a meltdown.

When we hear the term “meltdown”, your mind probably conjures up images of disgraced celebrities in highly inebriated states, screaming profanities and doing bizarre things such as going on prolonged social media rants. Often, it is more subtle than that. Essentially, a meltdown is the release of stress and other negative emotions that have been bottled up for a long time.

At the end of the day, check your mental vital signs. They may be subtle, but if you take a closer look you will be able to easily spot them. For instance, things that you normally don't even notice begin to aggravate you. People coming up to you and asking you questions might suddenly

cause you to feel resentment towards them. This is because you do not feel like you have anything left to give.

Be Mindful of Your Music Choices

Pay attention to the type of music you are listening to. This might seem trivial, but this can reveal a lot about your psyche. Of course, sometimes you simply like the way a song sounds, but what you listen to consists almost exclusively of sad or angry songs, this might be indicative of something deeper going on in your life. This is especially so if you get more emotional than usual over the music. There is truth to the idea that you are what you consume. If you are consistently listening to words that convey the message that everything is hopeless and nothing will ever get better, you will begin to see evidence of this in reality. In a way, you will develop a confirmation bias. In scientific research, this refers to when someone is conducting an experiment to prove a theory they have and only acknowledge the evidence that points toward their theory. If something comes up that contradicts it, they do not look at it. When you surround yourself with stimuli that place you into a negative mood, you will only notice the bad things that happen in your life. In addition, you will magnify the severity of them in your mind.

This isn't to say you should invalidate your feelings when they are hurt. However, on the other hand, it is also detrimental to a person's mental health to feel the full effect of every disappointing or difficult event. You cannot survive under those conditions for that long.

It all starts with your internal dialogue. We need to keep an eye on not only the way we speak to ourselves directly, but the way we word it whenever we narrate what is happening to and around us. Pay attention to your choice of words- for example, when you spill your drink onto your shirt, is this a “horrible” event, or is it an inconvenience? When you have a date that doesn’t go anywhere, was it “the worst date ever”, or was it just unfruitful?

If your spill was a minor embarrassment, you will be able to move past it and not think about it after it is over. If you think of it as this awful mistake you made that everyone will remember forever, you will think about it every day and it will have no small impact on you mentally- your confidence meeting others, the way you value yourself, and much more. When this is how you interpret every unpleasant thing that comes along, you will be a mess internally. Everything will become insurmountable.

Move Along
People with a cluttered mind often have difficulty moving past something after it is over. They think of all of the ways it could have been prevented, better decisions they could have made, and they will go on to create an entire gallery in their minds of should’ve, would’ve, and could’ve. Let’s say an interpersonal relationship went sour. You had been very close friends with this person for a long time but now you have grown apart.

Sometimes things happen that are out of our control. It is difficult to give up the idea that we have the power to influence and prevent everything that can go wrong. However, it is the only thing that will give you peace of mind whenever bad things happen. When you give yourself powers that you do not have, you will blame yourself for things that are not your fault.

Many times, people with anxiety will punish themselves even though they have not done anything wrong. They feel like they have, and therefore they assume they must have done something that needs punishing. This is an example of emotional reasoning. Essentially, when you do this, you make judgments about the real world based on feelings that are going on inside of you. One of the first experiences a person will often have with this is in early childhood when they are alone in their room at night after they have watched a scary movie. They will hear something and picture it being the monster from the movie. They will feel scared and instead of attributing it to what they saw on the screen, they will think the monster must be under their bed or in the closet.

Emootional Reasoning

Emotional reasoning drives us to paranoia and negative self-talk. Even stimuli that are supposed to be positive will turn on the anxiety. For example, someone tells you they like the way your hair looks today. Instead of appreciating the compliment and allowing it to make you feel good, you start thinking “What if they are being sarcastic and not only do they

think I look bad, but they're laughing at how stupid I am for not noticing that? Are they saying my hair doesn't look good most days? Have I been walking around for years with a terrible haircut?"

*Y*ou will bring a lot of bad days onto yourself with emotional reasoning. It will cause you to jump to the worst possible conclusions. Your friend doesn't respond to your text so you will think they must dislike what you said and that you will never hear from them again. A few hours later you find out they were called by a friend to pick them up because their car broke down. This means you spent that entire time being consumed by anxiety and there was never any need for it.

*I*t isn't hard to get into the habit of assuming the worst in times of uncertainty. Any relief you get will be temporary because before long your mind will be occupied with another worry. It can actually become addicting to play worst-case scenario. You might think it is a crazy idea that you could actively seek out ways to torture yourself, and it does not mean what you might think it does. When people do this, it is not because they enjoy pain. It is because they literally do not feel comfortable when they are not stressed out. It is an unfamiliar feeling, so the unconscious part of their mind tells them there is something wrong. We go for what we know even if it is unhealthy.

ou deserve better than this. You need to do better for yourself than to keep yourself in a constant state of distress. Deep down, you want a life beyond this. The fact that you are reading this book is proof of that. Bad habits can become old habits. The first step to that is getting a handle on what happens to unhealthy thoughts once they enter your mind.

Social Connectedness and Support

In order to be able to handle the stresses of daily life, you need to be connected socially to someone. Life is too much for any one person to handle all on their own all of the time. This is why it is not only good but necessary to cultivate friendships in your life. There will be times that you have had an extremely rough day and need to vent about it to someone. There will be inconveniences in life, and you will be setting yourself up for a very difficult life if there is never anybody you can call to help you out.

If we do not talk about an issue, it will continue to fester inside of us and influence what we say and do. In order to manage and organize your thoughts, you will need to talk them out. Sometimes after you talk about a problem with someone you trust, it will feel less overwhelming. This is because your friend is now sharing the burden with you. Even if they cannot do anything about it except for listening to you, you will feel better after you have spoken about what is bothering you. Up to this point, your thoughts will all be bunched together and seem impossible to

overcome. Even if they do not advise you on what to do, you can sometimes be lead to a solution.

*L*ife comes to us in disorganized bursts, but we still have the opportunity to then take these events and compartmentalize them into organized places in our minds. When you are at work, stay there and focus on your projects. When you are at home with your family, be in that moment with them and engage in whatever activity is going on there. That is the ultimate key to decluttering your life, and therefore your mind.

CONCLUSION

What happens in the outside world is beyond your control, so you have to focus on what is going on inside of you. Your mind is the most important part of yourself to keep healthy. Whenever our mental wellness is suffering, it gets in the way of our ability to function in our daily lives. It will impact your ability to make good decisions, how you respond to hardship, and your overall quality of life.

You can get a handle on your thoughts. If you work for it, you will get to the point where you can say what thoughts have a place in your mind instead of being led by them. Keep at mind what is at the core- stress and burnout. Do the practices we talked about daily. Transform your life into a more tranquil experience. Focus your energy on what needs to be done right now, not your end goal, what happened before, or what could happen in the future. If a thought comes in that falls into the unnecessary category, let it go. You make thoughts go away not by repressing them, but by allowing them to come and go without paying any mind to them.

If you feel yourself becoming overwhelmed again, that's not horrible. It just means you need to renew your commitment to decluttering your brain. All you need to do is make today

better. Sometimes it is as simple as reminding yourself to breathe and that there will be a solution to whatever is troubling you today.

MASTER YOUR EMOTIONS

Developing EQ, Self-Awareness,
Mindfulness, & Intentional Living



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WHAT ARE EMOTIONS, REALLY?



THE AVERAGE PERSON seems completely mystified by the truth of what emotions are. Very rarely do people adequately understand what an emotion is, why it exists, or what its true value is. Most people chalk their emotions up to a form of strong feeling or a mental or physical response that they have to the world around them, and many attribute their emotions to providing them with a true ability to understand what is going on around them. This particular understanding of emotions is on par with someone who experiences emotions but does not fully understand what they are, why they exist, or how to use them as a tool in your overall life.

The reality is, emotions are a lot more complex than just a “feeling” you have, or an urge to act on certain impulses based on how you are feeling. The feeling of emotions is only one isolated aspect of emotions as a whole, which is why they can seem so frustrating and challenging for some people. Once you begin to understand the root of emotions, however, the way they are developed and processed within the body, and the true purpose of emotions, suddenly this mysticism falls away. You no longer find yourself wondering why you are feeling so strongly, or what to do with the feelings you are experiencing. Instead, you find yourself navigating your feelings intentionally and creating outcomes from those emotions that

are far more fulfilling and purposeful than anything you could have possibly created before you truly understood those emotions.

Emotions and Feelings Are Two Separate Things

The first thing we must address when digging into the topic of emotions is the fact that emotions and feelings are not the same things. In the aforementioned explanation of how the average person identifies emotions, you can see that most people believe that feelings are the same as emotions when, in fact, this is not the case. Feelings are actually a symptom of emotions. The two have a massive connection and are highly intertwined; however, they are not the same.

Emotions, from a scientific standpoint, are used to describe a psychological state that is generated in your subconscious mind. The emotions generated in your subconscious mind trigger various physical responses based on which emotion has been triggered. In many cases, these physiological responses can be quite similar in different emotions, although they are experienced in different ways based on which specific emotion has been triggered. For example, both anger and fear will trigger a rapid heart rate, increased blood pressure, tensing of the muscles, and an increase in your development of cortisol and adrenaline. However, one emotion will have you wanting to fight, while the other emotion will have you wanting to flight. The difference between your emotions is triggered by slight differences in *how* these physiological responses are stimulated.

Feelings, on the other hand, are subjective experiences that you have in response to your emotions. Feelings are driven by

your conscious thoughts, and by the conscious reflections, you have in regards to the emotions you are experiencing. You can have emotions without having feelings. However, you cannot have feelings without having emotions. As well, the way certain emotions feel to you can be shifted over time, while the emotions themselves will continue to remain the same.

***T*he Eight Core Emotions and Twenty-Seven Overall Emotions**

Every single human experiences eight core emotions. These eight core emotions determine the way your physiological responses will be triggered, as well as the way you will end up feeling. They include ecstasy, admiration, terror, amazement, grief, loathing, rage, and vigilance. Each of these emotions will trigger a different response in your body, which will create a different feeling for you, in addition to other symptoms relating to that specific emotion.

Outside of those eight core emotions, there are nineteen more emotions that you might experience. These other emotions are “subcategories” of the original eight, and they will produce a more specific set of symptoms, including feelings, based on which specific emotion you are experiencing. In the most basic summary of emotional mastery, your goal is to move from recognizing the eight core emotions to recognizing all twenty seven of your emotions and learning how to navigate them effectively and intentionally. The additional nineteen emotions you can feel include: aesthetic appreciation, anxiety, awe, awkwardness, boredom, calmness, confusion, craving, empathetic pain, entrancement, envy, fear, interest, joy, nostalgia, romance, satisfaction, sexual desire, and triumph.

In most therapy programs, you can find an “emotions and feelings wheel” that defines over 100 emotions and feelings you might experience in your life. Note that any of the additional emotions and feelings you would identify on this wheel are simply more specific definitions of the emotions and feelings belonging to the original twenty-seven emotions that you might experience. With that being said, the more specific you can get with identifying your emotions and feelings, the easier it will be to navigate them.

Emotions and Your Brain

All emotions are rooted in your subconscious brain. When you begin to experience new emotions, multiple parts of your brain are activated to trigger specific feelings and physiological responses based on that particular emotion. Essentially, emotions are your brain’s way of triggering a very specific response from your entire system that is intended to support you in navigating different experiences you might come across in life. For example, if you come across a situation that triggers fear, your brain will light up to activate a pre-determined fear response which is intended to give you enough energy, mental clarity, and power to protect yourself from that which you are afraid of.

Every emotion will light your brain up differently, which means that there are several parts of your brain that will be activated for different emotional sequences. With that being said, virtually your entire brain is involved in the process of recognizing and achieving various emotional responses.

All humans are born having already been programmed to experience specific responses to specific emotions. This means

that these emotions are pre-programmed into your brain, and for that reason, the specific trigger sequence will be virtually the same for everyone, at least, at first. Over the course of your life, however, the way your emotions are triggered and the experiences you have as a result of your emotions can shift. While the core occurrences in your brain and body may remain the same, the intensity to which they are triggered and the specific way they are experienced by the brain and body can shift. These shifts are experienced as a natural evolution in response to the life you lead, and they are designed to amplify your emotion's ability to support your wellbeing. This evolutionary experience is why some people experience emotions and are not largely phased by them, while other people experience the same emotions and seem to be completely crippled by those emotions.

In addition to affecting the way the rest of your system is triggered, your brain will be affected by your emotions from a conscious experience, too. This means your perception of your emotions, the thoughts you experience, and the feelings you have in relation to your emotions will all be experienced within the brain, too. This two-layer experience can make the mental processing of emotions rather complex, as there is a lot to be recognized and sorted through on a mental level.

Emotions and Your Body

Outside of your brain's experience with emotions, your entire body experiences symptoms of your emotions, too. Your emotions have the capacity to change your nervous system's behavior, adjust the way chemicals and hormones are being created, adjust your heart rate and your breathing, and even affect your body by urging you to tense your muscles or

change your body language in response to the emotion you are experiencing. Your emotions can powerfully impact your physical body in many ways, right down to the patterns and behaviors you physically act out based on what you are feeling in your brain and in your body in response to your emotional experiences.

When you begin to experience emotions, the flood of changes that occur on a biological level within your body can make it seem impossible *not* to act on them. Your body, in every way, is creating the perfect environment for you to act on your emotions, and in many ways makes it painful *not* to act on those emotions. This particular experience with emotions is why so many people believe their emotions are the absolute truth, and believe that they are at the mercy of their emotions anytime their emotions are triggered. Fortunately, this is not necessarily the case. You can experience emotions, even on a physical level, without necessarily acting on them, or with acting on them in a way that is far more productive to the goal of those emotions in the first place. Through this reprogramming of your brain and body, you can massively adjust the way you experience emotions both mentally and physically, thus allowing you to truly master your emotions.

***T*he Value of Your Emotions**

Emotions may seem like a passive experience, or like an inconvenience, if they continually strike at inopportune times, but the truth is that your emotions are extremely important, and valuable. Your emotions are a part of your evolutionary biology, and they are designed to help you keep yourself alive. Emotions specifically support you with survival. Through your emotions you are able to recognize and

avoid or eliminate danger, make important decisions, and understand others so that you can connect with others in your community. This connection, then, allows you all to work together to support each other's survival. In addition to helping you connect with and understand others, your emotions also allow others to connect with and understand you.

The easiest way to understand the evolutionary advantage of emotions is to realize that your subconscious mind's primary goal is to keep you alive. It does this by governing unconscious bodily processes such as your heartbeat, the creation of your hormones and energy levels. Your subconscious mind also continually scans the world around you based on the input of your five senses, and uses this information to determine what is needed in order to aid your survival. If there is any level of perceived threat around you, it will produce the necessary emotions to create the necessary physiological and psychological responses to protect you from those threats. If the perceived threat level is low, your subconscious mind will use that as an opportunity to engage in other necessary processes, such as triggering feelings of hunger or thirst so that you will eat, and then digesting whatever food and beverage you consume.

*H*ow Your Thoughts Perceive Emotions

Your conscious perception of your emotions is precisely the point in your emotional experience where you need to take control and master your emotions. When left unchecked, your thoughts surrounding your emotions can exacerbate the emotions, they can trigger you to act on those emotions, and they can make you feel righteous in your

emotions. Your thoughts can even trigger you to use your emotions in an unhealthy manner, either creating disharmony and harm for yourself, for others, or for everyone involved in any situation where you might be experiencing emotions.

Most often, people will have emotions they are fine with, and emotions that are problematic and that trigger intense conscious responses that can lead to toxic behaviors and outcomes. Learning how to identify where your problematic emotions lie will allow you to be particularly mindful of them, and will allow you to begin to learn how to control your emotions in a powerful way. When you learn how to intentionally and effectively navigate your problematic emotions, suddenly, navigating all of your emotions feels easier because you have tools to deal with even the strongest emotional experiences. This way, you truly do begin to master your emotions.

HOW EMOTIONS AFFECT YOUR LIFE



EMOTIONS CAN AFFECT your life in major ways. Since you experience them every single day, they have the capacity to cause countless experiences for you that will either be positive or negative. Recognizing how emotions are affecting your life will allow you to begin to understand where you might be having unhealthy experiences with your emotions, and where you can transform those experiences so that you can begin to have healthier ones. Once again, the trouble with this part of the process is that our society has not yet reached a point where it is normal for us to talk about emotions and explore different emotional expressions. As a result, you might find yourself confused about the difference between healthy and unhealthy emotional expressions. It is at this point of discovery that many people realize they experience far more unhealthy emotional expressions than they may have previously thought, which can be particularly overwhelming. In fact, discovering this can trigger an emotional response in and of itself, which may lead to you trying to justify that there is no reason why you should work toward creating an entirely healthy emotional response protocol in your life. You might feel like you only need to work on the truly problematic emotions, and like everything else is just “nitpicky.”

The truth is, if you are going to truly master your emotions, you need to recognize this particular emotional response first. This emotional response that works in an effort to justify your behaviors and minimize the true extent to which you are struggling is experienced in an effort to minimize the pain you experience from having to actually change these responses. That is because, for your subconscious mind, and in many ways for your conscious mind, too, change is scary and painful. As you read through this book, you will learn how to break down that response so that you can begin to see everything as an opportunity for welcomed and enjoyable growth, rather than as painful criticism. Through this, you will begin to make massive changes in the way you address and navigate your emotional experiences.

What an Average Day Looks Like

For this chapter, we are going to explore what emotions look and feel like on a surface level, or how they are impacting you in ways that you can easily recognize through your conscious awareness.

The average person does not experience non-stop emotional hijacking. People rarely experience every minute of every day of their lives being overruled by intense emotions that cause them to have intense emotional reactions to the world around them. Instead, it is more likely that you go about your day feeling relatively neutral, or fine overall. You might even go through several days feeling completely relaxed, neutral, and content with your day to day activities.

However, that one day that you do have an emotional response that is stronger than an average day to day experience will be

intense. The feelings you have may feel like they crash in out of nowhere, and they may interrupt your ability to experience peace for the rest of the day. Likely, they linger, they continue to cause psychological and physiological responses long after the trigger itself, and it may take you hours to get back to feeling normal. If you were to think about that particular incident later in the day, a similarly intense feeling may wash over you, as though the entire incident just occurred all over again. This can lead to you retriggering and re-experiencing that particular emotion several times over that day, or possibly even for a few days until you begin to experience a reduced emotional response to that particular trigger.

Once you were able to eliminate those thoughts from your mind, you would simply go back to feeling content and neutral throughout your day to day activities. You may shift from feelings of happiness and joy to feelings of sadness or frustration throughout the day, but overall you would comfortably come back to that neutral point every single time.

*H*ow It Feels When You Navigate Noticeably Problematic Emotions

If you are someone who deals with particularly problematic emotions, you will know it because you will experience what is known as “emotional hijacking.” Emotional hijacking is a term used by the psychological and medical community, which refers to what goes on within your mind and body any time a particularly intense emotional experience occurs. Emotional hijacking is the result of an emotion being triggered so rapidly that your conscious mind does not have a chance to keep up with the trigger and, so, a flood of chemicals and hormones is released through your body. This flooding of chemicals and

hormones causes intense, overwhelming responses in your thoughts, feelings, and body that make it seem impossible for you not to acknowledge and act on the emotion you have been hijacked by.

When you experience emotional hijacking, it likely feels like you are completely out of control over your experience. You might feel like you have to act on that emotion and the impulses it has caused, to the point where it feels almost addicting to act on them. Each time you do act on them, you experience a sense of relief from those hormones and impulses, and, as a result, your brain feels relaxed which reacts as a sort of reward for engaging in that particular emotional experience. When this happens, it can actually reinforce that emotional hijacking, making it easier for you to be emotionally hijacked in the future, and harder for you to come back from the experience.

Often, emotional hijacking can be replicated by thinking about the subject which triggered the experience in the first place. With particularly troubling emotions, you will likely find yourself feeling that emotion with such great intensity again that you feel obligated to act on it once more, essentially going through the hijacking all over again. For example, let's say you got in an argument with your spouse and something they said triggered an emotional hijacking within you, associated with the emotion of anger. If you were to think about what they said at a later time, you might feel that emotional hijacking all over again, causing you to pick a fight with your spouse over that same issue. It may seem like that issue is unresolved anytime you think about it, solely based on the intense emotional response you have every time it crosses your mind. This experience may occur regardless of whether or not the issue has actually been resolved at any given point.

*H*ow It Feels When You Navigate Any Problematic Emotion

Emotions that you have intense problems with are likely the reason why you are here reading this book, or seeking support in navigating your emotions. While they should certainly be a priority in your emotional mastery, it is important to realize that there are other problematic emotions you can experience that are less intense, too.

Any time you experience an emotion that is challenging for you to identify, understand, reason with, or resolve in a healthy way, you are experiencing a problematic emotion. The emotions we tend to deem problematic are emotions that feel “bad,” such as anger, sadness, anxiety, and so forth, because these are the emotions that we are most likely to have toxic experiences with. However, some people also find that they have toxic experiences with more positive emotions, particularly when those positive emotions cause them to lose touch with reality. For example, if you found yourself taking risks or engaging in unhealthy behavior whenever you were feeling particularly happy in life, that would be a toxic emotional experience, too.

It is important to understand that dealing with these problematic emotions is just as important as dealing with ones that may evolve into an experience of emotional hijacking. In contrast to your intensely problematic emotions, these may seem low priority and like they can be left aside, but the reality is that they can continue to create problems over time. The more you continue to allow yourself to engage in unhealthy emotional expressions of any sort, the more you will experience troubles surrounding your emotions, which can

lead to greater problems in the future. These problems may range from minor inconveniences to total losses and traumas. If you are going to truly master your emotions, you need to learn how to not only eliminate problematic emotional expressions, but how to use your emotional expressions as a positive tool to support you in living the best quality of life possible.

What Healthy Emotional Experience and Expression Looks Like

When you have a healthy experience with your emotions and your emotional expression, it is easy for you to recognize your emotions and use them to your advantage. The resolution to your emotions will always have a healthy, positive outlook, and you will experience no negative side effects as a result of how you experienced or expressed your emotions. Positive emotional experience and expression can occur for even the most troubling emotions you experience, and this should be the ultimate goal of what you are working toward. This will not only allow you to feel better about yourself, but it will also allow you to engage in life in a far healthier manner which will create countless benefits for you, ranging from deeper bonds and connections with other people, to more opportunities and a deeper sense of true happiness and fulfillment in your life.

Healthy emotional experience and expression will always start with you recognizing that an emotion exists. Upon recognizing that an emotion exists within you, you will take inventory of what that emotion is, how it is affecting your mind and body, and what likely triggered that particular emotion. Looking into your emotion in this practical manner will allow you to

navigate your emotion from a logical perspective, which will make dealing with your emotion much simpler. This way, while you will continue to feel that emotion, you will also continue to remain consciously in control of it, which drastically reduces the chances of you experiencing emotional hijacking, or behaving impulsively because of that particular emotion.

As soon as you understand what your emotion is, how it is affecting you, and why it was triggered in the first place, you will begin to try to understand what goal that emotion has. Was it triggered in an effort to protect you against a perceived threat? Was it triggered to help you make a specific decision? Was it triggered to help you have enough energy to navigate the situation you are a part of? Understanding the specific purpose of your emotion means that you can begin to identify healthier means of reaching that goal, which will allow you to control your emotional experience. Once you have chosen your new route for fulfilling the goal that your emotion had in the first place, you can follow that route to completion. Be sure to remain consciously aware of how those particular actions are fulfilling the goal so that you can, in a sense, persuade your subconscious mind to see how this particular experience is healthier than the one that was rooted in emotional impulse. Once you have completed the goal your emotion came with, you have completed that particular emotional experience and brought it to closure.

Every single one of your emotional experiences, as much as possible, should be experienced this way if you have truly healthy emotional experiences. Of course, there is always room for error as we are only humans, and therefore even after achieving mastery, there will be times where your emotional experience and expression are nothing like this. However,

overall, the majority of your emotional experiences and expressions should be rooted in logic and intention, as this is how you can have the healthiest possible experience with your emotions.

HOW EMOTIONS AFFECT YOUR MIND AND BODY



WADING DEEPER than the surface feelings and topical symptoms associated with the emotions you are having, we discover that there is a lot going on in your mind and body when you experience emotions, too. In many ways, the things going on in your body are the exact same from emotion to emotion. However, the specific ways in which these activities happen define which specific emotion you are going to experience. Your subconscious mind will choose each individual emotional experience based on what that part of your mind noticed from your sensory input in your day to day experience.

There are many different emotions you are going to feel, and many different nuances between how those emotions are experienced in your body and mind. However, we are going to focus on digging into the main five emotions that you are likely to recognize in your own life: happiness, love, fear, anger, and sadness. These five primary emotions are easy to identify in your day to day experience, and they will help you recognize the differences in your body from emotion to emotion. Know that as you get deeper into the eight core emotions and beyond, these symptoms adjust slightly based on the unique emotion you are experiencing.

The Psychological and Physiological Experience of Happiness

When you feel the emotion of happiness, your brain has begun to produce dopamine and serotonin. These two neurotransmitters flood your brain to create feelings of happiness. The neurotransmitters then move into your central nervous system, creating common signs of happiness ranging from smiling and laughing, to holding a light and open posture. With happiness, in particular, cortisol is a hormone that remains particularly low, though adrenaline may increase based on the level of happiness you are experiencing. Mentally, your happiness will translate into positive and enjoyable thoughts that make the entire experience of happiness feel truly enjoyable and even addicting.

The Psychological and Physiological Experience of Love

The emotional experience of love produces the two neurochemicals known as dopamine and oxytocin. When you fall in love with a new person for the first time, oxytocin, in particular, will flood your mind and create that sensation of falling in love. The same thing happens when a mother gives birth to a child. The oxytocin in the case of childbirth is designed to help the mother fall in love and bond with her baby so that, mentally, she is wired to care for and nurture her child. Physically, being in love can lower your blood pressure, give you sensations of “butterflies” in your stomach, cause you to feel like you have sweaty palms, and it can even increase your pain tolerance. Being in love can also reduce feelings of stress, create feelings of safety and security, cause

you to feel addicted to the feeling of love, and generally improve your overall happiness levels.

The Psychological and Physiological Experience of Fear

When you feel fear, your brain triggers the development of cortisol and adrenaline. These two hormones, created in the adrenal glands, increase your capacity to remain energized and focused, and to engage in the situation you are presently facing. Even if you are particularly tired or seem drained of energy, fear can trigger an entirely new wave of energy that keeps you active long enough to protect yourself. Of course, in this case, as the fear began to alleviate you would feel incredibly exhausted. Mentally, fear can produce a sense of clarity that allows you to stay alert and focused as to what is going on around you. You may also feel a sense of overwhelm based on how aware you are of the various inputs you are receiving from your senses in regards to the situation you are actively a part of. Physically, your pupils will dilate, your blood pressure will increase, your breathing will accelerate, and you will experience more blood flow and glucose toward your muscles. Any organs that are not necessary for your ability to fight or flight, such as your stomach, will slow down, preserving energy for the rest of your body.

The Psychological and Physiological Experience of Anger

Anger has a similar response as fear, since it is a part of your fight or flight response, too. Again, your heart rate will

increase; you will experience dilated pupils and accelerated breathing, as well as an increase in blood flow and glucose to your muscles. You will also experience a surge in your cortisol and adrenaline, as well as testosterone, allowing you to have all of the energy and power you need to protect yourself from the perceived threat that triggered your anger in the first place. The development of anger can create mental clarity which can also become a mental fixation, as you fixate on what made you angry and prepare to protect yourself from it. You may feel what many call “rage blindness” if you are particularly angry, which means that the only thing you can see and focus on is that which has made you angry. When anger strikes, your pain threshold tends to increase exponentially, though you will feel the pain once the anger begins to subside.

***T*he Psychological and Physiological Experience of Sadness**

When you begin to feel sad, a unique experience occurs which is different from other emotional experiences. While experiences like happiness, love, anger, and fear will result in the production of neurotransmitters, chemicals, and hormones, the feeling of sadness is actually marked by the reduction in the creation of these things. When you are sad, your brain produces less serotonin than it normally would. You may also begin to struggle to make decisions, feel difficulty with accepting what you have experienced, and find yourself feeling physically sick. Many people will withdraw from day to day activities and elect to instead sit around and preserve energy, because they do not feel motivated to get up and get anything done. You might also find yourself feeling an increase in experiencing headaches, stomach aches, and other

aches and pains in response to the sadness that you are experiencing.

WHY EMOTIONS CAN BE SO CHALLENGING



DEALING with your emotions can feel incredibly challenging, especially when you are dealing with emotions that are overwhelming or that seem to “run the show” anytime they show up. Learning how to navigate your emotions in a healthy, reasonable manner can help eliminate the challenges you feel around emotions. However, this is something that takes time, effort, and consistent practice in order to officially grasp these changes. Understanding why emotions can be so challenging for you to deal with can help you create a greater sense of compassion and grace for yourself. This compassion and grace can make recognizing and navigating emotional situations easier, which will ultimately allow you to begin experiencing greater peace and comfort in your emotional experiences.

The Truth About Emotional Hijacking

Emotional hijacking is, as I mentioned, an experience where an emotion is triggered with such great intensity that its physiological responses flood your body and make it challenging or even impossible for you to consciously regain control over your emotional experience. If you completely lose control over your emotional experience, you will begin to come down from your emotional expression as

soon as said emotion begins to dissipate. Otherwise, you will remain in your emotional hijacking.

Your brain, when it comes to emotions, in particular, is quite primitive compared to other parts of your brain. In respect to your emotions, there is very little logic, ration, reason, or conscious thinking involved. Instead, logic, ration, reason, and conscious thinking serve as filters to the otherwise automatic natural reaction that emotions, themselves, are. When you experience emotional hijacking, essentially, the prefrontal cortex of your brain is “shut off,” and your primitive brain is entirely responsible for how you are thinking, feeling, and behaving. This is why, when people are stuck deep in an emotional experience, it can appear as though they are acting like an animal. Because, ultimately, they *are*. The experience you have within an emotional hijacking is no different than a wild animal would experience in response to their regular emotions, because it is the same primitive part of the brain that is governing the reaction.

The problem with emotional hijacking is that when you experience it, it means that your prefrontal cortex is no longer involved in your experience. This is only a temporary experience, but it happens nonetheless, and the repercussions can be huge. The prefrontal cortex is the “evolved” part of your brain that is believed to house your logic, ration, reason, and conscious thinking, and it is an essential part of your brain when it comes to engaging in humanity. You *need* to be able to rely on it and use it at all times if you are going to refrain from engaging in unacceptable behaviors, such as those associated with an emotional hijacking. For example, if you were emotionally hijacked by anger, you might begin screaming, yelling, or even becoming physically aggressive toward the people around you. Naturally, this is a dangerous situation that

can have physical and social consequences, depending on what you do during that state of emotional hijacking. If, however, you refrain from engaging in the hijacking and you manage to keep yourself in a conscious state, you can refrain from actually acting on those impulses that have you wanting to scream, yell, or physically harm yourself or anyone else around you.

The problem with emotional hijacking is that it is not a choice you make, but rather a reaction that happens when you have not learned how to properly use your evolved brain in navigating various emotions. Emotions that are specifically intended to help you survive from dangerous threats can be especially overwhelming, and that is why fear and anger tend to be the two most problematic emotions that people experience when they struggle with their emotions.

***B*reaking the Habits of Emotional Expression**

One of the coolest features of your brain is its capacity to turn things into automatic behaviors, allowing you to engage in activities without having to use excess energy in doing so. For example, the way you go to sleep, the way you use the bathroom, the way you write, the way you drive your car, these are all great habits that make your life more enjoyable, and that enriches your human experience. Thanks to your brain, it memorizes how to engage in these functions properly, allowing you to engage in them automatically without having to relearn them every single time you want to engage in them. Habits are incredibly powerful, wonderful, and useful tools that everyone benefits from. That is, when they have positive habits.

Unfortunately, your subconscious mind does not know the difference between positive and negative. Instead, your subconscious mind recognizes a need, a fulfilling of a need, and the repeated need for that need to be fulfilled. When you have a need that requires repeated fulfillment, your subconscious mind recognizes the specific activity you are using to fulfill that need and turns it into a habit. This includes bad habits.

Your emotions can be experienced as a form of habit in the sense that your subconscious mind produces the emotion, and then uses a habit to help you fulfill the purpose of that emotion. For example, let's say you experience fear. Your subconscious mind will recognize that, in the past, when you experienced fear, going to lay in your bed and allowing yourself to cry and then take a nap rather than engaging in the scary experience was relieving. You did not have to deal with the pressure or the pain associated with the fear itself, and so you were able to eliminate that feeling altogether, in the quickest and easiest way possible. Thus, your subconscious mind saw this as a positive experience, even if you can logically and rationally see the long term negative repercussions of this action. Even so, your brain turns it into a habit and now, all of a sudden, responding to fear in any other way feels exponentially more challenging because your mind begins to tell you that you will not feel relief or fulfillment any other way. Your subconscious mind tells you that you *have* to fulfill that emotion in that particular way, no matter how damaging the long term effects may be, because *that* is the way that you feel relief right now.

Fortunately, all habits, no matter how big or how small, can be rewired, and you do not have to remain stuck in any specific habit pattern. With that being said, especially with emotions

that have such a massive psychological and physiological response, it can be quite challenging to break the habitual responses you have to any emotion you experience.

*H*ealing the Trauma That Caused the Pain

Finally, dealing with emotions can be particularly complex if your emotions are rooted in painful past experiences or traumas that you have endured that resulted in those emotions being more challenging for you to deal with. People who have dealt with past experiences or traumas that lead to their current emotional expression often have a hard time healing their emotional expression because, in their mind, they are convinced that this expression is protecting them. Further, anytime they try to dig into the expression and heal it, they may be forced to relive the trauma that produced the experience, which can be incredibly painful and overwhelming to deal with.

Overcoming the challenges of emotions that are closely linked to traumas or past painful experiences requires one to carefully dig into those past experiences and heal them. Depending on what you are dealing with, it may be best to do this with the support of a trained therapist who can help you navigate all of those feelings without running the risk of becoming emotionally hijacked, or further traumatizing yourself from mentally reliving those experiences.

THE THEORY BEHIND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (EQ)



ONE OF THE most popular psychological studies done to date is the one that describes the concept and theory behind emotional intelligence, and the methods that are used to achieve emotional intelligence. This particular concept and theory first surfaced in the 1960s, but was popularized by Daniel Goleman's book *Emotional Intelligence – Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, which was published in 1995. A great deal of research has been done surrounding emotional intelligence since then, suggesting that through emotional intelligence, we can measure one's ability to manage and navigate their emotions in a healthy manner. We can also identify methods that one can use to improve their emotional intelligence, thus improving their ability to manage emotions in a healthy way.

*W*hat Is Emotional Intelligence (EQ) Exactly?

Emotional intelligence is defined as having “the ability to monitor one's own and other people's emotions, to discriminate between different emotions and label them appropriately, and to use emotional information to guide thinking and behavior.” This definition was offered by Peter Salovey and John Mayer, two pioneers of the emotional intelligence concept. Emotional intelligence is often shorted to

EI, or to EQ, which is short for “emotional quotient,” which reflects the measurement of your emotional intelligence.

Why Emotional Intelligence Is So Important

Emotional intelligence offers a wide array of benefits to anyone who takes the time to increase their EQ. The benefits spread across various personal and professional aspects of life, offering the individual a better ability to assimilate in different environments, receive and utilize various opportunities, and otherwise get ahead in their personal and professional lives. It is said that people with a higher EQ will actually perform better in life overall than someone with a higher IQ, largely because a higher EQ makes it easier for you to relate to and participate in society. A higher EQ attributes to stronger intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships and interactions, improved work ethics, a greater capacity to learn and implement new skills, and an overall tendency to thrive in any setting an individual may find themselves in.

When you have a strong EQ, you find yourself experiencing less stress and fewer symptoms of stress in general, largely because you are able to navigate your emotions in a healthy manner. The reduced symptoms of stress, as well as emotions that accompany stress such as anger, anxiety, and depression, can improve your mental and emotional experiences in life, but it can also contribute to an improved quality of physical life. People with higher EQs and lower stress levels have stronger immune systems, a greater capacity to recover from illness and injury, and a reduced tendency to contract illness and disease in their lives. They are also less susceptible to

things such as heart conditions, heart attacks, or strokes, all of which can be caused by heightened stress levels.

Emotionally and mentally, a strong EQ means that you will experience a greater level of self-confidence and self-esteem, you will value yourself more, and you will stand up for yourself more. People with a strong EQ tend to find themselves thriving in social settings because they have compassion and grace with themselves and others, and because they know how to navigate their emotions in a healthy manner. They also tend to know how to help others' navigate their emotions in a healthy manner, meaning that other people tend to feel more at ease and confident around people with a high EQ. Overall, there are many positive benefits that come from recognizing and boosting your EQ.

*H*ow to Measure Your Own Emotional Intelligence

Measuring EQ is not an exact science, though there is a test that helps people discover where, approximately, they fall on the EQ scale. The current test being used is called the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test, or the MSCEIT. This test works by asking a series of emotion-based problem-solving questions, and then measuring the individual's EQ based off of how they answer the test. Many people call the MSCEIT the "ability model" when it comes to testing for EQ, as two additional measurements have been designed since then.

The two additional methods for measuring EQ include the mixed model and the traits model. The mixed model was designed by Daniel Goleman, and it measures self-awareness,

self-regulation, social skill, empathy, and motivation. The trait model was designed by Konstantinos V. Petrides, or K. V. Petrides, and it was proposed as a way to measure ones' traits in comparison to EQ. This model is similar to Goleman's model, and it allows individuals to self-report and then bases their measurements off of those self-reports.

Using Emotional Intelligence to Master Your Emotions

Using emotional intelligence as a guideline to help you master your emotions is important, as it provides you with a concise, research-backed set of guidelines that help you understand and manage your emotions. Implementing the tools that are designed to specifically increase EQ can provide you with many positive benefits in your life, as it can for anyone. Even children who implement positive EQ lessons will discover how to have stronger social interactions with other children, and adults, allowing them to experience more positive connections in their social settings.

Aside from children, adults can engage in healthier relationships with each other, their reputations are improved, they enjoy healthier intimate relationships, they achieve greater accomplishments in their academic endeavors, they enjoy stronger relationships in the work place, they enjoy a stronger sense of psychological wellbeing, and they engage in higher levels of self-compassion. You can achieve all of this by discovering how to become self-aware, regulate your own emotions, and use them to your advantage. Fortunately, since it's conception, emotional intelligence has birthed many great ideas and tools that you can use to help you improve your own

EQ. We are going to start exploring many of those ways right now!

HOW TO INCREASE YOUR EQ



INCREASING your EQ is an important activity to focus on if you are going to create the opportunity for you to master your emotions. There are many specific practices you can use in your own life to begin increasing your emotional self-awareness and self-regulation, both of which will make dealing with your emotions far easier for you. It is important to understand that increasing your EQ is not a trend, and that these activities are not always going to feel easy. You are going to come up against many emotional experiences along the way, some of which may feel overwhelming or even impossible to navigate. The more you continue implementing these skills, however, the easier it will become for you to begin navigating your emotions in a healthier manner.

You must understand that the practices in this chapter, and any additional practices you learn to use in an effort to improve your EQ are not things you can master and then quit. You must keep implementing this knowledge in order to maintain a high EQ. Otherwise, you will find your EQ dropping over time. Improving your EQ and mastering your emotions is a continuous, ongoing practice that you need to be aware of and willing to maintain if you are going to continue to reap in the benefits of it. However, as you continue to do so, you will find

yourself enjoying the benefits of EQ and likely finding it easier for you to implement these practices.

Increase Your Self-Awareness

First and foremost, you need to focus on increasing your self-awareness. Individuals with a high EQ are self-aware and they possess a high level of intuition around themselves and their own feelings, as well as other people and the feelings that other people experience. Increased self-awareness will allow you to recognize what is going on within yourself, and how that is affecting the people around you. It will also allow you to recognize the body language of those around you so that you can read more subtle cues and understand the experiences that you are sharing with others on a deeper level.

You can begin to increase your self-awareness by implementing mindfulness practices in your day to day life. Mindfulness allows you to tune into yourself and your intuition and become aware of how you are feeling, and what you might be in need of at any given time. There are two incredible mindfulness practices you can use to help you create a deeper sense of awareness within yourself. These include 5:7 breathing, and the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 grounding practice.

5:7 breathing can be achieved by giving yourself a moment to focus on your breath. Then, you are going to breathe in through your nose for a count of five and out through your mouth for a count of seven. You will repeat this breath as you mindfully focus on how you are feeling at this moment. If you find any emotions or needs coming to the surface in that moment, give yourself the space to recognize those emotions

or needs and resolve to deal with them promptly, and in a logical and intentional manner.

The 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 grounding method can help bring you deeper into your body and become aware of your own experiences with emotions you may be feeling. When you use this method, you become aware of your senses and how they are impacting you, and you also become aware of what that actually feels like for you. This increased awareness can massively support you with recognizing your emotions more clearly in the future and navigating them in a healthier way. To engage in the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 grounding method, you will want to look for 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste. Go out of your way to create a sensory experience if you need to so that you can complete the process all the way to the end. As you do, mentally describe the sensory experience you are having. For example, say to yourself “I see a yellow bus,” “I smell an orange-scented candle,” or “I taste water.”

*A*ssert Yourself When You Communicate

People with a high EQ know how to communicate in an assertive yet compassionate manner. This capacity to assert themselves creates the opportunity for them to acknowledge their feelings and opinions, as well as their goals, and communicate in a way that clearly reflects their needs, opinions, and desired outcomes. When they communicate, they do so with a level of awareness around how their communication style affects the person or people they are talking to, and they use that to their advantage. Rather than speaking passively or aggressively, both of which can minimize the quality of communication and lead to greater

emotional consequences, they assert themselves compassionately. This means that they assert what they are feeling, thinking, or in need of, but they do it in a way that is considerate toward the feelings of the person or people they are communicating with. This way, those listening to them know that they are serious, yet do not feel attacked by what they have said.

You can increase your level of assertive communication by learning how to speak honestly and confidently about what you feel, think, or need, as well as by learning how to speak with a strong level of respect for others. For example, let's say you are in a work meeting that is getting heated, and you are feeling overwhelmed, and you need to take a break. Rather than saying "I think we should maybe take a break" or "You are awful and I need to get out of here for a minute," you could say "I need to take a break to collect my thoughts, let's resume this meeting in five minutes. When we do, I need you to address me with respect, even if we are experiencing a difference of opinions." This way, your need to remove yourself from the heated situation is met, and you have respected the people you are talking to.

Switch From Reacting to Responding

If you experience emotions from a primal perspective, it can be easy for you to react to everything around you. Reactivity can lead to you engaging in emotions before you have a chance to recognize what those emotions are or navigate them in a healthy manner, which often leads to feelings of guilt or remorse for how you engaged in those emotions. Learning how to refrain from reacting and engage in responding means that you learn how to break away from

those intense overreactions, or inappropriate reactions, and you learn how to respond in an intentional and productive manner.

A great example of how switching from reacting to responding can benefit you is to consider a situation that makes you feel angry with another person. If you were feeling angry and you reacted, you might immediately jump into yelling, name calling, and saying things you would later regret. If, however, you responded, you could recognize your anger and articulate it in an assertive and respectful manner, then decide on a resolution that would also be respectful of both yourself and the person you are angry with. Another great example would be fear. If you are afraid of a situation and you react to that situation, your immediate response may be to run away from that situation, which can make engaging with that situation or similar situations even more challenging in the future because you have reinforced your fear. If, however, you are afraid and you choose to engage in strategies that minimize your fear while allowing you to continue to engage in that activity, you create the opportunity for you to see that activity through despite your fear. This way, you can overcome fear and continue to achieve great things in spite of how you were feeling.

Learning to respond instead of reacting requires you to recognize that every single moment an emotion is triggered, there is a momentary lag between you recognizing the feeling of that emotion, and you act on that feeling. That moment of pause gives you the opportunity to recognize that the emotion has arisen and gives you a chance to choose how you are going to respond to it. If you choose to go through with the impulsive reaction, that is a choice you have then made. If you choose, however, to try a new way of navigating that emotion,

then you choose to respond. You can increase your capacity to recognize and use this pause to your advantage by first increasing your level of self-awareness, and specifically creating self-awareness around the development and experience of your emotions.

P **ractice Active Listening Skills**

You might be surprised to learn that your capacity to listen to another individual is actually a powerful skill to develop if you want to increase your EQ. This is because learning how to listen effectively means that you learn how to listen to other people's emotions. Listening effectively means that you not only hear what someone else is feeling, but you also understand why they are feeling this way and what that particular feeling is creating for them. In addition to listening to the words they use to describe their emotional experience, you listen to their body language and their other non-verbal cues that give deeper insight into what they are feeling and experiencing on an emotional level.

Having a high EQ is as much about being aware of other people's emotions as it is your own, because being aware of other people's emotions means you can mindfully navigate conversations in a way that does not hurt anyone's feelings, or unnecessarily escalate emotional experiences either of you might be having. While your goal is not to personally feel responsible for managing someone else's emotions, being mindful of someone else's emotions can help you choose your own forms of expression that will be productive to the situation. For example, if you notice that you are talking to someone who is sad, you know it is not your responsibility to stop them from being sad. However, you also know that you

can be mindful of the fact that they are sad, recognize the fact that their sadness may be impacting the way they are interacting with you right now, and use that to share a more productive and compassionate conversation with that individual.

You can increase your active listening skills by learning how to slow down and pay attention to what someone is saying, how they are saying it, and what non-verbal cues they are using to say something. For example, if someone says, “I’m fine,” but their voice sounds somber and their body looks slumped over and without any energy, you can assume that they are not, in fact, fine. If, however, someone says, “I’m fine,” and it sounds assertive and their body language looks alert and engaged, chances are they are fine. As you listen for verbal and non-verbal communication from another individual, make sure you also take the time to rationally think about what their communication actually means. Then, think about how you can respond in a way that would be most productive to that conversation, and your goal in that particular conversation. It may take a while at first, and you may feel like your conversations are moving in slow motion for a while, but as you learn how to actively listen, it will become easier for you to move through the process of active listening at a quicker pace. At that point, communicating with a high EQ will become easier for you, too, thus allowing you to tap into many of the proven benefits of maintaining a high EQ!

*M*otivate Yourself, and Be Motivated

When you have a high EQ, you know how to use your emotions to your advantage, which means you can easily achieve things like self-motivation, self-fulfillment, and

the creation of your own happiness and contentment. In order to create any of those latter emotions, though, you first need to know how to create self-motivation. This way, you have the necessary energy to partake in the tasks that will help you achieve feelings of self-fulfillment, happiness, and contentment.

Creating motivation for yourself will depend on what motivates you as a person, as motivation is achieved differently for everyone. One of the best places to start when it comes to learning to motivate yourself is to consider what tends to occur around the times that you are motivated to do something. Generally speaking, every person is motivated by either a fear of the consequences of inaction, or a desire for the preferred outcome that is achieved through action. You will be motivated by both, but you will be *more* motivated by one over the other. Knowing which you are motivated by will help you begin to create circumstances where you can motivate yourself.

If you are someone who tends to be driven by a fear of the consequences of inaction, it would be a good idea to consider the things you *don't* want to happen in your life. This way, you can motivate yourself by developing the energy to do whatever it takes to get away from that particular state of inactivity. You may also want to motivate yourself by making the consequences even worse than they may naturally be. For example, if the consequence of you not taking action on pursuing your desired health routine is that you do not get healthy, maybe you can add that you *also* don't get to buy the clothes you love. This way, you are really driving up the motivational factors to get yourself in action.

If you are someone who is driven by the excitement of the rewards you will gain if you get into action, then you want to

regularly visualize what rewards you will achieve by getting into action. This way, you are continually reminding yourself about all of the great rewards you will enjoy if you jump into action on your desires. You can also make those rewards even better by including your own incentives, such as a vacation, purchasing something you really want, or joining a class you have wanted to try. This way, you have even more at stake, which makes you even more likely to work toward what you desire.

In either case, you should always keep a healthy awareness around what it is that you are working toward, and what it is that you do not want to experience in your life. This helps you remain realistic about where you are coming from and what you are working toward, which will be helpful when it comes to making decisions and taking action.

Discover How to Maintain a Positive Attitude

Your positive attitude will have a magnificent impact on your ability to achieve countless things in your life. Holding a positive attitude allows you to see things optimistically, to choose choices that aid in the creation of your happiness and fulfillment, and to engage with other people in an enjoyable, respectful, and friendly manner. In fact, having a positive attitude can completely rewire your brain, making it easier for you to enjoy a more enriching and successful life overall. You would be surprised at how rapidly a negative attitude, on the other hand, can infect your life, steal your attention away from your goals, and contribute to you losing out on desirable opportunities or relationships because of the attitude you have chosen to hold.

Maintaining a positive attitude does not mean that you have to be oblivious to the negative things in your life. Instead, it means that when you acknowledge negative things, you do so in a way that has a silver lining, so to speak. For example, let's say a superior at work routinely treats you poorly, and it has begun to cause you to feel as though you are inferior, or like the work you do does not matter and is not worth the time, energy, and effort. You could allow their negative behaviors and attitude to become yours, or, you could choose to continue to remain positive in spite of their negativity. For example, you might choose to see their words as being helpful criticism, and to ignore their negativity, as a way to help yourself gain value from what they are saying without gaining their negative attitude. Remember, you are not obligated to accept every invitation you receive to engage in a negative attitude. No matter how someone else is behaving, what they are saying, or how they are trying to use their negativity to affect you, you can choose to decline and remain positive anyway.

You can also boost your positivity by having a daily positivity practice that allows you to intentionally boost your energy and cultivate a deeper sense of optimism. This could include journaling, saying positive affirmations to yourself, reading or listening to something that helps you feel positive, or even engaging in an uplifting exercise routine that helps boost your energy. Doing this every single day will help you raise your overall vibe, thus creating the opportunity for you to feel your best, achieve your best, and enjoy your life to the fullest.



Learn to Receive Criticism Well

Criticism is a painful topic for many people, and it often elicits feelings of being inadequate, not good

enough, or not valued by the person who is criticizing you. However, criticism itself is not an inherently rude or cruel behavior, nor does it mean that you are not valued by the person who is criticizing you. While some people will provide negative or insufficient criticism that is intended to hurt you, there are other people who will use criticism as a way to support you, help you, and guide you to achieve greater growth in your life.

If you receive criticism that is truly meant to hurt your feelings, consider looking deeper into that situation to understand how you got there in the first place. What the person is saying may hold truth, or it may simply be a reflection of their pain. However, no matter what they are saying, there will always be a valuable lesson in learning how to understand others, and yourself, on a deeper level, and how to use that understanding to create more harmonious and positive interactions with people in the future.

For any criticism you receive, always be cautious about the emotion you experience immediately after. You do not want to jump into a state of defensiveness or anger, as this will cause you to avoid experiencing the criticism for what it is meant to be. In most cases, criticism is intended to be positive guidance toward doing better with something in your life. For example, your spouse might criticize the way you speak to them, your boss might criticize the information you include on reports, your personal trainer might criticize your form, or your friends or family might criticize your behavior. Being able to receive this criticism from an open mind means you listen to what they are saying, you take the time to understand why they are saying it and how it could be applied to your life, and then you take it into consideration. Not all criticism needs to be acted on; however, more often than not criticism will include plenty

of information for you to create more desirable outcomes for yourself. Knowing how to decipher what information should be acted on and what information can be held onto for later, or even set aside completely, is an important trait to learn, too. This way, you can either improve on your skills, or deepen your confidence in the choices you are already making, or skills you are already excelling with.

Develop Empathy for Others

If you truly want to see how emotionally evolved someone is, take a look at their capacity to experience empathy for others without feeling the need to take the other person's emotions personally. Especially when this can be achieved while the individual is directly involved in heated conflict with another individual, you know that this person has put a great deal of effort into mastering their emotions. People who have not will struggle to experience empathy for other individuals, and will likely be void of empathy completely when they are feeling particularly emotionally charged. This does not mean the individual does not want to experience empathy, or does not have the capacity to experience empathy; it simply means they have not learned to navigate their own emotions effectively enough to experience them as well as empathy for others at the same time.

Empathy is a trait that, more than anything else, shows emotional strength. Many people falsely believe this is a sign of weakness, but that is not the case at all. Being able to intimately understand what another person is likely feeling and experiencing means that you can relate to that individual on a basic human level, and that you can use those feelings to develop a greater level of respect and understanding for others.

In situations where you may have differing opinions or where you are facing emotionally charged conflict, empathy is the number one tool that will help you continue to peacefully and respectfully navigate those situations.

To develop more empathy for people, learn how to witness what other people are going through and imagine what that would feel like. See if you can develop a deeper understanding of what they must be thinking, feeling, and experiencing based on how they are behaving and what they are telling you through verbal and non-verbal communication. Avoid making the information you are picking up mean anything about you, and avoid taking it on as your personal responsibility to navigate this situation on behalf of that other person. Instead, learn how to sit in empathy for others and learn how to use that empathy to peacefully and respectfully navigate conversations and situations in a way that is beneficial to both of you. What this means will vary depending on the situation you are in, and the unique relationship you share with the other individual. Sometimes, you may need to simply express your empathy and hold space for that other person to experience their emotions. Other times, you may need to mutually come up with creative solutions for the situation you are facing so that the emotions can be peacefully resolved.

I ncrease Your Leadership Skills

Having the capacity to lead oneself through situations shows an impressive amount of emotional strength and growth. Being able to lead others in a positive manner that feels good for both the leader and those that they are leading, and that achieves results, is a sign of emotional mastery.

Learning how to improve your positive leadership skills is a great way to improve your EQ and emotional mastery.

One of the best leadership skills you can focus on in your life when it comes to developing your EQ specifically is learning how to lead by example. Many times, leaders believe they ought to be perceived as being perfect and that their sole job is to direct people on what to do and organize those around them. However, being a leader is less about commanding others, and more about bringing out the best in others. A true leader knows how to see the strengths and weaknesses of an individual and help them amplify their strengths and develop skills to offset their weaknesses so that they can achieve more in life. A leader will do this by regularly acknowledging and working on their own strengths and weaknesses, and by compassionately guiding the people they are leading to do the same for themselves. With that being said, you should never offer guidance out of turn. Only offer specific guidance to people when you are invited to do so; otherwise, simply lead by example and wait for people to ask you for your support as a leader.

In addition to leading by example, you can learn how to improve your decision making and problem-solving skills, as these are two skills that rely heavily on your ability to navigate your emotions and logic. In both instances, you need to acknowledge what your emotions are, while also looking into what the logical and reasonable decision or solution is to the situation you are facing. This way, you can make a decision that is truly right for the situation, and leverage your emotions to help you back that decision, rather than making a decision purely based on emotions, and that may not necessarily be positive or productive to the situation. You should aim to implement these leadership skills in all areas of your life,

including professional and personal, as they will come in handy in all areas of your life.

Learn to Become Approachable and Sociable

When a person is truly emotionally intelligent, they tend to come across as being approachable because they know how to manage their emotions and, so, people do not worry about the emotional response they may get from that individual. For example, if you approach someone who is emotionally intelligent because you want to share a conversation with them, you know they will not judge you, rudely ignore you, or otherwise turn that conversation into an unpleasant experience. You do not have to ask if they are emotionally intelligent, either. Usually, you can tell based on how they act, what it feels like to be around them, and what their reputation is.

Learning how to become more approachable and sociable yourself does not mean that you have to become a social butterfly, but it does mean that you learn how to navigate your emotions enough that you can navigate conversations with anyone, comfortably. People from your workplace, people in your personal life, and even acquaintances or strangers who may need to approach you should all feel comfortable in doing so. This way, should the need for communication arise, people know they can feel safe in communicating with you.

The best way to improve your approachability and sociability is to learn how your verbal and non-verbal communication comes across, and to learn how to adjust it to feel warmer and inviting. Talk in a tone that is open to and accepting of others, and that feels positive and encouraging to anyone you are

speaking with. As well, keep an open body language and a friendly posture that makes it seem like you are inviting to anyone who may feel the need to talk to you. You can do this by uncrossing your arms, keeping your posture casual, and keeping either a neutral face, or a smile on your face.

DEVELOPING A GREATER SENSE OF SELF-AWARENESS



DEVELOPING your EQ is a powerful way to master your emotions, but it is truly best accomplished if you deepen your level of self-awareness and create a stronger capacity to actually understand what is going on inside of yourself. While self-awareness comes naturally to some people, it may feel more odd or strange for others. Fortunately, like EQ, this is a skill that anyone can develop and implement in their lives. It will, however, take practice and consistency as you need to continually be alert for and aware of what is going on inside of yourself. The more you can maintain this awareness, the easier it will be for you to navigate your emotions, as well as your logical mind, and create the types of results you desire in your life.

As you continue to develop your self-awareness, you will realize that this particular trait is foundational in your ability to acknowledge, understand, and express your thoughts and feelings. The deeper you develop your self-awareness, the greater your understanding will be around yourself and your experience, which means the easier it will be for you to express yourself in a healthy and productive manner, too.

As you work through this chapter, I encourage you to focus on developing just one self-awareness skill at a time. Increasing your self-awareness can, at times, be overwhelming as it

requires you to look at entirely different sources of information than you are used to, and it can cause you to recognize yourself more than you are used to. Some people feel like they are putting themselves under a microscope or like the spotlight is suddenly on them, and that can feel emotionally overwhelming. Taking your time and focusing on this being a marathon experience, rather than a sprint, is a great way to prepare yourself for what lies ahead.

Understand How, and Why, You Judge Others

When you go through your day to day life, pay close attention to what you tend to judge and dislike in other people. According to popular psychology, what we dislike in other people, or what we are bothered by in other people, tends to be a reflection about a quality that we dislike in ourselves, too. Otherwise, we would not be particularly emotionally triggered by what the other person was doing.

To experience things about yourself that you do not like is natural and normal, and anyone who says there is nothing they dislike about themselves is not being honest with themselves, or with you. Your goal should never be to like every single aspect of yourself, but instead to accept these aspects, including accepting the fact that you do not like some of them.

Whenever you notice someone is doing something that you think is particularly annoying or irritating, ask yourself why you are so bothered by it and what about yourself you are not acknowledging or expressing effectively enough. Perhaps, for example, you are annoyed by the way someone laughs, which means that you are annoyed with yourself for not laughing enough. Or, maybe you are irritated by the way someone

expresses their anger, which reflects back onto you not expressing your anger in a way that feels authentic and peaceful for you. Once you acknowledge what has bothered you and how it relates to how you view yourself, look for opportunities to either change that part of your expression, or to accept yourself for it. This way, you are not just developing self-awareness, but you are using it for something positive in your life.

P **ractice Mindfulness Meditations Daily**

Mindfulness meditation is a form of meditation that is focused entirely on becoming self-aware and using that self-awareness to begin to understand yourself, your thoughts, and your feelings on a deeper level. This particular meditation practice can provide you with the opportunity to better understand yourself in many ways, which means that as you go about day to day life, you can factor this understanding into the decisions you are making. For example, during mindfulness meditation, you might realize that you have a tendency to feel anxious about your health because you feel disconnected from your body and you lack awareness around what is normal, and what is not for your body. Once you develop this mindfulness, however, you will know what your body feels like and what is normal for your body, which means that when something happens that is not normal, you will know that, too. You will also be able to decipher normal reactions to different stimuli, or abnormal reactions that may require greater consideration or support, which means you will know how to gauge your response to those reactions.

To engage in mindfulness meditation, you will simply sit in a meditative space and meditate for at least 10-15 minutes every

single day. While meditating, you will draw your awareness to your body, your thoughts, and your emotions. How you feel in your body, mind, and emotions will change on a day to day basis, which means you will gain exposure to several different normal experiences that you have on a regular basis.

If you want to take your self-awareness a step further with mindfulness, try exposing yourself to different stimuli or triggers during your meditation by either physically engaging with something, thinking about something, or invoking a certain emotion. This way, you can begin to see how these stimuli affect you, and you start to become aware of what it feels like when your reactions change. This will all support you in having a greater sense of self-awareness during your everyday life, and with understanding what those experiences you are acknowledging actually mean.

*R*ead High-Quality Fiction Books

Great writers have the capacity to observe the world around them, and they embed their observations into their writing. Often, they recreate their observations in ways that move you, and that drives you to read through everything they have written. Those who are truly phenomenal at their work will also develop the capacity to understand the tiny nuances in emotion, thought, desire, and action that people tend to experience, and portray those in their characters.

Reading high-quality fiction books gives you the opportunity to recognize these observations, read about them in a way that tends to articulate them incredibly well, and discover how it relates to you, or the people you know. You may be able to see aspects of yourself in the character you have read about, or

maybe you can see aspects of someone you know. Through this, you begin to develop a deeper understanding of why these aspects exist, how they impact that individual, and what can or should be done about it. You can also begin to develop a greater sense of compassion and empathy for yourself and others through this activity.

Recognize the Things You Can't Stand

There is not one person in the world who truly enjoys feeling sad, ashamed, anxious, or negative in any capacity, particularly because these emotions can feel bad and, many times, downright painful. If you find yourself engaging in behaviors of avoidance, in an effort to avoid bad feelings, you need to acknowledge these behaviors because they are going to help you acknowledge what emotions you struggle with. That way, you can pay close attention to those emotions and learn how to navigate them in a stronger, more productive manner.

Every emotion you experience has something meaningful to offer you, not just in general, but at that particular moment. For example, if you feel sad when you are around other people, you may be surrounding yourself with people who are ill fit for you. Or, if you feel anxious when you are participating in certain hobbies, you may not be allowing yourself enough time to build up your confidence, or maybe you are participating in hobbies or activities that are not particularly fit for you. Learning to acknowledge and listen to these emotions, rather than avoid them, allows you to deepen your self-awareness, as well as work with yourself to create a more peaceful and enjoyable life. Anytime you experience negative emotions, or emotions that feel negative, no matter

what they are or when they strike, always slow down and seek to understand why they exist, so you can refrain from avoiding important emotions.

*R*eflect On Your Past Experiences

Our past can provide us with a strong insight into who we are. Creating a timeline of your life is a great opportunity for you to learn more about yourself. To do this, sit down with a blank piece of paper and write a timeline that starts from your birth and goes all the way until where you are right now. As you do, you will discover what matters most to you, what you value, and what has contributed to you being the way you are now. For people who are struggling with anything, this can also put troubling situations into context for them so that they can begin to see why those situations have had such a major impact on them all this time. You might find yourself either realizing that you can let go of this situation, or realizing why you seem to struggle to let go of this situation so that you can find ways to heal from it and create closure in your life.

You may be fully aware of the fact that your past shapes who you are in your present, but until you sit down and actually look at a timeline of your life, you might find yourself struggling to truly understand why or how your past is affecting yours. Keeping that type of information exclusively in your head can make it challenging for you to really see the entirety of it and understand why it is so impactful on you, or how it is continuing to impact you. Seeing it written out physically on paper helps you understand exactly why you are being affected by your past in the way you are. It also helps

you begin to identify ways that you can work through your troubles in a way that works for you, specifically.

Be Willing to Ask for Feedback

At many points in our lives, we receive feedback on who we are, what we are doing, and how we are doing. However, it is not common that a person will actually go out of their way to seek feedback on themselves, their performance, or the way they are behaving in various areas of their lives. Learning how to go out of your way to ask for and receive feedback from others is a great way to locate patterns in your behavior or attitude that you may not be aware of, as well as to understand how your actions and behaviors are influencing your reputation.

When it comes to acknowledging yourself and becoming aware of yourself, it can be easy to recognize that there is a need for improvement. It can also be easy to remain blind to what needs to be improved, or blind to why your improvements do not seem to be creating the results you desire. When you ask someone else to help you reflect on your actions or behaviors, though, you allow yourself to get an outside perspective that you can then use to reflect on within yourself and create changes as needed.

When it comes to asking for and receiving feedback, always make sure that you ask someone who you can trust to give you positive, helpful feedback. Avoid going to people who are likely to harshly criticize you or make you feel bad for the behaviors you are engaging in, as this will make receiving and using that criticism much more challenging. You should also only ask for feedback when you are in a frame of mind where

you are willing and ready to accept feedback. Avoid asking for feedback when you are feeling particularly emotional or hurt, as this could lead to you becoming defensive and confrontational, which means you will block yourself from the purpose of the feedback itself. When you receive the feedback, consider writing it down so that you can reflect on it again later. This way, if you are feeling particularly emotional while receiving the feedback, you can still recall everything that was said and use it to your advantage.

T ravel By Yourself

Being in a new environment, especially by yourself, can force you to become self-aware because it breaks you out of your typical habits and puts you directly into a new experience. Travel does not have to be extravagant, either. Simply going to a nearby city you don't visit often is plenty, although you can certainly travel to a new country and go on a lavish trip if you want to. The goal is to get yourself out of your regular environment and routines and into a new environment so that you can shake things up a little. This move from your regular environment to a new environment will require you to focus on yourself because you will have to make decisions you are not used to, engage in things that are out of the norm for you, and participate in a productive manner.

When you do find yourself out of your normal environment, be sure to intentionally consider how engaging in this new environment compares to engaging in your regular environment. Pay attention, too, to the habits and routines you find yourself missing, and to the way that you adapt to and engage in new routines. This will help you recognize your own

patterns, become aware of what matters to you and what is meaningful to you, and bring that information back with you so that you can engage in your regular day to day activities in a more meaningful way, too. By traveling on your own, you also increase your self-reliance and are forced to truly make decisions on your own, because you cannot rely on another person to help you. You also learn to trust in yourself deeper, and to feel safer navigating the world on your own.

Try Learning a New Skill, Or Many

Just like traveling can provide you with the opportunity to get out of your normal routine and into a position where you have to rely on self-awareness to get you through, learning a new skill is a great opportunity for you to break up your routine, too. When you learn a new skill, you are thrown into a situation you are not used to and you are required to think and act in ways that are entirely new for you. This can help you develop a sense of self-awareness around how you tend to learn new things, how you tend to adapt in new situations, and how you embrace the process of being in unfamiliar surroundings.

Engaging in new skills will not only help you develop self-awareness, but it will also help you develop skills to embrace change, growth, and new experiences. This means that it will have both a benefit of allowing you to be self-aware, as well as a benefit of allowing you to recognize and work with your emotions to create more positive experiences. As adults, it can be easy to get trapped in a typical routine and push change and growth aside, which can lead to narrowmindedness, difficulty with self-awareness, and an inability to effectively navigate emotions in different situations. Pushing yourself to learn new

skills and try new things, however, can help change all of this by opening your mind, exposing you to growth and change, and giving you the opportunity to navigate your emotions more effectively.

Recognize When You Experience Cognitive Distortions

Cognitive distortions are inaccurate thoughts and beliefs that can distort how you see things, including yourself. A cognitive distortion could be, for example, you projecting a negative past experience you had onto an experience you are presently having and, therefore, assuming the present experience is inherently negative due to your past experience. This may not be true, however. For example, you might assume that because a friend has rescheduled plans with you, this means they do not like you, and they are trying to get out of spending time with you. However, it may be true that said person was truly needed elsewhere and the rescheduling was innocent and had nothing to do with you at all. Another example of cognitive distortion would be for you to believe that you are an inherently bad person because you cuss, even though that is not likely to be true. However, if you have developed the belief that cussing is bad and people who cuss are bad, then you may believe yourself to be a bad person based on this behavior, no matter how true that may or may not be.

Learning how to identify cognitive distortions is important, as it allows you to understand that these distortions are not inherently true. Then, it allows you to begin to navigate what the truth is likely to be so that you can begin to understand the reality you are a part of in a more realistic manner. For example, you can see your friend rescheduling for what it is,

an innocent need to adjust their schedule, or you can see that you are not an inherently bad person, and that your reputation is created by so much more than your tendency to cuss.

Clarify and Reflect On Your Values Often

Developing a deeper sense of self-awareness is improved when you take the time to clarify what your personal values are, and reflect on those personal values often. Our personal values define what we care about, what we want most in life, and what we feel we need to do and act like in order to be in integrity with ourselves, and in order to feel good about ourselves and the lives we are living. Our values can also help us determine how we are going to interact with other people, how we are going to make decisions, and what we are going to spend our time doing.

You might have a general idea of what your values are, but if you have not yet taken the time to specifically clarify your values, you need to do that. Knowing exactly what your values are, rather than having a loose idea of what they are, will allow you to specifically understand them so that you can use them as clear guidelines for your life. This way, rather than guessing and potentially feeling bad later on, you know for absolute certain.

Once you have identified and clarified your values, make sure you reflect on them on a regular basis. As well, anytime you find yourself needing to make a decision or take action on something, reflect on your values and ask yourself how you can use those values to help you make your decision. This way, you are always acting with self-awareness, and with

integrity surrounding who you are, what you want, and what you care about.

COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY (CBT) AND EQ



IF YOU FIND yourself dealing with a particularly stubborn emotion that seems so engrained in your behavioral patterns that conscious shifts are not helping you, or are not effective enough in uprooting that pattern, you are going to want a stronger tool to rely on. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a popular emotional self-regulation tool recommended by therapists, as it allows you to acknowledge the automatic behavioral pattern associated with a certain emotion and shift it from the very root of the behavior itself. For patterns that seem particularly troublesome, this can be a great way to break the cycle and give yourself a chance to create better results with your emotional management and emotional self-regulation.

Before we dig into using CBT to shift your emotional regulation, let's talk about what CBT actually is, and how this process can help you manage those tougher emotions. CBT is a short-term form of psychotherapy that was originally developed to help people deal with symptoms of depression. Unlike other forms of therapy, CBT focuses on dealing with the issues you are facing right now, rather than the issues you have faced at any point in the past. In order to help you achieve this, CBT looks at what behavioral experiences you are having alongside your emotions right now, and then it tries

to look into the root of those behavioral experiences at that moment so that you can shift them. It does this by recognizing that your emotional behaviors all run on a loop, and they start with one thing: a thought. The loop looks like this: your subconscious thought creates conscious thoughts, which create feelings, which create behaviors. You can shift these feelings and behaviors by recognizing your loop and adjusting your loop on a thought level, effectively changing your feelings, and your behaviors.

When it comes to applying CBT to your own life, there will be a few things you need to look for in order to help yourself create the best experience possible. By effectively moving through this detective work, you will develop a deeper understanding of your own emotional loops, which will help you apply CBT to your emotional growth.

*R*ecognizing Your Emotional Responses

The first step in applying CBT to your own wellbeing is to recognize what your emotional responses are, and how they fit into the CBT loop. Once you fit your own experiences into the CBT loop, you will create the opportunity for you to understand where you can make necessary shifts in your thoughts and understanding so that you can adjust your automatic behavioral responses.

To remind you, the CBT behavioral loop looks like this: subconscious thought, conscious thought, feeling, and behavioral response. This loop repeats itself over and over again as you continue to experience each new emotion. For some emotions, the loop may be low key, producing feelings and behaviors that are either preferred or easy to manage; for

others, the behavioral loop may be incredibly overwhelming and may create feelings or behaviors that feel impossible to control.

You can begin to identify a CBT loop by first identifying the problematic feeling or behavior that you want to address. If you identify a behavior, you are going to want to identify which specific feeling is causing you to engage in that particular behavior. If you identify a feeling, you are going to want to consider what behaviors you are engaging in as a result of that feeling, and recognize why they seem to be an ill fit for your needs.

Once you have reached back to identify the feeling that is a part of your problematic cycle, you are going to want to reach even further back to identify the thoughts that are contributing to the feelings and behaviors. It may seem challenging to pinpoint these thoughts, so you might want to keep a CBT journal complete with a log of all of your thoughts surrounding your problematic feelings and behaviors. Do your best to recall those thoughts as much as possible, as this will help you begin to identify a pattern in your thinking and how that pattern is contributing to the creation of intense feelings and behaviors. Lastly, if you can, you want to do your best to identify what specific subconscious trigger has caused the entire loop to begin. You may not be able to identify the exact answer, but if you keep trying to pinpoint what the trigger is, you may be able to find it. If you can't, however, don't worry about it. Knowing the conscious thoughts is plenty.

*I*dentifying the Cycle On the CBT Loop

Now that you have spent time tracking all of your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, you are going to want to fit everything onto a CBT cycle chart. Here, you are going to identify the subconscious trigger if you can. Then, you are going to identify the thoughts you are having, then the feelings, then the behaviors. Once you have everything laid out in an easy to follow CBT loop, you can start to see how each of the steps of the loop contributes to the next step being created.

With everything fitted onto your loop, you want to do your best to understand why this loop exists in the first place. While it is not necessary for CBT, if you can discover what memory or past experience may have contributed to you having these experiences now, it will help you develop self-awareness which is positive in an overall emotional mastery way. For that reason, I strongly encourage you to see if you can recall the first time you responded to said emotion in this way so that you can put a conscious effort into healing the root memory *and* the root behavior, thus helping you heal your emotions altogether.

A **djusting Your Automatic Responses From a Thought Level**

Now that you have your CBT loop figured out and you are aware of what is going on within your mind that is causing such strong emotions and behaviors, you can begin to create your adjustments to that cycle. Your first step in creating these adjustments is to create a plan around what these adjustments will be and how you will implement them. Naturally, you want to create the adjustments at a thought level so that you can prevent the feelings and behaviors from becoming quite so strong.

With CBT, there are three ways you can adjust your thoughts. You can distract yourself, shift your perspective, or see the thoughts all the way through. You are going to need to decide which of these responses will be the most likely to have the desired impact on your ability to shift your emotional regulation. If you find that the one you chose does not give the desired impact, you can always adjust it later, but you want to do your best to stick to one repeated response over and over as a way to help you officially and completely break the cycle.

For distraction, all you are going to do is distract yourself from the thought that is creating the feelings and behaviors you are experiencing. If you are experiencing emotions that seem to come up out of context, or that are continually retriggered every time you remember something that caused the emotions in the first place, distraction can be helpful. You should pick one to two distractions you are going to consistently rely on to help you distract yourself from the problematic thoughts. That way, as soon as you find yourself dealing with those problematic thoughts, you can immediately move into your prechosen distractions to help you refrain from developing problematic feelings and behaviors.

To see your thoughts from a different perspective, you are going to want to pause the moment you recognize your problematic thoughts and start criticizing them. You can criticize your thoughts easily by challenging them with questions that force you to determine whether your thoughts are true, or if they are cognitive distortions. If you find your thoughts are true, you can use questions to help you adjust how you see your thoughts so that you are more likely to see them from a positive and peaceful place. For example, let's say you are angry because someone has wronged you, and the thought "you did something bad to me" is what is creating

intense anger. Perhaps it is, in fact, true that something bad was done. In this case, you could then begin to ask yourself, “How can I see this in a different way?” or “How can I use this for my personal growth?” You may then find that, yes, something bad was done to you, but now you have the information you need to make better choices to avoid being treated this way again in the future. Or, maybe you will realize you could have vocalized your needs better, created stronger boundaries, or otherwise engaged in the situation in a peaceful manner that would have prevented you from being in such a difficult state of anger.

If you choose to see the thoughts all the way through, you will simply continue to ask yourself, “and then what?” or “what next?” every time you find yourself dealing with problematic thoughts. This way, rather than acting on the feelings and producing problematic behaviors, you can instead realize that those thoughts are not as all-consuming as they previously felt. For example, you might think, “I am angry because someone wronged me.” If you were to ask yourself, “And then what?” you might find that your answer is, “now my feelings are hurt.” If you feel that you can navigate your hurt feelings more peacefully from that point, then do so. If, however, you find yourself wanting to act on those hurt feelings, ask yourself, “what would happen if I did act on those feelings? How would I feel after? How would that help me or hurt me? Would it end the way I want to? Would I feel good about the choice I made?” Asking yourself these questions helps you imagine the acted-out scenario all the way to the end, which allows you to choose more appropriate behaviors for the feelings you are experiencing.

Following Through On Your Adjusted Responses

Now that you have planned out how you are going to use CBT to help you adjust your stubborn behaviors, you need to start taking action on those plans. To do this, you want to start recognizing the minute you have your problematic thoughts on a day to day basis and then making the necessary choices to implement your new CBT loop over those problematic thoughts. You will want to do this constantly until the new loop becomes habitual for you.

You might find yourself experiencing difficulty fully implementing your new CBT loop at first. It is important to recognize that your previous loop is habitual for you, and so your subconscious and conscious mind are going to want to act on that previous loop as much as possible whenever it is triggered. So, if you experience difficulty implementing that new loop at first, that is normal. Continue trying again and again until you see your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors effectively shifting. If, however, you try to implement the new loop several times over and it seems hopeless, you can try a different method for approaching your CBT loop. For example, switch out the way that you navigate your thoughts to avoid the problematic feelings and behaviors.

If, after plenty of trials, you find yourself still feeling a deep impulse to act on your feelings and create some form of physical fulfillment of your emotions, you can start implementing CBT to your feelings and, more specifically, to your behaviors, too. To do this, you will simply pick a specific behavior you will engage in that allows you to experience relief from your emotion in a way that is not as problematic to you or your wellbeing. For example, if you are feeling anxious and you are struggling not to act on that anxiety, consider carrying something in your pocket for you to fidget with. This way, you are acting on your anxiety, but you are not doing it in

such a way that it becomes problematic to your wellbeing or to your way of life.

HEAL YOUR EMOTIONAL PAST



EACH AND EVERY one of us has a past that is full of different experiences, many of which trigger various emotional responses. While some people seem to have an easy time navigating their memories without feeling triggered, others tend to find that their memories can create a huge amount of emotional turmoil for them. Others still find that their past creates emotional turmoil for them, but that they cannot always fully understand why or where their emotional turmoil is specifically rooted into. Learning how to heal your emotional past means that you can heal any painful memories that may be triggering certain emotional responses out of you every time you find yourself in a similar situation, or recalling those memories. This way, you can stop experiencing intense emotional responses to your past experiences.

Dealing with your past, and healing emotional experiences you have that are entangled with your past, can be a particularly challenging situation. Depending on what specifically you are healing, you might find yourself experiencing quite a bit of emotional distress in dealing with those particular memories. If you find yourself feeling especially triggered or experiencing true emotional distress as a result of your memories, it could be helpful for you to work with a therapist. Working with a therapist can help you sort through those

memories in a safe, structured way that allows you to tap into them and heal them without creating more, or unnecessary distress for yourself.

While there are many ways for you to heal from your past, the biggest methods for healing your past include perspective, closure, and emotional release. These are the most important components of healing from your past so that those emotions are no longer so triggering for you. Let me show you how!

Recognize How the Past Is Affecting Your Present

When you really think about it, the past is not about the past at all. Although you may believe you are thinking about the past, and that your thoughts are rooted in the past, the truth is, your thoughts are happening in the present. This means that the problem is not with something that happened in the past, but with what is happening now, in the present. Any anger, hurt, or fear you are feeling as a result of your past are occurring right now, and it is your present moment experience that is keeping the past alive. This means that the problem is not in the past; it is in the present.

By removing your problem from the past and bringing it into the present, you release some of the powerlessness you may feel by believing that the problem is somehow far away from you. The truth is, the thought is very close to you, and it is affecting you right here and right now. You must bring your realization into the present problem, rather than the past problem, if you are going to be able to take back the power that you have over the situation to be able to heal from it.

***R*alize That Your Memories Are Not the Problem**

Like the past is in the past and the problem is in the present, it is also important to realize that your memories themselves are not the problem. It is no longer the memory of what happened that is causing you pain, but it is the continuous remembering of that memory that is causing you pain. The sooner you can realize that the memory itself has no power or meaning, but the behaviors you are engaging in surrounding the memory do, the sooner you can reclaim your power surrounding the troubles you are dealing with from your past.

In realizing that your memories are not the problem, you realize that the goal is not to erase the memory, but to erase the behaviors you have around those memories. For example, the sticky thoughts you have that keep bringing that memory forward for you and causing you to relive it, or find new reasons to be angry or hurt over it. The sooner you can release those sticky thoughts, the sooner you can stop giving those past memories any power. The best way to release the power the sticky thoughts have is to lose interest in them. Stop feeling like they mean anything, or like they are worth your time or attention. Instead, let them go.

***L*earn How to Let Go In a Way That Works for You**

Many people believe that healing means that the past experience magically disappears, or that the emotions you experience because of that past experience somehow magically disappear. The truth is, healing has nothing to do with eliminating the experience or the emotions that you have regarding that experience. Healing has to do with choosing to

neutralize the story, and release the thoughts and feelings so that they no longer have an impact over you.

You cannot forget the past, ignore your feelings or stuff them down, wait for an apology or acknowledgment of the pain, wait for time to heal your wounds, wallow in your emotions, or redo the past. Nothing along these lines will allow you to truly let go and move forward. Your best bet is to decide how you can neutralize the story and release it. One great way you might consider trying would be to write the story down and read it over and over again, allowing yourself to feel through any emotions that may come up in a reasonable and healthy manner. Over time, you will find yourself not feeling quite so emotionally charged by the story anymore, which will allow you to essentially neutralize that story. Know that in doing this, you will not suddenly feel happy or completely unphased by the story. There will still be hurt or pain associated with it. However, you will find yourself feeling less impulsive around those emotions, and feeling less of a need to act on them or release them because they do not feel quite as strong as they once did.

Let Yourself Grow Tired of the Past Affecting Your Present

One particularly powerful way that you can release the impact that your past has on your presence is to grow fed up with how your past is affecting you. Getting annoyed by how your past continues to hold you back can motivate you to find ways to let it go because, quite frankly, you are done with it! You are no longer attached to the feelings of sadness, anger, pain, or anything else. Instead, you are tired of feeling those emotions, and you are ready to be rid of them altogether.

The best way to let yourself grow tired of the past affecting you anymore is to becoming as willing as possible to get annoyed with the past affecting your present. Become willing to see through the memories and to see them being released, because you are tired of how they are holding you back. Then, watch how this willingness transforms into a mental and emotional capacity to truly release your feelings so that you can begin to feel free from your past experiences.

Take Full Responsibility for Yourself and Your Life Now

Experiences that happened in your past might have not been your fault, but healing is certainly your responsibility. What this means is that you need to recognize that you are the one who is continuing to think the thoughts that are hurting you, and you are the one that is continuing to engage in behaviors that may be causing you to relive the pain from the past. This does not mean that you should become angry with yourself, or that you should try to simply “turn off” the thoughts and feelings, but it does mean that you should take responsibility for finding ways to release those thoughts and feelings.

For many people, realizing that their inner landscape is their responsibility, and that they need to be the ones to fix that landscape if they do not like what they see, is incredibly empowering. You will likely find that you feel a greater sense of freedom and emotional release in realizing that you have the power to shift how you are feeling and what those feelings are creating. You can choose to get into the root of what is causing your problems, to resolve those root problems, and to begin experiencing greater happiness inside of yourself.

Stop Telling the Stories That Keep You Lodged In the Past

Every one of us has a mind full of stories. Your stories consist of what has happened in your past, what you tell yourself those past experiences mean, and what you tell yourself that your present experiences mean, too. If you choose to continue telling yourself stories that are keeping you rooted in painful past experiences, or that are telling your present experiences in a painful manner, then you are using your stories against yourself. You need to stop telling yourself stories that keep you lodged in your painful past, and stories that keep you feeling bad about what is happening in the future, and start telling yourself better stories instead.

When you find yourself telling stories in your mind, or engaging in an inner dialogue that either reflects your past or assigns meanings to things that are happening in your present, always be sure to pause and engage in a moment of self-awareness. Use that self-awareness to help you better understand why you are telling these stories, what feelings these stories are creating, and what you can do to help yourself stop telling these stories. You can either distract yourself from the stories, or you can change the narrative so that they are more neutral and less painful for you to be telling. That way, you are no longer experiencing any sort of painful emotional connotation from the stories you are telling yourself.

Change Your Beliefs About Healing

If you have specific beliefs about healing that are not serving your ability to heal, it may be time for you to change those beliefs. Beliefs about healing often revolve around the idea that certain things need to happen in order for healing to happen, or that healing has to look a certain way in order to count. This, however, is not true. If you believe that you are justified in staying stuck because you were wronged, that it is someone else's responsibility to make you feel better, that letting go approves that person's behavior, that you require an apology to heal, or that it is impossible for you to heal, you are holding yourself back. Likewise, if you believe that healing looks like you go back to the way you were before the hurt happened, or that you can simply forget about that hurt and move on, you are holding yourself back.

Focus on shifting your beliefs so that you can believe in your capacity to heal, and so that you can develop an idea of what healing looks like that will be more attainable for you. For example, believe that you can choose to begin healing right now, no matter what has happened or has not happened, and that in order to truly heal, all you need to do is find peace with the past, and with the experiences you are having because of the past. By shifting your beliefs to this, it becomes easier for you to achieve healing because you open up the path for you to pursue it, and you allow healing itself to become an achievable goal.

***R*elease Present Patterns That Are Rooted In Past Experiences**

If you are currently partaking in any present patterns that are rooted in past experiences, you need to start releasing those patterns. Present patterns you might experience could include

having unhealthy relationships, unhealthy boundaries, saying “yes” when you mean “no,” taking on more responsibilities than you should, or otherwise setting yourself up for more negative things to occur in your life. When you engage in unhealthy patterns that are rooted from past experiences, you continue to relive and recreate the trauma you experienced over and over again, which results in you truly struggling to fully release the past.

An important measure to take when it comes to healing yourself from past experiences is to recognize where past behaviors have led to unhealthy present patterns, and to work on releasing those patterns from your present life, too. Clean up your relationships, heal your boundaries, say what you mean, and allow yourself to experience a healthier quality of life now so that you are no longer reintroducing that past trauma into your life.

Find Peace, Not Happiness

Dwelling on what happened in the past is sure to cause more pain in your present. Likewise, stuffing the past down and trying to pretend it never existed is going to cause more pain in your present. Both of these forms of “dealing with” the past are incomplete, and will lead to you having negative experiences as a result of your past. Rather than dwelling or denying the past, you need to be willing to find peace with the past. This means that you do not sit and stew on it, but you also do not shove it away or try to stuff it down if topics from your past come up. Instead, you find a position where you think about it only when it is necessary, and thinking about it does not bring up any pain or discomfort for you.

In order to allow yourself to find this middle way of being able to release the pain of the past without dwelling on it or denying it, you need to be willing to start working with your thoughts around the subject of your past. CBT would be a great modality to use here, as it will allow you to redirect your thoughts as needed, while still allowing you the capacity to tap into them if you find it is necessary at any given point.

Use the Past as a Self-Discovery Tool

While the past is something that you do not want to dwell on, spending time reflecting on the past can be an incredibly helpful activity for you to engage in. Regularly reflecting on the past allows you to recognize who you are, including your patterns, your strengths and weaknesses, your stories, and more. This way, you allow yourself the opportunity to understand who you are, have compassion for yourself, and work with yourself, rather than against yourself, when it comes to achieving growth in your life.

People who refrain from digging into the past to understand who they are in the present often find themselves experiencing confusion around who they truly are. It can be easy to deny parts of yourself or pretend certain aspects don't exist or are unexplainable if you are unwilling to acknowledge the past and use it to your benefit. Allowing yourself to indulge in understanding how the past has affected who you are today, and how you can use that to identify probable healing routes, is a powerful way to transform your experience with the past. It can also transform the way you approach problems in the future, giving you the chance to approach them in a far more meaningful and fulfilling manner.

CULTIVATING A FOUNDATION FOR PEACE



PEACE IS PERHAPS one of the most powerful emotional “baselines” you can aim for in your life. Aiming for peace, as opposed to happiness, joy, or any other elevated emotion means that you are embracing and honoring the human nature, and the nature of emotions. Emotions, including elevated or elated emotions, are feelings we have in response to a stimulus, and they are feelings that will frequently change. More often than not, you will feel just one feeling at a time, and that will transform into different feelings many times over on a daily basis. However, after each emotion has been recognized, experienced, and expressed, it will be released. Then, until a new stimulus comes along, you will find yourself resting in a sort of “baseline” emotion. If your belief for your baseline emotion is that it must be happiness, then you will always find yourself searching out stimuli that make you feel happy. Further, you will find yourself feeling less and less happy overall when you realize that no matter what you do, you always return to a state of non-happiness. Rather than allowing this to mean that you have failed, that you are not satisfied or fulfilled in your life, or that you are doing anything wrong, the best thing you can do is shift your belief.

Peace is an excellent baseline state to opt for because it is one you can experience no matter what is going on in your life. If

you are experiencing happiness, anger, frustration, depression, sadness, irritability, or anything else, you can *also* choose to embrace peace. You can choose, for example, to be at peace with the situation you are in, and at peace with the emotions that you are feeling as a result of that situation. Peace does not mean you are necessarily happy with what you are feeling or experiencing, but it does mean that you can relax and feel okay with where you are at. Through this, acceptance, allowing, letting go, and generally navigating life in a more fulfilling manner becomes infinitely easier.

There are many ways that you can amplify your peace and use this peace to create a deeper sense of fulfillment in your life. You should focus on practicing these peaceful behaviors every single day, as this will allow you to raise your baseline of peace and allow you to truly feel your best no matter what you may be going through in your day to day life.

Embrace the Art of Push/Pull

Whenever you are trying to change something in your life, it can be easy to get trapped in the mindset of running away from that which you are trying to change. The problem with this mindset is that when you are always trying to run away from something, your focus is still directed specifically on that which you are trying to run away from. You will *always* be running. Unless, of course, you stop looking over your shoulder all the time and start focusing on what you are running *toward*.

Embracing the art of push/pull when it comes to instilling more peace in your life means that you are mindful of what it is that you no longer desire in your life, but that you are no

longer giving it power. By not fixating on it and not allowing it to be the primary thing you are focused on, you take power away from this part of your life and place it elsewhere. In order to make sure that you are using the power of your focus for your own benefit, however, you need to make sure that you are focused on what you want, as this will ensure that you are running in the right direction. This way, as you are “pushing away from” your undesired state, such as troubled emotions, you are also “pulling toward” your desired state, such as a state of peace and masterful emotional control. With this in mind, make it clear what you are running toward, and focus on that every single day.

Set Limits for Yourself

One of the worst mistakes we can make in our day to day lives that can interrupt our peace fails to recognize our own boundaries and, as a result, overburden ourselves with things we do not actually need to be concerning ourselves with. If you find that your schedule is overloaded, or you feel like you are constantly worried about things that need to get done, you need to do something about this overwhelming experience. Learning to release some of that overwhelm will allow you to start focusing on more important things, while also gaining maximum fulfillment from those important things.

The best way to set limits for yourself is to prioritize the things you are engaging with, and to intentionally award a higher priority to the things that *you* feel are important to *your* wellbeing. This means that you will no longer accept just anything on your schedule, and that you will begin to see your personal time as being highly important and valuable. For

example, you may decide to stop taking on extra tasks from other people's to-do lists, unless you genuinely have the time to help them with those tasks without taking away from your own wellbeing. Or, you may decide to stop checking your inbox and your social media platforms multiple times a day and, instead, only check them a few times per day. These limits will greatly support you with minimizing the amount of time you spend doing "stuff" that keeps you busy, so that you can spend more time on the things that are meaningful to you.

*M*aster Just One Relaxation Technique

There are hundreds, if not thousands of relaxation techniques out there that have the capacity to help you pull some of the weight off of your shoulders. Each one of them likely holds great merit, and has the potential to provide you with great levels of relaxation. With that being said, trying to learn all of these techniques, much less trying to fit them all into your day to day life is overwhelming, and that, in and of itself, will limit your capacity to experience peace.

Rather than trying to master everything and overwhelming yourself in the process, learn about just one relaxation technique that feels truly fit for you and master that relaxation technique. Then, rely on that technique anytime you need to relax. In doing so, you make relaxing easier as you feel comfortable with the process and so you do not feel stressed to remember each and every step of that particular relaxation technique. Further, when you master just one technique associated with relaxation, your brain begins to habitually associate it with relaxation which means that the technique itself becomes a trigger for habitual relaxation. In other words, it works more and more effectively every single time.

See Things for What They Are

Have you ever heard the saying, “don’t make a mountain out of a molehill?” This saying is powerful when it comes to putting things into perspective, seeing the truth for what it is, and creating more peace in your life. So often, when things happen in our lives, it can be easy for us to only see the immediate experience and to forget that, often, the experience will not have any sort of significant repercussions. More often than not, that experience will be brought to completion within a few minutes, or possibly hours, and there will be no lasting effect from that. Unless, of course, you allow it to linger by giving it space in your mind longer than you need to.

When something happens in your life, immediately ask yourself, “how will I be affected by this in 5 minutes? 1 hour? 5 hours? 1 day?” If the answer is “not that much” or “not at all,” then you are dealing with something small. There is no reason to fret about it or make it out to be any more than it is, which means there is also no reason to create any sort of significant emotions around it, or any sort of stress around it. Simply deal with it, release it, and carry on. The more you learn to see things for what they really are, the more you will find yourself at peace in your life.

Learn to Slow Down

Emotions are typically created by experiencing a stimulus, and then emotionally reacting to that stimulus. However, you can have control over your emotions by reverse engineering them. By that I mean, you can control

the stimulus and, through that, control your emotions. When you find yourself in need of some peace in your life, seek to control your environment by slowing down and creating room for peace. Slow down everything you are doing, even if just a little, and watch how that increases the space you have for peace in your life. Slow down your body while you walk, use less excited expressions when you are talking, and even just give yourself extra time to engage in activities like eating or spending time with loved ones in a slower capacity.

Physically slowing yourself down is a great way to help yourself release stress, while also telling your body that it is “down time.” When you slow down enough, your body will begin to recognize that there is nothing to be alert toward, and therefore it will trigger your “rest and digest” cycle. Through that, you will find yourself feeling abundantly more peaceful and relaxed.

Unclutter Your World, and Your Mind

They say that the way you keep your space reflects the way you feel in your mind. If your space is regularly cluttered, messy, and difficult to navigate, chances are you feel the same way in your mind. You might find yourself feeling agitated, disorganized, and frustrated because your mind always feels “busy,” even if you don’t know what you are busying yourself with.

Taking just 3 minutes per day to declutter your space is a great way to help yourself feel more at ease in that space, while also releasing the clutter you are experiencing in your mind. You can do this as a part of your scheduled day, or you can simply do it anytime you walk into a room or space where you are going to be spending more than a couple of minutes of your time. For example, when you get home from work, spend 3

minutes decluttering the living room so that when you sit down to relax, you feel more at peace. Or, when you go into the kitchen to make dinner, spend 3 minutes decluttering the kitchen so that you feel more relaxed while cooking. If you do this on a regular basis, not only will your space remain clutter free, but your activities will remain easier to engage in, which means less stress and greater peace!

Make Your Workspace Minimalistic

Working in an environment that is stimulating, even if it is neat, can prevent you from remaining as focused on your work. Our brains tend to enjoy stimulation, and while looking at brightly colored decor or unique shapes may not seem stimulating to you when something more stimulating is in your space, when there is nothing else, these can be incredibly stimulating. So, even if you have a habit of putting your phone and other distractions away while you work, your brightly decorated work environment could still be keeping you distracted and, as a result, disrupting your peaceful work space.

The best way to create a minimal work environment is to keep only what is necessary for your job duties in your work environment, and to keep anything you are not actively using out of sight. So, let's say you work in an office environment and you typically work on your computer on a day to day basis. This means that your pens, pencils, paper, stapler, and everything else should be neatly tucked away in drawers. This ensures that these tools are accessible when you need them, but that they are not available to distract you or keep you distracted when they are not serving a specific purpose in your work duties.

*A*lways Arrive Early

It may seem a bit strange at first, but when it comes to creating a schedule for yourself and getting yourself to your scheduled activities, always make sure you plan to arrive 10 minutes early. Give yourself enough time on your schedule to arrive 10 minutes early, and always leave at a time that will ensure that you will arrive 10 minutes early, too. Giving yourself this extra time to arrive at the engagements you have planned for yourself ensures that you no longer experience the massive amount of stress that comes with worrying about being late, or rushing in order to try to be on time.

Not only will arriving early allow you to maintain your peace and feel relaxed if things go wrong, which may otherwise make you late, but arriving early will also open you up for many additional opportunities. In particular, workplaces see those who routinely arrive early as being committed to their job and are more willing to offer opportunities to those individuals. This is partly because they arrive early, and partly because arriving early means that they are always ready for the day, that they are peaceful and prepared for what they need to do, and that they are pleasant to work with. By contrast, people who tend to arrive *just* on time always arrive with an air of stress to them as they spent the entire travel time worried that they would be late, and they often arrive apologizing for their tardiness and rushing to get ready for the day. This not only amplifies feelings of stress, guilt, and shame, but it can also cost you opportunities and keep you stuck in practical ways, too.

Stop Guessing, Ask Questions

When you allow yourself to remain in a period of guessing, you allow yourself to remain in a state of anxiety. Guessing what people want and trying to anticipate things that you have no practical way of knowing is the easiest way to keep yourself misguided and confused, as you will not know what is expected of you or how to meet other people's expectations. Thus, you also fail to meet your own expectations, because you may genuinely believe you are doing the right thing, only to find out that you are not, in fact.

Rather than guessing what people want, or what people meant, ask. Asking for clarification keeps you out of that anxious state of guessing, and it also shows the people you are asking that you care enough about them to find out what they truly meant so that you can support them in a way that they truly needed. Communication in this way may feel uncomfortable or challenging at first, but once you realize how much it transforms your stress levels, and your capacity to interact better with others, you will begin to realize how important this communication step really is!

Give Yourself Regular Breaks

Taking a break from your day to day activities, or from your day to day life, is a great way to help yourself draw away from the routine of your everyday experiences so that you can give yourself more space for peace. You should take breaks on a daily basis, as well as take a few days' break on a regular basis to help yourself truly unwind from everything you experience in your daily life. Even if you love your job, adore being around your family,

enjoy your homelife, and have done everything you can to make your day to day life truly enjoyable, the simple practice of doing the same thing over and over can become stressful to the human mind. Giving yourself an opportunity to break out of the ordinary and do something different every once in a while is a great chance for you to break away from that stressor and give yourself a chance to experience even deeper levels of peace.

On a day to day basis, give yourself breaks by scheduling one block of time each day for you to do something that will allow you to truly feel at peace. This may be eating your lunch in a different place than you normally would, engaging in a new hobby, trying something new, or spending time relaxing when normally you would be spending that time being productive. For your larger breaks, even a staycation can be helpful, though getting out of your home environment to travel your own city, go to a neighboring city, or go somewhere else entirely can be helpful in giving yourself a break from your day to day reality.

MINDFUL PRACTICES FOR PEACE



IF YOU HAVE NOT REALIZED it by now, you may be starting to recognize the power that mindfulness has when it comes to mastering your emotions. Mindfulness helps deepen your state of self-awareness, it helps navigate challenging emotions, and it helps you deepen your levels of peace in your life. Learning how to create a specific mindfulness practice is a great way for you to give yourself space so that you can achieve all of these benefits, and more, on a day to day basis.

There are many ways to deepen your levels of mindfulness, with some being routine practices, and other being practices you can use while you are engaging in other day to day activities. I encourage you to recognize that some days mindfulness will come easier than other days, and that some days mindfulness will be more challenging. The best thing you can do is continue to practice mindfulness regardless of how challenging it does or does not feel, and to be patient with yourself on a day to day basis. The more you practice mindfulness, no matter how easy or challenging it comes to you, the more you will find yourself experiencing greater levels of mindfulness overall.

reate a Daily Mindful Routine

Having a daily mindfulness routine is perhaps one of the most obvious ways of increasing mindfulness in your everyday life. Like with mastering just one relaxation technique, mastering just one simple mindfulness routine can be a great way for you to increase your level of mindfulness without overwhelming yourself by this particular routine. In fact, you can even have your mindfulness routine also serve as your relaxation routine, effectively giving you the opportunity to achieve both of these things at once.

Your daily mindfulness routine could include mindful breathing, mindful meditation, body scans, mindful eating, or any other number of mindful activities that you intentionally create time and space for on an every day basis. It does not matter what routine you pick, so long as it is one that you will be able to keep up with. Then, you must commit to doing it every single day, as this will ensure that you gain the results from your routine that you truly desire.

P practice Mindful Breathing

Mindful breathing is a simple meditation-type exercise that you can use to help you maximize your daily mindfulness levels. I have already introduced you to the 5:7 breath, so now I am going to introduce you to box breathing. You can use either breath during your mindful breathing practices, or you can pick any other number of breathing routines to help you feel more calm and mindful in the moment.

The primary goal with mindful breathing is to bring your awareness specifically to your breath. You do not want to use this time to think about what has been going on during your

day, to consider how the rest of your body feels, or to otherwise busy your mind with anything other than your breath, specifically. This way, you are training your mind to focus on just one thing, and that one thing is specifically within *you*.

To do the box breath, start by giving yourself some quiet space to sit in a comfortable position. Make sure you turn your phone to silent and that no one will distract you for the duration of your breath. Then, begin breathing in through your nose to a count of four, hold it for a count of four, breathe out through your mouth for a count of four, and hold that for a count of four. Continue this rhythmic breathing pattern for at least 5-10 breaths, or for about 1-5 minutes, whichever feels most comfortable for you. Anytime your mind wanders away from your breath, peacefully bring it back to your breath without judging yourself or punishing yourself for getting distracted. This way, you remain peaceful and present the entire time.

*L*earn to Concentrate Completely

One of the telltale signs that someone lacks mindfulness is that they struggle to concentrate. People who do not have a consistent mindfulness practice struggle to completely concentrate when they are trying to do something, which results in them growing frustrated and stressed out with difficulty concentrating. It can also result in them cutting corners, making mistakes, or needing to take twice as long to complete anything because they cannot stay focused.

Learning how to concentrate completely takes practice. You will need to start with patience. Begin by recognizing how long you generally concentrate before you find yourself distracted, and be honest. If you can only concentrate for a few minutes, acknowledge that. If you can only concentrate for a few seconds, acknowledge that, too. This starting point will help you determine how much you can increase your concentration by during each practice session without placing unrealistic demands on yourself. Once you have that starting point, you are going to focus on increasing it little by little until you can focus for approximately 20 minutes at a time, which is the average level of concentration for most humans. You can increase your concentration by encouraging yourself to stay concentrated on a single task longer and longer between distractions, and then by allowing yourself to have a limited amount of distraction after each stretch of concentration. That level of distraction should be no more than 1 minute if you are only holding your concentration for 15 minutes or less, and as many as 2-5 minutes if you are holding your concentration for 20 minutes or longer.

*I*ntentionally Release Your Tension

Mindfully releasing tension from your body is a great way to help free yourself from stress while also deepening your mindfulness overall. You can mindfully release tension from your body using a simple body scan where you intentionally release the tension from each area of your body during the scan. This particular mindfulness practice is also known as progressive muscle relaxation (PMR), and it is often used by people who have high levels of anxiety or stress so that they can regain control over their

faculties. It can be particularly helpful in promoting mindfulness and peace, as well, however.

To engage in your mindfulness body scan, you will start by using a few mindful breaths to allow yourself to relax. Then, you will draw your awareness to your feet and intentionally relax every muscle in your feet. If this feels challenging, you can tense your feet muscles first for a count of ten, then completely relax them when you are done. You will repeat this for every part of your body from your toes to your head, including your ankles, shins and calves, knees, thighs, glutes and pelvis, lower abdomen and lower back, solar plexus and middle back, chest and shoulder blades, shoulders, biceps, elbows, forearms, wrists, hands, neck, scalp, and face. When you are completely done, give yourself a chance to relax in that space for a few moments and notice how your entire body feels before moving on to your next daily task.

Spend More Time Walking

Walking is a great activity that can allow you to drop into your mind and body and give yourself some attention. Ideally, going on a walk by yourself or going on a quiet walk with someone else at least once a day is a great way to give yourself space to be mindful while also taking care of your body. During your walk, notice how your body moves, and what your body feels like. See if you can pace your breath, and your steps, and create a rhythm within yourself. Give yourself a chance to notice what types of things come into your mind when you are in a quiet space, and allow those thoughts to play out without judging them, or yourself.

Once you have addressed what the walking meditation feels like inside of your body, address what it feels like to interact with your environment. Notice the air on your skin, the flowers in your neighborhood, and the sounds of the cars and the birds. Become aware of how your senses are being stimulated by your walk, and notice whether you enjoy that feeling or not. This way, you can start to recognize what it feels like when you are being stimulated, and how your environment affects you. As you do this, you will not only develop a deeper state of mindfulness and self-awareness, but you will also maximize your peace and experience a greater sense of relaxation, too.

NAVIGATING CHALLENGING EMOTIONAL SITUATIONS



CHALLENGING emotional situations can be particularly difficult to navigate as they tend to invoke a similar response as troublesome or stubborn emotions can. The difference between challenging emotions and stubborn emotions is that emotions can be challenging without being particularly stubborn. You might find yourself having one specific stubborn emotion. However, you may find yourself feeling intimidated by or challenged by many emotions. Anytime an emotion is invoked and it is overwhelming or intimidating, you know you have come up against a challenging emotion, or a challenging situation that is worsened by the emotions you are experiencing. A great example of challenging emotional situations would include conflicts, or other social situations where high emotions may be invoked. For example, some people would deem feeling intimate or vulnerable with someone as a challenging emotional situation because, for them, these feelings are overwhelming and intimidating.

Knowing how to navigate challenging emotional situations is important, as it allows you to truly master your emotions by knowing how to navigate your emotions in a healthy and productive manner. You are going to want to have a sort of go to “protocol” that you engage in whenever you notice a challenging emotion arises so that you can navigate that

emotion with ease. By having a specific protocol in place for challenging emotions in general, you allow yourself to navigate any challenging situation no matter what causes it, or what emotions you are experiencing that are making that situation challenging for you.

Before you can launch into your protocol, you are going to need to know what a challenging emotion feels like, and you are going to need to have a strong enough sense of self-awareness that you can identify it in yourself the moment one arises. The best way you can create this level of self-awareness and quickly become aware of challenging emotions is to pay attention to thoughts or behaviors that seem emotionally impulsive, or that seem evasive. If it seems like you are feeling impulsively driven to act without thinking, chances are, you are in a challenging emotional situation. Likewise, if you are in a situation where you find yourself doing anything you can to avoid having to act in that situation, you are also facing challenging emotions. As soon as you notice either impulsiveness or evasiveness, you need to be willing to immediately jump into action on your protocol for dealing with challenging emotions. Another time when you should begin to execute your protocol is when you know in advance that you are going to have to deal with a situation that may invoke strong emotions. For example, if you know you are going to need to talk to someone about something sensitive, you should begin implementing your protocol right away so that you are already managing your emotions before they even truly begin to sprout.

Recall Your Mindfulness Techniques

*R*The first thing you absolutely must do anytime you find yourself coming up against a challenging emotion or a situation that may invoke challenging emotions is beginning to recall your mindfulness techniques. There are four mindfulness techniques specifically that you can rely on to help you navigate challenging emotional situations. The first one is mindful breathing. Mindful breathing is going to help you regulate your emotions from a stimulus level, essentially allowing you to reverse engineer a state of calmness or peace through biofeedback. Next, you should engage in the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 grounding technique. This or any other grounding technique will allow you to keep yourself present in the moment, which will prevent you from getting worked up about “what comes next.” You are also going to want to be mindfully aware of your body, as it can be easy to hold emotion within your physical body. If you find yourself remaining tense, shying away from the people around you, or otherwise carrying your emotions in your posture and physical movements, you are going to want to be aware of that and intentionally shift away from it. Once again, this will adjust your stimuli to reverse engineer a state of calmness and peace. Lastly, you are going to want to engage in mindful choices. You want to make sure that you are aware of the fact that your feelings are impacting your choices and behaviors right now, and you want to consider how they are being affected. This way, you can refrain from allowing them to botch the situation or worsen it by causing you to behave in a way that is inauthentic with what you intended, due to your current emotions. Make sure that you know what it is that you want going into the situation so that you can keep your focus on that and mindfully work toward it throughout the situation. If you do not have a specific goal for that situation because of how unexpected it was, rely on your overall goal of being peaceful

in every situation. This way, you can work toward creating and respecting your own peace, no matter what situation you are in.

P **ractice Your New CBT Emotion Loop**

If you are going to be facing a challenging situation that also invokes a stubborn emotion you deal with, and you have already begun addressing that emotion with CBT, now is a great time to focus on invoking that CBT loop. In challenging emotional situations, it can be especially difficult to invoke a CBT loop and work your way through your emotions; however, these are the most important times to do so. In these situations, you gain the opportunity to truly witness the magnitude of the contrast between your current experience with your new emotional expression, and your previous experiences with your former emotional expression. Through witnessing this contrast, your brain will begin to understand why this new loop is so much more valuable, and it will begin to implement it with greater ease in the future.

If you find that challenging emotions, in general, seem to trigger a form of anxiety within you, you might want to use CBT as a way to help you navigate all challenging emotional situations. You can do this by simply choosing a thought pattern and behavioral pattern you will lean into anytime you find yourself facing a challenging emotion and the subsequent anxiety or overwhelm from that emotion. Then, no matter what challenging emotion you are experiencing, you can invoke that particular CBT loop. This may help you address more complex emotions in a more peaceful and intentional manner.

Give Yourself The Gift of Patience and Grace

You are only human, and you are working within the confines of a brain that is operated by nature. No matter how much you can apply logic to things, you are still going to experience emotions, and those emotions are still going to do what they were meant to do by driving your system with certain impulses and urges. While you can certainly use logic to override that, and you can train yourself to respond to emotions in an entirely different way, that takes *time*. You need to be patient and gracious with yourself whenever you are navigating any new practice, even more so with those surrounding primal behaviors such as emotions, and especially when those emotions are generally all-consuming or overwhelming.

Being gracious and patient with yourself does not mean that you give yourself a free pass to behave however you want, or that you ignore any mistakes you make or any slip ups that happen. Instead, being gracious and patient means that you accept yourself whenever you make a mistake, and you gently and compassionately address that mistake so that you can apply it as a lesson to future experiences. This way, rather than finding yourself struggling in the same way in the future, you can apply what you learned to help you get ahead again.

It is also important that you are patient and gracious with yourself, particularly with challenging emotions, because mistakes made out of emotional states can easily become things that you are ashamed of. Building reasons within yourself to be ashamed, or causing yourself to feel horrible for any mistakes you have made, is a good way to cause yourself to feel even worse, which can make changing even harder.

When we feel really bad about things in ourselves, we tend to ignore them or repress them rather than work with them, which is exactly what you want to avoid. By being accepting of yourself and having patience and grace, you allow yourself to carefully examine and learn from these parts of yourself without making the situation that much worse.

Stay Focused On Your Ideal Results

Anytime you enter a situation where you are going to be dealing with complex emotions, you should do your best to have a focus on how you want that situation to play out, and then you should give yourself the space to allow it to play out in such a way. In emotional situations, it can be easy to forget that the situation will not last forever. In many cases, it may seem as though your ultimate goal is to experience emotional release when, in fact, that is not the case. This can lead to an excessive emotional expression which can lead to you actually working against your goal, rather than toward it. For example, you may end up getting angry and saying something out of anger which could escalate the situation when your ultimate goal was to get on the same page so that you could compassionately work toward a reasonable solution for the situation that has triggered the anger.

When you go into any situation, think about what your ultimate goal is and always make every decision toward that goal. Resist the urge to act emotionally, and instead act rationally and reasonably, in alignment with what you have already planned for yourself. Once you have successfully seen that goal through, be sure to acknowledge yourself and celebrate yourself for a job well done. Pay close attention to giving your awareness to how much simpler the process went,

how much more effective it was, and how much easier the entire resolution was due to your emotional management. This will stimulate the creation of a “reward” inside of your brain, which means that you will naturally want to respond to that emotion in the same peaceful way again in the future.

*A*lways Give Yourself a Private Follow Up

After you have dealt with any emotional situation, you should always give yourself time to follow up with that emotion in a private setting. A private follow up simply means that you take time to yourself later on to address the emotions you experienced and to mentally work through them so that you can find a sense of peace and closure within yourself. In doing so, you mentally work through the process of acknowledging, affirming, and letting go of the emotions you were experiencing. This can be the difference between you holding onto situations and suffering from them for a long time, or you letting go of situations and allowing yourself to quickly move on from them.

If you find that you tend to deal with a lot on a day to day basis, it may be a good idea to include some private time to follow up with all of your daily emotions in your day to day routine. A few minutes toward the end of each day invested in simply acknowledging, processing, and releasing emotions you experienced that day can be a great way to help you process any challenging emotions you may have experienced. This way, your emotions no longer weigh on you and bring you down. Instead, they serve their purpose, and then they are released for good.

DAILY EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT RITUALS



TO TRULY MASTER YOUR EMOTIONS, you are going to need to go a lot further than just engaging in sporadic emotional management practices anytime an emotion is triggered within you. You are going to need to be willing to intentionally work with your emotions every single day so that you can acknowledge, process, and release your emotions on a day to day basis. In doing so, you are allowing yourself to release your emotional reserves so that you are not holding onto them longer than necessary. You also allow yourself to create space for you to learn from your emotions and discover new ways to deal with them in a healthier and more productive manner. As you will discover over time, your emotions are something that you will continually learn from every single day. The process of learning how to navigate emotions in a healthy and productive manner is one that lasts a lifetime, largely because every time an emotion is triggered, it will be under different circumstances. The more an emotion is triggered, especially under different circumstances, the more you will become aware of how those emotions feel for you, and how you can navigate those emotions more effectively.

There are many ways that you can create a daily emotional management ritual for yourself, with no one answer being right or wrong. The key to finding a ritual that works best for

you is to identify what your life tends to look like from an emotional point of view, and to create a ritual that works best for you. An ideal ritual should address how you are feeling and help you learn from and release those emotions all at once. If you are dealing with a particularly troubling emotion that seems to linger no matter what you do, your daily ritual should include some form of activity intended for helping you process that emotion, too. This way, you are always working within your needs and supporting your overall and day to day emotional wellbeing.

As you put together your own daily emotional management rituals, I invite you to check out the six ideas I have offered below. These ideas can help you get started with creating your own ritual, or may inspire you to find a new ritual that will be better suited for your needs. Always be sure to give any new ritual at least a month or two of your dedication to see how it fits for you, and then make your adjustments from there. This way, you are giving yourself enough time to settle into that ritual so that you can see whether or not it actually works and, if you find any areas where it honestly does not work, you can make the necessary adjustments once you uncover *why* it does not work.

Stay Committed to Your Daily Mindfulness Ritual

The first thing you can do for yourself, from an emotional capacity, is staying committed to your daily mindfulness ritual. Mindfulness is going to help you in countless ways, including processing and releasing emotions. A great way to incorporate mindfulness specifically into your daily emotional management ritual is to use mindfulness to help you recognize what emotions you are experiencing, and

to navigate them in an intentional capacity. The more mindful you are, the more you will be able to find meaningful ways to address your emotions during your emotional release.

One great way that you can incorporate mindfulness into your emotional management routine is to take the time to mindfully investigate any emotions you have experienced throughout your day. You can start by noticing one to three emotions you may have experienced that day that were particularly strong for you. Do not work through any more than three at a time, though, as you do not want to overwhelm yourself and make it more challenging for you to address your emotions.

Once you have noticed these emotions, give yourself time to analyze why they occurred, what happened once they did, and how the aftermath of those emotions was experienced. If you can identify the trigger of the emotions, understand your thoughts and feelings in response to those emotions, and recognize how they lead to your behaviors, this will give you a greater understanding of how those emotions were affecting you. Likewise, if you can acknowledge the consequences of your emotions, you can create the opportunity for you to understand how your emotional responses affected you in the long run. Be sure to do this for both negative and positive emotions, as this will give you a chance to identify opportunities for growth while also giving you a chance to celebrate yourself for growth you have already implemented.

***T*ake Up Journaling**

Journaling is a wonderful practice for many different reasons. Aside from helping you keep a little log of your life, journaling allows you to express your true thoughts

and emotions outside of yourself, where you otherwise may not have been able to. For many people, talking about what they truly think and feel seems impossible, even if they are talking to someone such as a therapist where it seems like you “should” be able to speak honestly about what you are thinking or feeling. Having a totally private journal that you keep to yourself can be a great way for you to openly admit to how you were truly feeling, what you were truly thinking, and anything else that you may have hidden at any point during your day. You can also honestly reflect on what you think and feel after the fact.

Releasing your thoughts from your mind and physically getting them out onto paper may not be quite the same as talking to someone about your emotions, but it will provide you with a great opportunity to get a sense of release. In many cases, the sooner you can release your feelings by admitting them, and the more honestly you can do so, the easier it will be for you to let go and move on in the long run. However, if you get into the habit of acknowledging your emotions and then repressing them, it will become more challenging for you to release how you are feeling about that particular situation. Hence, the pent up experience begins.

If you are not someone who typically journals, rest assured that there does not need to be a right way or a wrong way for you to engage in journaling. You do not have to be thoughtful, emotional, inquisitive, or well-articulated in order to keep a journal. You also do not need to worry about spelling, grammar, punctuation, or other errors in your writing. You don't even need to worry about writing full form sentences, sharing things in story form, or otherwise being exhaustive in what you are thinking and feeling. Even just keeping bullet-point styled notes about what you were thinking and feeling

and how that impacted you can be plenty to help you sort through what is going on in your brain. Use your journal in a way that works for you, and trust that this will be plenty to help you fully accept, learn from, and release any emotions you have experienced on a day to day basis.

Give Yourself Frequent Stress Breaks

I firmly believe that stress breaks should be a mandatory part of everyone's daily activities. Day to day life can be stressful, even if you are doing the same thing every single day. The demands of work life, family life, and other parts of life can all be overwhelming, even on the best of days. Giving yourself stress breaks means that you are willing to acknowledge your own emotional state and make choices that will nurture your wellbeing. When it comes to emotional management, there is no one size fits all. Spending just one session working on your emotions each day is not going to result in you having effortless or healthy emotional expressions for the rest of the day. It will improve your chances. However, you do still need to make choices that are going to keep you in a healthy state of expression during the day. You can improve your expressions on a day to day basis by being willing to give yourself stress breaks so that you can decompress.

As I mentioned earlier in this book, a stress break could be an intentionally scheduled break where you get to do something different from your normal activities. However, a stress break can also be accomplished by giving yourself 5-10 minutes to decompress anytime you find yourself feeling particularly stressed or emotionally charged during the day. You can also give yourself 5-10 minutes to decompress if you find yourself

feeling drained or overdrawn from your day. During those 5-10 minutes, allow yourself time to simply breathe, be mindful, and engage in a relaxing routine that will allow you to feel more at peace after your day. Through this, you will find yourself flowing much more peacefully and harmoniously throughout the course of your day.

Work In Harmony With Your Nature

Whenever you are trying to do something such as manage your emotions, it is always best to work with your nature rather than against it. With emotions, in particular, working with your nature means rather than denying your emotions or trying to force them to change, you learn to incorporate them into your daily experience. Incorporating your emotions into your daily routines could include fitting certain parts of your routines into certain parts of your day when you tend to have the right amount of energy, scheduling your days based on how your feelings tend to behave, and using emotional relief measures that feel natural and fulfilling while still being healthy.

When it comes to scheduling with your energy, consider how you personally tend to have energy during the day and schedule your activities based on that. This way, you are not trying to force yourself to engage in things when you do not have adequate energy for them. Therefore you have no reason to feel pressured or stressed in those activities. For example, if you know that you tend to have more energy in the morning and less in the evening, you could exercise in the morning and do your mindfulness routine in the evening. If, however, you are the opposite and you tend to have less energy in the morning and more in the evening, you might benefit from

doing your mindfulness practice in the morning and exercising in the evening. This way, you are working with your nature to create harmony and flow throughout your day, and you are not amplifying your stress for any reason.

You can also schedule your days based on how you anticipate you will feel. For example, let's say you are trying to schedule your week out, and you know that on Tuesday you have a stressful project to complete. Based on this knowledge, you might make Monday and Tuesday relatively relaxing days and save other things, such as cleaning the house or engaging in other demanding activities later, once the project has already been finished. This way, rather than trying to force yourself to get anything done when you already know that you won't really have the energy, you work with your nature instead.

As far as emotional fulfillment efforts go, focus on learning tools that allow you to release emotions in a way that can easily be executed on a day to day basis. Exercise, art, listening to music, relaxing, talking to a loved one, and other similar measures can all be used as a means to release your emotions in a healthy, productive manner. If you find you tend to experience many rapid emotions during the day, you might even consider carrying a journal with you and quickly jotting things down anytime you come across a large feeling. This way, you are able to quickly release that feeling in the moment, and you can reasonably circle back to it later on in the day. This would be far healthier than, say, stuffing it down and allowing it to ruin the rest of your day.

***C*reate Space for You to Feel Through Your Emotions**

Addressing your emotions from a logical perspective is great, but in order to truly master your emotions you are also going to need to give yourself space to actually feel through your emotions. Your emotions are, essentially, energy built up within your body. Every single emotion you experience will create a sort of emotional charge within you that needs to be expressed. In a totally natural world, you would simply act on the impulses that those emotions presented with and you would feel completely released of that particular emotion. For example, in the wild an angry tiger would simply attack another animal and fight until it felt better again. Or, an impala that was threatened or attacked but not killed would feel anxiety, so it would thrash about violently and then jump up and run away. This immediate relief from those emotions means that they no longer feel those emotions, and so they are no longer affected by them. In our modern world, however, immediate relief in such ways is socially unacceptable, and ineffective to our wellbeing. Rather than attacking people or thrashing when we are scared, we need to find other ways to deal with our emotions. Sadly, most people's method for dealing with their emotions is to pretend that they don't need to deal with them at all.

Giving yourself space to actually sit down and work through your emotions on a daily basis is a great opportunity for you to release them. This time should differ from periods where you mindfully reflect or write about your emotions in your journal, because your goal here is not to be logical about your emotions. Instead, it is to simply feel them. Of course, you do not want to express them in a way that will hurt yourself or anyone else. However, you can express them in a way that feels complete and thorough, thus allowing you to fully release that energy from your body. For example, if you are sad you

might cry, or if you are angry you might beat up a pillow or yell into a pillow. Allow yourself to thoroughly release anything you feel so that you can experience freedom from those emotions entirely. For some particularly large emotions, or ones you may have been dealing with for some time, you might need to feel through them a few times over before you can fully release them. Over time, however, you will find yourself feeling a complete sense of relief which will allow you to move on completely from those emotions.

Do Things That Soothe You Every Day

The final thing I strongly suggest you incorporate into your daily routine is a self-soothing ritual. Self-soothing can be used to help you feel safe, comfortable, and nurtured, no matter what the situation may be. If you are feeling particularly angry, sad, or overwhelmed, self-soothing can help you bring yourself through those emotions. You do not only have to be feeling negative emotions to benefit from self-soothing, however. Even if you are feeling neutral, some time spent self-soothing can help you feel better overall. Once again, this is a scenario where your actions would be helping you enjoy a more relaxed and peaceful baseline of emotions so that whenever anything happens that triggers large emotions within you, you have an easier time dealing with them.

Every single person will be soothed by different things, so you have to find what helps you self-soothe. Self-soothing could be accomplished through warm baths, massaging yourself with lotion, cuddling under a soft blanket, watching comedies, talking compassionately to yourself, stretching, listening to soothing music, meditating, or grounding. There are many other activities you might consider trying, too. Give each one a

try and see which of these helps you feel the most comforted and supported. You might even try using a couple of them and interchanging them based on the situation and how you are feeling. This way, you are able to truly soothe yourself as deeply as possible, and you end up feeling your best in the end. I recommend self-soothing every day, and making extra time for it after particularly emotional experiences, or at the end of particularly challenging days. This way, you are able to fully nurture yourself after emotional experiences, allowing you to manage your emotions like a master.

CONCLUSION

Congratulations on completing *Master Your Emotions!* This book was written to help you understand your emotions from a deeper level and learn how to navigate them in a way that is more meaningful and productive to your wellbeing.

I hope that in reading *Master Your Emotions*, you discovered many empowering tools to help you better understand yourself and the emotional experiences you might have in your day to day life. I hope that you are also able to feel more confident in your ability to completely navigate your emotions in a way that is safer and more thorough than you may already be doing. When you learn how to truly navigate and master your emotions like a pro, you end up creating space for you to enjoy life in a more fulfilling and meaningful manner. What I mean by that is, you can begin to rely on your emotions to support you with your wellbeing, *and* you begin to trust that you will be able to navigate difficult situations from a perspective of emotional resiliency. This ends up creating the perfect scenario for you to open yourself up to receiving greater opportunities in life, and feel confident in taking those opportunities because you know you have what it takes to manage yourself as you embrace them.

Emotional management is also an incredibly powerful tool to help you begin to experience true happiness and fulfillment in

your life. So often, people get stuck in negative cycles where their emotions feel overwhelming and seem to take over, and that can lead to massive levels of guilt, embarrassment, and shame. The more you feel those emotions, and reinforce them through your emotional expressions, the more you will find yourself struggling to feel true happiness and fulfillment in your life. When you learn to change those behaviors, however, you begin to create space for you to heal from past emotional expressions and enjoy healthier and more fulfilling new ones. Through that, you begin to experience emotional freedom, as well as true happiness and fulfillment in your life.

After reading this book, I strongly encourage you to continue to reinforce your daily emotional management practices. The more you work on reinforcing these practices, the better you will be able to rely on them, and the more thorough they will be for you. Remember, emotional mastery is a practice you will continue to engage in all your life, as you continue to learn how to navigate each of your emotions in more advanced ways, and in more challenging situations. Take time to look over your shoulder every now and again to see how far you have come, otherwise keep focusing on your growth. The more you focus on creating and implementing growth in your life, the more fulfillment and happiness you will experience in the long run!

I also ask you to please take a moment to review *Master Your Emotions* on Amazon Kindle. Your honest feedback would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you!

OVERTHINKING

Stop Intrusive Thoughts and
Reduce Anxiety



Justin Moore

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INTRODUCTION

We all worry sometimes. But for some people, it's all-consuming. They can't trust that they turned off the stove, so they have to turn the car around to go home and check, so a fire doesn't break out. They pick apart everything they said in a conversation and worry that they offended someone and embarrassed themselves. They can hardly make a move because each one feels like the wrong one. All of this can make you feel like you're about to go crazy.

If this sounds familiar, don't worry. You've come to the right place. I can assure you that you're not going crazy. What you're doing is overthinking. As the name would suggest, sufferers obsess over everything. Long after an event is over, they think, "I should've done that. I shouldn't have done this. Everything would be okay if I had, but I didn't, so now it's ruined." This is how overthinking brings on and contributes to anxiety disorders.

The good news is, you are not stuck with this. Just like nail biting or any other bad habit, overthinking can be stopped. It won't be overnight- in fact, it will be an ongoing process- but you can overcome this, and within this book, you will find all of the tools you need. In time, you will become the one in control of your thoughts. Instead of looking anxiously at the

past or dreading the future, you will be firmly grounded in the present, allowing you to tap into your full potential.

WHAT OVERTHINKING IS AND WHY IT IS HARMFUL TO OUR HEALTH



STRESS IS a part of everyone's life, especially these days with how many responsibilities we have- work, family, organizations you are a part of. This can cause our minds to be pulled into a lot of different directions. You'll be assigned to a large project and worry that your work will please your boss. You'll have a disagreement with your partner or a family member. You might get a desperate call from your kid saying they left their homework at home while you're in the middle of running an errand. It is rare that at the end of the day, we truly feel at peace and like we have done everything to the best of our ability.

For some people, this reaches an unhealthy point. It transcends a normal level of worrying and becomes overthinking. They can never relax. They are never sure things are going to be alright. Instead of sleeping at night, they lie awake occupied with thoughts such as "What if there was an assignment I forgot to do? No, I checked off everything on my planner. But what if I forgot to write it down on the planner in the first place?"

"But what if." These three words are the foundation that overthinking stands on. It is what allows anxiety to build such a presence within our minds. "Nothing bad is happening right now, but what if it does within a few seconds?" "My friends

tell me they like me, but what if they are lying?” “But what if” sends you on a wild goose chase. You will be on an endless quest to disprove fears or that someone isn’t secretly thinking something ill of you. This means you are trying to prove a negative, which is impossible, especially if it involves what is going on in other people’s minds or other things that are beyond our control.

Overthinking will also cause you to become suspicious of others. If left unchecked, this can develop into paranoia. You will start interpreting things other people say as insults even if they did not mean it that way. This will have a negative impact on the way you interact with people and the turnout of your relationships with them. You might not even realize it, but you will start acting defensively as a result of questioning the motive of everything they say and do. Then, to make matters worse, it can get to a point where you are unable to figure out whether there really is a red flag about someone or if it is just the paranoia talking. What if they didn’t even do what you think they did, and it is all in your mind?

This will exacerbate what overthinking already does well, which is lower your self-esteem. It does this in many ways.

- You don’t trust yourself. You’ll check the stove over and over because you don’t think you can rely on your memory that you turned it off. You’ll hesitate to use a word or phrase because you’re afraid you don’t really know what it means.
- You analyze everything you said and did at social events to an agonizing degree. You will never be able to walk away from them having had a fun time and wanting to do it again next time. You’ll feel embarrassed about some sort of faux pau you feel like

you made. You'll worry that you said something to deeply offend everyone. When you leave the room you will be certain that everyone starts talking badly about you.

- You will “make a mountain out of a molehill.” This means making a situation worse than it really is. You miss a stop sign, and instead of just warning yourself to be more careful next time, you will spend the entire drive punishing yourself about killing an imaginary person, even though in reality, nothing like that happened.
- You will always feel like everything in your life is just about to fall apart. Every miscommunication in your relationships will make you think this is the end of them. You get reprimanded once by your boss, and you are preparing to be fired. Reassurance never lasts for longer than a few minutes.
- You will engage in a lot of negative self-talk. “No one actually likes you; they just pretend to.” “It’s your fault.” “You’re a bad person.”
- You will talk yourself out of opportunities because you will automatically think you will not be good enough to get them.

As you can see, it causes a lot of damage to your mental health. What are the benefits of it, you might ask? There are none. It won't even make you more responsible. In fact, you will overlook something by being so worried about something else. For example, you are driving to work and terrified that you left a candle on and that your pet will be hurt by getting close to it, and then you look up and realize you missed your exit. Overthinking is like a controlling friend or even an abusive partner. You can't get low enough. Think about it. You

can't even be sure you turned off a stove, how could you ever handle any big responsibility? Do you think anyone thinks well of you anymore after that ridiculous joke you made at that party? You're a bad person.

Take a good look at the things you say to yourself on a daily basis. When you do, it will be a sobering moment. Would you ever say these things to anyone else? Imagine your friend was in a relationship with someone who was talking to them this way. You would want them to leave that person as soon as possible. Overthinking is such a partner. It takes but doesn't give. It wants you to think nothing of yourself. It causes you unrelenting anxiety. When was the last time you weren't stressed to the high heavens, losing track of everything you were worried about because your thoughts were racing around in your mind in a jumbled mess?

It's time to break up with overthinking. You don't need to offer an explanation or justify yourself. You owe yourself better treatment than this. This isn't "just who you are." Anxiety and self-doubt are not personality traits, and they are not supposed to be a part of your identity. In fact, this is just another way that negative self-talk kicks in because you tell yourself you are a coward who can't handle the same things everyone else can. Do not listen to the voice that tells you this. You are meant to be confident. You are meant to think you can be and achieve anything you want.

The term "overthinking" might sound self-explanatory, but it goes so much deeper than just thinking too much. A person who does this will feel like their mind is being thrown around all over the room like a ragdoll. As many thoughts run through your mind, you will not be able to even complete one. Imagine being in a crowded auditorium where everyone there is talking loudly at once, and their voices all echo off of the walls. You

would not be able to process anything anyone is saying. You would be overstimulated and just want all of the noise to stop altogether.

You can't focus because it is like trying to watch a movie while someone is talking over it the whole time and asking you questions about details that are irrelevant to the story. That is the worst part of overthinking. You do so much for nothing. As much energy as you put into this, you do it all for nothing, because at the end of it, you have done nothing productive. You will waste so much time when overthinking. In this way, stopping overthinking is a fight for your life- to take it back. Every moment that goes by is one you will never get back. You need to think long and hard about how you want to spend these moments because eventually, they will accumulate to your entire life. We only get a finite amount of time, and so when it is over, you are forced to look back on how you used your time. Do you want to have spent it worrying and obsessing, leaving you in a constant state of anxiety? You are worth more than that. Overthinking is not.

You will also miss out on the good moments in your life because you will hardly even notice they are happening. You will be preoccupied with the thoughts that are plaguing your mind. Say you are at a Christmas party with your family, and your house is where it is hosted. The days leading up to the party will be a stress pit for you. You will agonize over the decorations and even after hours of working on them, you will still not feel like they look good enough. You'll probably spend too much on food trying to account for anything that anyone attending might possibly want. You will be apologetic about the state of the house when they arrive even though you cleaned the entire place from floor to ceiling. As everyone else is laughing, drinking, eating and merry-making, your mind

will be scoping out the lay of the land, looking for every little flaw in it. “The Christmas tree has is overly decorated on one side and sparse on the other.” “You hung one of the stockings backward!” All of the things you notice will be insignificant details in the eyes of other people. They probably did not notice them at all, and even if they did it didn’t add up to anything more than a momentary observation, a fleeting thought that came and went, and within half an hour, they did not even remember having it. It did not have any impact on how much they enjoyed themselves. They still had a perfectly grand time and might have even thought it was endearing.

Overthinkers remember everything they have ever done with a critical and condemning eye. They label it as something weird, embarrassing, or unsightly. Even small things that are not even actual crimes are things they will never forgive themselves. For example, we all have that cartoon show we loved as a child, and it became our world for a while. We pretended we are the characters and imitated them in social situations. We talked about it too much, even constantly. You might have even gotten some flack about it from friends and family, or they might have told you they do not want to talk about that show all of the time. When you get older, you grow out of that phase and move on. However, an overthinker would hold their feet to the flame even for something like that. They were just a child and did not hurt a single person with what they did, and yet they will give themselves a life sentence for it, saying, “how could I have done that? You looked so bad when you did that. That is what everyone is going to remember you by. Everyone thinks there is something wrong with you.” The thoughts go on like this. Their mind becomes an overlord that stands over you and taunts you. You can’t get low enough. You

can't grovel, apologize, and shame yourself enough. In fact, in a way, this will egg on the negative self-talk.

Try to find other ways you can think of these past "transgressions." Take the example above. You can view it as this big wrong thing you did that you tar and feather yourself about forever, or you can break it down and see it for what it really was. The first thing you need to take into account is the fact that you were a child. This means you were essentially experiencing the world for the first time. When you are a child, you don't know how things work, so you will search for things that will help you make sense of it. You are also trying to find your identity. That is the reason children go through so many phases. They are trying on different hats to see if one fits. You enjoyed this show, and there might have been a character that was your favorite. Since you loved them so much, you might have thought their personality would work well on you. You also wanted to be like them because there was something about them that spoke to you on a fundamental level. In a way, it was a step in your journey to self-discovery.

Overthinking always involves feeling bad. You are either giving yourself a hard time, questioning the stability of an aspect in your life, or trying to figure out if some horrible event your mind has conjured up will come to pass in the real world. When you are not living in shame, you are living in fear. One way or another, you are downtrodden. You are putting yourself through something you do not have to go through, looking at every moment in your past as that "bad thing" you did. There is no limit to how horrible you think you are, or how bad you think things are going to get. You have the ever-looming fear of losing control of yourself. You feel like you are trapped in your mind.

When you overthink, you pick every bit of yourself apart, searching for a huge and ghastly flaw. Psychology states that when you try to find something, you will see it, whether it is real or not. Your mind will play tricks on you. An overthinker might look in the mirror one day and think, “I never know what a large and oddly-shaped nose I have. How have I gone my whole life without noticing that?” The truth is that there is nothing unusual about the shape of their nose, but now they cannot unsee it. As I said before, the mind is powerful. It can distort what you see when you look at yourself. In this example, the person begins viewing their entire life in a different way. They think about when they were at the supermarket the other day and saw a group of people laughing. At the time they didn’t think about it, but now they are convinced those people must have been making fun of their nose. Now, every time they see anyone laughing or whispering, they think it must be about them. They might even convince themselves they can hear what they are saying. They project the things they are saying to themselves onto those people. This is where things can get dangerous. The person would then not be able to think about anything but hiding and minimizing their nose when they were out in public. They would feel like everyone in the place was watching and mocking them. They might even start to consider unnecessary medical procedures to fix a deformity that does not even exist, all because of negative self-talk. This might seem like a simple word with a straight-forward meaning, but it goes much deeper than just calling yourself stupid or another derogatory term. It is living your entire life with that belief in mind. How you treat yourself and let others treat you is swayed by this internal dialogue. It is a constant self-punishing ritual. It is like a bully, standing over you, pointing out every time you do something wrong. You spend all of your time trying not to

make another mistake, thus giving it more ammunition, which will only cause your performance to be even worse.

There is something else at work when you engage in negative self-talk, and that is anxiety. You might be thinking, “How would one have to do with another? Isn’t anxiety just being worried?” That’s partially correct, but it is also more than that. When you are feeling anxious and afraid, your thoughts will all become negative. You predict bad things to happen, and therefore you think you will only make poor choices. You do not only fear outside forces but yourself. You convince yourself that you cannot do anything right. You might think nothing good ever happens to you, which is another form of thinking negatively about yourself. When you are about to meet a new person, your thoughts revolve around all of the ways in which you could mess it up- “What if I say the wrong thing? What if I make a joke and it offends them? What if they think I’m a total idiot? What if they are put off by the way I say hello?” There lies how anxiety brings on negative self-talk. You give yourself a hard time even about the way you greet another person. There is not one single thing you will not criticize yourself over.

Negative self-talk and anxiety will dominate and destroy you if you let it. However, this is not going to happen inevitably. Contrary to whatever your mind is telling you right now, you are not doomed. Nothing horrible is happening to you right now. All you have to do at this moment is to read the words on this page. I am going to help you gain a better understanding of why you are having these distressing thoughts, which will go a long way in alleviating them.

Much of the reason people struggle so much with anxiety is that they do not even realize what is going on with them. This is because, for a long time, people have been silent about

whatever internal struggles they were going through because they worried about what others would think if we came out with it. This left people who were having panic attacks with no way to help themselves and no one to talk to. They feared they would die, go crazy, or even need to be institutionalized.

Fortunately, both society and psychology have come a long way in the past few years, and I can assure you that your worst fears are not going to come to life. You are not going to be harmed. You are not going to be admitted to a mental hospital for being stressed, anxious, or even having panic attacks. Doctors reserve institutionalization for those who are judged to be an immediate danger to someone else. What you are struggling with is much more common than you might think. Over half of the world's population goes through some type of mental health crisis at some point in their lifetime. In the United States alone, over 40 million people are living with anxiety, and that is only the reported cases.

Also, think about what is going on in your life. Have there been problems with your family? Are you having financial problems? Are there changes happening in your romantic relationship? If so, it is not only alright but expected that you would be distressed. You need to congratulate yourself. Why you might ask? You could say it is the sanest thing to do to freak out right now. When we are hit with stressful events, we react in strange ways. This is because your life is in a state of disarray.

Anything that comes with responsibilities will also cause stress. This can mean anything, but work and family are some of the most common triggers, especially if you have children. Of course, you love them, but they do not always behave in the way you want them to. Sometimes they argue with you and act out, and these outbursts can happen at a very inopportune

time. You will also have conflicting schedules sometimes, and then you have to figure out a way to have someone watch them so you can meet your obligations. Work can be very demanding at times, and it is your way of supporting yourself and your family. At times the workforce can be unpredictable, causing you to fear for your financial stability. All of this adds up to a great deal of anxiety.

Even pleasant events can be anxiety-inducing. For example, someone who has gotten a new job or is getting married will likely experience feelings of stress. This can amplify the feeling because it doesn't make sense to the person. In the case of a person getting married, they are probably thinking, "This is a time I should be happy. I'm getting ready to spend the rest of my life with the person I love. So why am I afraid? Does this mean there's a problem in our relationship? I haven't looked at it until now? What if I don't really love this person as much as I thought I did? How do I know they truly are that one?" These thoughts can escalate to the point where they are having doubts about going through with the wedding because they do not feel like their emotional response to it is what it should be- a big part of this probably is because are comparing how they are feeling to what they have seen on TV, music videos, or even commercials.

Let's take this scenario apart. For one, they are judging themselves, a real person, against a fictional character. They are played by an actor who has rehearsed these lines which were created and reviewed by a team of professional writers, all of this being done to project an image that fulfills a common fantasy- finding that "one true love," where one is certain they have found the perfect person for them. Also, once the film is over, that is the end of the story- hence the line, "and they lived happily ever after... the end." However,

in real life, when you marry someone, it is just the beginning. You are joining your entire life with someone else's. You might raise children with them. You will handle finances with them. You are pinning a lot onto one person, and as the time for all of that to set in motion draws near and reality sets in, you would naturally want to know if you were doing the right thing.

This goes to show that not every time you look at something from every angle or feel nervous about taking something on is it a bad thing. That is when anxiety is doing its job, and we will go deeper into why that is in the next chapter. However, the point I am trying to make right now is that you can load more anxiety onto yourself by telling yourself it is the wrong thing to feel. This is when it becomes a vicious cycle. You become afraid of experiencing the anxiety, which brings it on even stronger, meaning the fear itself and the idea that you should not feel this way feed off of one another to become stronger.

You take your inner peace away from yourself when you engage in overthinking. Every chance at it will be sabotaged. This is going to be a difficult process, but it will be well worth it. Imagine not having to go back and check things over and over again. What if you could just get into your car and go out without worrying you left some appliance on and having visions of coming back to a house that was burning? What if you could trust that your relationships were secure if there had not been any evidence to suggest they were not? Your world would change. Not only would you no longer be bombarded with thoughts that are upsetting to you, but you would have time to think about other things that do make you happy.

Think about the things in your life that you value. These are the things you need to hold onto while you are going through

this. This is what all of your efforts are working towards, one of those things being yourself. You might not think you have any love for yourself, but the fact that you are here, trying to figure out how to improve your thought patterns so that you can live a better life proves that you do.

A big part of stopping overthinking is getting out of the habit of considering yourself abnormal. When we feel anxious, we feel detached from the rest of the world. We see other people as better than us and ourselves as bumbling oafs. You might think of yourself as crazy because you have these intrusive thoughts, and others do not. I can tell you that it is not true. Everyone is going through some sort of struggle that they do not want others to know about.

You need to stop thinking of yourself and your thoughts as bad. They may be unpleasant, and you want to get rid of them, but the opposite will happen if you shame yourself for having them. This will cause them to become stronger. It never works to try to tell yourself not to think of something. Everyone is a work in progress. These are just your particular set of challenges. You cannot force yourself to feel a certain way, especially if you are doing it from a place of desperation. For example, you are having a family get-together. If you tell yourself you must not have a panic attack, or you will have let your family down, you will inevitably become anxious. If you are thinking anything like, “Then how do I get these thoughts to go away? They are driving me crazy! Is that even possible?” I am here to assure you that you can. If there was no way to do so, all of those self-help books would not exist. Therapy would yield no results, but both of those things exist and they do help people. This is why the very next thing we are going to talk about is what to do when you get into this state of mind.

REDUCING ANXIETY



ANXIETY HAS BEEN WIDELY DISCUSSED over the past decade. You've probably seen hoards of self-help books, blogs, and video channels dedicated to the management of it. Many people, including successful business people and widely idolized celebrities, are coming forward with the fact that they deal with this problem. This means you are not alone in feeling this way. It also means this problem cannot truly inhibit you from living a fulfilling life. I am going to tell you all about what you are experiencing, where it comes from, and what you need to do about it.

It is more than just fear. It is a constant dull ache that sometimes becomes escalates to an extremely uncomfortable and downright scary sensation known as a panic attack. People who have them have described feeling like the walls were closing in around them. They sometimes even think they are having a heart attack because their heart is pounding so fast. Sometimes people go on for years without recognizing the fact that they have an anxiety disorder because they think everything is alright now after the fear has subsided for a while. However, the sensations will come back, so you need to know how to be prepared for them and deal with them when they happen.

Overthinking both stems from and contributes to anxiety. This means both of them are working together, and if they are allowed to do this, things will spiral out of control. This is why the first step to overthinking is managing your anxiety.

Notice how I said “manage” and not “eliminate.” This is because there is no such thing as making anxiety go away completely. That is not something you would want to happen. It would be detrimental to our health and safety if we did. Just the way a smoke alarm goes off to warn people in the building of a fire, anxiety gives the body and mind a heads up when there is danger. When a predatory animal is nearby, anxiety gives a person the ability to recognize the fact that this is a situation they need to get away from. This, in turn, sets off the “fight-or-flight” instinct.

However, a constant state of anxiety is a problem. When we are in a state of elevated tension, our hearts beat at a rapid rate. Digestion is interfered with. This is not sustainable. Over a long period of time, stress begins to take a toll on one’s health in many ways. You will begin to run the risk of heart problems. People have even experienced heart attacks and/or strokes because they could not get their stress under control. Stress also often causes people to subconsciously clench their jaw and grind their teeth during their sleep. Over time this causes wear and tear on the teeth. You can suffer chips, cracks, or even breaks. In short, it affects every part of your body and mind.

Stress is supposed to be temporary. Let’s think about the smoke alarms again. They are supposed to sound off when there is smoke and stop when it has disappeared. It is not meant to go on beeping indefinitely. If this is happening, there is something wrong with your alarm system. This is why constant anxiety is classified as a disorder. In order to keep

yourself from becoming broken down, you need to get your stress under control.

The first step to this is taking care of yourself, both physically and mentally. When your body is healthy, your immune system is stronger, meaning you will be less at risk for illness. The mind works in a similar way. When you do things that promote a decrease in stress, you will find that you are less susceptible to being overcome by it, even when you are placed in stressful situations. We've talked about the mind having an effect on the body, but it goes both ways. When you are not feeling well physically, it is distressing for a whole set of reasons. For one, the physical discomfort will make you feel agitated. There is a fear that it is something worse than the common cold. You worry about having to take time off of work and being unable to fulfill the responsibilities you need to. As we've discussed, stress takes a toll on your body, and when this happens, it will decrease. They have a relationship that is extremely destructive to you.

So how do we keep our bodies and minds healthy?

Prioritize your health. It seems simple, but we often fail to do that. You sacrifice sleep to get some work done or help someone in need. You skip a meal because you don't have time for it. You can feel yourself becoming tired, but you push through your day anyways. You might think you're only going to do this once, but these things have a way of happening another time after they have once. This can go on until a lack of self-care becomes a habit.

Also keep a watch on your diet, particularly your caffeine intake. Many times we use it as a means to get up in the morning or power through a hefty work assignment. The problem with this substance is that it is a stimulant, which will

contribute to anxiety. You especially do not want to consume it shortly before you go to bed. Not only will you have a hard time getting to sleep, but you might have unpleasant dreams, which will cause you not to feel well-rested.

When thinking about keeping your mental health intact, the most important thing to do is stay organized. Anxiety has the easiest time creeping in when you are knee-deep in work and do not know what you did and did not do, losing hope that you will be able to get everything done in time. We can improve our organization skills, so everything doesn't always come at us all at once. One of the most effective ways of reducing the amount of stress you experience is to work on time management. When we manage our time well, our lives become more orderly. Weekly planners are useful in this department. They are inexpensive and will help you keep from missing deadlines. Figure out how much time you need to put into each project per day so you will work on it progressively over a long period of time. This way at the end of it, instead of scrambling frantically praying, you are somehow going to be able to make the deadline; you can peacefully make any last adjustments that need to be made to it. Then, you will feel proud of the work you are handing in and avoid the fear of how you know it will be reviewed and the shame of knowing you could have done better.

When the panic begins to set in, you might feel like you can't stop it. This is not true. When we let the sensations of anxiety overwhelm us, they get to assume control over us. When you feel an anxiety attack coming on, pull yourself into reality. Look at what is going on in the present. Anxiety attacks cause you to fear things that have not and will not happen.

You also need to know when the people in your life are helping your anxiety and when they are bringing it on. While

social interaction is a necessary part of our lives, there are certain times in the day where it should not happen. There has to come a point in the evening where you unplug from your phone. Most of us have fallen into the behavior pattern of texting or calling someone late at night, looking up later and realizing it is a morbid hour in the morning, and then having trouble falling asleep afterward. When this happens, you get up feeling exhausted. You aren't going to be productive. This means you will have lost an entire day. Remember that we do not fall asleep the second we lay down. This is why putting your phone or computer down at midnight and thinking, "I'll get seven hours of sleep" isn't going to work.

It won't work to simply tell yourself not to be anxious anymore. As we've stated before, this will have the opposite effect. Overthinking isn't some bad habit; you can just tell yourself not to do like biting your nails. It is a thought process that has been integrated into your brain. This means it needs more than just a "stop doing that." It will need to be slowly severed from you and managed until then. Instead, give yourself something to think about besides the anxiety. Plan some fun activities into your day. Many times when we are overthinking, we are not doing anything else. This can cause you to spend hours just sitting there, thinking about all the things that could go wrong. This means you lose precious time with nothing to show for it.

To manage your anxiety, you are going to have to learn to do something that feels uncomfortable for overthinkers. You are going to have to relinquish that need to know things for sure. The need for certainty is the crux of your inner turmoil. "How do I know nothing bad will happen to my loved ones?" "I won't be happy unless I know without any doubt that my partner does not want to break up with me." "But there's still a

chance my friends don't really like me." You've probably sought reassurance from your friends and family about these thoughts and felt better for a little while, but something always derails it- "They could just be lying. They didn't break up today, but they could tomorrow." Then the cycle begins.

You are going to have to learn to accept uncertainty if you hope to stop overthinking. That is because the only guarantee in life is that things are going to change. People with anxiety have a fear of change, but it is actually a good thing. Imagine how boring it would become if your life stayed the exact same way it is now forever. You see the same people and never meet new ones, and you never get any closer to them than you are now. You stay right where you are in your job or education. Every morning, you wake up knowing what routine you are going to go through.

Sometimes the best changes for our lives are the ones that seem the scariest at first. For example, your partner does decide to end your relationship. When you reflect on it later, you realize the two of you had been fighting almost constantly for the past few months, and today you had the first bit of peace you'd had in a very long time. Your boss lets you go. You'd been dreading going to work for a long time because they were never happy with anything you did and singled you out in front of everyone to chide you about a mistake you had made. This undoubtedly had a lot to do with the anxiety you've been feeling. You can now focus on finding a healthier work environment where you can face the prospect of moving higher in the ladder.

Even if a change does cause inconvenience, you will still get through it. Just keep reminding yourself of that fact. Think about your life up until now. You have had many things go wrong, just as everyone else has, and you came out of it

alright. None of it killed you. Let's do a little exercise. Go through your memories until you reached five years ago. Try to remember what you thought was the worst thing that had ever happened in your life at that time. You might not even be able to at this point, and if you can, you probably don't know why you were so worked up about it anymore. You might even look back on it and laugh these days. Now jump forward to four years ago and do the same thing. Keep doing this until you reach the present day. Even the big crisis last year probably feels small now. It likely has little to no impact on your life anymore.

Your fear of the future and the need for permanent reassurance keeps the overthinking going. They come from a rigid idea of how things are supposed to be and the thought that it is unacceptable for them to be any other way. This is why you need to learn to separate your happy moments from the problems in your life. There can be a small amount of time that you allow yourself to forget about them- dare I say even deny them. Of course, I don't mean you shouldn't face what is going on. However, you will never be able to achieve any happiness if you feel the full weight of it all the time. This is why many people create a fantasy world to go to when they need an escape.

You might think this sounds strange, but it is much more common than you might think. Many times, people dream of a different life where the stressors that affect them in their daily life do not exist. For some people, this world is a very elaborate story where they have created an entire world. There are even communities dedicated to this. If you would like to do this, there is no problem with that. However, it does not need to be that detailed. It does not even need to be an epic story. Maybe you just close your eyes sometimes and picture

that you are in a meadow. It just needs to make you happy. Being in a good mood for just a little while will go great lengths in helping your mental wellness.

That being said, there will be times that you need to face reality, even if it is unpleasant. It is essential to learn to deal with anxiety while you are experiencing it. If you pressure yourself to calm down, you will only feel worse. This is why loved ones of people with anxiety are advised against that. This is because you are only putting extra pressure on yourself. This sends the message to your brain that what you are feeling is bad, which means you are doing something wrong.

Anxiety cannot thrive in an atmosphere of acceptance. This means when you ground yourself in the present and take it for whatever it is, you will be happy. You recognize that you have everything you need: you have a roof over your head, a bed to sleep in, and if you want something to eat, you can get it out of the fridge. The lack of these things would be a true cause for panic. You are safe in your own home.

Whatever you don't have or have not achieved, it's alright. You don't need to have these things to have a good life. This is not an admittance of defeat or acceptance that you will never have what you want. You are simply accepting that you currently don't, and that is alright. There is nothing wrong with the way your life is in its current state. When you let yourself be where you are on the path to your goals, you will be more able to work toward them.

Let's say you want to work towards becoming a relaxed person who is not dictated by anxiety. You can shame yourself for how often you feel anxious or how many panic attacks you've had this past week, which will do nothing but make

you feel worse and therefore be more prone to episodes. On the other hand, you can mark this as the point you are at now. This leaves you free to think about what you are going to do to take a step in the right direction.

We can make our lives more or less stressful. What we focus on is what becomes the most prevalent aspect of our lives. To become a happier person, learn to turn the sound off in your mind, and appreciate the little moments in life that can bring happiness. Many times we imagine happiness in the form of prestigious accomplishments or glamorous moments- your crush asks you out, you get your dream job, etc. It is not wrong to want these things and try to get them. However, there starts to be a sickness when you live or die by them. “If they don’t happen, my life is over.”

If you have found a nice coffee shop, take some time to sit there and enjoy the atmosphere. Sip on your favorite drink, read a book, work on your studies, or do whatever else you want. If you’re out for a walk and see a butterfly you like the look of savor that moment. Maybe you’re able to snap a picture of it. Let’s say you go to a party. Maybe you didn’t make as many friends as you wanted or meet the person of your dreams, but you did have a great time with your friends you do have. This means you now have fond memories to look back on.

This example ties into another way overthinkers often set themselves up for disappointment. They place too much pressure on single days or events. They build them up to be life-changing. They tell themselves they need to be the life of the party. There are a few reasons this is damaging to your mental well-being.

For one, when we build up extreme expectations about something, we will be disheartened if things do not go the way we played them out in our minds. Disappointment causes just as much stress as anger, sadness, or any other heavy emotion such as this.

Another way this hurts you is that you will go into these events feeling stressed. For example, you are going to a party. Instead of being excited about what could happen tonight, you have a list of rules laid out for yourself. You have a picture of how tonight needs to go. So what happens if something falls out of line? Also, when you are trying to make things go a certain way, it will show in the way you act, which will be off-putting for the people you are trying to impress. This is because it will give them the idea that you are trying to get somewhere with them. Think about when you get a call from a telemarketer or are pulled aside by a salesperson at the store. It is often an uncomfortable experience because you know they are trying to get you to buy their product.

In short, when you meet someone or go somewhere, avoid having an agenda. Let things happen as they will. Remember, just because the big magical thing doesn't happen tonight, does not mean it won't later on. Say you meet a group of new people. You talk for a while, share some laughs, and they tell you they've had a great time getting to know you, so you exchange numbers. This means tonight was a success. Now you have the potential to meet them again later. For all you know, these people will end up becoming your best friends.

Now let's talk about some tried-and-true techniques for reducing your stress and creating a sense of inner peace. First, remember that in order for these methods to work, you will need to believe it is possible for them too. Imagine someone is conducting an experiment, and the subjects are given a

mysterious “power food” that is supposed to give them energy and creativity, not knowing that it is really just broccoli.

The “placebo effect” often calls attention to the fact that the method is not truly effective, but there is another thing that should not be overlooked. The mind can make things happen that seem impossible. Think about it this way. Your mind is powerful enough to create doomsday scenarios and convinces you that they are related to something completely random. Perhaps you could wield this power to do good things for yourself.

Before we go any farther, I want to tell you this- don’t put too much pressure on relaxation techniques. They do not have to be a cure for your anxiety. Do not feel like you have failed if you are still feeling poorly after you have completed them. This problem has built up over a long time, so it is only natural that it will take some time to work out. You need to acknowledge and congratulate yourself on the fact that you are doing something to help yourself instead of feed the anxiety. You are just beginning to learn coping techniques. It will take some time to see the results of them.

There are exercises in which one of their core purposes is relaxation. For many years now, yoga has been established as a stress-relieving activity. For one, it emphasizes proper breathing techniques. You are constantly being reminded to inhale and exhale. When you are stressed, you could be holding your breath and not even realize it.

For you to complete the poses, you have to have balance, which stems from focus. If you purchase a yoga tape, the instructor will often tell you to focus on one spot in the room because it serves as a foundation. Think about how you tend to make more errors when you have something on your mind,

and therefore are distracted. On the other hand, when your mind is clear, and you are solely focused on the task at hand, your performance will often be at its best. By making the exercise impossible to do without focus, yoga provides an escape from the stresses in your life by making them leave your mind for a while.

If you are to find relief from anxiety, there must be a time that you are not thinking about the source of it. You will drive yourself crazy if you don't. Worrying about something is not impacting it in any way. You are only causing harm to yourself. It is easy to get into the false belief that by worrying about a problem, you are doing something about it. For example, you have just applied for a job. You cannot do anything else after you have sent in your application after having crafted it to the best product it can be. What you need to do now is keep yourself calm so that if you do get a call from the company, you will be able to put your best foot forward. You have to get out of the habit of thinking about a problem every second of the day. You are not able to do anything about it in the evening. You are only wearing yourself out so that by the time the morning comes, you will be too tired and stressed to act.

Temporary escapes from your life and responsibilities are not only alright but necessary for one's mental stability. We are not talking about using substances or avoiding reality altogether. When you create inside jokes with a friend, you are escaping reality. The same goes for if you go out for a drive just to take in the scenery. It is about enjoying yourself.

Imagine you are playing on your computer, and you realize the device becomes overheated. This means it has become too stimulated and needs to be turned off for a little while so it can

get back to its normal levels. It might even have dust that needs to be cleared out of it.

If you want to change your thoughts, you have to change your habits. Some people live a stressful lifestyle. This means becoming flustered every time something goes wrong. It is internalizing everything going on inside of you until it all comes out in a rush, and then you have to try to do damage control. It is beating yourself into next week every time you do something wrong.

It is also putting your time and effort into stressful things. For instance, you have a friend who is known for liking to create conflict. They are easily offended and twist your words into meanings you did not intend for them to have. As a result, many of your interactions with them result in an argument, and these can carry on for a long time, no matter how late it is in the evening. They are not thinking about the fact that you might have work or school early tomorrow, and you do not need to go there with your mind in a whirlwind and your body run down from a lack of adequate (also, let's not forget that when you go to sleep in a distressed state, you are going to sleep fitfully.) You do not have to be dragged into conversations with them. Before you send them another message that keeps the cycle going, you could choose not to.

As you make a move to stop overthinking, try to think of the things you can clean out of your life. There are aspects that could be contributing to your stress. In the example above, a friend like the one described below is a person you would need to cut out of your life. When you have an interpersonal relationship with someone that consists mainly of arguing, you are naturally going to overthink. You will go over the things you said and wonder if they were too harsh, even though at the same time, there will be digs you wish you could've made at

them after the fact. You will go through the day with an uncomfortable feeling in the pit of your stomach, wondering what the next fight is going to be about. When you talk to them, you will be trying to figure out how not to upset them. That is more emotional suffering than anyone should warrant.

It is easy to take a passive role in the situation, to point at the other person, and say they cause you all of the stress into your life. However, the truth is that another person cannot give you stress that you do not take on. It is a choice whether or not to reply to their messages. If you do, you are taking part in a stressful lifestyle.

Now let's talk about a peaceful lifestyle and how people achieve it. We talked about how people who spend most of their time stressed place other people in the driver's seat, acting based on the choices those people make about their life. A person who lives a peaceful lifestyle owns their decisions. At night, instead of reading insulting messages from someone and giving their own anger-filled reply, they are sleeping. This means the next day; they feel rested.

It can be difficult to take responsibility for one's own life. That is because when they do not, they can place the blame for their unhappiness everywhere but at where it comes from. On the other hand, when you do this, you will eternally be the victim. You will never have any say in anything that happens to you. In addition, you will subconsciously attract toxic relationships when you have this outlook on life.

When you hold yourself accountable, you are to blame when things go wrong. However, on the flip side, you are in control of your life. No one will be able to tell you what to do or keep you in a situation you do not want to be in, and when things go

right, you will not have qualms about taking the credit that is rightfully yours.

Those who live their life peacefully can also put things off until later. The ultimate solution to a problem does not have to come right now. They can do the best they can for now and accept that. If the problem has been alleviated in any way, recognize that. This means a step has been taken in the right direction. Sometimes success is just finding a way to buy yourself some time or coming up with a solution that isn't ideal but will work. For instance, you do not have a certain ingredient for a certain recipe, so you choose one that is in your cabinet that mimics the ingredient that is called for.

One thing those with a peaceful lifestyle never do is create a problem where there does not have to be one. People who overthinkers are notorious for this. Their relationship is going too well, so something must be deeply wrong. There must be something the other person is not telling them.

You must let go of the idea that things are going "too well" if you are ever to reach a state of inner peace. It places you in an inescapable trap. When you have a problem, you blow it as out of proportion as it can possibly be. Then, you finally get into a quiet moment, and then this must mean something worse than anything is about to happen.

Give the world a chance to be good to you sometimes. Maybe it isn't the calm before the storm. Maybe you are at a picnic with your friends, the sun is shining, a gentle breeze is blowing, and that really is what the day is going to be like, and the rug isn't about to be pulled out from underneath you. When you think about what could go wrong, you can sabotage yourself. The anxiety has already caused you so much anguish

during stressful times. Don't let it then take the good times away from you.

THOUGHT LOOPS AND INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS



IMAGINE you are going through your day as you usually do—going to work/school, spending time with friends, watching TV, whatever you like to do in your free time. You’ve been hearing about a potentially deadly virus spreading around, and so when you sneeze, the thought goes through your mind—“What if I have caught it? Am I going to die?” Suddenly, your every thought is consumed by monitoring every symptom in your body. Any time you sneeze, cough, feel nauseous, or show any other signs of less than perfect health, your anxiety goes through the roof. You find that the more you obsess over your health, the more symptoms appear. You think, “why am I suddenly getting so sick all the time?”

Here is what really happened. You were hit with an intrusive thought. Everyone has these from time to time. A strange thought pops into your head out of nowhere, and most of the time, we are able to shrug it off and move on. This goes to show that the content of our thoughts is not the problem. It is when you obsess over the thought and try to figure out what it means. In the above example, you feel like an inevitable deadly illness is just about to infect you, and this is based on a feeling of fear.

No matter what form intrusive thoughts take, they consume the sufferer’s mind. Pretty soon, they are spending every

second, trying to find reassurance that their fears are not real. Say a person plays an action video game that involves killing creatures and opponents that are other players. They've watched a news special about a supposed correlation between video games and violence. This causes them to start thinking, "Could I be a violent person? Is that why I've enjoyed these games all this time?" They give up their favorite pastime out of fear. They avoid using sharp objects like knives because they do not trust themselves around them. They are terrified that there has been a dark side to their personality all along and it is surfacing now and that it will ultimately end in them harming someone else.

If you have ever struggled with a thought pattern such as this, let me assure you right now that you are not going crazy. You are not a bad person. You are not a danger to others. The first piece of evidence to prove this is that you do not enjoy the thought of hurting people and want these thoughts to go away. People who are at risk of becoming violent indulge in fantasies about these things and make plans to act them out.

This is how people develop an internal dialogue that they are bad people. They draw attention to a flaw, whether it is real or perceived. Then they attach a terrible meaning to all of the things they have ever done that is related to it in their life.

People also get their thoughts stuck in a loop because they attach meanings to them. This is built on a system of faulty beliefs. "If I picture myself doing something, it must mean I am going to act on this thought." "Every thought I have says something about me."

These thought loops become cognitive distortions. What this means is that you develop thought patterns that are inaccurate representations of yourself and the people around you. These

two sets of thoughts tend to coincide. If you do not feel good about yourself, you will start feeling poorly about other people and vice versa. Negativity spreads wherever it is allowed to.

A common example of a cognitive distortion is when a person gets the idea that they are denied the good things in life that everyone else gets, and that all of this comes from the fact that there is some unseen force in the universe that doesn't like them. They think "other people have it great, and they get everything they want, but I can't catch a break."

You have to be careful when you are making judgments about the way someone's life is based on an outside view of it. People often present their home and family in a way that is less than authentic, embellishing the good qualities while hiding the unpleasant ones. People tend to deal with problems behind closed doors. You know everything that is wrong with your life because you have an inside view of it. With other people, you will not know they have a problem unless they tell you, which is unlikely to happen because we are encouraged to say, "I'm fine, thank you" when asked how we are doing.

You are not singled out. There is no higher power that dislikes you and wants to keep you under its thumb. You are not destined to be unhappy and always get the short end of the stick. The only way that will happen is if you create that destiny for yourself by not pursuing the things you want and choosing unfulfilling relationships. You have the power to shape your reality. You always have been in control, and you still are now. Your thoughts and feelings might be frightening for you, but there is nothing they can actually do to you. They cannot cause anything to happen outside of you.

When an intrusive thought is allowed to make a permanent home in your mind, it will seek to make you uncomfortable. It

will inhibit your life because it will come along every time it is triggered. For a person who is afraid they could harm someone, they cannot cook because that involves being around knives. For a person who is afraid of getting sick, they might compulsively wash their hands which would not only take up a lot of time but damage their skin over a long time because of the constant friction and the fact that they would also be killing off good bacteria that defend the body from infection.

Your brain is constantly telling you that you are in danger and that a disaster is just about to happen. It comes up with bizarre scenarios that often sound ridiculous whenever you stop and take a moment to think about them. In a way, it is like reading one of those sensationalist magazines that have conspiracy theories about a long-dead celebrity being alive after all, a famous couple splitting up, and even aliens from space coming to Earth. As an exercise in seeing how unlikely these things are to happen, picture your fears printed on the cover of one of these magazines. This will also serve to make the thoughts humorous. The moment you laugh about them is when you take some of the power away from them. Then they no longer get to these imposing and ominous entities.

You will torture yourself if you see every thought that comes into your head as a reflection of who you are, or a prediction of a disastrous future for you or your loved ones. Remember that you are not the only force that influences what goes through your mind. Every day we deal with a countless number of people. You hear them say and see them do things. Someone might tell you a shocking story they heard on the news. You are exposed to music, movies, and other media. Many television programs portray acts of violence or disasters. When you take all of that in at once, it can feel like the world is a dangerous place that you need to be afraid of. Of course,

there are nefarious forces in this world, and you should make sure to protect yourself. However, it is not everyone you come across, and you should not limit your life based on the fear of something happening.

Think about a person who never goes near the ocean because they fear being attacked by a shark, or won't go camping because of the prospect of a bear being there. Once you start on this path, it is difficult to stop. If you go out at night, someone will attack you. If you step into an elevator, you'll get trapped in there and not be rescued. If you try to cook, you'll burn the house down. This is no way to live your life. There is a difference between avoiding danger and avoiding life. The truth is everywhere you go; something might happen. When you drive, you might crash. By that same token, when you walk you might fall, so does that mean you are going to stay sitting on your bed for the rest of your life? This is where we need to reiterate that your thoughts are not a guarantee something will actually happen. If you are at the beach, the flash in your mind of a shark lurking around somewhere you does not mean one is anywhere near you. It was just an intrusive thought, which only exists in your mind. It can only turn your head if it is allowed to.

Life is too short to spend it constantly worrying about abstract things. Back to the example of driving. Car accidents tend to happen when someone is not paying attention or in a mental state that does not lend itself to being behind the wheel of a car. If you keep your eyes on the road ahead of you and avoid getting distracted by your phone, fiddling with the radio, or something else like that, you will most likely be alright. Also remember that even when accidents occur, it is more often than not just damage to the car, and while that is unpleasant, it is better than people being injured.

Let's say this is your fear, and you want to conquer it. First, identify what the thought loop is "If I drive, I will lose control of the wheel and get myself, and everyone involved killed." This is a cognitive distortion because you know you are a responsible driver. You stay sober and pay attention to what is going on around you. Also, being afraid something is going to happen does not make it a reality. Think of the impact it is having on your life. In today's society, we depend heavily on cars. We need them to go to work, get food and other groceries, have a substantial social life, and so much more. If you cannot drive, you are essentially stuck in your home unless someone else drives you around. This means you are completely dependent on other people for your mobility.

A good question to ask yourself is, "why is this fear so crippling?" you might be confused as to why it takes up such a big portion of your life because you have never been in a serious accident. However, personal experience is not the only way you can develop an irrational fear of something. It might have happened to a close friend. You might have recently read a news story about a fatal car crash. It can even be the result of a graphic movie scene you saw as a small child. Sometimes trauma comes to us in ways that are unexpected, and if you are experiencing anxiety that forces you to completely rearrange your life, that definitely counts as trauma.

When you have figured out why fear has such a hold on you, you have taken a great deal of power away from it. Compare it to when the villain's appearance is finally revealed in a horror movie. It loses some of its edge because it is no longer the mysterious figure lurking in the dark corner. Terrible things happened because of it, but before it was always off-screen. You didn't know what it looked like, and so your mind conjured up the most horrifying picture possible in addition to

the fact that people have an innate fear of the unknown. Partially, then it is capable of anything. However, when the shroud goes away, and the villain is revealed, you know what you are dealing with. It is not going to get any worse than this. This is why you cannot discount anything that could be the cause of your distress, no matter how bizarre it is or how invalid you feel like it is.

You can have a life beyond unhealthy thought patterns. Remember that it wasn't always there. It came in, but it can be kicked out as well. Think about how sometimes we accidentally pick up a virus on our computer by clicking on a link or opening an email that carried malware. The device isn't done. You just need to clear it out with anti-virus software.

You can consider the thoughts you use to combat the intrusive thoughts to be such software. Your first impulse might be to try to find arguments that would prove them wrong, but this is the last thing you want to do. If you try to do that, you are only going to dig yourself a deeper hole. When you experience intrusive thoughts that persist in your mind, you already know you have a force within you that is trying to do harm to your psyche. Let's go back to the example of thinking you have a serious illness. At this point, you have been to several doctors who have all given you a clean bill of health. You even get it from a logical standpoint that there is not really anything wrong with you, but that does not make the thought that there is any less scary. You try to reassure yourself by saying, "I could not possibly have any awful. Every doctor I have been to has said the exact same thing, that I am perfectly healthy."

At this point, your thoughts would evolve. It would say, "That doesn't mean anything. Haven't you heard of those cases where the person went to hundreds of doctors, and then it turned out they had something undetectable all along?" You

try to reason with it, noting how slim of a chance there is for that to happen, giving a minuscule percentage. Then the thought becomes “you are that percentage. All of the symptoms line up. Don’t you remember that time you went outside in the rain?”

As you can see, you cannot make an argument that is solid enough. No matter how much evidence you try to present, the fear will find a way around it. In the study of narcissistic personality disorder, there has been a term coined known as “word salad.” Broken down its basics, it is when you are having an argument with a narcissist, and the discussion goes around in a circle for hours. No matter how long it goes on, nothing is accomplished with it. They throw a mishmash of accusations, and none of them have anything to do with one another. When it is finally over, you have no idea what you just witnessed. You’re both frustrated and exhausted. You don’t know where this argument came from or why you spent so long talking about the way you are supposed to fold a towel and why your method of doing it is proof that you do not respect them. The conversation will never reach a conclusion because their goal was never to resolve an issue. It was to get your attention directly on them and to drain your energy.

When anxiety and intrusive thoughts take over, you are being served a word salad by your own mind. Just like it would be with an actual person, nothing productive will come of this back-and-forth between you and the thoughts. They also share another similarity with a narcissist, and that is the constant need for attention. Think about how the thoughts seem to get louder when you first try to focus on something else. This is how you are tricked into thinking the only way the anxiety will stop is if you give in to it and let it decide what you are going to do. With a narcissist, psychological warfare does not stop

because you cut off your friendships, give up your hobbies, or whatever else they say is the reason you always argue. In fact, at this point, things will get worse because they know they've gotten you away from your support system with your self-esteem diminished. You might get temporary relief by giving more ground, but there will always be some other problem. Even if you only talk to people online, that's still wrong. They will demonize you doing something as simple as watching your favorite TV show, because, in their mind, you are putting it above them.

Has the anxiety ever really decreased when you canceled a date or turned down an invitation to a party? You have made your world smaller when you have done this. It is another thing that is too far out in the world, too scary. Before long, even trips to the grocery store become daunting. This is when you run the risk of developing agoraphobia. Essentially this is when a person is confined to their house out of the fear of leaving it. They cannot stand being out in the open or around people. Believe it or not, it doesn't stop there. If this is left untreated, spaces in their own home will become off-limits. Next thing you know, the living room is too stressful to go to. This can escalate to where they cannot leave one particular room, and even then, the fear can go on to tether them to one particular piece of furniture in that room. The worst part is, even when that bed or sofa becomes their entire world, they are still stressed to the high heavens by the mere thought of having to leave it.

This is why giving in to anxiety is never the answer. The "safe place" will do nothing but shrink from there on out. You have got to treat yourself better than that. You deserve better than to be trapped in your own home and filled with fear. You cannot let anxiety be the one in the driver's seat.

We've established that no amount of hoping the thoughts will go away will make it happen. Intrusive thought loops will not dissipate with you taking a passive role in them. This means you are going to need to set a plan in place whenever you do experience them.

Find healthy coping mechanisms. This means not doing reassurance-seeking behaviors. It also is not using alcohol as a means to relax, which will turn out to have the opposite effect-not to mention the ill physical effects you will have the next day if you consume too much of it.

Let's talk about the difference between a healthy coping mechanism versus an unhealthy one. There are some that would argue that the former does not exist, their minds going to addiction and other self-destructive behaviors. For our purposes, the term "coping" simply means something that helps you get through a difficult time, no more and no less. There are people who use a stress ball when they are feeling overwhelmed, and that counts as coping. There are no ill effects from doing this, and therefore there is no reason not to do it. If it does not hurt anyone, including yourself, then it is healthy. If it causes you to suffer in any form, is detrimental to your decision-making abilities, or has an impact on the people around you, it is something you do not want to engage in. The difference is as simple as that.

Here are a few ways you can cope with stress without harming yourself.

- Affirmations- This is different from reassurance-seeking. With the later, you are asking a question, which encourages the self-doubt. When you speak affirmations, you are making statements, and the negative self-talk does not have any say in them.

They are precise and do not leave any room for doubt. “I am strong,” “I can get through this,” “I will get better.” Any phrase that is meaningful to you can be an affirmation. You can have one or a set of them. Start and end your day with them, and use them any time you need to.

- Journaling- this is helpful for a number of reasons. Sometimes we have negative feelings that need to be let out. They could be socially unacceptable, so you need a safe place to say them. You are also more likely to speak your truth because you aren't worried about another person's reaction or someone overhearing you. There is no right or wrong thing to write in a journal. You do not have to impress or censor yourself for anyone. You can say whatever you want to.
- Take a short trip. It does not matter where it is, as long as it is a place you enjoy going to. It could be a park, library, diner, or anywhere else. A change of scenery truly can help you feel better. Sometimes it can feel suffocating to stay at home when you are distressed because you will feel like you are alone with the anxiety.
- Lighten the mood- watch a comedy movie. Call a friend you know will make you laugh. When you are feeling anxious, you build up a great deal of tension. This makes the problem seem much more serious than it actually is. When you laugh, you will find yourself automatically feeling a little better.
- Exercise- We've discussed yoga, but the truth is that any form of exercise can help you unwind at the end of the day. It helps you channel any negative emotions you are dealing with into something

productive. When you release this pent-up energy, it will also help you get to sleep more easily.

Just because yours is not listed here, doesn't mean you cannot use it. Different techniques work for different people. As long as it passes the critique listed above, go for it.

I'm going to elaborate on the need to laugh more about life. Your intrusive thoughts became trapped in your mind as a result of taking them too seriously. You saw a fleeting thought run through our mind and attached a meaning to it that it did not have, and now it serves as a tormentor for you that consumes all of your mental energy.

Often, we do the same thing about life and ourselves. Have you ever noticed that when you try to hard to impress others, you will wind up doing the opposite, but when you just relax and be yourself you go over much better? This is because you allowed yourself to laugh with others and even joke about yourself, thus making people a lot more comfortable around you.

As an added bonus, becoming comfortable with yourself will go a long way in alleviating everything we have been talking about throughout the book. Self-doubt, insecurities, intrusive thoughts, and worry are allowed to thrive because you do not trust yourself. When someone feels like they do not know themselves as well as they thought they did, they will naturally feel afraid. Has there ever been anything I thought was real that was?

This type of thinking especially comes out when an interpersonal relationship falls apart, or you have been deceived by someone else. The tragic thing about humans is that when we have been lied to or otherwise done wrong, it is

not them we call into question-it's us. These questions probably are going to sound familiar- "Why did I not see this coming? Am I not a good judge of character?" You begin to think about all of the signs there were and how you should have put them together. Later on, you do not trust yourself to make good decisions about people, or anything else for that matter, and you live based on this thought. When you cloister yourself away like this, you miss out on all of the good things in life, and you don't even accomplish what you want to, which is missing out on the bad, because then you will be lonely and when you are hit with a difficult time, there is no one to rely on but yourself.

When you feel the urge to belittle yourself about the end of a friendship or relationship, you need to think about the fact that you are judging yourself based on the information you have now that you did not at the time. This is known as Monday Morning Quarterbacking. This is a term that came from football to describe when audience members criticize misplays of those who were actually in the game, pointing out what they should have seen around them or done differently. They are giving these critiques having all of the information and seeing how the entire game played out, not considering the fact that they were not in the moment with all of the chaos happening around them.

When you judge yourself for things you did not see about a person after the fact. You might start to connect behaviors they did and wonder how you missed all of these signs. I will tell you how, and it is not because you can't judge a person's character. Imagine a time when you have watched a mystery movie that had an unexpected twist at the end. After the big reveal, you begin thinking back over small clues they gave you over the course of the movie that you didn't think anything of

at the time. However, now that you know the truth, you can see all of them coming together, and they make sense.

Also, keep this into perspective. When someone betrays your trust, it is they who made the poor decisions. They are the ones who lost a person who genuinely cared about them. You thought you were giving that devotion to someone who felt the same way about you because you were acting based on what you knew at the time. Now that you know better, you are not going to invest any more time into them. You need to give yourself a break, put the blame where it belongs and focus your energy on finding new, better relationships.

TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR THOUGHTS



WHEN AN EPISODE OF OVERTHINKING BEGINS, you can probably feel your thoughts begin to spiral out of control. Many times, when a person is overcome by anxiety, they describe feeling like the world around them is not real, or even like they are not in their own body, that they are watching things happen to someone else. The main theme of it is that everything is happening because of something or someone else. At this moment, they do not feel like they have any point of impact. It can feel like they are being swept away in a tornado because if that happened, your entire being would be at the mercy of the storm. You would not even be able to move on your own.

This is a reality that your mind has created for you right now. It is not true. Thoughts do not really have the ability to decide what we do. If that was true, we would never be able to prevent ourselves from doing something that crossed our minds. Have you ever been extremely angry at someone and wanted to slap them, but did not because you knew that would be an irrational thing to do? Think about a time where you had to give a presentation in front of a lot of people. You were nervous about it and even wondered if you would be able to do it, and yet, in the end, you could. The fleeting thought telling you to run away did not win.

This means thoughts and feelings can be intense but still not have an effect on what you do, because ultimately, that is your decision. Even when a person “loses their temper,” they still lashed out in anger on their own. Before they did it, there was a part of them that said they should not do this. However, that is not the voice they wanted to listen to.

We have to face that same reality when we are dealing with anxiety. You may not have the choice to feel the stress, but you do have to let it limit your life. There are points in overthinking where you realize, “I have gone over this issue in my mind all evening, and nothing has come of it.” You do not have to keep this going. You can either turn your thoughts to something else to keep spiraling down. Think about when you are distracted from everything else due to anxiety, and therefore it has your full attention. This means you have to block out every other stimulus that tries to enter your mind, and that if a potentially pleasant one comes to you, you have to overlook it in order to keep your mind focused on the same things it was before. However, on the bright side, this means you can also minimize how strongly you feel the anxiety to opt for more pleasant feelings. Think about a time when you were a child and had a bad day at school, and your parents noticed and went to your favorite restaurant. When you got home, a TV program you loved came on, and before you knew it, you realized that not only had it been hours since you thought of whatever had upset you before, but it didn’t feel like as big of a deal anymore.

Even if you are an adult now, this will still work. If that example is broken down to its basics, you chose to put what made you upset aside for a little while. Instead, you decided to focus on what you were going to order at the restaurant. You were engaged in the conversation that was going on at the

table. At home, you then gave your attention to what was happening on the TV screen. Even though your parents helped you reach that point of feeling better, it was ultimately you who had the strength to go to that happier place. Think about it this way. You could have remained stuck in your thoughts and refused the help that was given to you, but you did not. This goes to show that you are in a position of power and that what your mind nurtures becomes the most powerful force. This is why overthinking has become such a presence in your life.

There is some good news about this fact, however. It may be powerful right now, but it is not a guarantee that it will stay that way. Its strength comes from being fed so regularly—feeling anxious, questioning yourself, making doomsday prophecies, etc. However, if you take on different habits that do not give your current ones a place to thrive, it means the anxiety will no longer be getting the support it once did. It will begin to starve, which means it will become smaller. As time goes on, its force will be less imposing. Before, its effects could be compared to a colossal tsunami sweeping over an island, destroying everything it touches. If it keeps getting choked out, it will be reduced to the power of someone throwing a pebble at a brick house. Think about it this way. What other people say or think about you cannot affect you if their opinions do not mean anything to you. If you live your life the way you want to and enjoy it, all they can do is make a comment that will not be listened to. The fact that they are taking time out of their day to say something disparaging about you actually means you have a hold on them.

Anxiety can place us into the mindset that we do not have any control over our thoughts. To a certain extent that is true. We have too many thoughts every day to be able to control each and every one of them. As we discussed in the previous

chapter, there are certain thoughts that appear out of nowhere, and you need to ignore them, which is another means of controlling them. You are directing traffic. What is valuable can stay, and what is not has to go.

In this chapter, we are shifting the discussing the tone of your general mindset. Are you going to think positively or negatively? Are you going to devote your time to anxiety and panic, or are you going to focus your efforts toward more productive things, like goals, dreams, and strengthening relationships? You have to pick one or the other because one is going to cancel out the other.

You have probably heard the saying that you need to watch your thoughts because they become your actions. You might be confused right now, because I just got through telling you how thoughts are not reality, and I still stand by that. However, we also discussed how a thought that was meant to just come and go can become one that plays on a loop and disturbs your entire life. They do not impact us just by popping into our heads. We have to act on them. When a person feels like they need to walk through a door three times to protect their family, the thought has become their actions. Everyone gets discouraged sometimes, and it is alright to have the occasional pity party. It becomes a problem when you linger in that mindset. That is how a person comes to spend all of their time feeling sorry for themselves instead of trying to help themselves. They listen to the thought that says, “What’s the point of trying? Nothing is ever going to turn out right anyway because it never does for me.”

In a way, negative thinking shares a lot of properties with addictive substances. Once a person consumes this type of drug, they develop a dependence on it. It doesn’t take long either, and in some cases, it only takes once. A few minutes

spent thinking negatively about yourself will beget an hour, which will go on to become a day, and then the days will pile up. Before you know it, you are spending every waking moment in that place. A person addicted to a drug does not like what it is doing to their life. They know this is wrong, and they need to stop, but the draw pulls them to using again. When all of your time is taken up by worrying, you will get into the mindset that it is something you must do based on the false belief that if you do not do so, something bad will happen. When you try to relax, you will feel a compulsion to start overthinking. It is not a desire, which is something pleasurable that you want to engage in. It is an urge—something harmful that you know isn't good for you but is difficult to resist. It is as if the anxiety itself feels insulted that you are trying to do something else with your time.

Think about that friend back in your early life who believed you could only be their friend. If you spent time with someone else, they would think you were not their friend anymore and become upset with you. You would need to completely isolate yourself from everyone else and reject other social opportunities in order to maintain your relationship with this person. Anxiety is that friend. There will be more and more limitations placed on you because everything you do that brings you enjoyment is a threat to it. If you are happy, you are assuredly not thinking about the anxiety.

Living under the rules of anxiety is a constant state of putting out fires. You are constantly trying to find brief relief from the intensity of it, which usually means giving things up. Some people are unable to go out with others or have physical contact with them because they fear the spread of germs. They might even be afraid to step outside of their house. All of their efforts are poured into preventing disasters, meaning they do

not live their lives to the fullest. Anxiety is now holding you back from doing the things you want to do.

It is said that other people only have the power over you that you let them have. The same could be said about anxiety. You might think you can't go out with friends because you are going to feel too nervous you get there. First, think about the fact that isolating yourself is not going to make the disorder let up on you. All that will do is make its power over you stronger because it then knows you will do whatever it tells you to do. Remember, the worst thing that is actually going to happen to you is that you will feel the anxiety internally. It may be uncomfortable, but it will not prevent you from doing anything. You will still be able to walk and talk with them. That is all you will have to do.

Imagine you are having a conversation with someone, and it is going nowhere. You cannot bring them anywhere positive. You try to offer them solutions and advice, and all you get in response is "that will never work" or "but I can't do that because..." The entire thing is futile. All they want to do is bring negativity. It is getting late in the evening and work starts early for you tomorrow. You cannot keep this conversation going on. You can't help them and they don't want to help themselves. You need to quickly tell them you cannot stay up any later and that you will have to talk to them at another time.

There are times we have to take similar action with our own minds. We can get ourselves caught up in terrible predictions about our future that serve to do nothing except make us become more frightened. You must tell the anxiety, "you don't get to talk anymore tonight. I am going to bed." Be firm and authoritative when you say this. Speak in a calm voice, and just as you would do when working with a difficult person,

make the message polite but cold and to the point. Think about how there are some phone calls you let go to voicemail or text messages that you wait a few hours to reply to. You have to set that precedence with the voice in your head and the anxiety that it does not get to come to you any time it wants to play, “but what if.” That is its favorite game. It never gets tired of it, and if you allow it to happen, you will spend untold hours worrying about everything and everyone. There is no fun to be had in “but what if.” It is a soul-crushing game and a waste of time. It will contribute to your stress immensely, and if left unchecked, can lead you to have a mental breakdown.

Focus on reality. Act based on the things that are truly happening around you- that you can see, hear, and feel. Despite the doomsday scenarios that are playing out in your mind, what is really going on is that you are awake at midnight and need to go to work or school tomorrow, and you need to get some sleep. This means you need to slow the thoughts down, have more peaceful ones that encourage rejuvenating rest.

While there is no question that anxiety affects how you feel, there comes the point where we need to take some responsibility for the way we feel. It’s easy to leave an event because you’re anxious and then say the disorder ruined your night. The truth is that you ruin your own night when you let the anxiety call all of the shots. It can even become a comfort zone of sorts, where you do not try anything new because the anxiety will not let you. It is even more difficult to leave something behind when it becomes somewhere to place all of the blame for regrets and chances that were missed out on.

Taking responsibility for your reactions to emotions is not meant to be a self-shaming event. On the contrary, it should be an empowering one. When you realize you cannot be

controlled by your emotions, you will come to see that there is nothing that will not let you do whatever you want to do.

When you think about it, your thoughts and actions are the only things you have full and direct control over. Other things will happen as they will. Your response is your span of control. This fact is why some people succeed while others do not. Unsuccessful people lament about past times or what they wish they could have. Successful people can adapt to the circumstances that are going on right now. They use what they have to do what they can. While some people may have better options than you, you can still make good choices. There are people who were seemingly born with all of the advantages someone could have, and they squander every opportunity they are given. Other people came from very humble beginnings, some you would even say never stood a chance, and yet the choices they make lead to them becoming highly successful.

When you focus all of your energy into thinking about what you do not have, you will overlook a good choice you do have. It may not be your “pie in the sky” wish, but you can take it as opposed to staying where you are right now. Say the college of your dreams did not accept you, but another one did. You will have no less of a degree than you would have otherwise, and you will still walk across the stage in four years with a diploma in your hands if you play your cards right.

Another thing to be careful about is the fact that we can cause our choices to be taken away from us. Let’s say Tina is unhappy with where she currently is in her career. She feels like she is not as high up in the company as she should be. This causes her to behave in a way that is curt both with her coworkers and customers. This is not going to impress her boss. Because of the poor performance, she has put forth,

getting a raise or promotion is no longer an option for her. Meanwhile, Sarah, who is in the same position as her, goes the extra mile to help customers. She always shows up on time and with a positive attitude, and she volunteers herself for projects that mean staying at the office a little longer. Before long, she gets a raise. When Tina hears about this, she is frustrated because she feels like the boss played favorites with Sarah. She feels like this confirms the idea that the world doesn't want her to get anywhere in life. Tina does not realize she sabotaged herself while Sarah did all of the things she needed to do to move up on the ladder.

If you truly want something, you have to do the things that will get you there. If you want to take control of your thoughts and stop overthinking, you have to make it happen. The longer you wait for good things to come along, the longer you will continue to be disappointed. This is because you have to make good things happen to you. Remember that when you fear to send out that application or inviting someone out. You have a choice right then. If you decide not to do it, you made the decision to give in to the anxiety. It is true that life is full of setbacks, but it is also full of choices. Even if you surrender all of your power to someone else, that is still making a choice.

There is a common misconception of what makes a happy person. Many people think it is those who are born with all of the advantages- money, opportunities, etc. However, those who seem to have it all have just as much potential to let their life go to waste as anyone else. A truly happy person is one who maps out their own course in their life.

When you start to become the one in control of your thoughts, this feeling of power will drift outward, meaning you will start to impact other aspects of your life. You will feel comfortable telling others what you will and will not accept. You will make

decisions that are good for you. When you want to go out and get something to eat, you will not be held back by any fears. You will just get up and do what you want to do. At night, you will not be bothered by an endless cycle of thoughts.

Remind yourself as many times as you need to- you have power. You can decide what does and does not happen to you. You do not need to look to anxiety to grant or deny you permission to do anything.

Speaking of the outside world, I would be remiss not to bring another point up. You will also need to watch out for when other people try to change the decisions you have made without thinking about it from your perspective. This can cause you to have doubts about something you were sure about right before you talked to them.

Let's say you are going to buy a blue refrigerator because it would make you happy, and you like the way it would look in your kitchen. You tell a friend about what you are doing, only to have them try to discourage you from it. They tell you that you will get tired of looking at the color and that you should go for a more traditional color for a refrigerator, noting that they made this mistake in the past and are trying to keep you from doing the same thing. Just a few minutes ago you were excited, but now you are full of doubts and just short of calling off the deal.

In this case, they are telling you what you think they should do based on their own experiences. In a way, they are not talking to you even though you are the recipient of what they are saying. They wish they could go back and change a choice they made, and trying to turn your head is a means of telling a younger version of themselves what they wish they had done.

You can come to people for advice and listen to what they have to say, but it is ultimately your decision. You do not have to do what they tell you. Remember that they do not know your situation better than you do. Just because something did not work out for them, does not mean it won't for you. When we listen to those who are trying to take our decisions away from us, we will fall into an unpleasant pattern. You will be caught between taking newfound concerns they gave you onto yourself and remembering the reasons your decision made you happy at first.

Finally, when you have made a choice, be at peace with it. Trust that you made the right one. One of the most common things overthinkers do to give themselves more internal pain is to question themselves after they have committed to a course of action. This should be a time where you feel some relief because for better or worse, you know what you are going to do. It can come down to even simple things like choosing a flavor of ice cream. They start thinking, "What if I really should have gotten the chocolate? Maybe so, I did get vanilla last time too. I might be happier had I not done that." On the other hand, had they chosen chocolate, they would have the exact same mental processes. Learn to back yourself up when you do something. When you make a choice, now is the time to be looking forward to making the most of it. If you question yourself, you will be spending all of your time looking over your shoulder at the past.

Overthinking can paralyze you because you will make tasks much more difficult in your mind than they are. This will make them feel too daunting before you even start them. For example, you have decided to take up sewing. If you think about how much you will need to learn and how far away you are from completing your goal, you will put it off, thinking, "I

will do it tomorrow when I am better able to handle it.” So you put your supplies away and feel relief when you do so. Then when tomorrow comes, the anxiety kicks right back in as well as the thoughts that are holding you back- “I’m going to mess up and not be able to fix it.” You are now considering giving it up altogether.

Overthinkers jump ten steps ahead of where they are now. This causes them to take on not only the problem they have now but every single one they will or might encounter along the way. Of course, the anxiety will cause you to think of everything that could go wrong and attach it to your experience, even though that has not even occurred yet, and there is nothing to indicate it will.

Don’t think about the stitching or anything else except for cutting out your patterns needed to make whatever you are planning to. When you think too far ahead in your project, you will feel discouraged because it will seem impossible that you could get all of that done in this amount of time. This is actually a common reason people have to procrastinate. You intimidate yourself until you become sure you couldn’t possibly take on this task. Before you get to this point, break your tasks down into smaller, doable segments. If you just think about cutting the fabric and that is your only task for the day, you will feel a great deal less stressed because you will only have one responsibility instead of an entire cluster of them. If you somehow cut wrong, this isn’t the end of the world either. All you will need to do is cut out more fabric. You are going to make some mistakes while you are learning the ropes and even when you have mastered the art. That is because having imperfections and making errors are part of the human experience. I know that, as an overthinker, you have a fear of doing things imperfectly. You place expectations on

yourself that are impossible to live up to and confuse not reaching your ultimate goal with failure.

When you make a mistake, you learn, so if you think about it that way, you should try to make more of them. When you do this, you might begin to learn that nothing terrible happens. People will not think less of you. They are human too, and have done things incorrectly. You might be surprised to learn that when we see each other in times where we are imperfect, we will feel more comfortable around them. This happens because you have humanized yourself to them. It will show that you are comfortable enough with yourself that you do not always need to keep up a front.

Learn to have some fun with your mistakes. If you accidentally cut off more fabric than you intended to, instead of punishing yourself, laugh about it. Just be happy in the moment you are at right now. You are never more powerful than when you are content.

LETTING GO- YOU ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR OTHERS



WHEN YOU OVERTHINK, you hold onto everything. You look back at things you did years ago, even as far back as your childhood, and chide yourself about how you could have done better. you wonder if people are still thinking about something you did that you perceive as embarrassing. You think about everything you said during the last conversation you had with someone and wonder if it offended them or made them think less of you. Even after you have checked multiple times to make sure you have an important paper with you, you spend the entire drive worried that it will not be there for some reason. You take every bit of baggage you can as far as it can go. However, it doesn't stop with the things you personally did.

Overthinkers are notorious for thinking everything that happens around them or even away from them is their fault. This often comes in the form of giving powers to one's own actions. We've talked about people who have the thought that the safety of their loved ones relying on them doing something the "correct" way, and if they fail to do so, that will be the cause of anything bad that happens to anyone.

It also happens when you designate yourself as the reason someone says, does, or feels something. A colleague walks into the room and tosses their bags onto the ground, clearly

upset about something, and you immediately start checking your behavior because you assume you are the cause of their anger. You remember an offhand comment you made yesterday, and then in your mind, you have successfully figured out how this all falls on you. You then start to be apologetic in the way you interact with them. You will be on your heels, trying to make them feel better. Alternatively, you will become resentful of them for being angry at you and not telling you, which will also impact your behavior towards them. Either way, you are reacting to a hypothetical situation. You do not even know if it is the truth and you have not sought out the answer to whether or not it is.

These are slippery slopes to fall into. They will leave you on edge and second-guessing yourself all the time. You cannot let yourself sink into this type of thinking, or you will continue to, as we said before, act based on situations that do not exist. You will see everything anyone does as a protest against you, and you will also hold yourself accountable for any hardships that come anyone's way. For some people, it even gets to the point where they feel like they are taking from other people every time they have something for themselves. Their focus is entirely on how they are inconveniencing other people. For example, they are at the grocery store and looking at something when they realize another person is standing beside them, trying to get something that is right where they are standing. A quick sorry and stepping aside is not punishment enough for them. They think about how they were impeding that person. They wonder how long they stood there with their way being blocked. Then they start thinking about the possibility that the other person was on a time schedule and they were being prevented from what they needed to do because of them. "What if I caused them to be late?"

This is where you need to stop. You apologized and gave them access to the item they were reaching for. Therefore you have done everything you possibly can to make their situation better. They might not have anywhere to be, and even if they do, the longest you could have held them up was for a few seconds. Also, if this the case, it means they were putting off getting whatever they needed to get for the said event until the last minute, and if that is so, it is on them if they are late. Whatever happens to them afterward and any consequences they suffer is up to forces that are entirely separate from you.

In this chapter, we will teach you how to let go of personal responsibility for the actions of others and other things that are beyond your control. In order to do this, we will first go to its likely origin. This type of overthinking starts in early childhood. Often, whenever we saw our parents arguing, we automatically assumed it had to do with something if we did wrong. For someone whose parents fought more than usual, this would become an ongoing internal dialogue: “If I was a better child, Mom and Dad would get along.” Later in life, this causes the person to feel guilty every time they see someone angry or upset because they think they are responsible for this.

Children who had unhappy parents often take this onto themselves. They think they weren’t good enough. This is flawed thinking because you cannot make someone happy who doesn’t want to be. We’ve discussed how you need to take responsibility for your own actions. Now it is time to flip that onto the other side and say other people are accountable for what they do, not you. Sometime people will tell you that what they chose to do was your fault. For example, “You made me angry, and that’s why I had to yell at you.” That is an example of a person failing to restrain their temper and then putting it off on another person to save face.

A parent might tell their child they had to give up their dream of being a musician because they were born, and because you were so young, you took their story at face value and took on the guilt they were trying to instill into you. Now, I want you to look at that in a different way. No one decides when they are born. You did not pull anyone into a situation by existing. They are the ones who pulled you into theirs. When a parent tells a child they were forced to give something up for them; they are rewriting their history and assigning blame to someone else that is their fault. They did none of the things that would get them a music career and everything that would make them have to be responsible for a child. As a young child, we have no impactful influences on the way we see ourselves and others outside of our parents, so what they tell us becomes the voice in our heads during our youth.

For some people, this inflated sense of responsibility gets so out of hand that they take responsibility for things that happened away from them. Even when it is a natural disaster that happens in another state or country, they think, “there’s something I could have done to prevent this. I should have prayed harder. I shouldn’t have eaten that ice cream. That was selfish, and now those people are suffering.” If they hear of a family member falling ill, they remember a time they made fun of that person when they were just a child and attribute that to what is happening now. This might sound extreme, but it does happen.

It is also a product of trying to make a connection between events that do not share one. This is why you need to abandon the idea that there are “signs” that something was going to happen and that if you do not listen to them, you will be responsible for whatever goes wrong. Your actions do not have

any impact, direct or indirect, on someone else's life. If you did not cut someone, you are not the reason they are bleeding.

You doing something for yourself is not going to condemn someone else. You not arranging your silverware in the correct way isn't going to cause a loved one to get into a car accident. You are assigning powers to yourself that you do not have. A lot of times, bad things happen for no good reason. Someone was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Illnesses do not pick someone; they just happen. Sometimes it is due to the person not taking care of themselves or indulging in an unhealthy habit such as smoking (which you would not be responsible for). Other times there is no known explanation. That is why you cannot torture yourself with the task of trying to figure out the meaning of a tragedy when it occurs. You are trying to make sense of the nonsense.

Taking unwarranted responsibility is how those who overthink tend to engage in something known as magical thinking. This is when we connect things that happen in the outside world with things we think and feel on the inside. For example, someone at work starts a harmful rumor about you, and it damages your reputation. You feel extremely angry at them, and, for a fleeting moment, you wish for something bad to happen to them. A few weeks later, they are fired. You are now worried that your negative thoughts about them made this happen, meaning you are responsible for them losing their job and therefore their source of income.

There are a few reasons that are not true. For one, a person who was trying to sabotage one of their coworkers is not likely to perform their best as an employee. In any case, this behavior might have come to the attention of the manager who did not take kindly to someone trying to create a hostile work environment. In this case, this person brought this upon

themselves with the choices they made. Since they made such poor decisions, they should expect to get undesirable consequences.

As far as the thoughts you had toward them, that was not you cursing someone. That was you expressing human emotion. When someone does something that hurts us, we will naturally feel angry. You might even go through a period of hatred towards them. This is normal. We have billions of thoughts throughout our entire lives, and not all of them are nice. When we are feeling highly emotional, our thoughts can become dark. If that time comes and goes, and then you are back to your old self, there is nothing to worry about.

Also, think of it the opposite way. Try to summon something you want but don't have with your mind, such as a large sum of money or an exquisite treat you can only have when you go on a trip to a foreign land. You can try to make it appear all you want, but it isn't going to happen because our minds cannot impact the world around us.

Letting go of accountability for things you cannot directly impact is a part of growing up. Children try to figure out how everything is their fault. Adults realize that, more often than not, things do not go as planned and act based on the current circumstances. The longer we beat ourselves up about the past, the longer we hesitate to do better in the present. To add insult to injury, it becomes a substitute for self-improvement. As much as you whip yourself and sling hatred your way, your behaviors do not change. This is because negative self-talk damages your self-esteem. Those who do not think well of themselves do not try to get better because they do not think they can, as they are "bad people."

You inhibit yourself by being overly hard on yourself. Instead of teaching yourself to do better, you make it so that you cannot move on from the moment that upsets you to think about. You will make the same mistakes over and over again because when you are reliving them, you place yourself back into the mindset you were in when you made them. We've been taught that it is wrong to be unkind to others; there is not as much of an expectation to be kind to yourself. Talking down to yourself is not seen as being as bad as if you did it to someone else. It is. Every time you devalue yourself, you make another dent in your self-worth. If it keeps going on like this, before you know it, you will have rendered yourself completely ineffective. You won't think you are competent enough to do the simplest tasks. If you don't even trust yourself to fold bedsheets correctly because of the way you verbally abuse yourself, can you honestly say you are doing a good thing?

Of course, there will be times where something bad happens, and it is your fault. This is a part of being human. We don't always handle things the right way. We'll take bad news poorly or feel offended at something that doesn't really warrant it. Everyone has had one of those times where they'd been having a bad day and then took it out on someone who didn't deserve it. Whatever it is, you're going to hurt people at times in your life. It would be delusional to think you could go through life without being the villain in someone's story.

When this happens, what you need to do is learn from it. Any reflection you do on it needs to be constructive- meaning you are figuring out why you did this, recognizing that it was wrong, and figuring out how to not let this happen again. Anything beyond this is destructive. Telling yourself, "I'm a horrible person, I don't deserve any friends," and other such

things are not atonement. It is punishing yourself and not allowing yourself or anyone else to move on past that unpleasant moment. There is no going back and undoing what you've done wrong, and no amount of wishing will change that. Being alive in this world means accepting that there were times you could have acted with more integrity, but didn't. The expectation of yourself to be perfect and never behave poorly is an unreasonable one and will prove to get you into more trouble than if you let yourself be a human that makes mistakes. Also, remember that there is a time limit for how long you can be responsible for someone else's feelings, and even then they are still culpable for what they go on to do. Never letting go of guilt over how you treated someone in the past is also what can cause you to be at their beck and call. Any time you try to place limitations on them, they can always remind you of what you did. If this is happening to you, recognize this for what it is. It is not someone expressing their pain- it is extortion. They are playing on your empathetic nature.

There is another way that can be used against you that you need to be mindful of to avoid. Many times people who overthink fall into the habit of trying to save other people. They spend countless amounts of time, energy, and resources on these quests. It could be trying to make a pessimistic person see the bright side. They might try to convince someone to leave a relationship that isn't good for them. A student might see their friend skipping school to hang out with the wrong crowd and try to put an end to that. Whatever it is, they feel that they know what is best for that person and try to convince them to follow this path. When the other person refuses to do so, they feel like they have failed the person by not being able to do so.

I understand that when you are doing this, you truly do have their best interests at heart, and you most likely do have the right idea, and they probably should listen to you. However, you must accept that people are going to do exactly what they want to do. They might even know on an intellectual level that you're trying to do good for them, but it will not stop them from making the decision that is their actual heart's desire.

When you try to advise someone against making a bad decision, you are only going to end up alienating yourself from them. Since you are attempting to stand in the way of what they want from their point of view, you are the enemy. They might even become angry at you and seek revenge. It is a messy situation to be in.

Another thing you will have to worry about when you try to be a savior for someone is the possibility of them latching onto you. Say, for instance, a friend is in a tumultuous relationship, and while they refuse to actually leave the person, they do want a place to complain about the person when they feel like they have had all they can stand. In this case, you are being used. Your energy is being sucked out of you, and they are giving you hope for something that will never truly happen. You need to cut the ties and realize you tried to help this person, but they would not accept it.

A classic overthinking move is to trouble yourself with the idea that "I could've done more." You need to know when you have done all you can do and it is out of your hands. Just like in the example above, once you have given them sound advice, they will do with it what they see fit.

When a person overthinks, they also run the risk of losing themselves in the process when they are trying to make others think well of them. This can lead to people-pleasing behaviors,

which are unhealthy for a multitude of reasons. For one, it means you will be walked on. People will learn quickly that they can take advantage of you, and those who have it in them to do that will. It will also cause you to take on a manipulative way of doing things, and you will portray versions of yourself that are insincere.

We do not have the power to control what other people are going to think of us. We can try to influence them by treating them nicely, but ultimately they are going to think whatever they want to. It is their right to. Anxiety creates a sense of powerlessness within us, which can lead the sufferer to try to micromanage everything that happens in their life, even things that come from others. They feel like they can impact the opinions of others.

You do not need everyone to like you to have a good life. In the grand scheme of things, few people we meet in our lives even form a well-developed opinion of us, good or bad. There will be a few people who do not like you on sight. You could do all the right things, but the two of you just will not click. Many times in movies, you see someone meet a person who is bitter and wants to be left alone. After a number of rejections, the person keeps trying to get them to see the light. In the end, the cynical one is moved by how much effort they put forward, and the two become friends. Unfortunately, that is only a story. In real life, when someone does not want you to be near them, they will only become annoyed if you do not listen to them and try to get close to them anyways. This behavior is actually a failure to respect boundaries, so it is not one you want to engage in.

If someone does not like you, it does not always mean you did something wrong. Think about how many talented people are rejected from competitions that showcase singing. It does not

mean that a person is no longer a singer- it could just mean their voice, musical style, and persona is not a good fit for this particular gig. Not gaining approval from one person is not a failure on your part.

Also, remember that someone not wanting to be your friend does not mean they hate you. You two might just not share any interests, and therefore it would be next to impossible for you to spend time together without one person having to go along with something they do not really like. They may not be a social person. Some people prefer to spend their time alone, and in this case, it is nothing personal at all.

You need to also take into consideration that people do not always have rational reasons for disliking someone else. If they decided they do not like you without even taking a moment to get to know you, that says a lot more about them than it does about you. Even if it is because you look like someone who did them wrong, it still shows an inability to compartmentalize you, a person they have never met, away from the actions of someone else. It also shows that they have unfinished business with that person, which means this is about something that happened before you ever met them. You do not need to change something about yourself over this.

Think about how many times most best-selling books were rejected. That did not mean they didn't have something good to say. They just had not found the right person to hear it. This is why you cannot dismiss or make judgments of yourself on account of anyone else.

Overthinkers always take it onto themselves when something goes wrong. Their mind immediately jumps to what they might have said that was wrong, what they shouldn't have done. This is why when someone talks badly to them, they feel

guilty. When you start this process, you need to stop and take a step back for a moment. When someone loses their temper and takes it out on you, that is on them. It was their decision. Remember- that is what abusers say to their victims to justify their reprehensible behavior towards them, that they pushed them to it. This type of person will always point the finger at others. Every single time, someone else forced them to do it. It is not you who should feel bad; it is them. They will not likely do that for some time to come, so the best thing you can do for yourself is to let go of the situation and know that you are not to blame.

People who struggle with anxiety can fall into an unhealthy cycle of trying to please someone who cannot be pleased. They will think, "if I just try hard enough, they will be happy." This will never happen, and here is why: when you are submissive in this way, you become a primary target for those who want to take advantage of others. The secret to this kind of person is that they do not truly have any specific thing they want you to do. As much as they act like it is, this is all really about something much more sinister. What they are really after the feeling of power that comes from watching you scramble around trying to give them what they want. You trying desperately to please them is what makes them happy, and as long you keep doing this, they will let you.

To paint this picture, let's say Bobby has a girlfriend named Chelsea. Bobby has found that he cannot get in the good graces of Chelsea's father. Since the day he met her parents, he has been an outsider. He is the one her father pointedly does not like. He speaks to him with a short tone and often talks about how his daughter deserves better than her. Bobby has tried to give gifts to and do favors for her family, made declarations of love for Chelsea, and always raised his hand

when there was an errand that needed to be run. While he is disapproved of, he is always the one her family calls when something needs to be done.

It is probably becoming very clear to you that Chelsea's father's actions are not out of love for his daughter. He likes the feeling of being superior to Bobby. He wants him to know it is ultimately his call whether he gets to be in Chelsea's life. It makes him feel good about himself when he drops everything at his call. This is an abuse of power and not a situation Bobby should stay in. If Chelsea is unwilling to tell her father to back off, he needs to reconsider his relationship with her. If neither of these things happens, he will always be treated this way. That is because, with this kind of person, you will never have proven your worth. In the father's case, talking down to Bobby has very little to do with his actual opinion of him. This is simply a power trip, and things will never change.

The more time you waste trying to please this type of person, the longer you miss out on meeting people who would treat you nicely without you having to try to get them to. This is why you need to break the habit of thinking of things other people say and do to you as your attributes.

Imagine someone told you that you have blue eyes when they are clearly brown. You would think it was strange that they were saying this, and no amount of them repeating themselves would cause you to think maybe they were right, and your eyes really are blue. You might think this example came out of nowhere, but if it was something like this, you would be able to recognize immediately that they were telling you a lie. The same goes for if someone tells you that you are in any way unworthy of good treatment. That is merely their opinion, and more often than not, it is their projection what they feel about

themselves onto you. That is why even when a statement is directed at you, you cannot take it personally.

HOW TO STOP THINKING IN BLACK AND WHITE- NOTHING IS HORRIBLE



HAVE you ever been having a good day, only to have it spoiled, but then when you think about it afterward and realize what happened was not really that bad and that you reacted too strongly to it? You might've spilled coffee on yourself or been a couple of minutes late to work when that usually is not the case. You then started thinking, "I look horrible. Everyone is staring at my coffee stain." Of course, this would be upsetting and embarrassing, but it is nothing that has not happened to everyone at least once before. You just wash it off the best you can, and when you get home you change clothes. However, a person who overthinks would agonize over how many people saw it and how everyone must think they are a slob now. They imagine other people talking about it at this moment and it gets into their head. Before they know it, the next day has come along and they are still thinking about that coffee stain.

This might sound extreme, but it isn't. We can worry ourselves into a frazzle over things as small as this. When we overthink, we have very strict constraints on what can be good or acceptable. If we do not win, we failed. If things are not perfect, they are terrible. Inconveniences turn into disasters.

This kind of thinking places a huge strain on our relationship with ourselves and the people around us. People who always think in terms of worst-case scenarios bring an elevated state

of tension into the room. This causes people to feel trepidation around them. Being around them can feel like walking on a minefield because if something bad happens, their emotions will overwhelm them. They will also internalize it, and then the self-punishment phase will begin.

In this chapter, I am going to show you how to stop thinking in catastrophic language. This is when a person interprets everything that goes wrong as something horrible. They will often say things such as “my life is over” or “this was the worst day ever.”

While you should validate your feelings, it is also important to recognize the difference between an inconvenience and something that is truly terrible. Being low on money for the time being and having to go without luxury items is inconvenient, and definitely discouraging, but it is not the same as having to choose between eating and keeping one’s electricity. This time will pass, and when you get more money, your life will be back to running normally.

There are things you might want but not have, such as a large circle of friends or a significant other. This means things are not the way you want them to be (yet), but things are not truly bad. These are also things you can change. If you want a more robust social life, go out to places you haven’t been before where you will meet new people. You could also connect with friends you haven’t seen in a while.

Remember that the times in your life where there are no problems will be extremely rare. You might get an evening once in a while where there is absolutely nothing wrong. This is why it is important to learn how to be a happy person instead of waiting to have a happy life. There are people who

have more than us who are unhappy. The opposite is true. Others have less than us but make their life a good one.

When people who catastrophize make a mistake, they are much harder on themselves than others. It is healthy to reflect on your mistakes so you can see where you went wrong and avoid doing it again. However, this should be the extent of it.

Let's say you work at a restaurant, and you get someone's order wrong because you were thinking about something else while you were taking it. This is an embarrassing situation, and it is understandable to feel bad about it. You can also think of it as a learning experience- "I made a mistake at work because I let myself get distracted. From now on, the customer will have my full attention when I am taking their order. Sometimes we slip up. This just means we need to get our heads back in the game.

Also, make sure what you did was truly a failure. With overthinking comes perfectionism, and perfectionists often believe there is only winning and failing. Contrary to popular belief, this mindset does not lend itself well to success. For one, every setback is discouraging for the person. Their mind goes to "I failed, and therefore I need to beat myself up" rather than looking at where they can improve next time. Perfectionists can also be difficult to work with because they expect a great deal out of themselves and others, and do not always respond well to setbacks, which are inevitably going to happen when you are working on a project together.

You need to get out of the mindset that you have failed if your life isn't the way you want it to be. Let things be okay sometimes. This means you are not reaching for anything more or thinking about what you could lose. When things are okay, you have room for error. Maybe you made some typos

on the email you sent out. They will still understand what you are trying to say, and even if they do not, they will ask you about it so that you can clarify your meaning, and then the problem will have been resolved. Maybe you forgot to send that book you loaned from someone today. Apologize and do it tomorrow. If they are a reasonable person they will be okay with that. Your body and mind cannot handle the strain of always being in crisis mode.

Black-and-white thinking will also lead to you feeling a great sense of frustration. You will often be hit with feelings of devastation and disenchantment as a product of the “it’s perfect, or it’s terrible” mindset. To get an understanding of why this happens, think back to a time when you idolized a celebrity. You admired their talent, looks, and charm, and you both loved and aspired to be like them. They could do no wrong in your eyes. Then, one day, you got some bad news about them- an interview gone wrong, an arrest, a dark secret from their past surfaced, or something to that effect. Whatever it was, it permanently tarnished your view of them. You no longer look at them as shining and glorious. In fact, it is hard to look at them at all anymore because they were not the person you thought they were.

What happened here is that you were holding that person up on a pedestal. You saw them as perfect, which no human is. When you think that highly of someone, they are inevitably going to fall from grace. At that point, they become “bad.” Before, you had never seen anything real or human about them. They were an idea. The version of them they had portrayed was, in many ways a fictional character. You might have also assigned qualities to them that they do not possess, as is what often happens when we greatly admire someone.

The same logic is why there are so many highs and lows when we overthink. You wind up expecting too much of yourself, and while you hold others to low standards of how they treat you, you will, on the other hand, expect too much of them. Let me explain how this is possible. On one hand, you will not require them to respect boundaries and give too much, even if you do not have a great deal yourself. At the same time, if they do not text you back, you will jump to the conclusion that this means they no longer want to be your friend. You will find yourself detecting a different tone in their voice than they usually use when greeting you and assume they must be angry with you, causing you to search your memory banks for anything you could possibly have done wrong. This means you will often need to seek reassurance from them. It also does not permit them to have an off day where they are not as available as they usually are.

No matter what happens, you are going to be okay. Even if you do fail a test miserably, you can bring your grade. If your boss is disappointed in you, you can work to gain their trust again. If a friendship or relationship runs its course, no matter how upsetting it is, you are going to get through this. Bad things happen to people every day, and they manage to come through it. Nothing will be too much for you to overcome.

Black-and-white thinking means holding onto the false belief that one day, you will reach a point where you have everything together, and you have run into your last problem. This will cause you to chase something unattainable, feeling more desperate as time goes on. Desperation plays a large role in this mentality. If everything is the best or the worst, you will never be free from anxiety. Unfortunately, there will never come a day where your life is truly “set,” and nothing ever goes wrong. This is not to be pessimistic; it is just reality. Life

is a mixture of good and bad things. The best thing to do is to enjoy the good times as they come and adjust to the bad times the best you can. Wouldn't you rather be okay on a constant basis than going through unpredictable bouts of feeling triumphant and anguished, knowing the other shoe could always drop?

What you need to remember is that no matter what is happening, it will come to an end. It has to. Everything in this world must at some point. If you are currently feeling anxious, this is just the thing you currently have to get through. It isn't the big one that is going to cause your demise. Tough times have passed before in the future, and they always will.

Catastrophic thinking comes along the most when you feel isolated. This is because you feel like if something bad were to happen, no one would care or even notice. This fear feeds the one that is already there. This is why you need to reach out in whatever way you can at this time. Being connected with other people is crucial in managing anxiety overall. A group of friends is something you can have. You do not have any big defect that makes you unsociable. Abandon those thoughts that tell you that no one would want to be your friend because of your anxiety. There are people who meet and become life-long friends because they both suffer from anxiety. Wouldn't that be the picture of making the most out of a hardship?

When we overthink, we place limitations on ourselves. We will decide that we can't do or have things other people can. You might feel like other people are going to judge you if they find out you are struggling with anxiety, or that you would even be in danger of being known as "crazy." Of course, you have to know the company you can share personal information in, but when you are among friends, give it a try. You might be pleasantly surprised if you open up about your problems. It

might turn out that they have the exact same one and avoid telling others for the same reason.

Speaking of talking with others about anxiety, there are places you can reach out to and find other people who know what you are going through. There are support groups dedicated to any issue you can possibly think of, and there are many ones for anxiety and overthinking. There are even groups you can join online, whether it is a forum or on a social media website. It is good to talk to friends and family, but if they do not have anxiety, they will only be able to help you so much. They might try to understand, but they cannot make a true connection with your struggles. There is a certain level of understanding that can only be achieved when two people have been through the same thing share their experiences with one another. You might also feel freer to speak around these people. It is not to say your loved ones are not good sources of support but along with the issue we just discussed, you might not feel comfortable being completely open with them. You might fear being judged by them as well as scaring them. It is alright to feel this way, and you do not have to tell them everything. Of course, you don't want to keep secrets from them, but not everything that happens is going to be something you want to share with them. This is true for any interpersonal relationship. In fact, those who feel like they cannot keep anything at all from the person and needs to tell them every minute detail of their day often have an unhealthy relationship that is based on control rather than by respect.

When you connect with others who have anxiety, you will meet with people who have been actively dealing with it for longer than you have. They will help you avoid some of the pitfalls they experienced. You will be able to tell them things that seem alarming, and they can tell you it is a normal part of

the journey. For example, when you have been doing the right things for a long time to relieve your stress and shut out the intrusive thoughts, you might experience a period of time when your anxiety comes back. You might think you did not ever actually improve, or even that you have been getting worse this whole time. I can assure you that this is not what is going on at all. You might be surprised to learn that it is so natural that it has been given a name- a spike. Essentially, you have felt tumultuous inside for a long time, so much that it has become the norm for you. The fact that you are not feeling it now causes your body to feel unsettled. Something must be wrong because things are not operating as they normally do. Hence, you feel anxious.

When your heart begins pounding, and you start the “everything’s terrible” thoughts, just stop for a moment. Stop everything you are doing. Act like you are doing yoga and focus on something in the room. Let’s say it is a pot of flowers. Think about what kind they are. Describe their colors, and not just which one it is. If they are pink, is it a light or dark pink? Is it a warm or cool shade? Are there other colors too? Think deeply about it so that you can pull yourself out of your thoughts.

Focus on something outside of yourself to practice mindfulness. You’ve probably heard this term going around for the past few years. It is a simple concept when you break it down. You just pull your train of thought to a halt and focus on the environment around you. You make sure you are breathing in and out while you make observations using your senses. You hear a song playing, so you try to figure out what the words are. You see a painting and follow the brush strokes. You are sitting on the couch, so you place your hand on the material. You have a cup of coffee beside you so you take a sip

of it. Maybe you put some French vanilla creamer in it, so you take in that flavor. The idea is that when you get a feel for these things, it will become clear that the scenarios in your mind are not.

Life is too short to spend it in a state of dread. Even if you have practiced overthinking your whole life, it is not too late to stop now. Of course, this change will not happen overnight, but every moment you spend thinking positively is one that the anxiety is not in control, which will put it in a position where it has to give ground, allowing your true self to shine through.

CONSTRUCTIVE THINKING



WE'VE TALKED about how to break out of unhealthy thinking patterns. To wrap up the book, we will show you how to replace those with positive ones. There is a Maori proverb that goes like this- "Turn your face toward the sun, and the shadows will fall behind you." This means when you choose to accept positive things, you will be a happier person, and in turn, more good things will come your way. We do have a metaphorical gravitational force. We become surrounded by the things we put out. If you think negatively about life, the people you associate with will also be this way. You will not get friends who have things going for them and enrich your life. You will get the ones who are down on their luck. They will never move up from where they are now and they will always have an excuse for it. The way you act will determine how you are treated. People who are often confrontational and treat other people rudely will find that they are often treated poorly. You will hear them asking why bad things always have to happen to them without realizing the role you play in it.

This is not to say you should be a doormat. In fact, in many ways, it is the constantly angry people who are the biggest doormats. They give everyone else control in how they act. If someone cuts them off in traffic, they let it ruin their entire day. If the service at a restaurant isn't up to par, they will make

a scene, which will cause them to embarrass themselves and possibly get banned from visiting the place again.

The lesson here is to learn how to look at the future with optimism. For this to happen, you will need to retire words like “can’t,” “never,” “hopeless.” These words will make it impossible for you to succeed. Instead, think, “I can overcome and manage my anxiety. There will be times I’m feeling panicky, but they will pass.” Just because you are experiencing an unpleasant emotion, does not mean your life is actually changing. Feelings are just as ever-changing as any other aspect of life.

This is what is meant by the saying that happiness is a choice. You can look at your life with the idea that it will never change or get better and that you will always be stuck where you are now, and that is exactly what will happen. This is because you will not be doing anything to improve yourself and your circumstances. On the other hand, you can decide that you are going to take on better habits.

The first thing you are going to need to do is to accept and forgive your past. Many times, when people are recovering from anxiety, they feel a sense of guilt and regret about the things they let their anxiety miss out on- career opportunities, friendships, dates, even simply going outside. Nothing is more that are more vexing than thinking about what could have happened but didn’t. However, it gets you nowhere. That’s why it is said that you have no use for “should’ve, would’ve could’ve.” These thoughts will only hurt you. Whatever time you feel like you wasted, there is no getting back. You can only control how you are going to approach the present and future. You can’t do anything about past regrets, but you can make it so that you have fewer future ones.

Notice I said “fewer” and not “no regrets.” It is impossible to achieve this. During life, you will have to make choices, and no matter what you decide, you will lose something. You will not be able to stop yourself from wondering what could have come of it if you had made the other choice. When situations come up in life, you will not always handle them in the best way. You will wish you had said or done something differently. You are going to make mistakes. That’s all there is to it.

Sometimes, when you are feeling down, you just need a quick pick-me-up. Make some time for something you enjoy every day. Even if it is just fifteen minutes. If you do not do this, you will feel like you don’t do anything except work and responsibilities. You will become burnt out. This leads to being fatigued, which will also cause you to become irritable.

Start the path to getting the most out of your day. If you feel like you do not have any time, you might need to wake up earlier. Do you find yourself pressing the snooze button until the last minute when you absolutely have to get up, causing you to get ready for work in a blur? This will not only place you in an extremely stressful time constraint, but it sets a tone for the rest of your day.

Also, think about what is consuming all of your time. How much time do you spend wringing your hands with worry? Perhaps you take too many requests from others, even if your plate is full. It is not unkind to say no if you cannot complete a task someone asking of you. Actually, it is the responsible thing to do. When you take on too much, you will not be able to devote proper time to anything. You will just be scrambling to get it all done in time. This is not being a hard worker. It is setting yourself up for failure. You might have gotten all of those projects done in one night, but what was the quality of

them? You might not have even had the time to review your work before you had to send it in, which never usually ends well.

While you are installing better habits for yourself, don't shame yourself for your past behavior. Acknowledge that you are trying to change and give yourself some credit for it. Make that another habit you implement- learning to be kinder to yourself. So you've made a mistake. Who hasn't? That doesn't mean you are less of a person, or that you need a never-ending verbal beat down. Think about someone you care greatly about, like a best friend or family member. Now think about a time where they were beating themselves down and saying unsavory things about themselves. You would be horrified. You would want them to stop and would be willing to do whatever it took to pull them out of that mindset. Think of yourself this way, which ties into what I'm going to discuss next.

To think positively, you need to learn to love yourself. This is something most of us struggle with. It is often said that we are our own worst critics, and it's true, especially when it comes to overthinkers. We call out every single flaw in ourselves and what we do. This is because we search for them. When we look in the mirror, we try to cover up blemishes, so we look for all of them, and sometimes that causes us to see ones that aren't there.

It's time to turn off the volume on your inner critic and give yourself some encouragement. You will never improve from where you are now with that kind of attitude. When life coaches are helping people with their parenting, a common piece of advice they give them is to give some positive reinforcement. When a child is never called out for good behavior, only chastised when they have done something

wrong, they will either become withdrawn or someone who seeks negative attention. Neither of these will lead to success later in life.

This is one way we stay the same from childhood to adulthood. We need that bit of encouragement. Imagine a boss who is not happy with the writeup his employee gives him. The way he handles this will have an impact on whether her work will improve or suffer more. If he covers it with red marks, criticisms, and pointing out mistakes, she will feel completely incompetent and embarrassed. It will demotivate her. The next time she gets an assignment, she will probably put it off until the last minute because she knows she will just get it wrong anyway. She will probably even fear for her job, which will cause her to be even more demotivated.

Now let's say he starts out by telling her which things she wrote well because no matter how off-the-mark someone was with an assignment, they did something right. This will set the tone that he still does value her work and think she can do it; she just struggled with this particular assignment. Next, he tells her where the discrepancy was between what he wanted and what she wrote. Now she can approach the next assignment with a clearer head.

This same concept can be applied to how you speak to yourself. Think of your mind as your boss, and make sure it speaks to you like the second example. If it does not, make it treat you better. No relationship is healthy when one party is always the one trying to change, and the other never lifts a finger to do the same.

You can start this process by creating positive material that you can read about you. Write down three things you like about yourself or that you do well. It doesn't matter what they

are. Maybe you have good handwriting. You might be able to tell a story well. Think about your positive character traits- being a good listener, compassionate, caring. While you are doing this activity, you will be forced to turn your attention away from the negative self-talk for a moment. When you have written these things down, place the paper somewhere that you can see it every day- taped to your bathroom mirror, laid on your desk, tacked to your wall. It doesn't matter. It just needs to be visible. We are what we consume. Think about the way you feel when you listen to a sad song as opposed to an upbeat one. You need to surround yourself with positivity if you want to think that way. This will not feel natural at first. This is because you have become accustomed to beating yourself down, but just do it, no matter how long it takes. Even if you do not really feel it, write it down.

In order to uphold this, you will need positive reinforcement from the outside. Reach out to the people in your life. When you are feeling down, call a friend. Nothing worsens anxiety than feeling like you have no one to talk to. Then it has you right where you want it, feeling completely alone and, therefore at its mercy. Do not listen to the idea that you have no one. There is someone who will answer your call. I can say this with full confidence.

While you definitely should have someone to vent to, make sure your conversations are not entirely made up of going over the negative thoughts. Watch a movie and laugh about it with them. Play a board game. Do things that take your focus to something more positive. Simply taking your attention somewhere else plays a huge role in reducing anxiety. When you isolate yourself and beg it to go away, it will only increase because then your entire focus is on it.

Think about a time when you scraped your knee or had some other injury. When you were looking or thinking about it, the pain became more intense. However, when you became distracted by something that entertained you, like a book or TV show or even just a very engaging conversation, it began to lessen, and for a while, you might not have even felt the pain at all. This is because your mind was giving something else its energy, so you literally did not fully receive the message the pain receptors were sending you.

If you want to think about something that isn't the anxiety, find something to do with your hands. This means you need to channel your creativity. When you've made something yourself, you will feel a sense of accomplishment. You might even discover a new hobby. There are many ways to hone your creative side. You might write a short story. It could be painting, sewing, or even cooking. Yes, cooking is an art. There are people who have had extremely successful careers out of it.

When restoring and maintaining your health, physical or mental, it comes down to making one healthy choice after another. Keep it going in a pattern. Say you are working on your fitness. You could start out by choosing a salad and juice for lunch instead of a burger and coke. When you get home from work, instead of retiring to the couch with a beer in hand, you decide to head to the gym or outside for a run. If you keep going on a pattern like this, before long, you would be looking and feeling much better.

There is a saying: "look good, feel good." This is not to say you should base your value on your looks or change yourself. In fact, the contrary is true. "Looking good" in its true form is using the features you already have and crafting them to look the best they can. When you start working out and eating

healthier, your body will get into shape. When you dress in a way that flatters your body style and color palette, you will feel more confident when going out and approaching new people. When people overthink, they often feel nervous about being in public because they worry that others are focusing on a blemish on their face, or judging them for some other aspect of their appearance. It would be great if everyone judged what was on the inside and didn't even notice the way a person looks, but we do not live in that world. Think about when you walk into a job interview. The potential employer has a portion of their decision made when the person has first walked into a room before they have even said hello. That is because this is how little time it takes for a first impression to be formed.

When you meet new people, replace thoughts of what could go wrong with ideas for how you could improve your first impressions. What makes someone likable comes down to a very simple list- normally, people like someone who has a genuine smile and a friendly personality. Focus on these aspects of yourself and maximize them. Anxiety wants you to think about what could go wrong. Constructive thinking pushes you to think about what could go right. Our attitudes send out boomerangs. When you only think of what bad things could happen, you will become withdrawn. You won't want to see anyone or even go outside.

People who think positively see opportunities where pessimists see roadblocks. Let's say your flight is delayed. This is frustrating, but you have a choice here. You can get upset and panic, creating a miserable time for yourself, or you can take it in stride. Let's say you decide to get coffee, and while you're there, you have an interesting conversation with someone. This means you decided to have a good day.

Earlier, we talked about the fact that you can choose how hard inconveniences hit you. If you choose to dwell on the negative in life, it will seem like it is the only thing that happens. This is why exercises in gratitude are helpful in combating anxiety. A popular one is to create a list of good things that happened to you today. It doesn't have to be anything grand. It can be as simple as having watched a nice sunrise, or your coffee was especially good this morning. At the end of every day, compile this list. It will be difficult for the first few days because the anxiety has trained your brain to zero in on unpleasant stimuli. When you make this list, you will be forced to shift your focus away from the anxiety.

Make time in your day to work on your talents and passions. You need to have a source of enjoyment to feel emotionally well. Otherwise, you will just be going through the motions. When you get into this state, you feel physically and mentally drained. Everything will feel like it takes all of your effort to do. This will cause you to feel overwhelmed. Days will become something you dread.

There are a lot of little ways you can begin to change your attitude and begin the journey to choosing happiness. It starts with the moment you first wake up in the morning. You can groan, feel annoyed about having to get up, and put it off, or you can make your mornings something to enjoy. Have time to kick back and drink some coffee or other beverage of your choosing. You might watch some TV, listen to music, sit outside and watch the sun come up, or anything else that helps you feel relaxed and rejuvenated. If you do this, you will approach your day with a tranquil mind and, therefore ready to handle whatever it might throw at you.

While at work, some people think of it as a place of torture. They look at the clock until it is time to go, but then when that

hour does come, they go straight home. Others find ways to enjoy their work. They might make a little game out of it, or find a way to make it less mundane. This means they will go through their tasks with a smile on their face. Employers notice who is begrudgingly doing the bare minimum and who is going the extra mile with a cheerful disposition, and they will be thinking about this when it comes time to figure who should be promoted and who should not. This is the way we decide our own fates.

I'm going to draw from an earlier chapter for this point. To achieve inner peace, you need to focus solely on yourself. This is not being selfish. Try this spin on the idea- when you work on yourself, how you act, and how you think, you render yourself able to help others. When you are overcome by anxiety and cannot keep up with your thoughts, you are in no position to help anyone. The person who gives until they do not have anything else and yet still finds a way to give more has long been idolized. That might have worked for an earlier time, but now it is time to put that personality to bed. Self-serving is not bad. If you think about it, it means you value the quality of the energy you put out into the world.

Only put the pressure on your daily tasks that they warrant. Make sure you place what you are doing into perspective. Of course, you want to put time and effort into the things you do so you will come out with a good product, but you need to learn how much a particular one needs. There are those projects that will require all of your attention and for you to agonize over it. These are very rare. Then there are the ones that need TLC, but there is still room for error. Finally, you have those that you just need to have fun with. They will not have any impact on your future, so you do not need to cause yourself any stress over them.

As this problem begins early for most people, I'm going to use school projects as an example. Most of the time, your teachers probably gave you everyday classroom assignments. These were to make sure you were reading and understanding the material. You wanted to take them seriously because they were for a grade, but if you missed a few points here or there it wouldn't have a devastating impact, mostly because the core purpose of these assignments was to figure out what you are having a hard time with early on so you could have it worked out before the stakes became high. These would all be leading up to the final exam, which would be an accumulation of everything you had learned in that class. This would count for a significant portion of your final grade, so there was no fluffing this off. You would need to make sure you had gone over all of the past class material. Then in days leading up to vacation time, you would be given word searches, coloring pages, or any other pastime assignment. These were not for a grade, and it did not matter if you did it incorrectly or did not finish it. It was merely a way to pass the time until school was out.

Keep the spirit of the purely fun things what they should be. If you are at a painting class, focus on having fun and tapping into your creativity. This is not going to be judged by anyone else. You will not lose anything important if it does not hold up to a certain standard. Your painting does not have to be better than anyone else's.

As an overthinker, it is difficult to weed things out of the "maximum importance" category. This is because of the overwhelming need to succeed and win. It is a form of validation and proving your worth. One of the most important aspects of constructive thinking is learning to still feel good about yourself, even when your performance isn't at its best.

Maybe you said the wrong answer in class. Maybe your boss told you that your performance was not at its usual level today. If you play a sport, there will be times you are off your game. No one does well all the time.

The most insidious problem that comes with basing your self-worth on how well you perform is that it will be all over the place. There will be days where you are the most productive member of the team. Others, you will be tired and uninspired, and the others will need to pull you along to a certain extent. This means you will never consistently feel good about yourself. While you might feel full of confidence on the good days, you will have the opposite feeling on the bad days. You will only think you deserve good things when you have “earned” them.

Another complication is that over a long period of time, this type of thinking will cause you to feel at odds with others. Let's say your boss told you he has seen better work from you than you what you gave him today, making your confidence plummet. Then you overhear him telling a coworker that he has done well. Whether you mean to or not, you will feel resentment building up towards your coworker. This is because you have placed yourself in competition with him. Your mind will surmise that the fact that he was praised means he is better than you, and that you are not as valuable. This will hurt, but also make you jealous of him. All of these feelings will cause you to feel like he is trying to hurt your position in the company even though he has no such intentions. When competition crosses over to an unhealthy point, you will see other people as the enemy. When this happens, you will want their performances to suffer. At this point, you have extremely harmful thoughts going on inside of you. You are dwelling in negative energy. A person who

wishes badly for others will only cause hardship to themselves in the end.

When you haven't had a good day, this isn't a time where you need to be punished. Instead, it is a sign that you need more self-care than usual. It means you need to recharge. Get a better night's sleep than usual. Cuddle up with your favorite book or movie, and don't put pressure on yourself. When we do not perform well, it is a message from your body and mind. They are telling you they are becoming tired. Trying to push yourself farther when you have reached this point is not going to work. You are just going to further exhaust yourself and therefore feel even more discouraged. Your battery is low and needs to be placed on the charger.

When you have made a commitment to do better for yourself, do not worry if you also feel a sense of pressure. When the initial joy of having made a new resolution wears off, you will then have to deal with the reality of it. You will even have to deal with the discomfort of being without your old habits. Even if you knew they were not good for you, they gave you a sense of familiarity, which is something people gravitate towards. For better or for worse, what we know is our comfort zone.

There will be times where you have to recommit to your new habits. There are inevitably going to be times where you falter. The saying "old habits die hard" exists for a reason. Especially during times of stress, you will feel tempted to go back to your old thinking patterns.

When you instill a new good habit, it needs to come in increments. Just as you would build up the amount of time you work out per day, you would not expect yourself to leave behind the behavior of overthinking within one day. Don't

overthink your recovery (pun fully intended). Just think about the here and now. Choose to stay positive at this moment, and do whatever it takes for you to do that. Tomorrow, repeat that plan. Before you know it, the way you think will change for the better.

CONCLUSION

Overthinking is not based on reality. In fact, its foundation is the creation of terrifying scenarios in your mind. These fears can be outlandish, such as a shark lurking in one's bathtub, or impossible to predict, such as a significant partner's plans to end the relationship. Indulging in these thoughts will drive you crazy.

Don't pick yourself apart. You might have said the wrong thing in a conversation. It isn't the end of the world. You will make mistakes in life. There is no avoiding it. When you place expectations on yourself to be perfect, you will never be able to discover yourself, and you will set yourself up to always fail. Try to stop thinking about mistakes as a failure you can't come back from. Instead, look at them as an opportunity to grow. You will never improve by beating yourself down.

It is impossible to be prepared for every unpleasant event. You can try your best, but sometimes things will happen out of the blue. Relationships will fall apart. You will get bad news. You will try to win someone's approval to no avail. However, the chances for these things to happen are slim if there are no signs that they will. Think of the phrase "crossing that bridge when you get there." In short, only put energy into something if it is real.

When you are able to master these concepts, you will find an increase in productivity and confidence. You are not meant to be an anxious person, and you will get over this in time.