

The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Anxiety: A Guide to Breaking Free from Anxiety, Phobias, and Worry Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

By John P. Forsyth, PH.D and Georg H. Eifert, PH.D

You can stop trying to cope with worries, anxieties, and fears. [...] You can leave them alone and simply experience them as thoughts, sensations, feelings or painful memories. [...] You don't have to act on your anxiety.

The solution to worry, anxiety and fears is not more struggle. [...] This battle cannot be won (and) you don't need to win this battle. [...] You can choose to stop fighting. [...] You'll need to learn how to acknowledge anxious thoughts and feelings without "becoming" them, and without acting on them.

Acceptance and commitment therapy

Accept what you're already having anyway. [...] Drop the rope in your tug-of-war. [...] Make anxiety just a part of your larger life.

Anxiety management and control efforts are unnecessary. [...] They're about *struggle*. [...] It's hard work to push against unpleasant thoughts, feelings and memories. [...] People who fight their thoughts and feelings on a regular basis report poorer quality of life.

Your *actions* in life add up to what your life is about.

Anxiety and fear can become just a part of your life, not the very fabric of your being.

There's no way to stop unpleasant thoughts and feelings from showing up from time to time. (But you can) welcome anxiety as you engage your life.

Anxiety is a future-oriented mood state. Anxiety tends to be fueled more by what your mind says than real sources of danger or threat.

Fear requires little thought; anxiety needs big thought.

The real enemy is rigid **avoidance** of fear and anxiety.

Your life need not be determined by how much or little anxiety you have.

Managing anxiety doesn't work. [...] Experience anxiety for what it is and start doing what you care about doing.

Don't get stuck trying to convince yourself of anything.

Avoidance of fear and anxiety feeds anxiety and fear.

Let go of the label (someone with an anxiety disorder)!

You can change your life by changing what you do.

Create change in your life by refocusing time, energy and resources in those areas that you can control and change -- **the things you do with your hands, feet, and mouth.**

Avoid this trap: In order to live better, I must first think and feel better. [...] When anxiety pain shows up, you go after it to make it go away or to weaken it.

When you don't want anxious thoughts and feelings, you'll get more of them. And the more you don't want them, the more you're stuck with them.

You can learn to live better without first having to think and feel better.

Could it be that your worries, anxieties and fears aren't your enemy?

You can choose to do what you care about, even if that means you're guaranteed to experience worries, anxieties and fears now and then.

What would I be doing with my mental and physical energy if I weren't spending it coping with my worries, anxieties and fears?

Everything you've done and continue to do about your worries, anxieties and fears has cost you much more than the worries, anxieties and fears themselves. The *struggle* itself is a trap.

Controlling anxiety doesn't work in the same way that control works in other areas of life. [...] Give up the struggle with anxiety and **surrender**. [...] Allow yourself to feel anxiety. [...] You don't need to win this fight.

Emotions have no on/off switch. It's next to impossible for anyone to feel one way or another just because they want to.

Allow your worries, anxieties and fears into your life. [...] You cannot escape or avoid your feelings of anxiety, apprehension, and insecurity. They are part of you.

You can take your worries, anxieties and fears with you on your ride through life, without acting on them. [...] The first and most important task is to make a choice to **do something different** when they show up.

When you struggle to control what you cannot control, you'll only end up feeling more anxious. Worries, anxieties and fears *need* this struggle to stay powerful.

Dropping the Rope

The first thing you need to do is give up your job as anxiety manager. [...] Worries, anxieties and fears need the fuel that comes from a good fight with you. [...] Drop the rope and become an observer, not a player. [...] Become an "expert observer of anxiety"

Have you ever approached anxiety with willingness to have it? (no)

You control your choices and actions, *what you say, and what you do*.

You don't have to *do* anything about your worries, anxieties and fears. [...] Simply allow them to be.

The advantage of being an observer is that you can watch what's going on (your experience) *without having to take sides*. It allows you to end the struggle and drop the rope.

(Thoughts) come and go. We don't own them. We can't make them go away. [...] Anxiety and fear are emotions you experience periodically. [...] You are not your thoughts or your feelings.

We cannot choose what comes into our minds and what we feel. We can only choose *what* we pay attention to, *how* we pay attention, and what we *do*.

No matter how bad an internal experience seems, it neither lasts forever nor can it do any harm. [...] **Anxiety isn't the enemy.**

The purpose (of observing) is not to feel better but to get better at *feeling and being with all that is you, as it is*.

If you notice you're worrying, silently say to yourself, "Worry... there is worry." [...] If you find yourself judging, just notice that and call it "judging... there is judging."

One choice is to continue spending your life managing anxiety. Another choice is to move with your anxiety in the direction you want your life to take.

Driving your Life Bus

You can think of yourself as the driver of a bus (pickup truck?) called "My Life." Along the way, you pick up some unruly passengers, like frightening thoughts and images that your mind comes up with. Other passengers on the bus are feelings of panic, apprehension, and tension. These passengers are loud and persistent. You realize while you were busy trying to come up with arguments and strategies to quiet them, you missed a road sign and took a wrong turn. Now you're an hour out of your way, headed (in the wrong direction). You are, in a sense, lost. So you stop the bus and focus on getting your passengers in line. [...] You've stopped the bus, let go of the steering wheel, turned yourself around, and

you're looking at the back of the bus instead of staying focused on your real destination.

What you need to do is stay in the driver's seat and (keep moving ahead) no matter how much noise those other passengers are making. [...] The unpleasant passengers (worries, anxieties and fears) are still on the bus with you. You can't kick them off. [...] Every now and then they creep forward and scream, "Pay attention to us! Turn around! Go back!"

Only you can take yourself where you want to go -- and you have no choice but to take the whole crowd with you.

Anxiety can be a monster crippling your life, or it can be a temporary experience that comes and goes pretty much all by itself.

A thought is just a bunch of words.

When you're doing nothing, you create a big void in your mind. And your mind will do what it can to fill it. (A high-risk time for worries, anxieties and fears) **DO SOMETHING!**