

GOOD ANXIETY

Harnessing the Power of the Most Misunderstood Emotion

by Dr. Wendy Suzuki

NPA Louisville Book Club — Discussion Guide

5 Sessions | Every Other Thursday | 7:00–8:00 PM | Starbucks, Prospect (Hwy 42)

BOOK OVERVIEW

Where to find the book:

<https://amzn.to/4vs3HB9>

About the Author:

Dr. Wendy Suzuki is a Professor of Neural Science and Psychology at New York University and an internationally recognized authority on neuroplasticity. Her TED talk on the brain-changing benefits of exercise has been viewed more than 55 million times. She is also the author of *Healthy Brain, Happy Life*.

Overview:

Dr. Wendy Suzuki makes the case that anxiety is not a flaw to be eliminated — it's a survival mechanism with real evolutionary purpose. Drawing on her own neuroscience research and personal experience, she shows that anxiety, when understood and worked with rather than against, can sharpen our focus, deepen our resilience, fuel our creativity, and strengthen our relationships.

For NPA's audience, this book is a meaningful entry point into the group's larger journey: Suzuki devotes an entire chapter to the brain's plasticity — its lifelong capacity to change — and uses that science as the foundation for everything she teaches about working with anxiety rather than being ruled by it.

This is also why we chose it as our first book: it meets people where they are. Nearly everyone can relate to anxiety, and from there, the group can build shared language and trust before moving into more clinically focused books later in the year.

HOW THIS GUIDE IS STRUCTURED

★ Each session covers a portion of the book — broken into manageable chunks rather than the whole book at once.

★ This approach is intentional: research on adult learning shows that spacing material out over time, rather than absorbing it all at once, leads to much stronger understanding and retention.

★ No one needs to have finished the reading to participate. Come as you are — many of the best conversations come from people hearing an idea for the first time, out loud, in the room.

★ Each session below includes: the chapters covered, key points to guide the conversation, and a set of discussion questions for the facilitator to use as needed.

SESSION 1

Thursday, July 16, 2026

Chapters Covered: What Anxiety Actually Is

Chapter 1 — What Is Anxiety?

Chapter 2 — Leveraging the Power of the Brain's Plasticity

Chapter 3 — Coping with Anxiety in Real Life

Key Points to Discuss:

- Anxiety is not a malfunction — it evolved as a survival mechanism that draws our attention to real or perceived threats.
- For most of the 20th century, scientists believed the adult brain was fixed after adolescence. Pioneering research by Dr. Marian Diamond in the 1960s — showing that rats in enriched environments developed measurably different brains — helped overturn that belief.
- Brain plasticity is the foundation for everything else in this book: if the brain can change, then our relationship with anxiety can change too.
- Suzuki introduces early, practical coping tools for everyday anxious moments — a gentle starting point before the deeper strategies in later chapters.

Discussion Questions:

1. *What is your own relationship with anxiety? Has it ever been useful to you, even if it didn't feel that way at the time?*
2. *Suzuki argues that the brain's ability to change is the foundation for managing anxiety differently. Does this idea feel hopeful, surprising, or familiar to you — and why?*
3. *What is one small coping tool from this section that you might try this week?*

SESSION 2

Thursday, July 30, 2026

Chapters Covered: Building Resilience

Chapter 4 — Supercharge Your Resilience

Key Points to Discuss:

- Resilience is not a fixed trait you either have or don't — it is built through practice, flexible thinking, and support.
- Suzuki outlines specific factors that strengthen resilience: cognitive flexibility, seeking help and connection, finding moments of joy, and nurturing physical health.
- Stress and resilience are deeply interconnected — the goal isn't to eliminate stress, but to build the internal and external resources to recover from it more quickly each time.

Discussion Questions:

4. *Think of a difficult period in your life. What helped you become more resilient afterward?*
5. *Suzuki lists flexible thinking, seeking help, finding joy, and physical health as pillars of resilience. Which of these feels strongest for you right now? Which feels like it needs more attention?*

6. *How might resilience look different for someone navigating a neurological condition or supporting a loved one through one?*
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SESSION 3

Thursday, August 13, 2026

Chapters Covered: Performance, Flow, and Purpose

Chapter 5 — Enhance Your Performance and Open the Door to Flow

Chapter 6 — Nurture an Activist Mindset

Key Points to Discuss:

- Suzuki introduces the idea of "micro flow" — small, frequent moments of engagement and enjoyment that don't require hours of dedicated practice to access.
- Anticipatory nerves before a big moment (a presentation, a difficult conversation, a new challenge) can be reframed as excitement rather than threat — and that reframe alone changes performance.
- Suzuki shares her own story of an emotional crisis around her fortieth birthday that led her to cultivate what she calls an "activist mindset" — channeling anxious energy toward purposeful action.

Discussion Questions:

7. *Can you recall a moment when nervous energy actually helped you perform better, once you reframed it?*
 8. *What would a "micro flow" moment look like in your everyday routine — something small and accessible, not a big production?*
 9. *Suzuki turned a personal crisis into a new sense of purpose. Has anxiety or a difficult period ever pointed you toward something meaningful?*
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SESSION 4

Thursday, August 27, 2026

Chapters Covered: Focus, Productivity, and Connection

Chapter 7 — Amplify Your Focus and Productivity

Chapter 8 — Prime Your Social Brain, Quell Your Social Anxiety, and Heighten Your Compassion

Key Points to Discuss:

- Practical tools for focus: reducing distractions, regular meditation, and physical exercise all measurably improve concentration and decision-making.
- Social anxiety and compassion are deeply linked in the brain — Suzuki explains how priming the "social brain" can reduce social anxiety while increasing empathy for others.
- This session connects naturally to NPA's caregiver audience: connection and compassion are not separate from recovery — they are part of the mechanism.

Discussion Questions:

10. Which of Suzuki's focus strategies (reducing distraction, meditation, exercise) do you already use, and which might you try?
11. Has social anxiety ever held you back from connecting with others, especially during a hard season? What helped, if anything?
12. How does compassion — for yourself or others — show up in your own life or caregiving experience?

SESSION 5

Thursday, September 10, 2026

Chapters Covered: Creativity and Putting It All Into Practice

Chapter 9 — Boost Your Creativity

Part 3 — The Art of Worrying Well: Tools to Calm, Flip, and Channel Your Anxiety

Key Points to Discuss:

- Anxiety and creative problem-solving are more connected than most people realize — anxious energy, properly channeled, can sharpen creative thinking rather than block it.
- Part 3 is the book's practical toolkit. Highlight a few favorites as a group: the "What if?" journaling technique (reframing worries as actionable questions), emotion regulation strategies, and the steps to cultivate a growth mindset.
- This is the wrap-up session — the goal is for everyone to leave with one or two tools they will actually try, not just discuss.

Discussion Questions:

13. Has anxious energy ever sharpened your thinking or led you to a creative solution?
14. Of all the tools in Part 3 (the "What if?" technique, emotion regulation, growth mindset steps), which one feels most useful to you right now?
15. Looking back across the whole book, what is one insight you're taking with you — and how might it change the way you approach your own recovery, caregiving, or daily life?

FACILITATOR NOTES

- ★ You do not need to use every discussion question — pick 2–3 that feel most relevant to the group in the moment.
- ★ Encourage participants who haven't read the section to share their reactions to hearing the ideas live — this is often where the richest conversation happens.
- ★ Consider closing each session by asking everyone to share one takeaway in a single sentence — a simple, low-pressure way to consolidate the discussion before people leave.
- ★ Session 5 doubles as a soft launch point for the next book — have the title ready to announce.