

RELEASING FEAR AND ANXIETY

Fear and anxiety are emotions that your thoughts and imagination create. You are afraid and anxious of what you imagine might happen in the future.

The only exception is when someone is standing in front of you threatening to do you physical harm, which is a unique present fear. But how often has this happened? In my own life, I can remember only a few times when this happened to me. And that was usually during childhood. However, you still experience fear and anxiety because your imagination has a powerful ability to create these feelings.

Why you experience fear and anxiety

There are a number of reasons why humans experience fear and anxiety. Among them are protection, procrastination and fear of change.

Protection means we have coded past threats into our autobiographical memory so that we can bring up the menu of possible threats when we are reminded of that event (triggered) by sensory stimulus similar to that event. The story of some projected inevitable future suffering that we tell ourselves in that moment is our trauma narrative.

Procrastination means we do not want to do something. We make ourselves anxious so that we can excuse ourselves for not doing it.

Fear of change and the unknown means that, even though we may not particularly like how things are, we don't know what things will be like if we change, which is scary. All changes are stressful. But positive changes are less stressful than negative changes and both depend on our coping skills.

Our imaginations have a powerful ability to invent all kinds of scenarios of what might happen in the future, but the truth is that we simply don't know what the future holds for us until we get there.

Calming Your Mind

Fear and anxiety are vastly reduced in the present moment. If you focus your thoughts and your mind entirely on the present moment and simply observe where you are right now and what you are doing right now, there is little or no fear or anxiety.

Your ego mind is always searching for stimulation. It rushes around constantly in a never-ending search for ways to improve your life, set priorities, solve problems, indulge expectations, create judgments, project trauma narratives, etc. It is trying to help you, and in its efforts to help, it continually creates scenarios, narratives, and stories some of which are scary. It's very helpful to find ways to calm your mind and bring it into the present moment.

The challenge for most of us is that we are not accustomed to observing what is happening in our minds. We just accept that our mind exists and let it do its own thing. We accept that the mind has “a mind of its own.” Mindfulness is a skill set that helps us observe our mind and pay attention to what it’s doing. How do you pay attention to your mind?

You may have noticed that when you have a thought, it starts a chain reaction so that you register some emotion, and that emotion then creates a need to take action. Thoughts give rise to emotions that are the engine of behaviors. Your body responds to what your feelings and thoughts are urging it to do. In the case of fear and anxiety the outcome behavior is usually some combination of fight, flight, freeze, or fawn.

Mindfulness can help you reverse that chain reaction. Keeping your body still can calm your emotions and still the mind. For thousands of years meditation has been used as a tool or skill set to still the body, observe thoughts and bring them into the present moment. This is why meditators sit still, watching their thoughts by focusing on the breath or using a centering prayer or mantra technique. Through this process you also begin to observe and then experience reduced fear and anxiety in the immediate present moment.

