

a n i n s t a n t h e l p b o o k f o r t e e n s

the mindfulness & acceptance workbook for teen anxiety

activities to help you overcome
fears & worries using acceptance
& commitment therapy

*** cope with stress**

*** deal with difficult
thoughts & emotions**

*** build resilience**



SHERI L. TURRELL, PhD
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FOREWORD BY LOUISE L. HAYES, PhD

"The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Teen Anxiety by Turrell, McCurry, and Bell is an excellent resource for anxious teens and the adults who want to help them. The book is divided into two main sections: Parts I and II, which provide psychoeducation; and Parts III through VII, which cover skills such as defusion, valuing, and more. Chapter layouts are consistent and aesthetically pleasing. Each chapter includes didactic information, stories, and activities that normalize and concretize difficult ideas. The acronyms used throughout the book (DOTS, LLAMA) are quite catchy and useful for adolescent readers. Links to audio files will benefit adolescents too! Highly recommended!"

—**Amy R. Murrell, PhD**, associate professor in the department of psychology at the University of North Texas, coauthor of *The Joy of Parenting*, and author of *I See Me*

"Rather than telling people what to think, this workbook encourages teens to try things and learn from their own experiences. Readers who give these exercises a go will gain so much and feel supported along the way."

—**Ben Sedley**, clinical psychologist, and author of *Stuff That Sucks*

"This is a truly excellent self-help book for teens struggling with anxiety—which, as far as I can see, means just about every teenager on the planet! In teen-friendly language, this book takes readers step-by-step through a wealth of powerful tools and strategies, to help them develop resilience, courage, and confidence to cope with the many challenges of this difficult phase of life. So, if you want to help teens live mindfully, be more self-compassionate, get on well with their peers, and act effectively guided by their own core values, this book will make it a whole lot easier for you to do that: a great resource both for parents to use with their kids, and for therapists to use with their clients."

—**Russ Harris**, author of *The Happiness Trap* and *ACT Made Simple*

"Turrell, McCurry, and Bell provide an extremely practical and extraordinary resource for helping teens who are struggling with anxiety, fears, and worries. Written by three very experienced acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) clinicians, *The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Teen Anxiety* is highly engaging, compassionate, and accessible. The book provides a step-by-step guide that really helps teens with anxiety to stop running away from anxiety and mindfully embrace the fullness of their values and lives. This book is a must-have that every teen and anyone who works with young people will treasure."

—**Emanuele Rossi, PsyD**, licensed clinical psychologist and psychotherapist, peer-reviewed ACT trainer, and ACT instructor at Scuola di Psicoterapia Cognitiva in Italy

“If you work with young people who struggle with worry or anxiety, I strongly recommend this book. It does an excellent job of helping young people accept themselves and their worries, whilst also encouraging them to build a life inside value and meaning. It has a lot of easy-to-use worksheets, which can be delivered flexibly in different stages of therapy. The exercises follow a nice progression. They start out by normalizing and raising awareness about anxiety, and then gradually shift to building skills and creating new patterns of behavior. Practitioners and the young people they work with will find this book extremely helpful.”

—**Joseph Ciarrochi**, professor at the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education at Australian Catholic University, and coauthor of *Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life for Teens* and *The Thriving Adolescent*

“Every teen that struggles with anxiety needs to read this book! It’s based on a treatment that has strong scientific support, is written by experts, and is also jargon-free. However, the real jewels of this book are the many concrete exercises that help teens learn and explore that they’re more than anxiety, figure out what really matters to them, allow those anxious feelings ‘to be,’ and practice how to handle anxiety-provoking situations step-by-step. This is a fantastic book for teens, clinicians working with teens, and parents who want to get extra help for their kids!”

—**Patricia E. Zurita Ona, PsyD**, founder of East Bay Behavior Therapy Center, author of *Parenting a Troubled Teen* and *Escaping the Emotional Rollercoaster*, and coauthor of *Mind and Emotions*

“What a great book! As a clinician who specializes in anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) work with children, adolescents, and families, I’m happy to see a workbook specific to teens. This book will be a very useful tool for clinicians doing exposure-based work with adolescents. It is written in a down-to-earth style that will be easily consumed by teens. It’s also well structured to allow a gradual introduction to skills critical to facing fears. I’ll certainly be handing it out to my young clients.”

—**Lisa W. Coyne, PhD**, cofounder and director of the New England Center for OCD and Anxiety (www.newenglandocd.org), founder and senior clinical consultant of the McLean OCD Institute for Children and Adolescents, and assistant professor at Harvard Medical School.

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foreword

Young people are the future. We adults have a responsibility to help them reach their potential so they can create a future that is rich with vitality and meaning. Anxiety whispers quietly, “Be small, stay safe,” whereas the acceptance and mindfulness process found in this book gives a call to “Live boldly, try your best.” It is this latter message that we want young people to hear.

The activities inside this self-help book rest on two important premises.

The first is a message of compassion to young people: you are not broken. Anxiety has become such a problem that it has reached extraordinarily high levels. This tells us that it is not a problem just within the individual. It is bigger than that. Anxiety can be precipitated in young people through biological and developmental vulnerabilities, broader social and community factors, and even global threats of political and environmental change. For many young people, anxiety comes through a combination of these internal and external threats. This means our answers for them must also be embedded in a broad context, not only looking within a young person for what is wrong, but also firmly embedding the issue in their context of learning, society, and community.

The second premise is that anxiety is not your enemy; it is a message. For generations, the dominant culture has said the opposite, that anxiety must be controlled, ignored, turned off, and shut down. Research now shows us that control is often the problem, not the solution. When we give this control agenda to young people, we adults fail them. If anxiety begins as a message that something is wrong, feels unsafe or alarming, we should not be surprised when young people cannot merely turn this anxiety off. Our task is to help young people know how to listen to their internal messages and which ones need attending, learn not to be afraid of themselves, and develop the confidence to respond. When we do this, we can help young people understand anxiety, bring compassion to their struggle, and learn how to move forward in their lives.

This book uses acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) to bring these two premises together to help teens with anxiety. ACT is an approach that sets out to create

psychological flexibility, which is the ability to do what one cares about even when one's thoughts and feelings suggest it is too hard. When anxiety brings messages that our thoughts and feelings are dangerous, ACT counters this with strategies to help us listen, become aware, decide whether a message is what it purports to be, and turn to our values. ACT has a solid evidence base in treatment for anxiety at multiple levels, from generalized anxiety to panic disorder to obsessive compulsive disorder. This book turns that ACT research base into basic steps that will help young readers learn what is needed to turn away from anxiety, a life-narrowing phenomenon, and focus instead on a life well lived.

The authors are experienced clinicians who have spent their careers with young people, hoping to change their lives and help them live well. Young readers will find the basic steps clear and easy to understand. Adult helpers will also be able to use this book to provide support. Readers begin their journey by first learning what anxiety is, then follow a step-by-step path through acceptance, mindfulness, and valued actions.

It is a worthwhile journey to take.

—Louise L. Hayes, PhD

The University of Melbourne Centre for Youth Mental Health

note to readers

So, here you are with *The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Teen Anxiety* in your hands. You may have picked it up yourself, or someone who cares about you may have handed it to you. Either way, we really hope it helps you in some important ways.

This book is for teens who struggle with anxiety. Typically, anxiety shows up as thoughts about some future event: *This is going to be bad*, or *They'll all laugh the minute I begin talking*. Anxiety often involves feelings (for example, worried and nervous, maybe even sad, angry, and ashamed) and body sensations (such as sweaty palms, restlessness, light-headedness, and stomachaches) that show up, too. When we experience a big burst of bodily sensations because of something dangerous happening *right now* (for example, we come close to getting into a car accident), that's called *fear*. Anxiety, on the other hand, is what we feel when we are stressed or scared, but when there is no immediate, actual danger.

Mental health professionals may talk about different types of anxiety, such as generalized anxiety (lots of worries about lots of things), social anxiety (worries that other people will think badly of you, worry about embarrassing yourself), panic attacks (sudden appearance of intense physical sensations with fears that you are dying or losing control), obsessive-compulsive disorder (repetitive, intrusive thoughts and rituals), and many others. We're less interested in these categories and more interested in how anxiety is showing up in your life *and how it might be getting in your way*.

There are some important things for you to know before you start to read this book. First, anxiety is a normal human emotion. Because you "have" anxiety, you are not abnormal, you are not broken, and you do not need to be fixed! How do we know? *Because anxiety is just too common for it to be something wrong*. We all experience anxiety at some time. Just like happiness, excitement, joy, pain, embarrassment, guilt, shame, and sadness, anxiety is one of those things you are going to feel because you are a real human being, living a life, and experiencing it intensely.

Yes, being human means you will feel anxious, *but it does not mean you have to let anxiety run your life*. Sometimes teens feel anxiety and just keep going, doing what they need to do. No one would even know they are anxious on the inside because, on the outside, they just look like they're taking care of business. At other times, they might feel anxiety coming on and automatically take big steps to avoid the anxious feelings or thoughts. Most of us do both, keep going or start avoiding, at one time or another. If you are one of those people who feels things very deeply, you may have found yourself avoiding people, places, or situations that make you feel anxious, and you may start to do things to avoid thinking anxious thoughts and feeling anxious sensations and emotions. These "coping mechanisms" may provide some short-term relief, but you may also find that you're giving up a lot of living in the bargain.

We are going to teach you to stop running from anxiety (a tiring race at best because anxiety is inside each of us, and it's hard to outrun ourselves)—to let the thoughts and feelings just be there and to take them along for the ride of your life! The approach we will use in this book is based on acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). This is work that involves accepting, or allowing, all of the thoughts and feelings you have, including any difficult ones, and challenging yourself every day to bring them along with you while you do what is important and meaningful in your life. This is difficult work that's worth doing. We know this because we've worked with hundreds of teens who have struggled with anxiety, used this approach, and put their lives back on track. With patience, practice, and support, you can do it, too! Opposite to how it may seem, taking an attitude of kindness toward yourself, your normal human feelings, and your normal human reactions to them really helps.

how to use this book

Using this book is simple: read each activity and then do it! The skills in this book build on each other, so we strongly suggest you read the book from front to back, in order. Check out each activity, think about it, try it out, and then go to the next one. We want you to learn by doing the activities and noticing what changes. Try each activity before you go on to the next. If you forget something, please go back and review the section and try the activities as many times as you need to. The entire book may take you seven to twelve weeks to complete.

We have included voice recordings and other helpful materials on the website connected to this book—please check them out at <http://www.newharbinger.com/41153>. If you're working with a clinician, such as a psychologist or counselor, do let them know about this book and share the ideas and exercises with them. Also, you might want to let your parents know you are working with this book and, if you'd like, tell them about the activities you are doing. A note for parents follows below.

All right, let's get started!

note to parents

This book will not make your teen's anxiety disappear overnight. Nothing will do that. What it will do is help your teen navigate life more fully, anxiety and all. If you find that working with a book is not enough and your teen is still struggling, therapy may be recommended for your teen and your family, or in some cases, medication for your teen's anxiety. If your teen is not making progress, please consider these other options seriously.

note to clinicians

If you are working with a teen who struggles with anxiety, we hope the activities in this book can serve as an adjunct to your therapy, used either in-session or between sessions to augment learning. Each of the seven parts takes about a week to complete.

Part I

The Basics of Anxiety

1 getting to know your anxiety

for you to know

We'd like to start with some basic information about anxiety to help you recognize what your anxiety looks and feels like and to explore the ways you have tried so far to deal with it. Later, we'll ask you to consider some different approaches to anxiety.

Anxiety, sometimes described as nervousness, dread, or apprehension, is a normal human emotion. Other words for it are "stress," "worry," and, sometimes, "panic." Anxiety includes thoughts (in the form of words, pictures, or images), feelings, physical sensations, and behaviors. Thoughts are what would appear in the thought bubbles of a cartoon strip of you or, if people could read your mind, what they would hear you saying inside your head. Anxious feelings (emotions) that show up may be energetic (nervousness) or heavy (dread). Often, other strong feelings may show up, such as anger or sadness. Physical sensations can show up anywhere in your body and include things such as nausea, blushing, sweating, headaches, and a racing heart. Behavior is what you do with your hands or feet and what you say—it is what we'd see and hear you do if you were in a movie. It is important to notice and identify your thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behaviors that show up when you're anxious so you can work with them. And while you're at it, see if you can be a bit gentle with them and with yourself. Believe it or not, your human feelings are there to help you. We'll explain more about this later.

* *Althea's Story* *

Althea was struggling to finish her last year of high school. Overwhelmed and worried most of the time, she stayed up late studying, hardly slept, and woke up every morning nauseous and exhausted. She was scared she wouldn't graduate or get into university. She dreaded having to stay at home another year and falling behind her friends, who were all doing well.

for you explore

Look at the following list, and decide whether each item is a thought, feeling, physical sensation, or behavior. It is important to know the difference as you go through the activities in this book because the most helpful way of handling each is sometimes different. So, let's get started. Read the description in the first column in the table below; decide whether it is a thought, a feeling, a sensation, or a behavior; and make a checkmark in the corresponding column.

	Thought	Feeling	Sensation	Behavior
1. Butterflies in your stomach				
2. People think I'm boring.				
3. Heart is pounding				
4. Leaving school before you had to give your presentation				
5. I feel like such a loser.				
6. Anger about missing out on things				
7. Worry				
8. If I'm anxious, there must be something wrong with me.				
9. Feeling really light-headed and kind of disconnected				
10. Turning down a friend's request to hang out				

Compare your answers to the answers listed in the back of the book to be sure you understand thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behaviors as you read on.

more to explore

Over the next few days, think about moments when you have felt anxious, and make some notes about what you were thinking, what feelings you had, and the physical sensations that showed up. Add a note about what you did (your behavior) in reaction to these. Here’s an example from Althea.

- Situation:** *Trying to do homework*
- Thoughts:** *I’m going to fail. My friends will think I’m stupid.*
- Feelings:** *worried, sad, hopeless, angry*
- Physical Sensations:** *Nauseous and exhausted*
- Behavior:** *Staying up late*

Situation: _____

Thoughts: _____

Feelings: _____

Physical Sensations: _____

Behavior: _____

Situation: _____

Thoughts: _____

Feelings: _____

Physical Sensations: _____

Behavior: _____

Situation: _____

Thoughts: _____

Feelings: _____

Physical Sensations: _____

Behavior: _____

Now that you know what your anxiety looks like, you are ready to move on to the next activity and get curious about trying to control or get rid of symptoms of anxiety.

2

trying to control your anxiety

for you to know

Let's face it, we live in a world where we are taught that certain feelings are bad, happiness is the preferred way to feel, and if we aren't happy, we should fix this. So, when we feel anxious (or stressed, overwhelmed, or nervous), we're often mad at ourselves for having these feelings—quite unfairly, as you'll learn later—and we try to make them go away. We might avoid people, places, or situations to prevent the thoughts and feelings from showing up in the first place, and once they do show up, we might distract ourselves so we don't really notice them. We might even hear other people tell us, "Calm down," or "Take your mind off it." The things we do to prevent or try to get rid of thoughts and feelings are called "control strategies" because they are about controlling, or getting rid of, what we are feeling inside. Sometimes control strategies are helpful. They make us feel better for a while, which is what makes it so tempting to use them over and over again. We use the term DOTS—which stands for distracting, opting out or avoiding, thinking, self-harm—to categorize the control strategies that are commonly used by teens to avoid feeling anxious or to get rid of anxiety once it starts.

* *Tania's Story* *

Tania really, really wanted to be one of the popular kids in school. But just being around people made her nervous and worried that she'd say or do the wrong thing. For days before any party, dance, or even just certain classes (the ones with popular kids in them), she'd anticipate everything anyone might say and how she'd reply. She would rehearse every word she might say and even how she might laugh. But when the actual situations came up, Tania found that all her planning and rehearsing didn't fit with what people actually did. Then Tania felt completely lost and scared, unable to speak, and worried that she was laughing the wrong way at all the wrong times.

for you to explore

The acronym DOTS can help you remember and recognize the control strategies you use (Harris 2009).

D = Distraction

This includes any activity done with the intent of distracting you from anxious thoughts and feelings, such as watching TV, playing on the computer, looking at social media, reading, cleaning, and so forth.

O = Opting out

These are the people, places, and situations that you avoid, or opt out of, to prevent anxious thoughts and feelings from showing up. This might include making excuses or saying no to things you actually want to do. Avoiding homework, social events, school, and job interviews are examples of opting out.

T = Thinking

This refers to thinking in other “time zones,” like getting stuck in wishing the past was different or worrying about the future. Sometimes worrying seems to promise some relief from anxiety. Most of the time, it just keeps us looped into worry thoughts without a solution. Examples include, *What if I get sick?*, *Something bad might happen*, and *I’ll fail*.

S = Self-harm

This includes anything that is harmful to your body, such as eating, exercising, or sleeping too much or too little; drugs; alcohol; gambling; cutting; burning; and thoughts about trying to kill yourself. Shopping and sex can be included here too if they are done for the purpose of making anxious thoughts and feelings go away.

What control strategies, or DOTS, do you use to try to manage your anxiety? For example, Tania uses a lot of unhelpful thinking in the form of *time traveling* into an imagined future and planning what to say. Use the table below to track the control strategies that you notice yourself using over the next three days.

activity 2 ✱ trying to control your anxiety

	D	O	T	S
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				

Using control strategies like DOTS to get rid of anxiety some of the time is just fine. But when you rely on your control strategies too often, it can actually make things worse for you. So, it's important to begin to notice your behavior and be aware of your “go-to” DOTS.

more to explore

Think about the strategies you have used over the past few days to try to control your anxious thoughts and feelings and ask yourself how well your DOTS are actually helping you control your anxiety. In the table above, put a checkmark beside any DOTS that helped you feel better for a little while. Next, circle any of your DOTS that helped you get rid of thoughts and feelings permanently, meaning they never came back. Many people notice that DOTS work well for a little while, but DOTS don't get rid of anxiety permanently.

We're all likely to find ourselves using control strategies at times. But it's a problem when they get in the way of what we want out of life. Learning to notice when we're using them is an important first step in finding new and better ways of coping with anxiety.

3

the cost of controlling anxiety

for you to know

Using control strategies to reduce your anxiety once in a while is just fine—we all do it. This includes things like distracting, avoiding, and ruminating (thinking on and on about the same thing with no solution). In this activity, we'd like you to investigate how well your control strategies are working for you. It's important to notice the long-term consequences of your control strategies.

Many people notice that when they do things to try to control their anxiety, anxiety is still there, somewhere, running in the background of their mind and body. And to make it more complicated, they might notice that the control strategies they are using to reduce anxiety actually create new problems and more anxiety, for example, falling behind in school after avoiding school for a few days in an attempt to control anxiety. Often, we use control strategies without even knowing it, and that can feel like we have no choice. As you notice what you do and how it works out, you will start to have a sense that you have a choice about what you do.

* *Frankie's Story* *

Frankie noticed that it was taking longer and longer to fall asleep each night. Instead of watching a few videos, he was now watching movies until he couldn't keep his eyes open, which meant he was staying up later and later. Frankie usually didn't get much sleep as a result of this control strategy. Once he got to school, he would start thinking about his lack of sleep, and his anxiety would build up again as he worried about how to get through the day. Frankie needed something at school to help him feel less anxious during the day, and eventually he started smoking to find a sense of relaxation. Frankie was now stuck in what seemed like a vicious cycle to get control over his anxiety, which was really getting in his way of doing well at school.

for you to explore

Over the next few days, think about the control strategies you used when you were anxious and think about the benefits and costs of those control strategies. Use the table below to record your findings. We've filled out a line from Frankie to get you started.

Control Strategy	Benefits	Costs
Watching videos until asleep	Didn't notice anxiety when watching videos	Tired at school, can't study Failed test, breath bad from smoking

Teens often report that their control strategies have a tremendous cost in terms of consequences. For example, although keeping really busy may help you quiet down your fears of failure for a little while, later you may realize you've run out of energy for things that matter, that you've put all your energy in the wrong places.

more to explore

Go back over the list you made above, and this time, add in what happened with your emotions in terms of the benefit or cost when you used each control strategy. Did anxiety go away or come back? Was it more or less intense? Did other emotions show up? Add these into your answers. Frankie would have added in the benefit of "less anxiety" when watching videos, and under costs, he would add "anxiety came back the next day and was worse because I was tired and had a test, and now I'm angry and ashamed."

If your control strategies are costing you a lot, being aware of what you do and the consequences can help you make different choices.

can anyone control anxiety?

4

for you to know

As you may have noticed from the earlier activities, whatever we do to distract ourselves from our anxious thoughts and feelings usually makes things more difficult in some way. So why do we use distractions? Because, in the short term, they work. They take us away from noticing our thoughts and feelings, or at least from noticing them as intensely. There can be a lot of pressure to “feel better” and control our worrying. And many people, young and old, feel badly about themselves (another worry!) when they can’t control their anxiety. Trying to control thoughts and feelings, however, can be harder than you think. Try these activities to see just how hard it can be.

* *Mateo’s Story* *

Mateo arrived with his father for his first therapy session. When the therapist asked what Mateo was struggling with, his dad replied, “He’s anxious, and we want him to be happy.” Mateo added, “I am constantly worried about my future, and I need these thoughts to go away.” Mateo was putting a lot of time and energy into getting rid of his thoughts and feelings: he was spending hours on his computer, on social media, or sleeping. When he stopped doing these things, his thoughts and feelings came back. Mateo’s time on the computer was increasing to the point that he rarely fell asleep before 2:00 a.m. and could hardly make it to school.

for you to explore

Read the following instructions first, and then close your eyes, if you're comfortable with that, and begin the activity below (adapted from Harris 2009). If you're not comfortable closing your eyes, just look down to the floor without focusing on anything and turn your attention inside. You can find audio instructions for this activity online at <http://www.newharbinger.com/41153>.

controlling thoughts

Bring to mind a moment from earlier today. Watching this moment, take a picture of it in your mind in as much detail as possible, as if it were a photo you would post on Instagram. (It might be something like an image of you picking up this book, texting a friend, or walking into class.) In the space below, draw the "photo" that's in your mind.



Now, *delete* the photo from your mind! Forget the image—erase it. Not just for a moment or two, but make it actually go away. If this hasn't happened, try harder for a moment.

Were you able to delete the photo? (Circle your answer.)

YES

NO

If you circled yes, can you answer this question: What was the photo you deleted? If you can answer this question, perhaps it isn't gone! We admit, it's a bit of a trick question, but we think it makes the point that it's impossible to delete our mind's photos, our memories, or our thoughts.

controlling feelings

Now let's see what happens when you try to control feelings—you have probably had some experience with this already. Think of a time in the past when you felt nervous, stressed, worried, or anxious. Did anyone tell you to stop feeling that way?

Were you able to control your feelings?

YES

NO

Have you discovered any strategies to *permanently* control your feelings, allowing you to turn feelings on and off like a light switch?

controlling physical sensations

Grab a lemon and cut a slice. Hold the slice in your hand and just look at it. Now, bring the slice of lemon to your nose and gently sniff the lemon, taking in the smell. Now, for the next few steps of this activity, here's the challenge: *don't salivate!* (In other words, don't have the feeling of your mouth watering.) First, lick the lemon or put a bit of juice on your tongue and notice what happens. Now take a bite of the lemon or lick some juice, and notice what happens in your mouth. Did you remember not to salivate?

Were you able to control salivation?

YES

NO

Take a look at your answers above. Were you able to control your thoughts by erasing the “photo” of an event earlier in your day? Were you able to control your feelings when another person told you to stop feeling whatever you were feeling? Were you able to control your inclination to salivate when you tasted the lemon? Is it possible to actually control your thoughts, feelings, or physical sensations just because you want to? It may appear that the people around you are doing this successfully. Trust us, they are no better at it than you are—and neither are we!

more to explore

As you go about your day, today and onward, notice the messages that are out there about controlling your feelings. (For example, “Just think about something else.”) This may come from well-meaning family, friends, or others in your life; the media; or elsewhere. Make some notes about what you notice.

You might consider sharing what you are learning with others if that will be supportive for you.

There is a simple reason for your inability to control thoughts, feelings, and sensations: you are human! Anxiety is like any other feeling: we all have it, just like happiness, sadness, fear, shame, anger, and guilt. You can’t control having feelings. *You can learn to control what you do when feelings show up.* This is the focus of the rest of the book. Let’s work on living with anxiety and living well.

Part II

How We Misread Anxiety

5

comparing to others

for you to know

The tendency to compare is very normal and is sometimes helpful. It's one of the things our mind does to help keep us safe. For early humans, knowing who was bigger—they or the wild animal in front of them—was likely very helpful. For contestants in modern reality shows, such as *Survivor*, comparing might be a useful way to keep an eye on your competition. You know whom you have to beat and what you have to improve at so you have a better chance of winning and staying part of “the tribe.”

It is even more normal for teenagers to compare themselves to each other because at this age, being part of a “tribe” is very important—it matters. When it comes to you, your school marks, and your peer group, your comparing mind might take over to make sure you are good enough to remain part of the group. With all the technology around us, comparing happens faster than it ever has! But comparing is not helpful if it just makes you feel badly and leads nowhere. In this activity, we'll work on ways to notice when your mind is comparing, to step back, and to decide whether your comparing mind is helping you.

* *Eli's Story* *

Every morning was a nightmare for Eli. As soon as she woke up, she'd check her phone to see what others had posted and how many likes she had on her posts. Her mind got busy comparing herself to others before she'd even gotten out of bed. Eli was late for school every day, spending more and more time in front of the mirror, picking at every little detail about her face, her hair, and her body. She wanted the perfect look, the one she could post and feel good about, the post that others would like. Finally, Eli hit her breaking point and decided that listening to these comparisons was not helping her and that, in fact, it was making life tougher. Eli looked in the mirror and described what she saw, just the facts, no comparisons, and left the house for school. She still felt anxious, but she also felt determined. Eli stopped comparing herself to others because it was not helping her do what matters.

for you to explore

Make some notes about the thoughts you have that include comparisons. There are probably some that happen often that you can think of right now and maybe more that will come to mind over the next few days. After you write them down, make some notes about what you usually do (behaviors) if you focus on one of these thoughts and how you feel. Here's an example to help you get started.

Comparing Thought: *I am not as smart as Susie.*

Behavior: *I don't study.*

Feelings: *Sad, ashamed*

1. **Comparing Thought:** _____

Behavior: _____

Feelings: _____

2. **Comparing Thought:** _____

Behavior: _____

Feelings: _____

3. **Comparing Thought:** _____

Behavior: _____

Feelings: _____

4. **Comparing Thought:** _____

Behavior: _____

Feelings: _____

Many people notice that their mind repeats the same comparisons over and over and that they get stuck in the same behaviors over and over.

more to explore

Looking at what you wrote down above, try to rephrase your comparing thoughts as *facts* only. Remember, if it’s a fact and if one of us were a fly on the wall in the moments you describe, we would see or hear the same things. Then make a guess about what your behavior would look like if you “followed the facts.” Try to remember that your mind is trying to help you stay in the “tribe” and stay safe—so treat yourself and your mind kindly when it’s busy comparing. When you restate comparisons as facts, you’ll know what to do based on what is really happening and do something that matters.

We’ll give you an example to get you started:

Comparing Thought: *Susie’s Instagram pictures are better than mine.*

Fact(s): *Susie’s picture has twenty likes, and mine has ten.*

Behavior *Connect with friends*

Feelings: *Connected, relieved, nervous*

1. Comparing Thought: _____

Fact(s): _____

Behavior If I Follow the Facts: _____

Feelings: _____

2. Comparing Thought: _____

Fact(s): _____

Behavior If I Follow the Facts: _____

Feelings: _____

3. Comparing Thought: _____

Fact(s): _____

Behavior If I Follow the Facts: _____

Feelings: _____

4. Comparing Thought: _____

Fact(s): _____

Behavior If I Follow the Facts: _____

Feelings: _____

Actions based on the facts of the situation, rather than on how we imagine we compare with others, usually give us some distance from our comparing thoughts. And, most importantly, when we follow the facts, it helps us get to where we want to go.

6

what matters makes you anxious

for you to know

Most people we know want to get rid of their anxiety. That's a problem because feelings are really tough to control and absolutely impossible not to have. Feelings don't work like a light switch. To be who we want to be and do what matters most, we will have to do things that are new or challenging, and our brain may register this as potential danger to be avoided. When we care about something and take steps that are important to us, there will almost always be more anxiety showing up than when we don't care. Our mind might tell us to run from the things that scare us, but at these times, we might benefit from hearing our anxiety as saying, "Go toward," not, "Get away." When you get used to the idea that anxiety is a signal, telling you that you are going in the direction that matters to you, you won't have so many misunderstandings in your mind when you step out of your comfort zone.

* *Cameron's Story* *

Cameron was sitting at home enjoying dinner with his family when the topic of university came up. His parents said they wanted him to pick a university and courses that would make him "happy" and then started to talk about how competitive it is to get into a good university, how expensive university is, and how awful life is if you don't get into a good university. They told Cameron about how hard they had to work at school to get the house, clothes, and vacations they all enjoy now. Cameron knew his parents were trying to motivate him to study, and he did have a test tomorrow. As he sat silently, Cameron noticed his heart was pounding, he felt dizzy and nauseous, and his mind suddenly went blank. Feeling like this, studying was the last thing Cameron wanted to do. He listened to his feelings and heard the message, "Run far, run fast." Pausing and remembering that anxiety shows up when things matter, Cameron left the table and grabbed his school books.

for you to explore

Which of the following things do you care about? For the items you circle yes in the “I Care About This” column, write a few words in the “Why This Matters” column so you can become more aware of why you care about this issue. Then circle yes or no depending on whether the item listed makes you anxious. What pattern do you notice in your answers?

	I Care About This	Why This Matters	Anxious
1. Wearing socks that match	Y / N		Y / N
2. Eating a cold lunch	Y / N		Y / N
3. Driving for the first time	Y / N		Y / N
4. My bedroom is messy	Y / N		Y / N
5. Parents are grouchy	Y / N		Y / N
6. Sharing an opinion	Y / N		Y / N
7. Missed favorite TV show	Y / N		Y / N
8. Friend did not text me back	Y / N		Y / N
9. Submitting school project late	Y / N		Y / N
10. It's raining outside	Y / N		Y / N

You may have noticed a pattern of more anxiety showing up with the items in the list above that matter to you. For example, if Cameron hadn't heard his mind's message to go after what mattered to him (school), he would have gone out with friends and failed his test. Seeing such patterns helps us be ready and willing to experience anxiety when something is important to us.

more to explore

Over the next few days, notice when anxiety shows up and ask yourself if it is connected to something that matters. Make some notes about what you discover.

We hope you are tuning in a bit more now to what's important to you in life and will be more prepared to experience some anxiety in relation to the things that matter to you.

You may also notice that, at times, you get anxious about things that have never happened. For example, perhaps you have never been bitten by a dog, yet you are terrified of dogs. How does this happen? We'll explore that in the next activity!

everything connects to everything

7

for you to know

The human mind has the unique ability to connect everything to everything. Our mind is very skilled at making connections between what we experience outside our skin with our five senses (what we see, smell, taste, hear, and feel), making a mental image of the experience, and then connecting it to what's inside our mind and body: our hopes, dreams, thoughts, images, memories, feelings, and sensations. The stuff inside may be things we've experienced personally or things we have heard or read about. Because everything connects to everything, so does how we feel about things.

Whether your mind's ability to connect is helpful or not depends on the circumstances. This ability allows you to feel joy and excitement when you're sitting at home daydreaming about the person you have a crush on and imagining all the possibilities of a relationship with them in the future. This same skill kicks in when you see money on the kitchen table, and moments later, holding on to this image of money, your mind jumps to thoughts about wanting money, needing a job to get money, and having a potentially disastrous job interview. As you imagine this, your mind's threat system is activated, and anxiety kicks in, even though nothing dangerous is actually happening. As you continue through this book, we'll teach you to notice anxiety, check in with what's happening, and move toward what matters. You might notice anxiety, check in, and then find there is something you have been avoiding and need to deal with. Or you might find that you are anxious because of the mind's ability to connect everything to everything and to react to your imaginings with anxiety, like being scared of dogs or failure when you have never had a bad experience with either.

* *Jayden's Story* *

Jayden was trying to get his room cleaned so his parents would stop hassling him about what a mess it was. He absentmindedly picked up a ring from his dresser. Before he knew it, twenty minutes had passed, and he was smiling with tears running down his face. What was going on? Jayden's ring was very special to him because it was a gift, passed along to him from his grandfather before he died. Once Jayden pulled himself back into the present moment, he realized the ring had a certain look to it and a certain smell to it, which conjured up images of his grandfather. As he thought of his grandfather and their time together, he could almost feel his grandfather hugging him and hear his grandfather's voice. Jayden felt the sadness and the happiness all at once as he experienced the connections his mind made to the ring. Then Jayden remembered his grandfather telling him to "listen to your parents" and realized his room wasn't clean yet. This thought connected to feelings, and suddenly Jayden was anxious. He began cleaning his room.

for you to explore

Pick up a familiar object that you don't feel particularly positive or negative about, something that is just there, at home with you, that you feel neutral about. When we say "neutral," we mean that if the object were thrown away and never seen again, you wouldn't care. This could include a tissue box, an apple, a spoon, or anything else that is around. Make some notes about your five-senses experience of the object with whichever of your senses are appropriate. What does it look like, smell like, taste like, sound like, and feel like? For example, an apple might be red, feel cool to the touch, smell spicy, sound crunchy, and taste tart. Try to focus on the object and your experience of the object. If your mind wanders off, just notice that and pull your focus back to the object. Jot down what you noticed in the chart below under "Outside (Five-Senses) Experience."

Object	Outside (Five-Senses) Experience	Inside Experience

Then spend a minute or two looking at the object, let your mind wander, and notice where it goes. Notice what thoughts, memories, judgments, feelings, and sensations show up. You might notice your mind thinking that the apple you are looking at brings up memories of apple picking and feelings of excitement as a child, for example. Jot this down under “Inside Experience” in the chart above.

Now, go back to the object you were experiencing with your five senses, and ask yourself, Do you feel more positive or negative about the object than you did at the beginning when it was just the object?

Often, we notice a shift in how we feel about an object based on what other things it reminds us of or is connected to. If a tissue looks to you like a ski hill and brings up memories of a fun winter sport, you might look at the tissue again and find yourself smiling. If it is connected to memories of a really bad cold you had last winter, you may find yourself glaring at the tissue!

more to explore

Over the next few days, as you notice anxiety creeping in, pause and ask yourself, What am I anxious about? Sometimes you may find yourself anxious about something you need to deal with, likely something that matters to you, in your present world. Or, you may find you are anxious about things that are out of your control, like other people’s behavior or the future. Yet at other times, you may not be able to figure out what your anxiety is about. In these moments, it may be your mind making connections and *voilà*, anxiety shows up. There may be nothing you need to do, nothing to solve, and nothing to fix.

What Was I Anxious About?	Is There Something for Me to Do?

When you notice anxiety about things you can’t change or anxiety that has just popped up, your only option may be to notice this and say thank you to your normal human brain! After all, it can’t help itself from trying to keep you safe. Seriously, tell your mind, “Thank you; I appreciate your concern,” and then return to your five-senses experience. In the next section, we’ll help you develop your skills at noticing what is going on.

Part III

Noticing Skills

8

learning to notice

for you to know

In part 1, you learned that thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations are hard to get rid of or change, maybe impossible. As we realize that our efforts to get rid of thoughts and feelings don't work, we discover the only thing we really have control of is our own behavior. The problem is a lot of our time is spent behaving on "autopilot," from slapping the snooze bar in the morning to our bedtime routine and so much in between. This isn't necessarily a problem. In fact, because we don't have to think about them, habits and routines make life efficient and save us physical and mental energy. They only become a problem when anxiety shows up and we make moves on autopilot to get rid of thoughts and feelings without even knowing we are doing so. In these moments, you may not feel as though you have a choice—you just do what you are doing. Noticing is the first important step to handling your anxiety differently. This practice of noticing is sometimes called *mindfulness*.

* Cathy's Story *

Cathy had just started chilling with Tony. This was her first relationship, and she was really excited and, at the same time, really nervous. Cathy noticed her mind had this annoying habit: every time she started daydreaming about being with Tony, her mind would flip to thoughts about him rejecting her. Thoughts about not being pretty enough or smart enough showed up a lot. One Sunday, Cathy realized she had just spent hours changing her makeup and practicing hairstyles in hopes that Tony would like them. By the end of the day, she was feeling anxious and stressed. The problem was, while she was doing this, she missed a text from Tony, asking her to spend the day with him.

for you to explore

Over the next few days, go back over your day and reflect on what you might have done that was autopilot behavior. Likely you walked to school without noticing what was around you if you took the same route you always take. Perhaps you ate something without really noticing what it tasted like or sat in class without really listening. Make some notes about what you did and what you might have missed out on. We added Cathy’s answers as an example.

	What I Did on Autopilot	What Did I Miss Out On?
	Makeup and hair	Noticing how I actually looked, call from Tony
Day 1		
Day 2		
Day 3		

more to explore

Looking at your list above, try to do those same things with more “noticing.” This means slow down and, on purpose, direct your attention to the experience. Make a few notes about your five-senses experience. And when your mind wanders off into thinking and feeling, try to notice that happening, notice where your mind wandered to, and bring your focus back to the activity you chose. It might make you smile a little when you see how quickly your mind can take off somewhere. This happens to us, too.

	What I Did off Autopilot	What I Noticed with Five Senses
Day 1		
Day 2		
Day 3		

Bringing your attention back again and again is the important skill. It’s like doing push-ups for your mind.

noticing in everyday life

9

for you to know

We really want you to practice noticing in your everyday life. As your noticing skills grow, you will be able to give yourself a “pause button,” which is your opportunity to stop and make a choice about what to do next. Thoughts, images, judgments, comparisons to others, feelings, sensations, and the urge to avoid can sneak up when you’re not paying attention, catapulting you into autopilot and causing you to avoid, over and over. In this activity, we’re going to help you develop noticing skills in what you do every day. You might find you notice new things about your everyday life, or you might notice things you had forgotten about. Ultimately, keeping your attention on your present world will help you make decisions based on what’s happening in your life in the present.

* *Damian’s Story* *

Damian was frustrated and angry with his anxiety. He was fed up at having to work so hard to avoid it, only to have it come back again. Worse, he began to realize, was that most of what he worried about never actually ended up happening. What a waste of time and energy. In fact, he was so caught up in the work of avoiding anxiety that he was missing out on big chunks of life every day: assignments in class, what friends were telling him, the taste of the food he was eating.

Damian was determined to find a way to get out of his head. He’d heard about mindfulness from his parents, but their enthusiasm just turned him off. Still, he had to admit, he was intrigued. Damian decided to give it a try. He knew from what he’d heard on podcasts that he might find the present moment not very pleasant, but neither was life in his head. Either way, he’d feel anxiety. Focused on the present, he might experience anxiety when something that mattered needed his attention, but he’d have more of the life that he wanted.

for you to explore

Pick a few things to do that you do in your daily life and use them to practice noticing with your five senses. We've given you some options below—add your own as you like! Whatever you choose, slow down the activity, and try to focus fully and intentionally on that activity. Make some notes about what you notice. When your mind wanders off, try to notice that and bring your focus back to what you are doing. Try this a few minutes a day for at least a few days to get your practice going. You will likely benefit most if you can do this every day ... from now on!

Brushing your teeth

Putting on socks

Washing your hair

Putting on clothes

Riding the bus

Sitting in class

Listening to music

Listening to birds

Walking the dog

Watching cars go by

Looking at a flower

Eating breakfast

Patting a pet

Drinking tea or coffee

Watching trees sway

Hugging a friend

Drinking from the fountain

Walking in the hall

What I Did	What I Noticed (Five Senses)	What Showed Up Inside

more to explore

For more practice at breaking out of autopilot and noticing, try using your nondominant hand (that would be your left if you're right-handed) for things you normally use your dominant hand for. Give this a try for a few of the following activities for a few days and notice what it does to your ability to notice! Record your findings in the table below.

- Brushing your teeth
- Combing your hair
- Shaving (electric shavers only, please)
- Opening jars
- Unlocking and opening doors
- Using a fork, spoon, and knife
- Dialing your locker combination
- Writing (not for schoolwork that needs to be legible)
- Shooting baskets
- Kicking a soccer ball (you also have a nondominant foot)
- Using the remote control or your cell phone

What I Did	What I Noticed (Five Senses)	What Showed Up Inside

As you practice noticing, take note of what you find in your world and how that feels for you. There may be a lot more than anxiety to discover. This is an ongoing process, so try to practice every day.

10 noticing, even when anxiety shows up

for you to know

Most of us live inside a comfort zone to some degree. This is the life that allows us to feel safe and secure, where things are familiar and predictable. This is a life without anxiety. This is fine, unless our entire life gets too comfortable and we become trapped in trying to avoid feelings. Then we become “stuck.” Moving out of our comfort zone involves pushing our own limits, exploring the world, learning new things, and following our interests.

As we explored in activity 6, when we do things that push on our limits, anxiety has a funny way of showing up. Our mind wants to keep us safe, and to do that, it prefers to keep us stuck in our comfort zone, safe and out of harm’s way. So, as soon as you step out of that comfort zone, your mind will go from quiet chatter to ferocious screaming, predicting danger and ushering you back into your comfort zone where, by the way, you will still be anxious. In this activity, we want to help you do some noticing at moments when anxiety shows up so you can be anxious and exploring, instead of anxious and stuck. While you’re at this, we’d like to ask you to experiment with taking an attitude of kindness and compassion both toward your hard working, protective mind and toward yourself. Your mind really can’t help itself from working hard to keep you safe—that’s its main job! Whenever you notice it doing this, it’s all right to let yourself smile a little. You can see what it’s trying so hard to do!

* *Taras’s Story* *

Taras was on his way to the dentist. Taras hated going to the dentist. He was terrified of the pain and didn’t care much for the noises or smells, either. He knew he had to get a cavity filled as the pain was excruciating, but he wasn’t quite sure how he was going to get himself into the dentist chair and stay there. He’d tried a few weeks ago and run out of the office amidst a panic attack. As Taras got closer to the office, he remembered a podcast he’d heard recently that suggested trying to really sink into the moment, anxiety and all. He started right then, telling himself what

he could see and hear on the street as he continued walking. When he arrived at his dentist's office and when the work began, he continued to do this. Taras noticed that the smell was just as he thought, a bit like disinfectant, and he didn't like it. He was surprised to notice, however, that the pain he was dreading was not actually there. The noise of the dental tools was a bit like a construction site to his ears, yet when he really took notice of what he could feel, there was no pain. While this won't always be the case, sometimes when we really notice a moment in which anxiety shows up, we realize things are not as our mind says they are!

for you to explore

Try your noticing skills with something that's likely to evoke some anxious thoughts or feelings: place your phone, schoolbooks, or some other object in front of you. If you chose an electronic device, notice every detail about its shape and color, the shape of any buttons or indentations, and any smudges or streaks on the glass. If you chose to practice noticing with something else, follow the same steps and try to notice every detail about the item you chose. Keep refocusing your attention on this thing as an object, on only its physical properties as it sits there in front of you. Detach your attention from any thoughts about who might text, what you want to look at or check, what work you have to do, or any other thoughts. Just look at what is there.

Write what you noticed about your device or object.

Write any thoughts or judgments that come up about people, places, or things that your object connects you to. If you didn't have any such thoughts, you might now that we've mentioned it!

more to explore

Make a list of things that are anxiety-provoking and that matter to you, perhaps something you'd like to start doing, things you need to do, or something you have been avoiding. Make some notes about the thoughts and feelings that are likely to show up when you imagine doing these things. Then decide on a place to start by asking yourself this question: For the sake of being who you want to be and doing what matters, are you willing to have the thoughts and feelings that will show up? Where you answer yes is where you start! Try different things on your list, making notes about what you tried and what you noticed. Spend some time on this activity before you move on, or come back to it over and over as you go through the remaining activities.

What Matters to Me	What Thoughts and Feelings Might Show Up	What I Noticed

grounding skills 11

for you to know

Now we're going to expand your noticing skills to include moments when you feel extremely anxious. In these moments of anxiety, you may experience a sense of panic or a feeling of being disconnected from your body, or your surroundings may start to seem somehow strange or different. (If this has happened to you, this description won't sound weird. It will sound familiar.) Even with extreme anxiety, when you can notice you aren't paying attention to the present moment, you can use *grounding skills* to help you get back into the moment. Then you can deal with what's going on in your world. With practice, grounding skills will help you adapt to and deal with whatever is actually happening in your world.

* Arianna's Story *

Arianna was scared of almost everything and just leaving the house was beyond difficult for her. She was just finishing breakfast when her friend Rachel called, frantic about an issue with a teacher and needing Arianna to come over, *now*. Rachel always got really upset if she thought a teacher disapproved of her. Arianna mustered all her strength to get dressed and leave the house—she knew she would have to face strangers on the public transit and be overwhelmed by thoughts of others judging her as she moved through the noisy, crowded city. By the time she reached Rachel's house, Arianna was totally overwhelmed and exhausted. Sitting on Rachel's couch, Arianna slowly became aware of a feeling that she was floating above her body, not really connected and not really feeling anything at all. Arianna knew this feeling. It had happened before when her anxiety was really high. She needed to ground herself back in the present moment if she was going to support her friend.

for you to explore

What helps us come back to the present moment can be different from one person to the next and from moment to moment. So, we're going to give you a variety of things to try. Try these when you are not feeling anxious at first. Then try them in moments when you notice mild to moderate anxiety and build up doing them to moments of higher anxiety. For each of these exercises, notice when your mind wanders; tell it, "Thank you for trying to help"; disengage (stop talking to your mind); and gently refocus on your grounding experience. When you are ready, stop the grounding practice and use your five senses to find out what's happening in your world. Physical grounding may be especially helpful if you tend to freeze up when you are anxious. You can try these separately or combine them. You can also find audio instructions online at <http://www.newharbinger.com/41153>.

Before you start this activity, rate how present you feel at this very moment, from 0 to 10, with 10 being absolutely super present, your mind is not wandering at all. (We doubt anyone feels a 10 for long, if ever, so no pressure to write down high numbers.)

What is your rating? _____

1. Push your feet into the floor, wiggle your toes, and bring all of your awareness to the sensations of your feet on the floor.
2. Imagine you are a tree, tall and strong, firmly rooted in the ground. Close your eyes if you wish and see yourself as this tree. You might sway in the wind, and you continue to stand tall and firm; imagine roots extending from your feet into the floor or ground.
3. Move your body around, shift around in your chair, or shift your balance from side to side if standing. Roll your shoulders, gently move your head, and shift your arms and hands. Notice what you feel. Keep your head up and look around.

4. Use one or more of your five senses to experience something in a way that is vivid enough to pull your attention out of your busy mind. Let your senses wake you up to what is immediately around you. Look at something captivating, for example, or touch something that's a different temperature, such as a cold water bottle. Try touching something that has an interesting texture, such as a hedge or a furry pet, or tasting something with a strong flavor.
5. Try jumping, just a little bit, or a lot if you prefer. Notice that you always land, that gravity is always there, pulling you back down to earth.

After trying one or more of these activities, what is your rating of feeling present now from 0 to 10? _____

more to explore

In order to really pull yourself into the present moment and get out of your thoughts and feelings, it can be helpful to look at something and describe it in a lot of detail. Pick something nearby and describe it in such detail that someone who can't see it could draw it based on your description. Just to make sure you've got this, try writing down some details of something you can see and then draw it in the space below, using only what you wrote to guide you. Do this with a friend to check out your accuracy and make it more fun.

If you can predict when you might feel anxious, try to find a way to remind yourself to use grounding skills as you're heading into that moment. Practice grounding when you are not feeling highly anxious to get the hang of it and take a step toward what matters.

Part IV

You Are More Than Your Thoughts

12 watching from a distance

for you to know

In the last few activities, we focused on the important tool of noticing. In this activity, we're going to take noticing a step further and answer the question: How can we use this noticing skill? You will learn to use your noticing skills to get a perspective that helps you "look at" your thoughts. You will learn to get some distance from them and to recognize that you are more than your thoughts. Then you will practice taking a new, bigger, outside perspective on yourself. This way, you will be more able to choose to take steps toward what you want in life and just take your thoughts along for the ride.

* Hank's Story *

Hank was looking out the window of his dad's office on the twenty-sixth floor of an office tower, waiting for his dad to finish work. He kept thinking about what his English teacher said to him about his creative writing project earlier in the day: "You could have given us some richer, more concrete detail here, where you were describing this character." *She must think I have no imagination*, he thought. *She thinks I'm a lousy writer*. He had been thinking about how bad she must think his writing is all the way to his dad's office on the bus. He was lost in his head, hardly noticing the heavy rain that was coming down. Suddenly, Hank realized what was happening, became more aware of the moment, and found himself looking at the cars below with great interest as they moved along and shifted position in the storm.

for you to explore

This might work best as an eyes-closed visualization, so you may want to read it through first and then give it a try. Or listen to the audio instructions online at <http://www.newharbinger.com/41153>. Imagine you are Hank, standing on the sidewalk in

front of his dad's tall office building on that rainy day, your back to the building, facing the street. There are vehicles sliding along the road in that nasty rainstorm. Watch as the cars, trucks, and buses splash past through the puddles in front of you, soaking you with cold, muddy water. Notice what you see, feel, hear, and smell, standing at this viewpoint on the sidewalk.

Now imagine you are Hank looking down from his dad's twenty-sixth-floor office in the building and seeing the road below from there. What do you see from up there above it all, sealed in the comfort of the office, watching through the window? Try to imagine what you would experience looking down from the window, *watching* the rain-soaked road from that distant perspective. Now out of the cold, harsh rain, you are warm and dry at the window, seeing the full extent of what is happening below. You can see the movement of all the vehicles from a safe, dry distance! Watch it play out below you. Draw what you see.



Now bring to mind an experience of getting unwelcome comments about something important, like the ones Hank got from his teacher. Try to remember these in as much detail as you can. Notice what thoughts come up. Now picture these thoughts as if they were the vehicles and imagine looking at them from the safety and warmth of a twenty-sixth-floor office. What do they look like from there?

Watching what’s inside you from the position of an office tower is an important skill to develop. It gives you space to have your thoughts while you make new choices.

more to explore

Next time you start to experience a rush of anxiety or any strong emotion, try imagining your thoughts as cars on a wet road you’re standing above, watching from a comfortable place, just like Hank’s dad’s office. From within your own mind, try to “look at” your thoughts from high above. Recognize that you and your thoughts are not one and the same. There’s you, standing up high and noticing. And there are your thoughts, which are separate. As you go through the next few days, bring this metaphor to mind and try to treat your anxious thoughts like cars below on a road: just watch them, knowing you aren’t part of them. Then, try to do something that matters to you and make some notes about this experience.

Keeping a bit of distance from our thoughts gives us a new perspective, like being high up in an office. We aren’t swept away. We are safely looking at what is passing by, which might give us a moment to choose a behavior that leads somewhere important instead of toward avoiding thoughts.

you are not your thoughts 13

for you to know

The teens we work with often come to therapy saying, “I’m anxious,” and seem to have adopted that as their entire identity (“I am ...”), which is no surprise because anxiety has taken over their life. It doesn’t help when friends, family members, and maybe even teachers start to see you as “the anxious one” or “the shy one.” This can just add to your identity and a sense that you are what you think and feel. In part 6, we’ll help you figure out who you really are and who you want to be. For now, we want to give you the skills to look at your thoughts differently so they don’t define you.

* *Maya’s Story* *

Maya was overwhelmed with thoughts a few days before her final math exam. Her mind was telling her that she was “stupid” and that she would fail her exam no matter how hard she studied. Maya felt like one of those hamsters on a little wheel, just going around and around with the same thoughts going through her mind over and over. She was feeling anxious, and her heart was pounding. Maya had a hard time figuring out where her thoughts ended and where she began.

for you to explore

Next time you're outside, look up at the sky and notice what's up there at that moment. You might see some clouds, birds, an airplane, or maybe a kite. These things pass through the sky, but they are not the sky. Sometimes a brilliant sunset or sunrise is on display. As you watch these objects in the sky, notice that the sky itself, that great expanse of blue, remains steadily in the background, unchanging. Even when you can't see it for all the clouds, the sky is still constantly there. Watch for about sixty seconds, then jot down what you notice.

Were you able to tell the difference between the sky and what's in it?

In the same way, thoughts, feelings, memories, and physical sensations of all kinds pass through your awareness continually. But they are not you. The sky makes room for the clouds and rain. You can learn to make room for all the things you think and feel, letting these experiences pass through like the weather in the sky. The weather just passes through the sky. The weather is not the sky (Harris 2009).

more to explore

For this activity, you will need something to drink. Hold your cup and swirl the liquid. Are the cup and liquid inside the same thing? How would you describe the cup, and how would you describe what's in it?

If you change what's in your cup—go ahead, add something new—does the cup change?

YES

NO

Chances are pretty good that when you added something new to your cup, what was inside looked different, yet the actual cup remained the same. Imagine now that you are the cup, looking into the liquid, just describing what's inside. Maybe the color or density changed, or the volume changed if you drank some. Yet you, as the cup, are the same, just being a container and looking at what's inside. This might be like thoughts and feelings. They are inside, moving around, and changing, and you are the cup, just watching. From the position of the cup, you can also look outside into the world of your five senses.

The next time anxious thoughts or feelings show up, try to be like the cup, and just watch and describe what's inside from the position of a cup—you are just a container for it all, just observing. Once you are done noticing and describing, bring your attention to the world outside your body, notice what's going on there, and take a step toward something that matters to you. Make some notes here.

14 your drone's perspective

for you to know

It's interesting to see yourself in videos and hear your voice on a recording: "Do I really sound like that?" We shift our perspective a bit when we observe ourselves, seeing and hearing ourselves as others do. How cool would it be to have a third eye, one that was attached to a stalk that came out of the top of our head? Retractable, of course. We could use it to observe others and ourselves. Or how neat would it be to have a tiny drone that we could launch from the top of our head that could fly around, give us the bigger picture, see where we are, and help us navigate to what we're looking for? A drone's perspective can help us when we are caught up in anxiety. This perspective can help us see what's actually happening in our world, not just in our mind. This might help us make different choices—choosing to do things that matter instead of choosing to avoid anxiety. Let's try that using our imagination. You can find audio instructions for this activity online at <http://www.newharbinger.com/41153>.

* *Jordan's Story* *

Standing at the job fair, Jordan took a deep breath and then another. He said to himself, "Okay, I'm noticing that my stomach is freaking out on me. Keep breathing. Just breathe. I notice I'm having the thought that I can't do this. And now I'm having the thought that this is a pathetic way to talk to myself." But that last thought made Jordan smile a little. He spotted two of his friends nearby, which reminded him of a time last winter, when they were together flying a drone over the park. Jordan remembered how weird it was when the drone's camera allowed him to see himself from above. The higher it flew, the broader his perspective became and the more territory came into view, not just the park they were standing in, but also the surrounding neighborhood. Then the drone would swoop down for a closer look at him and his friend. He thought it was cool to see himself from his drone's perspective. Jordan wondered what he would see now if he could launch a tiny drone out of the top of his head and look at himself here at the job fair.

for you to explore

You'll have to use your imagination for this activity. Imagine you are operating a drone. Use the drone to see yourself as you are, wherever you are right now. Hover the drone a few feet above you and a bit to the right. What do you see? Are you sitting down, in a chair, on a couch, or on the floor? What are you wearing? What's near you: a table, your cat, the person next to you on the bus? How do you look: relaxed, tense, bored, excited, busy? Draw what your drone would see as it sees you or make some notes.



Send the drone a little higher to take in the whole room or wherever you are. How does that change what you see and how you appear? Since this is an imaginary drone, let it go on right through the ceiling to give you a larger view. See the whole house or building you're in, the neighborhood, your town, your state or province, the country, and then the planet. Swoop back down to find yourself again. Make some notes about what you notice.

more to explore

Over the next few days, ask yourself: When would it be helpful to have a drone's broad, high-up perspective, and when would a narrow, lower-to-the-ground perspective be helpful? By "helpful," we mean helping you do more of what is important to you. We include a few thoughts from Jordan as an example.

Broad Perspective: _____

Jordan: At job fair, help to find friends, see who is friendly. I guess this would be good at a party, too!

Narrow Perspective: _____

Jordan: When I'm trying to study and I need to stay focused on my books, not looking out the window or thinking about university.

Getting a "drone's eye view" can be a very productive thing to do. You can try this any time you are feeling stuck. Try experimenting with the drone's perspective in terms of how broad or narrow its focus is. Which is more helpful at any given moment? If you are finding this tough, you may want to go back and repeat some activities in this section to improve your ability to notice.

15 watching thoughts

for you to know

Thoughts generally come and go. Most don't stay around long, but some are “sticky,” and as we get stuck to them, we feel more distress. Thoughts such as, *Nobody really likes me*, or *I'm a failure*, might show up along with uncomfortable feelings, memories, images, or physical sensations. If we get “stuck” and we believe a thought, we might act as if it's true when it's actually just a thought that our mind came up with. As we get stuck in our thoughts, our mind can start to argue or debate with us, and then more thoughts show up and more distress. Since thoughts might be true in one circumstance and not so true in another circumstance, behaving according to them doesn't always help. In this activity, we're going to take the noticing skills you started to build in the last two sections and use them to look *at* your thoughts, from a distance, so you can be in a better position to make a choice about what to do.

* Ryan's Story *

Ryan experienced social anxiety and often felt like other people found him really boring or stupid and didn't like him. This left Ryan feeling scared when he was asked to hang out with a group that gathered at lunch, even though he wanted to. He was sure they saw him as not very smart, not very cool, and not much fun. He felt as though he had a huge neon sign above his head that followed him everywhere glowing, “Idiot.” He could hardly speak. One day, in English class, he answered a question the teacher asked him about the poem the class was reading. Jessica, from the lunch group, was sitting beside him. She turned to him after class and said, “You know, I really liked what you said about that poem. Nobody else thought of that. That's what I like about you. You're really original.” Stunned, Ryan felt his face go red, thanked her, and left for his next class. He felt good for a few moments, and then he felt worse as his mind conjured up the thought, *She just feels sorry for me. She didn't mean it.* Clearly, Ryan was having trouble letting go of his sticky thought.

for you to explore

Imagine you are sitting in a movie theater, watching a film from your seat. Now, shift your focus and try watching your mind for a while, seated comfortably inside your own mind, watching your thoughts as if they were on a movie screen. Notice what thoughts, ideas, images, and memories play across your mind. You might experience them as lines that an actor is speaking. Or you might see them as subtitles, like in a foreign film, at the bottom of the screen. What is your mind saying? Write the thoughts below.

Paying attention to your thoughts, watching them like a movie, is a way to get some distance from sticky thoughts. This distance makes it easier for us to take thoughts with us and do what matters.

more to explore

As you go through the next few days, try treating your thoughts like they are subtitles on a movie screen—just watch them go by, leave them on the screen—and decide what to do that matters. Make some notes about how this works for you.

say your thoughts in new ways 16

for you to know

When we think about anxiety, we typically think about certain kinds of *worrying*: thoughts about what might happen in the future *plus* thoughts about ourselves as unprepared or lacking some important skill or ability. For example, if you have a test coming up that is important *and you care about doing well on the test*, then you're likely to have some anxious thoughts. We're not telling you anything you don't already know. What makes anxiety such a problem in people's lives is not the thoughts themselves, but the actions people take or don't take when these thoughts show up.

When we notice our anxious thoughts, step back, and look *at* them, we create a pause button that decreases the power of anxious thoughts. They may still be there in our mind, demanding our attention and obedience, but we can learn to be less "hooked" and less controlled by our thoughts. When we can "unhook" from thoughts, life just works better.

* Mike's Story *

It kept coming back, over and over, the scene laid out in front of him: third-period history, this coming Tuesday, Mike standing in front of the class, trying to begin his presentation, and the words are stuck in his throat like a chicken bone. He can feel the heat rising in his face, imagining how red he must be, everyone noticing and staring, giggles, and barely heard comments coming from the students. Mike was, in fact, sitting in front of his game console, controller in hand, but not feeling the buttons, not seeing the screen. It was Sunday, and his mind had been torturing him all weekend with thoughts of failure so real he could feel it. He tried to tell himself, "I'm as ready as I can be. It's a good presentation." But that thought wouldn't stick. It was pushed aside by a stream of impending disaster images and feelings of dread. These stuck around, like Velcro on his mind. He kept trying to distract himself, but his mind kept returning to the failure he was certain would come. *I need a new way to think about my thinking*, thought Mike.

for you to explore

Before you can unhook from your thoughts, you first have to catch them in action, to notice when they pop up. This is easier if you know what you are looking for. Thoughts often appear in repetitive themes or categories. Sometimes our thoughts are about a future catastrophe that we are sure will happen, like, *I am going to make a fool of myself if I answer this question in class*. Instead of automatically accepting the “truthiness” of a thought or arguing with it, you might simply notice it as just another of those many *ideas* your mind comes up with every day.

Spend a few days looking at your mind for catastrophes, such as *This will be a disaster*, and say it differently when this happens. Try, *Ah, I notice I’m having my disaster thoughts*, or *I notice I’m having thoughts about failing my history test*. Write down at least one worry a day and then write it a second time in this new way.

Day 1 Thought: _____

I notice I’m having the thought that: _____

Day 2 Thought: _____

I notice I’m having the thought that: _____

Day 3 Thought: _____

I notice I’m having the thought that: _____

Now, go back and read what you wrote above out loud. Notice how you feel when you read your original thought out loud and when you read the new version, starting with “I notice I’m having the thought that,” and see if one feels like you are a bit more distant from your thought. If both felt the same, some of the ideas in the next activities may be more helpful for you ... keep trying!

You are now well on your way to noticing the many sorts of thoughts that can get in your way and make it hard to do what you want to do.

more to explore

For some people, getting distance and unhooking from thoughts is achieved by saying them in a different voice, maybe even a strange or funny voice.

Say the thought in a funny cartoon voice or in the voice of a famous person. There are plastic toys and phone apps that you talk into that will change your voice in strange ways. See how important and forceful that thought sounds when Donald Duck says it, for example.

Noticing and getting unstuck from thoughts is a victory in itself. Activities like these can help create some distance between you and your thoughts. This is especially helpful when your thoughts limit what you believe you can do.

17 thoughts as stickies

for you to know

This activity is going to give you more practice at unsticking from thoughts. Remember, you aren't so much concerned with how true those thoughts are or may be in the future; you are more concerned with how helpful they are right now. When you step back and look at your thoughts, it's easier to assess the usefulness of them. If you listen to your thoughts, do they take you where you want to go—are they helpful to you? Or do they get in the way? This activity will help you identify, notice, and let go of unhelpful things you tell yourself. Unsticking from *I'm going to fail*, for example, may allow you to focus on what really does matter: studying!

* Ilana's Story *

For years Ilana thought of herself as a total klutz. She took part in basketball and soccer because she loved sports. As the years went on, Ilana's anxiety seemed to change from a few butterflies connected to a mild fear of missing the ball to a night full of panic and dread. She had recently avoided going to practices and games, convinced she'd make some catastrophic move and lose the game for her team. These fears stuck around even though Ilana was a valued player. Her past success was not helping her talk her way out of these thoughts. She really needed to unstick from her thoughts of herself as a klutz.

for you to explore

This exercise will help you take notice of your thoughts and get them out where you can look at them. Get a stack of sticky notes and a piece of blank paper. You're going to need at least twenty stickies.

On the piece of blank paper, write or draw something that represents a goal you have, something you want to do in life in the near future. Draw this in the middle of the page, leaving room around the edges.

On the stickies, write down, in a word or two, some thoughts or memories that show up when you think of doing the thing you put on the paper. Write one idea or feeling per stickie. Some might be thoughts or feelings that steer you away from what you want to do. Others might be more pleasant or motivating. Try to write down some of each.

Now, one by one, look at the words on each stickie. Say each one out loud. As you say each one, imagine what you might do if you were hooked on that thought. Perhaps hooking on the thought, *I'll do it later*, would lead you to watch TV. On the other hand, hooking on the thought, *I can do this*, might lead you to study if that was your goal. As you read each stickie, put the ones that would lead you to your goal in the center of your page, close to your goal statement or picture. Put the stickies that would lead you to avoid or use your control strategies (such as distraction, avoiding, thinking too much, and self-harm, from activity 2) closer to the edge of the paper.

Once you are done, you will notice that all of the stickies are still there—we didn't ask you to get rid of any. You have chosen which ones will lead you to what you want to do and which ones will not. The task now is to let unhelpful thoughts sit to the side.

more to explore

As a next step, write down the thoughts that get you stuck on a regular basis, the ones that show up a lot, the ones you want to get rid of. Perhaps write them on a cue card or similarly sized piece of paper. Then, gently tuck the paper in your backpack, pocket, wallet, purse, or somewhere that they can tag along with you every day. For the next few days, keep the paper with you, notice it's there, and take it with you while you do something that matters to you. This activity gives you practice having the thought and doing what you want—taking the thought along with you for the ride.

These activities can help you start to distance yourself from the limiting story of who you are so you can try new things, things that your mind might tell you that you couldn't do. In the next section, we'll take you through some activities to help you stop struggling with feelings, similar to what we just did with thoughts. If you are struggling to identify your thoughts, go back and try the activities in "The Basics of Anxiety" and "Noticing Skills" sections again to review thoughts and practice noticing.

Part V

Allowing Feelings

18 naming and describing feelings

for you to know

We all have emotions—like joy, anger, disgust, happiness, sadness, fear, shame, and anxiety—along with physical sensations that can turn up with them. A scorching heat can flare in your head when you're angry. A weight can sink your chest when you're sad. A flutter of butterflies can appear in your stomach when you are anxious. To get some distance from your feelings so they aren't so controlling, we'll help you to notice, name, and describe what you are feeling. You can find audio instructions for this activity online at <http://www.newharbinger.com/41153>.

* *Jason's Story* *

Jason is good at sports, and sports are pretty important to him. He plays on a basketball team, but yesterday, for some reason, he was really nauseous at the start of the game. He could hardly concentrate on the ball because his thoughts got caught up in whether or not he would vomit on the court. Then his nausea was joined by dizziness, and his heart was racing. He could not wait for the game to end. The next day, he refused to go to basketball practice, nervous and riddled with nausea. His little brother, seeing Jason curled up on his bed, asked him what "nausea" meant. Jason struggled to explain it and said, "It's a feeling in my stomach and throat, like something is pushing up from below. Sometimes pushing down. Or everywhere at once. It depends." Jason paused, "It's just a heavy, sick feeling in your stomach, and mostly it doesn't mean you're really sick."

for you to explore

Over the next few days, notice when physical sensations turn up in your body. If you know what emotion it might be connected to, great! It's also okay if you can't name it right away. Then, try to describe what the feeling feels like, just how Jason described nausea to his brother. What is its size, color, and shape? What is its weight? Is it hard or soft? Get as detailed a look at it as you can. Make some notes about how you see it.

Day	Feeling(s)	Description
Day 1		
Day 2		
Day 3		
Day 4		

more to explore

Notice where feelings turn up in your body, maybe as tightness or heaviness in your stomach or your chest, your neck, or your shoulders. Watch closely and see if your feelings have a shape, like a ball or a block. What color would the feeling be if you could draw it? What is its temperature or texture? If your anxious feeling were an object, what would it look like? Describe your feelings by saying, "I notice I'm having sensations of _____ that look like _____." And then, after naming and describing your feelings, go do something that matters while taking those feelings with you.

If you are living a life, feelings are going to show up. Staying open, curious, and interested in the feelings you experience inside is the brave beginning of managing them differently. You can smile to yourself every time you remember to do this even for a moment, knowing you're on the journey toward what you want in your life. When feelings show up, see if naming them and imagining what they look like helps you.

being willing to feel 19

for you to know

If we want to better manage our lives when difficult feelings show up, we actually have to start by being *willing* to experience difficult or uncomfortable feelings. To be willing means we are consenting, almost inviting, our feelings to show up and stick around. A word of caution: if you pretend to be *willing* and use this as a distraction strategy, your mind and body are going to figure this out. And as you have already experienced, trying to get rid of anxiety just grows more anxiety, so don't fake it! As you push yourself to make new choices and do what matters, choose things that will bring thoughts and feelings that you are willing to have.

* Talinda's Story *

Talinda was on vacation with her family. She loved the beach, but this time she hadn't wanted to go. She had a new boyfriend she really liked and found herself worrying he would start talking to someone else while she was away. She tried to block out her anxious thoughts and feelings by playing a video game on her phone. The second morning of her holiday, Talinda's mom made her take her little brother swimming. Standing waist-deep in the water, without her phone to occupy her mind, her anxiety was paralyzing. Her little brother threw her a beach ball, but she was so distracted by her thoughts that the ball just hit her in the head.

for you to explore

It may be tough to follow the visualization below while reading it. If you prefer audio directions, you can find them online at <http://www.newharbinger.com/41153>. Otherwise, read this story of a very bad morning (adapted from LeJeune 2007), and then stop and visualize it either at the end or in stages as you go along. Really try to sink yourself into the story and any images, memories, and feelings that come up for you.

Imagine you have an important day today, maybe a test, an exam, a job interview, or something big. You decide to get dressed first. It's late, so you'll eat breakfast when you arrive at your destination to make sure you are on time. You don't have time to waste. You hop out of bed and get started. Once dressed, you head toward the bathroom. Just enough time left to brush your teeth, get your boots on, and catch your bus. Halfway to the bathroom, you realize you have put on that dreaded sock with the loose elastic, the one that won't stay up. Groan. You are filled with thoughts about how gross the feeling is when your sock wrinkles up and is falling down near your heel. You can feel your frustration rising. You stop, grab your sock, and yank it back up. No time to go back and find other socks or you'll miss your bus.

Teeth done, moving on, you reach the front door, and the sock is down again, wrinkled under your foot, leaving your heel bare in your boot. Ugh. Again, you stop and pull it back up, yanking it from between your toes and then jamming your foot into your boot, thinking, There, that will keep you in place.

This, of course, doesn't work. You grab your bag and head for the door, but your sock is not cooperating. It falls down again, bunching under the middle of your foot, leaving you with that icky feeling you get when this happens. You stop, reach down, yank your boot off, and pull the sock up again. This time, though, it's not so easy because you have your bag over your shoulder. The bag falls off, lands on the floor, and all your stuff falls out. As the contents scatter around you, you fall to the floor, frustrated and close to tears because you just missed your bus. And your sock is still wrinkled under your foot.

Sounds like a pretty awful start to the morning. What would you say is the cause of the bad morning?

Many people would say the sock is the culprit. If this was your answer, we'd ask you to consider whether trying to control your sock contributed to your very bad morning. If the sock getting wrinkled was something you could not control and was something that was going to keep happening, like having feelings, might you have been better off just leaving it wrinkled?

more to explore

We invite you to try your own experiment with the wrinkled sock. If you have a sock that tends to fall down, try to wear it for a while and allow it to wrinkle. Allow whatever thoughts, feelings, and urges show up along with it. Don't pull up your sock. Notice what that's like. If you don't have such a sock, try bunching up some tissue in your shoe or a small pebble and walking around for a while, allowing the thoughts, feelings, and wrinkled tissue just to be there while you go do something that matters to you. Make some notes about your experience:

Approaching feelings like you might the sock, just letting them be, may help you be willing to have them.

20 making space for feelings

for you to know

It's funny how we try to push away feelings or block them out mentally as if we could somehow keep them outside of or away from us. Here's the problem: they are already inside. Despite this fact, we humans tend to work really hard to keep out what's already in. Our mind is programmed to protect us from danger. It works really well for unpleasant and dangerous things outside of our body, like poisonous plants or dangerous animals. Unfortunately, our mind doesn't distinguish between real danger and danger that it is conjured up in the form of thoughts, images, memories, or feelings. Our mind wants us to handle real danger by getting rid of it, by pushing it away. Our mind tries to handle danger in our imagination the same way, encouraging us to get rid of, or push away, our "dangerous" feelings. This activity gives you an opportunity to practice making space for feelings. You can find audio instructions for this activity online at <http://www.newharbinger.com/41153>.

* *Keith's Story* *

Keith's team won the robotics meet in his school's region and got to advance to the next level of competition. Keith loved robotics but considered himself extremely shy. This competition meant traveling five hours by car to another city. A teammate offered Keith a ride with his family because Keith's mother didn't drive. The thought of five hours in a car with a family Keith didn't know was petrifying. Angry with himself, he didn't want to miss out or let his team down. He knew the trip would be awful because of the horrible physical anxiety he would experience.

for you to explore

This exercise will give you a chance to make space for uncomfortable feelings like Keith's. First, try this: Find a hairbrush or similar small stiff brush. Take the end with the bristles in the palm of one hand with the bristles poking your palm. Focus your attention on your hand and slowly close your fist around the brush, tightening your grip so the bristles press into your palm. Notice what that feels like as you keep your grip tight. Is this a pleasant experience that you want to enjoy for longer or somewhat annoying or even painful, something you would prefer to stop doing?

Now, loosen your grip on the brush, opening your hand but allowing the bristles to still sit against your palm. Notice how that feels. Is this something you would want to continue or end?

When unwelcome feelings show up, try to imagine them like the hairbrush; imagine holding them loosely, without constricting around them, and notice what happens.

more to explore

Here's another idea to give you a feel for making room for feelings: imagine your feelings are like flower buds inside you, trying to open their petals. Imagine giving the buds room to open. If your feelings were like flowers, what would they look like? Make a diagram below.



The next time anxious feelings show up, try to imagine them inside, like your flower, and imagine making some room inside for the flower. Watch curiously and carefully what happens if you give your feelings room to open as you try to take your next step.

treating feelings like puppies 21

for you to know

Now that you've tried making space for feelings, let's look at what you can do with your feelings while they're active in your body. Most people, at some time, find themselves getting derailed on the way to doing something important. They think about something important, and because it's important, anxiety shows up. The anxiety is unpleasant, and they bail on their goal. The cycle continues, and often the anxiety only increases each time they step foot on that same path.

This activity is meant to give you an approach for experiencing anxious feelings when they show up on your way to achieving something. Rather than wasting attention and energy on trying to push these feelings away, you're going to treat them kindly and gently, the same way you might hold onto a small puppy. This allows you to focus on moving toward what matters and to take your anxiety along on the journey.

* *Andrew's Story* *

Andrew was a talented rapper and often got asked to rap at school events, but he got really nervous when he was going to perform. He was terrified that his voice would go thin on him. Before rapping, he would get a sharp, hot feeling in his stomach. He really hated it. It made his chest go tight and his breathing, shallow. He would do anything to get rid of these feelings, but he knew it was impossible. Why couldn't his feelings be more soothing and nice to have around?

for you to explore

When anxiety turns up in the next day or so, try imagining your feelings as a tiny, vulnerable puppy and imagine yourself treating the puppy with kindness. Try out the following exercise. You can find audio instructions for this exercise online at <http://www.newharbinger.com/41153>.

Step 1. See It: With your eyes closed or your gaze down, turn your attention inside. Notice where you feel anxiety and name the feelings that show up. Now imagine your feelings are like a tiny puppy you have just brought home. What does your puppy look like?

Allow the feelings to be there, just like a puppy that wants your attention. Pat your feelings on the head and give your feelings permission to be there as long as they need to be. Observe your feelings with curiosity, the way you might watch a new puppy that you’ve just brought home.

Step 2. Breathe It: Still watching your feelings as if they were a puppy, give your puppy some fresh air to breathe. Don’t smother it. Think of opening a window or turning on a fan. Continue with this for several breaths. Watch what happens. Was there any slight shift? Keep breathing. Describe what happened.

Step 3. Make Space for Your Puppy: Bring your attention back to your feelings as if they were a puppy. Keep giving the puppy air to breathe. Now imagine you could somehow open up inside and make more space for your puppy to run around. Try being kind. Give it a huge, generous space to be in. Now take a deep breath into that big empty space you've made around your feelings and your puppy. Imagine your feelings as the puppy; give it some toys to play with, and make it feel safe and welcome. See if you can use your breath to make the space enormous, as if you could somehow open up all the space in the universe for it. Keep breathing for a few minutes. Notice what your puppy does as you move through this experience.

more to explore

As you notice unwanted feelings, try to think of them as little puppies—vulnerable, attention-seeking little puppies—who just want a warm place to feel safe. Imagine yourself treating your feelings like the vulnerable puppies and notice if you can do something that matters when you treat your feelings with kindness and compassion. Make some notes about what you did.

This activity gives you a chance to experiment with being *willing* to have uncomfortable feelings, allowing them to be inside without pushing them away, and making comfortable space for them. In the next section, we’re going to get more indepth about what matters to you in your life and who you want to be.

Part VI

The You That Matters

22 who and what matters to me

for you to know

To start creating a sense of yourself that includes more than just you with anxiety, let's start by figuring out who is important to you. Once we know that, we can figure out how we want to treat those who matter to us. The way we treat others comes from our values and our sense of who we want to be in relationships. Knowing this will help you take along the anxiety that shows up when you start to move toward something important. Knowing what your values are in relationships with others will help you feel genuinely connected and more fulfilled. This is because values form your identity. They give you a sense of self and help guide your choices in relationships so you can live beyond the limits of your anxiety.

* *Leslie's Story* *

Leslie was supposed to go swimming with a group of friends to celebrate her close friend's birthday, but the thought of being in a bathing suit and being around people filled her with dread. She noticed butterflies moving around in her stomach, and it was hard to breathe, so she made an excuse and canceled. As Leslie started to think about this, she found herself feeling sad and alone. She realized that she had not seen her friends all week and felt badly for canceling. Leslie started to daydream about the past, about moments with her friends, hanging out together, talking, sharing, and laughing. Leslie realized that what mattered to her was her friendships, feeling connected, and being a caring and supportive friend. Thinking back about her week, she realized that her anxiety often shows up in connection to things that matter, like her friends.

for you to explore

Ask yourself this question: Who matters to me? Make a list of the important people in your life. This might include people who are alive or dead, someone who is in your life right now, someone who used to be in your life, or someone whom you want to be in your life in the future. Who matters to you?

Now ask yourself another important question: If you were treating those people as if they mattered to you, what qualities would guide how you act toward them? In other words, what would you want your behavior to say to them? Leslie's behavior might say, "I care about you," when she goes to a party accompanied by her anxiety. What would your "code of conduct" be with the people who matter? You don't have to answer this question quickly: spend a few minutes, hours, or days on this if you need to. To help you get started in identifying what matters, on the next page is a list of values and qualities. Circle any that feel right to you and add additional values that come to mind.

activity 22 ✱ who and what matters to me

Accepting	Determined	Funny	Loving
Caring	Empathetic	Genuine	Patient
Compassionate	Engaged	Good Listener	Respectful
Connected	Flexible	Grateful	Able to Say No
Courageous	Friendly	Honest	Supportive
Creative	Fair	Industrious	Trustworthy
Curious	Forgiving	Kind	Understanding

Other: _____

Let’s use your imagination to try another way to figure out your values. Imagine you could be anyone you wanted. Who would you be? Maybe it’s someone you know personally, or maybe it’s an actor, a musician, a famous scientist, or a fictional character. It could be someone who is alive or dead.

Who is this inspirational person? _____

What qualities about this person would you like to have as part of who you are?

Now, take a look at what you wrote about the person who inspires you. Did you identify new values—perhaps something that you hadn’t circled or that was not in the list above?

more to explore

Keep your eyes open over the next few days for moments when you can treat those who matter as though they are important to you. Make some notes about what you did and how you felt.

	Values	What I Did	How I Felt
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			

Knowing what your values are in your relationships with others—whether with your friends, family, teachers, coworkers, or anyone really—will help you feel more genuinely connected and fulfilled in your relationships. Try to take some steps to be the person you want to be with others.

23 the me I want to be

for you to know

In this activity, we are going to help you expand your identity and your awareness of your values—the qualities that matter to you. Knowing these can serve as a compass, giving you a sense of direction, especially when emotions run high or your anxiety tries to steer you off course. You started to work on this by identifying your values in relationship to other people in the last activity. In this activity, you’re going to focus on other areas of your life.

* *Elijah’s Story* *

Elijah was having a tough time figuring out who he wanted to be. He was so used to being called “the anxious guy” by his friends and his family that he had lost touch with who he was aside from his anxiety. Generally, Elijah was not very kind or patient toward himself. He’d often set his goals really high, and when he didn’t achieve them, his mind would get busy telling him what a loser he was and how he’d never do anything important in his life. He realized too that he was missing out on other roles in his life that mattered to him. Elijah wanted to get a part-time job. He struggled with the puzzle of who he was beyond his anxiety.

for you to explore

We have listed some of the roles that you may take on in your life. Take a look at each one and ask yourself, Who do I want to be when I am in this role? There are many values and characteristics listed after the chart to help you if needed.

Role	Values
Family Member	
Friend	
Romantic Partner	
Student/Learner	
Coworker	
Community Member	
Team/Club Member	
Spiritual Community Member	

Accepting	Curious	Genuine	Organized
Adventurous	Determined	Good Listener	Patient
Balanced	Efficient	Grateful	Respectful
Caring	Empathetic	Healthy	Able to Say No
Committed	Engaged	Honest	Spiritual
Compassionate	Friendly	Inspired	Supportive
Connected	Fair	Kind	Trustworthy
Courageous	Forgiving	Loving	Understanding
Creative	Funny		

more to explore

Pick a few values and try to act on them—in a way that’s more compatible with them—over the next four days. Fill in the table below.

	Values	What I Did	How I Felt
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			

There are lots of ways to describe the person you want to be, and we hope you now have a beginning sense of who that is for yourself. Keeping these qualities, or values, in mind will be important in the next few activities because your values will guide you to do what matters, even when, *and especially when*, anxiety shows up. Before you get to doing what matters, we want you to clarify your values just a bit more in the next activity, which is called “Value Traps.” We will ask you to write down your list of values from this and the prior activity so you can keep them in mind.

for you to know

In the last activity, you identified your values—the qualities that describe who you want to be in the world and that guide how you treat others as well as yourself. In this activity, we give you some ways of fine-tuning the values you identified. This will help you respond to different situations based on the person you want to be, not based on avoiding anxiety. These choices include who you are going to be with, what matters to you, and what your next move will be in any given moment. While values may seem easy, there are some sneaky traps we want to help you avoid. The first trap occurs when we view our values as if they were rules about how we have to behave all the time. When values take on this rule-like quality, we often follow them without really noticing whether it was a good idea.

* *Dominic's Story* *

Dominic spends a lot of his time looking after his mother. He loves her very much, and at the same time, he feels very burdened by his caretaking role. His mother's physical illnesses leave her in bed much of the day, unable to look after Dominic. He worries about her a great deal and does all he can for her so she can remain at home with him. He is terrified of losing her. With his friends, Dominic realized that he assumes this same caretaking role, looking out for everyone and doing things for them even though he is already really busy.

Dominic spent some time identifying his values and realized that being connected to others and caring for others is very important to him. While there were many times he was caring and this felt very rewarding, he noticed there were other times when he wished he'd said no to requests, but he felt that he had to be caring out of fear others would leave him. To make it more difficult, being caring was part of Dominic's identity. In these moments, Dominic noticed tension and feelings of anger and resentment showing up.

for you to explore

Values, although important, can make our life difficult if we stick to them like glue. There might be moments when being caring is great—we feel good, we feel fulfilled, we acted a certain way and did a certain thing because we chose to do so, and the consequences were something we were willing to have. There may be other moments when being caring feels like something we do either on autopilot, outside of our awareness, or because we feel we have to, like following a rigid rule.

Write your values in the chart below and reflect on moments when you chose to take action according to your values. Then add some notes about the consequences of your actions. We have filled in a row from Dominic to start you off.

Value	Actions	Consequences/Outcome
Caring	Cooking for my mother	We ate together. I felt connected to her.

Now make some notes about times when you acted according to your values as if they were a rule you always have to obey.

Value	Actions	Consequences/Outcome
Caring	Listening to friends' problems the night before a test	Angry at myself for not speaking up, angry at friends for not noticing I was busy, stopped talking to them, then felt worse

You might have noticed that acting on values can be tricky. Whether it's a good idea or not depends on the moment. The noticing skills you worked on in part 3 can help you notice whether the moment is a good moment for a particular value or not. You may want to go back to part 3, "Noticing Skills," and strengthen your noticing skills.

more to explore

Over the next three days, notice the times that you make a move based on values because you wanted to and the times that you do something because you felt you had to—because your value seemed like a rule to live by. Notice the consequences, how you felt inside, and what feelings showed up. Do you notice different feelings or sensations when you act according to values verses rules?

Values are the qualities that can guide our behavior once we know what they are. Once you have an idea about the person you want to be, it's important to apply those qualities when the moment calls for it. Knowing when it's a good idea to act on certain qualities or values will allow you to adapt to your daily life as things come and go and situations change. In the next series of activities, you are going to start using your values to decide what you want more of in your life.

“good enough” is not a value 25

for you to know

Often we get caught up in rules about who we are supposed to be and how we should behave, which we talked about in the last activity. In this activity, we’re extending this topic to rules about being “enough.” These are kind of a subset of rules, like being thin enough, muscular enough, popular enough, and the list goes on. The problem with thinking of being thin, muscular, or popular as values is that those things aren’t really in our control. They aren’t qualities from inside of us that we can decide to act on. Who decides if you are handsome enough, rich enough, or successful enough? Your answer may include you, and we bet it also includes other people and their opinions—which, by the way, you can’t control.

* *Emmanuel’s Story* *

Emmanuel worked out every day, sometimes for hours after school. After feeling bullied and unwelcome at his elementary school last year, he was determined to be accepted by his peers at his new high school. Emmanuel was very stuck on the idea that if he looked good enough, he would be popular, and if he were popular, then school would be fantastic. He could avoid feeling ashamed, humiliated, and isolated if he could just get his biceps and his abs to look the way he wanted them to. The problem was, no matter how much he worked out, Emmanuel’s mind told him he wasn’t there yet, he was not “buff enough” yet. Emmanuel was exhausted from so much time at the gym, and new friends weren’t magically dropping in. Emmanuel was going to have to do something else to make friends, and he started to think about how to approach his new peers.

for you to explore

Notice what comes to mind as you read the following sentences and fill in the blanks.

In order to be liked, I have to be: _____

To be successful, I have to be: _____

To keep my friends, I have to be: _____

To finish school, get a good job, and have a good future, I should: _____

To be loved, I should: _____

Read over your answers above and notice if any of the qualities you wrote down seem more like ways you “have to” be or “should” be in life. Look out for external qualities you “have to” have, like being pretty, smart, rich, thin, or muscular. Do these feel like rules you *have* to follow?

more to explore

If you answered any of the above questions with external qualities, this next question is very important: What will you do once you are “enough”? Once you are thin enough, muscular enough, smart enough, or successful enough, then what? What would you want to do in life once you were “enough”?

The answers you came up with are probably related to who and what actually matters to you. Once Emmanuel is “popular enough,” he might want to hang out with his peers and have a chance to be a good friend, which means caring, listening to others, and being supportive. These are qualities that Emmanuel can already demonstrate in what he chooses to do. If you notice your mind getting “judgy” or “truthy” about you being “good enough,” you may want to go back to part 4, “You Are More Than Your Thoughts,” and try some of the activities again to help you be less stuck with your thoughts.

26 from values to goals

for you to know

We've talked about values. Now it's time for action: *what* we do, now that we know *who we want to be*. We do things that reflect our values every day, and the next few activities show you how to take *action* in line with your values by setting goals. If you try to think of a goal, what first comes to mind is likely "not to feel anxious anymore" or "to feel calm and confident." Sounds wonderful, but if you've read earlier sections of this book, you may have noticed that controlling thoughts and feelings is not what we are going for. The only thing we can control is our behavior—what we do, the *action* we choose to take.

Consider this: If you were no longer anxious, instead feeling calm and confident, then what would you do? The answer to this question is your goals. Goals are behaviors that we aim toward, step-by-step, that highlight our values. Goals might include things like trying out for a part in the school play, being more assertive with the peers who criticize you, or applying for a job.

* Luke's Story *

Luke hit the snooze bar for the third time. He mashed his face deeper into the pillow, tired in spite of a decent night's sleep. Any minute now Momma would be sticking her head into his room with that annoyingly cheerful voice calling him downstairs to breakfast. He did not understand so-called "morning people."

Luke's thoughts kept weaving back to the presentation he was expected to give in first period with Josh and Stella. Josh hadn't done squat on this project, and Luke felt the resentment rising up again. Stella had been critical of Luke's ideas from the start, and a little voice in his head kept agreeing with her. *I can't do this*, Luke thought again. *I don't have the confidence. I'm too upset. I can't even get out of bed.*

His bedroom door opened. But this wasn't "morning person" Momma. It was Mom. Mom is *not* a morning person. "Luke! Up! Now! You can't be late! People are counting on you!" "Okay. Okay. I'm up." Luke swung his legs out of bed, feet hitting the floor, and he was quickly vertical. "People are counting on me."

for you to explore

Let's make sure the difference between a value and a goal is clear. Values are who or what matters to you, while goals are behaviors that you can check off as done. Which of the following is a value and which is a goal? Check your answers in the back of the book.

	Value	Goal
1. Riding your bike		
2. Cleaning your room		
3. Respecting your body		
4. Losing ten pounds		
5. Finishing high school		
6. Being a caring friend		
7. Getting a job		
8. Listening to a family member		
9. Being curious		
10. Showing up for work on time		
11. Being honest in a conversation		
12. Not giving up		

The answer to number 8, for example, might deserve a bit more explanation. We think listening could be a value or a goal, depending on how you think about it, and this is sometimes the case. For example, being a good listener when listening to someone might be a value, while having the conversation might be a goal.

more to explore

Take a few moments each day, over the next few days, and make some notes about behaviors you did that were about being who you want to be. Even if you didn't set out to do anything ahead of time, we bet you took some steps toward being the person you want to be. We've filled out the first row based on Luke from the story in this activity.

Date	What I Did	My Values
March 3	Showed up for the presentation	Being reliable

Guided by his values, Luke shows himself as reliable and responsible by attending school. If guided by avoiding anxiety, Luke would have headed back to bed. It's important as you take steps to reflect on where your behavior is coming from and notice where you end up. We'll help you identify your goals and break them into manageable steps in the next activities.

27 making moves

for you to know

Breaking large goals down into manageable “moves” is essential if you want to set yourself up for success and get your life on track. How big or small each move needs to be is up to you and might be different moment to moment. Identifying things you can do in the next few hours, the next few days, the coming weeks, or even the next several months can help you move toward larger goals.

* Kelly's Story *

Kelly stared at the poem in front of her. She needed to memorize it for language arts class by tomorrow. “Two roads diverged in a yellow wood . . . long I stood and looked down one as far as I could.” Kelly did not think of herself as a patient person. *Come on*, she thought. *What's the big deal? Pick a road!* She was annoyed with herself for having waited until the night before to even look at the poem. But for the past two weeks, every time Kelly thought about memorizing the poem, something else caught her attention, something much less boring. She always seemed to do that—take the easy path to avoid doing something uncomfortable, and then she ended up feeling frustrated with herself and anxious about getting it done well and on time. *This has to change*, she thought. *I need to make better decisions, especially before college.*

for you to explore

To get you started, fill in your answers to the questions below. Kelly's answers are given first.

Area of My Life That Needs Changing: *Student*

My Values: *Being prepared and responsible*

Long-Term Goals (in the next six months or longer): *Finish high school and go to college*

Short-Term Goals (in the next week or two): *Recording homework daily in my agenda, studying a week before a quiz, completing the language arts memory assignment, asking Mom or Dad to test me before a quiz*

Moves I Can Make Now (in the next twenty-four hours): *Talk to teacher and make a plan to finish the work*

Area of My Life That Needs Changing: _____

My Values: _____

Long-Term Goals (in the next six months or longer): _____

Short-Term Goals (in the next week or two): _____

Moves I Can Make Now (in the next twenty-four hours): _____

Once you finish making some moves, plan new moves for the next day. As you move along, you may want to change or add to your short-term and long-term goals, or work on a few at the same time.

more to explore

Guided by your values, make some moves over the next few days. Each move is an opportunity to practice your noticing skills. Use your five senses to really stay in the moment and notice what is going on.

Day 1: What I Did: *Talked to my teacher*

Day 1: What I Noticed: *He smiled at me and helped me practice*

Day 1: What I Did: _____

Day 1: What I Noticed: _____

Day 2: What I Did: _____

Day 2: What I Noticed: _____

Day 3: What I Did: _____

Day 3: What I Noticed: _____

Day 4: What I Did: _____

Day 4: What I Noticed: _____

Breaking long-term goals into short-term goals and daily moves will help you move toward your long-term goals and the life you are ultimately aiming for. In the next activity, we are going to show you a way to double-check your planning. We call this making SMART moves, and you'll find them in the next activity.

making SMART moves 28

for you to know

As you set your goals and start to move toward them, making sure each move you make is SMART will help you stay on track. We define each letter of SMART below.

S = Specific

Specific means that your step is explicit and detailed. It is about behavior—something you do with your hands, feet, or mouth. If you had a video of yourself making this move, you could pause the video and say, “Look, there’s me doing this or that,” and other people would be able to experience the same thing with their eyes or ears.

M = Meaningful

Meaningful moves and goals are ones that are important to you. Meaningful goals come from your values and are about being the person you want to be and doing things that matter to you. This is a good time to ensure you haven’t fallen into any value traps.

A = Allowing Anxiety

If your goal is about something that really matters to you, anxiety is highly likely to follow along in your footsteps. If no anxiety shows up, we suggest you rethink your goal and the move you want to make, and ask yourself whether it’s really something that is meaningful to you. The *A* is about allowing, and the question to ask yourself is this: Am I willing to have whatever shows up inside in order to make moves toward my goal and be the person I want to be? Will I allow my anxiety to be present in order to be who I want to be and to do something meaningful? If you are unwilling to allow your anxiety to be present, you may want to think about a smaller move or adjust your goal or go back to practicing more of the skills in parts 4 and 5 and then try again.

R = Realistic

Keeping in mind your current circumstances—time, expenses, skills, and your physical and emotional health—is your goal and your next move realistic? If others are involved in your plan, make sure they have the time and skills necessary to help you. If, for example, your next move is to do research for a project at the library, but your dad can't drive you there as you'd planned, this may not be a realistic move to plan for tomorrow. Or, you may need to do some problem solving with your chauffeur.

T = Trackable

By “trackable,” we mean you can monitor your progress and notice the consequences of your choices and actions. When we are anxious, our brain often dismisses what we accomplish, so it's important to track what you do and how it turns out. If you want to be a caring friend, for example, design your moves and goals so you can notice if you did something that reflected being caring. Having a goal like, “I'll talk to Susie more,” may not be trackable because it is not very specific. (As you see, the steps of SMART overlap and connect to each other.) Also, when you do talk to Susie, to know if you were caring, check how she responded to you. Use your mindfulness skills to notice how she is actually responding, instead of how you're hoping or afraid she'll respond.

Creating more immediate moves and short-term goals can help you live a fulfilling life while you are en route to your long-term goals, allowing your values to show up more and more each day. Ensuring your goals are SMART helps ensure you are on the right path.

* Becca's Story *

Becca was frustrated. She wanted to join a group of girls at lunch but told herself she was too nervous and shy to do that. "You just need more confidence," her mother kept telling her. Her mother was full of suggestions: "Why don't you invite them all over for a sleepover sometime?" But every time Becca started to approach those girls with an idea like that, she froze up and turned back, frustrated and sad. *I will never have any friends*, she thought. *I'm such a loser*. Becca desperately wanted to hang out with the girls in her class, but a sleepover felt like too much. She had no idea what to do.

for you to explore

Make some notes about your moves for today and tomorrow.

Is each move SMART?	YES	NO
Is your next move specific?	YES	NO
Is your next move meaningful to you?	YES	NO
Is your next move associated with anxiety, and are you willing to allow anxiety?	YES	NO
Is your next move realistic for you?	YES	NO
Is your next move trackable?	YES	NO

more to explore

Now let's think about what's likely to show up as you try to make your SMART moves and plan ahead with an *action* plan.

In order to be the person I want to be, to let my value(s) of _____

guide my behavior, so I can reach my ultimate goal of _____,

I am willing to have these feelings (for example anxiety, dread, or shame) _____

_____.

And I am willing to have the thoughts, physical sensations, or urges of (for example

They'll think I'm boring, or flushed and sweaty) _____

so that I can make a move to _____

(rewrite what you wrote about above in the "For You to Explore" section).

Now, from all the strategies we've described so far, make a list of the ones you will use as you make some moves toward your goal. If you've skipped over sections in the book, that's going to make this tough, so we strongly encourage you to go back and do the bits you missed. Here are some examples: *Taking a drone's perspective on my thoughts, saying "I'm having the thought that they'll think I'm boring." Not trying to get rid of feelings, treating them like a wrinkled sock or vulnerable puppy.*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

For some of you, breaking down your ultimate goal into smaller goals and moves may be easy. For others, the smaller moves and goals leading to the ultimate change may be less obvious. If so, you might want to talk to a trusted friend or family member to get some ideas.

Making moves each day, guided by your values, is important to living a fulfilling life, no matter what emotions show up. If you have a long-term goal in mind, consider breaking it down into things you can do today, tomorrow, next week, and next month—moves that lead you on the path to your goal. Whether you reach your ultimate goal or not—let's face it, there are lots of things we can't control that will pop up and influence our lives—making moves based on your values will feel rewarding.

29 goal traps

for you to know

Now that you have an idea of your short-term and long-term goals, you've identified moves you can make to head toward your goals, and you have checked to make sure they are SMART, we are going to ask you to check your goals again to make sure you haven't fallen into some common "goal traps." You might think of them like potholes along the road.

* *Frank's Story* *

Every year on his birthday, Frank would make a goal for himself for the coming year. He remembered some silly goals from when he was younger. At age six, his birthday goal had been to get a horse. At ten, he'd been convinced he could build a rocket ship and fly to Mars. Mom and Dad had not been supportive of either of those plans. This year he was going to be more realistic: "My goal," he decided, "is to feel more confident so that my teammates will show me more respect." But how to begin?

for you to explore

Write down your next move and goal and keep them in mind as you go through this list of possible traps.

feelings as goals

If your move is about heading toward a goal of feeling a particular way—such as being happy, confident, chill, or caring—remember, feelings are not easy to control, so setting them up as a goal won't get you very far. Frank can ask himself this question: What does confident look like? What could you see yourself doing if you could stand back and watch yourself, like the drone from activity 14? If being confident would look like you showing up at a party, at work, or for school, then that *behavior* would be a specific move or goal.

Is your next move about behavior change (not controlling feelings)?

YES

NO

action-oriented moves and goals

Make sure you are planning a move that is leading to a goal about what you are going to do, what you want to change, or what you want to have more of in your life. A goal like “not letting others walk all over me” tells very little about what you are going *to do*. A goal like “making sure I tell others what I want and what I don't want if I think someone is taking advantage of me” is more doable. Goals that are not action-oriented are often not SMART, either.

Is your next move and goal action-oriented?

YES

NO

goals for other people

It's easy to get caught up wanting others to behave a certain way. We may want others to be more kind to us, to treat us with more respect or caring, to like us, or to be less angry. Frank wants his teammates to show him more respect. When your goal is about what you want others to change, it is suddenly out of your control. If you need to, go back and reset your goals so they are about your own behavior.

Are your moves and goals about your own behavior?

YES

NO

being enough

Sometimes we set goals that are more about being "enough" of something than they are about who we want to be on the inside. For example, you might find yourself wanting to be thin enough, muscular enough, rich enough, or smart enough. Explore what being "enough" could make possible, and there you'll find your real values and goals. Activity 25 is all about this if you need more practice. Goals that focus on "being enough" usually are not very SMART. We'll never know when we have completed them.

Are your moves and goal about being enough?

YES

NO

If you answered yes to all but the last question, you are likely not falling into a "goals pothole." If you fell into any of the goal traps, go back to activity 28 and try to create a SMART goal and take SMART moves.

more to explore

Before you move toward your goals, take a few minutes to imagine yourself doing whatever it is you want to do—your next move, perhaps, or a short-term or long-term goal. Visualize it in as much detail as you can. Notice what you can see and hear, and notice who is there with you.

Now, notice what feelings show up inside as you keep this image of yourself in mind. You may notice some anxiety, and you may notice some other feelings, too—feelings rarely travel alone! Now imagine yourself using the strategies you have learned so far to make your next move.

Keep the acronym SMART in mind as you head toward being who you want to be and double-check you haven't fallen into any goal traps. In the next section, we will teach you LLAMA, an acronym that helps when anxiety shows up on your journey.

Part VII

LLAMA: Taking Action Step-by-Step

30 LLAMA: labeling

for you to know

We are going to walk you through LLAMA, an acronym we adapted from LeJeune (2007) that provides a step-by-step guide through the strategies you've learned to use when you move toward what matters and anxiety shows up. You can find audio instructions for the LLAMA activities online at <http://www.newharbinger.com/41153>.

The five steps (letters) of LLAMA are less like *walking* and more like *dancing*. They can overlap with each other. For example, you might get to the first *A* and have to circle back to the first *L*, then on to *M*. Or you might get to the end, start to do something that matters to you, such as studying, and have to pause and do LLAMA again. You may find you change the steps around, combine some of them, leave some out, or add your own. It's just fine to use LLAMA this way. The activities in this section walk you through each letter of LLAMA one by one.

The first *L* in LLAMA stands for "labeling" and refers to labeling our thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations in a descriptive way. This helps us get some distance from these things inside and look *at* them. When we do this, we're often more able to carry them with us to where we want to go, like unwanted passengers in our car. We might not like them, but they're with us anyway, along for the ride. Labeling frees us up to focus on what's outside the window and where we're going, instead of on our passengers.

* *Marta's Story* *

Marta dreaded Tuesdays. That was the morning every week when she had to carpool with her ten-year-old brother and two of his dumb little buddies: the Fratelli twins, Gunther and Gavin. When they were together the Double G's made her own brother a total jerk. Poop jokes. Fart jokes. Endless talk about video games. "Just ignore them," her mother kept saying. *Impossible*, Marta thought. Marta wanted to yell at them, but she didn't want to embarrass her brother.

The next Tuesday came around, and Marta was in the car marinating in a spicy blend of unhappy thoughts and feelings. This time she shifted her focus from the noises the boys were making to what was going on inside her. Specific feelings started to come into focus. Angry and annoyed were right at the top, but also anxious because Marta couldn't decide whether to say something. She noticed she was getting caught up in thoughts about how unfair it was that she had to share her ride to school with these jerks, which was making her angrier. She began to daydream about telling them off. Although daydreaming felt good, she noticed it brought even more intense emotions with it that left her cranky when she arrived at school.

for you to explore

Think about situations where you have noticed anxiety recently or even anxiety-provoking situations that might happen soon. What specific anxious thoughts are likely to show up? Sometimes our anxious thoughts start with words like "What if ... happens" or "I should ..." Write the thoughts that show up for you here.

Now go back and read each one aloud and, as you do so, take a minute to notice how you feel as you read it. Jot down these feelings.

Which of the thoughts above is most common for you, which one shows up most often? Put a star beside that thought and use it in the next two steps.

This time, we want you to *label* the thought by adding, “I notice I’m having the thought that ...” at the beginning. Here’s an example:

Thought: *I hate sharing my ride with these jerks.*

Labeling Thought: *I notice I’m having the thought that I hate sharing my ride with these jerks.*

Thought: _____

Labeling Thought: _____

Now say the thought again, out loud, and notice how you feel this time.

You may notice that when you’re labeling thoughts, something shifts. Many people describe feeling less “hooked” by the thoughts and more distant from them when they label them this way. Try to be gentle with yourself when you’re noticing and labeling your thoughts, especially if you don’t like them. They’re not your fault. You didn’t decide to have them. Your mind did that all by itself, and will probably keep on doing it, because that’s just what human minds do!

more to explore

You can also label feelings, sensations, and urges the same way you label thoughts, using factual descriptions. Here are a few examples from Marta to get you started.

Feeling: *I'm angry.*

Labeled: *I notice I'm having feelings of anger.*

Thought: *I'm anxious.*

Labeled: *I notice I'm having the sensation of butterflies in my abdomen, and my heart is beating fast.*

Urge: *I want to yell at my brother. (This could also be a thought.)*

Labeled: *I notice I'm having an urge to yell at my brother.*

Try labeling your thoughts and feelings as you move toward what matters and make moves toward your goals. Notice whether you are more or less willing to have thoughts and feelings when you label them. Notice whether you are more or less likely to try making your next move.

31 LLAMA: letting go of your battles

for you to know

The second *L* in LLAMA refers to “letting go” of the struggle to control thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, and urges that show up inside. This is very closely connected to the *A* that follows, which stands for “allow.” This second *L* is like hitting a pause button, which is what we can do when we notice we are getting stuck to our thoughts and feelings and are about to do something to try to get away from them. After doing the first *L*—labeling what’s happening inside—we stop, stay still, hit pause, and make a decision to quit trying to get rid of what is inside. Letting go of the struggle to control what’s inside involves developing a sense of willingness to have our thoughts and feelings and consenting to have whatever shows up. If you would like more “willingness” practice, go back to activity 19.

* *Steven’s Story* *

Steven opened the bottom drawer of the desk in his bedroom. He was looking for some old Pokémon cards. Steven had not opened this drawer for a very long time. It was like a museum for his childhood. The Pokémon cards were there, along with an old bright-orange water pistol and some ancient candy (which still tasted okay). Something caught Steven’s eye. It was one of those woven tubes, a finger trap. Years ago, Steven’s older brother had tortured him with this thing, getting Steven to put a finger in each end and then watching with evil pleasure while Steven tried to free his fingers. The more Steven pulled, the tighter it held him. Just thinking about this, Steven could feel the anxiety and anger rising up inside: he threw the finger trap and watched it sail into the wastebasket.

for you to explore

Imagine you wanted today to be sunny and warm, and you dress accordingly: sandals, shorts, and a tank top or T-shirt. You open the door with images of bike riding in your mind, only to find that it's pouring rain. You have a few choices at this moment. You can stick to your plan and grab your bike. But you know you won't be out for long before you return home, frustrated and soaking wet. Your other choice: notice the rain, realize you can't control it, make space for thoughts and feelings, stop struggling, and choose something else to do. Have you ever had a day like this one, where a different choice might have been more workable? Make some notes below.

more to explore

Next time you notice you are fighting with your thoughts and feelings, write them on a piece of paper and tape the paper to your wall. Stand steady, hands on the wall (and the paper), and *push!* Try your hardest to get rid of the thoughts and feelings. If you are not having much luck, stop pushing, stand back, and just look at the thoughts and feelings on your paper. They are there. What does it feel like to stop battling with them? There's no battle if you pause and stand still. Being willing to have thoughts and feelings is closely related to the first A in LLAMA, which stands for "allowing." We'll work more on allowing in the next activity.

32 LLAMA: allowing thoughts and feelings

for you to know

The first *A* in LLAMA refers to allowing what is inside to just be there. This is a shift that you can choose to make. You will know when you've done it—you can feel it inside. It involves *finding space* inside for whatever comes up. This *allowing* what is inside to simply be there is supported by your sense of willingness from the prior activity: “I’m *willing* to have this feeling or thought, rather than fight with it because it’s just part of living my values and moving toward my goals.”

* Jocelyn’s Story *

Jocelyn was certain she was going to puke. She was sitting on a folding chair in the middle of the gym, third in line to give her campaign speech to the entire high school. She was running for student president. If she were elected, she would be the first female student of color in the sixty-year history of her school. Jocelyn clutched her notes as she obsessed about puking in front of the entire school. *Can’t puke. That would be a disaster*, she thought. Her stomach started to tighten up even more. Should she run off the stage? The very question left her more anxious.

for you to explore

Step outside (or look out your window) and notice the clouds in the sky. Pick one cloud to keep your eye on as it floats through the air. Watch it as it drifts through the sky. Does it eventually disperse? Is it moving? Notice how some clouds drift together. Notice how each cloud is unique.

What did you notice?

Now, look at the clouds again, and this time, imagine that one of those clouds contains a thought created by your mind, and let the thought float in the cloud, allowing it to just drift along. Eventually, it disperses and is gone or just drifts across the sky. Choose another cloud and imagine another thought (or the same one if it comes back to your mind) in this other cloud, and just watch it while it floats around.

What was it like to imagine your thoughts floating through the sky like clouds?

Practicing these activities can help you *look at* your thoughts, just noticing them, while you sit back and watch, and not get caught up in them.

When we're trying to get rid of feelings, it can be a bit like trying to scrunch them up, to crush them. Read the following activity instructions and then try both steps.

1. Crouch down, rounding your body into a ball, as tight as you can, and take a few deep breaths in and out. How does that feel? How easy is it to get the air in?

2. Now, slowly stand up, expand your body, stretch out, and breathe again. How does that feel? How easy is it to get the air in?

Next time you get sidetracked with anxious thoughts or feelings, imagine them like clouds floating by or like something inside that needs space. Imagine stretching out gently around them, making room around them, and breathing into them.

If you want more activities to help you practice allowing thoughts and feelings to just be present, go back to parts 4 and 5 to review and practice ways of having thoughts and making room for feelings.

more to explore

Next time anxiety shows up, place your hand gently on your body where you feel anxiety the most—maybe your stomach, chest, or head. Continue to hold your hand where you feel anxiety—gently, so your hand is barely touching your body. Use as little pressure as you can—just enough to still be able to feel your hand. As you breathe in, imagine the air going into your body and touching your hand from the inside. Direct the air to the anxious feelings or thoughts. With every out-breath, try to release around the feelings or thoughts just a little bit, like relaxing in a hot bath. You may want to imagine your body going warm and “melty” with each out-breath. With each in-breath, direct the air to your hand; with each out-breath, release or unclench around the thoughts or feelings. If it helps you focus on your breath and your feelings, imagine the air having a color as it moves in and out and follow it along. You may even want to gently and kindly massage your body with your hand, moving it in a soothing motion where you feel anxiety. Notice whether this helps you make room for feelings and thoughts and move to what matters.

Allowing your thoughts and feelings does not mean that you have given up. To allow what’s inside means you notice what’s showing up, realize you can’t control it, and stop fighting with it. By recognizing that your feelings are trying to tell you something—that they don’t mean to harm you—you welcome them to be with you. You make room for your thoughts and feelings, and then you take them with you and do what matters. In the next activity, we’ll help you refocus your attention where you need it—the *M* in LLAMA.

33 LLAMA: mindfully come back to the moment

for you to know

The *M* in LLAMA refers to mindfulness, which we also refer to as “noticing.” Anxiety often shows up when there is something that matters in our world. Our normal human mind, however, starts to connect what’s going on with memories, thoughts, judgments, images, feelings, and sensations from past and future moments. When this happens, our anxiety usually grows. This additional layer of anxiety is what we call “psychological clouds.” Psychological clouds make the things that matter harder to see. When we bring our focus back to the present moment, we remove or let fade into the background that “extra layer” of thoughts and emotions that form the clouds. When we can move our focus to the present moment, exactly as it is, we make choices based on what is actually happening, and we can respond to the moment with what’s needed. We can see better.

* *Pete’s Story* *

It was late in the fourth quarter, and Coach sent Pete back in the game. This was in spite of a stupid, stupid mistake Pete had made in the third quarter that almost cost the team a touchdown. He stood in the huddle thinking of how embarrassing it had been, how everyone must be thinking he’s a total loser, how his stomach was ... “Pete! Get your head in the game!” Pete startled and quickly looked around at his teammates. Their faces spoke confidence, determination, and a little amusement. “Dude, shake it off,” someone said. Pete’s teammate was right: he had a job to do, right here, right now.

for you to explore

To practice bringing your attention to the present moment, think of something you don't like. It could be certain type of music, a TV show, a schoolbook, or even a person will do. Then try listening to the music, watching the show, looking at the book, or imagining the person, and tell yourself only the *facts* about what you are focused on. Judgments are not allowed—only factual descriptions are allowed. This means if someone else were with you, that person would hear or see the very same thing. You may want to set a timer for about thirty seconds and then ask yourself how focused you were on describing just facts. Chances are pretty good that after a few seconds of music you don't like, your mind wandered off into judgments like, "I can't stand this," or "This is terrible music. Why would anyone listen to this?" And *voilà*, you are back, stuck in your thoughts. Make some notes about your experience.

more to explore

As you practice moving to what matters with LLAMA, the mindfulness step will continue to be very important. Once you notice that your mind is busy comparing yourself to others, judging or calling yourself names, wishing the past were different, giving you reasons why you can't do something important, or worrying about the future, you will know that these are the thoughts and images to stop battling. If you find yourself fighting them, you can choose to bring yourself back into the present moment. Here, you can pause and ask yourself whether your anxiety is connected to something that needs your attention or something you can control or do something about right now. Or instead ask yourself, Is it just that "everything is connecting to everything" in your mind? The most useful thing for you to do is to simply *allow* the thoughts and feelings and work on staying here in the present moment, watching them. Make some notes over the next few days about what you notice when you are focused on the present moment.

Once you're back in the here and now, it's time for the final A in LLAMA.

LLAMA: approach what matters 34

for you to know

The final *A* refers to approaching what matters, or taking *action*. You started with *labeling* what was happening inside and then *letting go* of the battle to control the uncontrollable. The next step was to *allow* some space for thoughts and feelings and from there to bring yourself *mindfully* back to what is actually happening here in the present moment. Once you are here, you are in a better position to *approach* what matters and to take a step in the direction of your values.

* Allison's Story *

The online job applications were not a problem. Allison was actually grateful for them. It meant she didn't have to talk to anyone. But then she got a reply asking her to come in and interview at the Running Dog apparel store in the mall. The perfect job, except for the schedule. School was a big commitment and so was jazz choir and the tennis team. There wasn't a lot of space in her week for a job and not much flexibility. She was worried about asking for certain hours to make it all work. As she thought about the job, an anxious twist rose in her stomach, her cheeks flushed, and she imagined fumbling the interview, stumbling over her request for certain days off, and looking like an idiot, or worse, coming off like some kind of princess. This was her common reaction any time she asked for what she wanted. Allison had to unstick herself from these thoughts and feelings so she could approach what mattered.

for you to explore

You might remember being a little kid and being afraid to do something that later seemed easy, like stepping out of bed in your dark bedroom, where there could be monsters under the bed, or stepping on the cracks of the sidewalk, when something terrible might happen. See if you can think of one tiny thing in your life right now that's important enough to you that it scares you just a little bit—not so much that it's impossible to do it but is just a little scary. Choose a slightly scary step that takes you in the direction you would like your life to go. (Not one where there is any actual safety risk involved—we're not talking here about skateboarding down a giant hill.) For example, you might choose sticking your hand up in class to answer a question or asking someone you like at school to join you for coffee or lunch (if those are things that are usually uncomfortable for you to do). You can use the following question to get you started.

Something I Would Usually Be Scared to Do: _____

I did it.

YES

NO

If you did it, that's great! If you didn't, that's fine. Just pick something half as hard as what you were going to do and try again. And if you still can't do it, pick something half as hard as that. Keep going until there is one small step you can take. The most important thing is that you actually take a step, even if it's very small. This is *approaching* what matters.

more to explore

Think again about your goals and the moves you will make to reach your goals. Maybe there is a move you have in mind or one you have struggled to reach. Think about how you might use LLAMA to prepare ahead of time.

What's my next move? _____

What values are driving this move? _____

What are the thoughts that are likely to show up as I try to make my next move?

What feelings are likely to show up? _____

What sensations are likely to show up? _____

How I will use LLAMA:

L = Labeling

Labeling Thoughts: _____

Labeling Feelings: _____

Labeling Sensations: _____

L = Letting Go

What imagery or exercises can I use to let go of the struggle with uncomfortable thoughts and feelings? (For example, watching thoughts and feelings from a tall office building, looking at thoughts and feelings as if they were floating in clouds, letting them be like the falling-down sock on a very bad morning.)

A = Allowing

What can I do to allow thoughts and feelings? (For example, watching my thoughts on a movie screen; saying thoughts in new ways; describing feelings; giving them space like the hairbrush, flower bud, or puppies.)

M = Mindfully

Which of my five senses can I use to ground myself in the present moment? (Refer to part 3. "Noticing Skills.")

A = Approaching

Approach what matters. Think of your values, of who you want to be, and of what you want your life to stand for and make a SMART move in that direction. Keep your attention in the present moment.

looking ahead

We hope that this book, and your experiments with the activities in it, have made your anxiety a little easier to live with. We encourage you to redo any activities that you found helpful, whenever you would like. You might find that you will set the book down and forget about it for a while. That's okay. Hopefully, it means things are going better. You can pick it back up whenever you want to remember the activities and experiment with them again. We really enjoyed writing this for you and are hugely honored that you have worked your way through it. We wish you the very best as you continue to make living your life with your anxiety the very best it can be. It is our sincere hope that you have rich, connected, and meaningful experiences ahead.

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activity answer sheet

Activity 1 Answers

Thoughts: 2, 5, 8; Feelings: 6, 7; Sensations: 1, 3, 9; Behavior: 4, 10

Activity 26 Answers

Values: 3, 6, 9, 11, 12; Goals: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10

notes

Harris, R. 2009. *ACT Made Simple: A Quick-Start Guide to ACT Basics and Beyond*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

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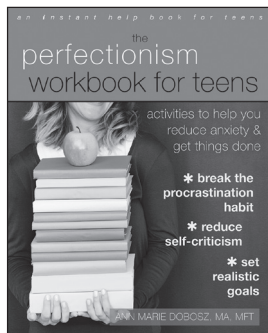
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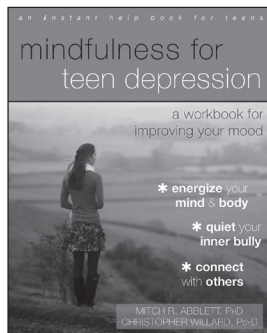
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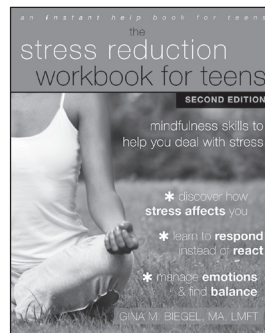
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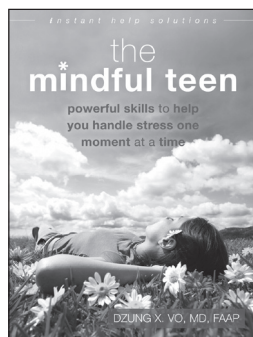
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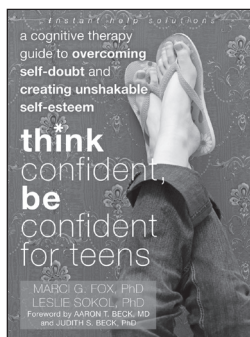
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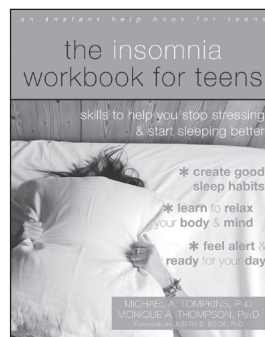
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don't let anxiety hold you back

If you're one of many teens who suffer from anxiety, you should know that you're not alone. Many teens have anxious thoughts and feelings—at least some of the time. But that doesn't mean you have to let anxiety run your life. This workbook will show you how you can get unstuck from anxious thoughts and get back to being your best.

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“A truly excellent self-help book for teens struggling with anxiety—which, as far as I can see, means just about every teenager on the planet!”

—RUSS HARRIS, author of *The Happiness Trap*

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