

Transforming Anxiety

Mindfulness Worksheet

Date / Time:

So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

Thoughts? Heart? Body? None

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



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■ PURPOSE / EFFECTS

Anxiety may seem like a consequence of busy modern life, but it first evolved as a response to threats our ancestors experienced in the wild.

If we examine the six stereotypical reactions we have to anxious situations, we can see their evolutionary origins and then transform these natural responses into productive ways of dealing with stressful circumstances.

These six responses are fight, flight, freeze, appease, tend, and befriend. By mastering them, making them our tools, and using them to our advantage, we can conquer our anxiety.

■ METHOD

Summary

Figure out your natural anxiety response and transform it into something positive.

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Long Version

- 1. FIGHT:** The fight response is fairly obvious; it's what gets us into scuffles. If anxious situations make you feel aggressive and feisty, you may be able to channel your energy into vocalizing your complaints (speaking up for what's right); just saying no; negotiating boundaries, conditions, and ground rules to avoid altercation; and doing battle with the anxiety-provoking beliefs and worries inside yourself. The fighter has to engage the situation to overcome his or her anxiety.
- 2. FLIGHT:** Flight makes us want to run away from our problems. If anxious situations make you want to run in the opposite direction, you're a flier. That doesn't make you a coward; you can and should leave situations if they're not working and can't be fixed; look elsewhere for better situations rather than suffering in the one you're in; step back and disengage, especially when a situation starts to look hopeless. The flier can also completely abandon and run away from anxious thoughts inside him or herself.
- 3. FREEZE:** Freezing is stopping all movement (mental or physical) until a problem goes away. If anxious situations tend to paralyze you, you may do best by calling time-outs; observing negative situations quietly; buying yourself or others time by waiting; being patient and restrained and letting things come and change naturally; and creating space for new, better possibilities. The freezer's patience and measured personality helps him or her to make it out of a stressful situation with minimal added stress.
- 4. APPEASE:** The appease response makes us supplicate; when we bow to our "betters." If you tend to take the blame yourself when in an anxious situation, you're an appeaser. You may find your anxiety lessened when you take maximum personal responsibility without overdoing it; when you offer genuine apologies; when you makes agreements and promises toward the future and amends for the past; when you give gifts, and when you acknowledge the grievances and anxieties of others and work to solve them.
- 5. TEND:** The tend response invites us to nurture in order to balance out our stress. If anxious situations make you want to curl up and be taken care of, you would do well to build up your personal resources for dealing with situations: taking meditative time for yourself, relaxing, and building alliances and to take care of yourself, making sure that you work on your own anxiety-inducing tendencies gently while allowing your kindness and caring for others work on their own anxious tendencies.

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6. BEFRIEND: Befriending is the tendency to defuse anxious situations with levity and charm. If anxious situations make you want to crack jokes and find common ground with others, you're a befriender. The befriender can use his or her skills by making friends with his or her enemies (to a point, of course), recognizing and being kind to the inner goodness inside every anxiety-inducing person or thing, befriending him or herself (meaning being one's own best ally), and bringing a sense of humor to a difficult situation.

7. Keeping the right hemisphere of the brain busy helps to alleviate anxiety because it evolved to scan for threats, while the left hemisphere in part works to control negative emotion. By keeping the "worrier" half busy and letting the "emoter" do its business without interference, you can reduce anxious reactions.

HISTORY

As far back as the ancient Greeks, people were dealing with anxiety openly. As a response to stress, anxiety is as old as we are, but we are only just now beginning to understand it.

It is completely normal to experience anxiety from time to time; however, the anxiety disorders (generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and social anxiety disorder) have become part of psychological discussion as ways to describe unusually high levels of anxiety.

CAUTIONS

If your anxiety problems are severe enough to keep you from living the life you wish to lead, consult with a trained psychologist about your options.