



Coping & Acceptance ^[1]

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Fear and anxiety will be with you your entire life. Knowledge and therapy are great ways to change your relationship with these emotions, but there are many other habits and practices you can experiment with to ease the anxiety in your life.

You've just spent a decent amount of time exploring the ways anxiety and fear can get out of hand ^[3], the ways they can adversely affect your health ^[4] (mental and physical), and any number of anxiety disorders ^[5] and related therapies ^[6] that exist to limit anxiety's negative and even overwhelming influence.

But remember: **At heart, fear and anxiety serve to keep us safe in a dangerous world, and help us prepare for contingencies and success in the future.** There will be times, however, that remembering the virtues of anxiety and fear may prove difficult. If an unexpected stress or tragedy happens in your life, or if you are diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, it may feel that all you can do is react and "ride this wave out."

The good news is that you don't need to remember how fear and anxiety work at the chemical level to rise above their weighty influence. In fact, it's best not to think of fear and anxiety as antagonists at all—the notion of "**facing your fears,**" for instance, **only pits these emotions as the bad guys, which they aren't.** Life is full of anxieties and fears, small and large. They are woven into the fabric of human experience and serve us well (for the most part!)

Take a moment now to erase the idea of "facing your fears" out of your head. Your goal in life is never to *not* experience fear and anxiety. Instead, it's too recognize when fear and anxiety have overtaken your normal, healthy patterns of thinking and acting, and to realize that they are doing their job—just a little too well.

Psychologists call the ways we respond to negative situations in life as **coping**. There are many coping strategies for all manner of temporary setbacks or long-term disorders, but they all share one thing in common: *They are ways of approaching what ails us with a sense of optimism and acceptance.* The more ways you have to creatively and effectively manage how you react to fear and anxiety, the stronger your coping skills become. Coping strategies can be used on-the-fly, and while their effects might not be immediate in some cases, the more you practice them, the more naturally you will behave in those ways when future danger and anxiety pay you a visit.

You'll recognize many of the coping strategies in this section as extensions of certain therapeutic schools from the previous unit. Regardless if you first encounter these coping

strategies in a therapist's office or are just now learning about them, the ideas and behaviors presented here are crucial for a healthy sense of balance and acceptance.

It bears repeating: **You don't have to "overcome" or "defeat" your anxiety and fear!** As we've established, these emotions are central to who you are and usually have your best interests at heart. They will be at your side your entire life. The trick is to accept their presence, especially if they break away from you from time to time and temporarily blind you from the less scary, less anxious way things used to be.

A large part of coping is routine. You'll find that implementing these thoughts and actions during particularly stressful or frightening times may feel awkward, or that you are not making much progress. Keeping a log of your plans and actions will give overtones of progress to your coping so you don't always feel as if you're starting from square one. Consistency is key to coping; the more consistently you think and act in ways that help ease your fear and anxiety, the less need you'll have to forcefully fight against these feelings, and the more accepting you'll be of their presence in your life.

It's inevitable that stressful and anxiety-inducing situations will be part of who you are. By putting these easy-to-start coping strategies into play, you are making a pact with yourself to **consciously and bravely interpret fear and anxiety from a productive and respectful point of view**. These habits may be hard, even scary to begin, but keeping at them and recording your progress helps you "in the moment" with things get scary or anxious, when your thoughts or fears overtake your logic (which they are wont to do [7]).

Give these coping strategies your time and attention, especially if you are currently experiencing tremendous or unexpected anxiety in your life or are coming to terms with an anxiety disorder. These habits are healthy even for people who normally don't react to stress and negativity in an overly-anxious way. There are always better ways to cope with your problems. In coping you accept, and in accepting you grow.

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