

Anxiety Gone: The Three C's of Anxiety Recovery, by Stanley Hibbs

Review by Dr. Chet Weld (posted on Amazon.com)

Unless you're reading this with a flashlight from six feet under, you probably experience worry or anxiety. Everyone does! But once we understand how we're making ourselves worried, we can teach ourselves to be free from worry.

If you don't have a tendency to worry, get ready to learn how to help others overcome their vulnerability to worry too much! Just to get you going, here's an example of something practical to help someone defeat worry: If you catch a worrisome thought trying to get inside your brain, just imagine that Donald Duck is speaking that thought to you. Who listens to Donald's negativity? No one! He'll always be a grump!

First, if you're worrying, ask yourself, "What specific thoughts am I thinking?" Since God isn't worried, these thoughts are probably lies or distortions of the truth. There are ways and there is a time and place to challenge unhealthy thoughts, but try this first. Rather than challenge these thoughts, just note them: A worrisome thought is simply a mental event. Thoughts get on the bus, and thoughts get off the bus!

Once you've identified the thoughts, you can imagine that they're temporarily projected onto a movie screen - in black and white sentences. The movie is a "short" and can't do anything to you but come to an end! Usually, there's more than one worrisome thought. Picture the words running forward and then running backwards. Run them forward in five seconds, then backwards in five seconds. Pretty soon, you'll become accustomed to the powerless black and white thoughts speeding back and forth. You'll also notice that nothing has changed about the bus ride! Look at the vivid colors out the window and realize that you are a permanent spiritual being with a vulnerability to thinking temporary worrisome thoughts - just like everybody else! Did the thoughts get off the bus yet? I wouldn't be surprised!

Or imagine that your mind is a chessboard. Picture the board. Picture that the thoughts are pieces that move around the board. If these thoughts engender worrisome emotions, are you going to make choices based on these emotions? Are you going to rehearse them in your head and speak them out, as if they're true? Or are you going to make choices based on your conviction of who you are on your faith in God, on your values, on your plans, and on your hopes and dreams?

Worry or anxiety is a form of fear. Let's spend a moment thinking about the causes of worry. Here's a clever acrostic that gives us some clues:

F - Fusion - We tend to think that our thoughts are real. We fuse them with our emotions and with our false and unresearched thoughts about reality.

E - Evaluation - We label according to our preconceived notions. Stephen Covey: We see the world not as it is, but as WE are. Thoughts come and go and so do my evaluations.

A - Avoidance - When we avoid, we add to our misery. We tell ourselves, "I must not feel any anxiety."

R - Reason giving: We make emotion-based decisions.

Here's a well-rounded approach for defeating worry:

1. Physiological: Calm your body. Breathe slowly and concentrate on your breathing. Picture times when you felt very peaceful. I call these "peaceful scenes." We all go into a "trance" 3-4 times a day, anyway. Go to your peaceful scene for a few minutes. Discuss with a psychiatrist or with a Primary Care Physician who is familiar with psychiatric medication and consider the benefit of balancing the chemicals of your neurotransmitters. If the worry is moderate to severe, you may benefit from certain anti-depressants that also have anti-anxiety effects and from an "as needed" sedative. If other chemical issues are involved, other medications may be necessary, e.g., mood stabilizers.
2. Cognitive: Correct your thinking. I tell people to "re-tread your head" with the word of God or with what you know to be the truth. If you don't know the truth, make it your research project to discover the truth. You might consult with friends that you trust.
3. Behavioral: Confront your fears. When you don't confront them, you make them even more intense. Perhaps, ask yourself, "What have I done that was scary that eventually wasn't scary?"
4. Spiritual: Pour out your heart to God; pursue normal discipleship such as reading the Bible, praying, fellowshiping with other Christians, absorbing Christian and wholesome music into your soul, and listening to your favorite pastors. If you're already doing this - or

trying to do this - and nothing seems to be working, then simply be mindful of God whenever you're doing something you enjoy. Start including thoughts of God in your jogging, your painting, your writing, your talking with others, or with anything that you enjoy.

Here are some specific tips for overcoming social anxiety, which is very common. Of course, there are different kinds of social anxiety. These techniques will help you with many of them:

5. Survey method: Ask friends to tell you their experiences. They're probably not much different from yours!
6. Double-standard technique: Pretend that a friend is having the same problem that you are and talk to him or her in a compassionate way, as you normally would, anyway!
7. Feared fantasy: Play out the nightmare scenario. Face the fear and see what happens!
8. Self-disclosure: Don't hide your anxiety. Share it with others!
9. Develop a hierarchy and gradually confront avoided situations.
10. Teach yourself conversational skills. This means talking to your family, colleagues, those you work out with, or other social situations. You've just changed the focus from worry to skill development!
11. Ask yourself, "What can I control and what can't I control." If you focus on what you can control, your circle of influence will expand.
12. Have a menu of more positive things to think about. For example, "peaceful scenes" can be on the menu!
13. Designate a specific time to worry. Simply set aside ten minutes to play the negative movie backwards and forwards or even just to worry as hard as you can and get it over with. You may not even be able to do it!
14. Sing out the worrisome thought(s). Your thought(s) may become quite entertaining!

15. Comedy channel: Imagine that somebody silly is telling you these things. Once you get tired of all the silliness, you can always change the channel.

16. Scale your worry: "On a scale of zero to ten, how high would my worry be if I were about to jump out of a plane?" Now you're concentrating on the scale instead of your worry. Watch the number go up and down and notice what you're doing or thinking and doing differently when the number is lower.

17. Make it a point to notice when you feel relaxed. Enjoy these times. Ask yourself what you're doing and thinking differently. Try to expand these times. Get used to them!

18. Try this experiment: Try to make something happen by thinking it. Keep yourself posted on how successful you are!

19. Practice "mindfulness": Step back from your experience. Be an observer. "I'm on the bank of a river, leaves are floating by, and I'm putting thoughts and feelings on leaves as they're floating by."

This book makes an excellent, practical contribution to the literature related to defeating anxiety. Anxiety can be gone!

Other resources for this review:

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, by Stephen Covey

Anxiety Gone: The Three C's of Anxiety Recovery, by Stanley Hibbs

Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy, by David D. Burns