

## Episode: Anxiety



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## Episode: Anxiety

Welcome to the Design Your Dream Life podcast where it's all about designing your life on your terms and now your host, Natalie Bacon.

Hi friend, how are you? Listen, if you are a new listener, welcome. Today is going to rock your world. We are talking about anxiety and how to manage anxiety and I hope it is life changing for you. I really think it can be. I remember when I learned to this work and applied it to my life and really changed my relationship with anxiety and stress and all of those really fun emotions.

If you have been around a while will you do me a favor? I would appreciate it so much if you left a review for me about this podcast on iTunes. It's just a way for this podcast to get more eyes on it because if there are more reviews than iTunes says, oh this must be a good podcast and then it suggests it to more people and then I can help more people. So thank you in advance. I know so many of you have already left amazing reviews and just a side note, it is so fun for me to read those. It's like offering me positive thoughts like you guys inspire me with your words. So thank you. Thank you. Thank you for that.

Let's jump into this super fun topic of anxiety. So I'm not a doctor, right? I consider myself a mental health expert because I study the brain. I'm a certified life coach and I got certified at the life coach school, which is based in teaching causal coaching. So that means that everything I teach, I am doing from a place of understanding that the brain is the cause of all of it. So your thoughts create your feelings, your feelings create your actions and your actions create your results. And I'm a constant student of studying the brain because I believe that the more I invest in myself and knowledge, the more I can help you. So I can help you manage your mind. And I want to do that today. Talking about anxiety.

I am a huge proponent of going to a doctor, going to a psychiatrist, getting help, especially if you have a mental illness. And that includes taking medicine. So if that is you like I fully believe in that and support that 100%, right? There are chemical imbalances that are outside the scope of what I do and what I'm talking about. That said, even if you are someone who struggles in that way, I think that managing your mind intentionally with your thoughts can always be another way to help yourself, right? And if you're like me who doesn't have a mental illness, this can also help. So what I'm giving you the intro here about is just know that regardless of your mental state, managing your mind can be so helpful, right?

So for me, I didn't know that my thoughts were optional right before I became a life coach. And now that I know that, and now that I study the brain and now that I understand that my thoughts create my results and that I can think and feel anything at any time, I have so much more freedom and I feel better. Right? And that is true regardless of anyone's circumstances and regardless of kind of what's going on in other areas of your life.

So with that, let's talk about anxiety. I'm laughing because I was really, really excited to dive deeper into this topic and bring it to you, even though it can kind of be something that we don't usually enjoy thinking about or talking about. I want to start with what anxiety really is. So anxiety is a feeling, it's a feeling. And that is just good to know. I think that we make it so much

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bigger and scarier than it needs to be. So let's just bring it back to what it is, which is a feeling and all of your feelings are caused by your thoughts. So what you think creates how you feel.

So it's not a circumstance such as coronavirus causing you to feel anxious. It's not your job or your layoff or your money causing the feeling. So what's happening is something like coronavirus happened or you lost your job, or your sister in law said something to you. So these are all circumstances and depending on the wiring, the neuropathways in your brain, your brain will fire a thought very quickly and that thought will create a feeling in your body. Now, this does not mean that you don't want to experience negative emotion. It's just really important for you to know that you're the cause of it because that's where all your power is.

I think that it's helpful to understand where anxiety and fear, where those emotions really came from and why our brain defaults to thinking thoughts that trigger those emotions. I think it will help you process them, which I'm going to teach you how to do later in this episode. So I want to talk about your brain and humans, the humans. We have evolved to develop a prefrontal cortex and that prefrontal cortex is your human part of your brain. I've talked about this a little bit before, but it's always good to have a refresher and just think about it very simply. So you have your primitive brain, which is rooted in survival, meaning your primitive brain's job is just to keep you alive. This is really important. It's good. It's what got us here today. Your brain wants to seek pleasure. It wants to seek the berries and the food so you stay alive. It seeks sex so you reproduce and keep the humans going and it wants to avoid pain so that you don't die, right? When the bear is coming into the cave, you run right? Fight or flight. That's your survival brain. This is a good thing.

Your prefrontal cortex developed on top of that and it's very different. It is future focused. It's slower. It's what you use for creativity and planning. I always use the example of Penny my puppy. Penny is not thinking about her future and her job and money and her relationships. She is only thinking about sleeping and going on a walk and treats. That's because she doesn't have a prefrontal cortex. Right? That's like the easiest example I have for you is look at the animals compared to you. So your prefrontal cortex is also what predicts what will happen in the future for you. And it does this based on your prior experiences, right?

So your prefrontal cortex looks to what you've experienced thus far in your life and comes up with the most likely scenario for what's likely to happen in the future. And if you don't have that exact experience, right, like the one that's in front of you, your prefrontal cortex is going to make its best guess on the likely outcome. And it does this just by looking for similar experiences, you know, and coming up with that best option. And this is where anxiety comes in.

So I looked up the definition of anxiety cause I love a good definition so we can get really clear about it. It's defined as a feeling of worry, nervousness or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome. Notice that the first three words of this definition are a feeling of, so it's important to remember it, that it's a feeling in your body, right? It's that uncomfortable feeling of unease, nervousness, or worry typically about something uncertain. So what's happening here is that when your prefrontal cortex struggles to create thoughts about

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what it perceives as a certain future, your primitive brain is triggered, your prefrontal cortex goes offline and you go into survival mode.

Your primitive brain just wants to keep you alive and your prefrontal cortex tried to come up with a scenario for this future and it's really uncertain about it so your primitive brain says, okay, I better jump in fight or flight and let's make sure you survive. This was really, really useful and important hundreds of years ago, but it's not useful today, most of the time, right? We're anxious about losing our jobs, about money, about our relationships, about our health, about our kids not making the team or getting in a fight with their friends, about us getting older, about retiring. Those are the things that we are anxious about. There are so few times in modern society, especially for listening to this podcast where we are anxious about getting physically attacked, right? That death is imminent.

Now, rationally you are aware of how illogical you might be being in the moment, such as stockpiling when the grocery stores are still open. Yet you can't seem to get out of acting that way and it's simply because you're in survival mode no matter how much you rationalize it, right? I think of the people who were kind of stockpiling and using the explanation as, oh, well everyone else is kind of doing it, so I don't want to be the one to run out, even though I'm not afraid of what's going on. Regardless of how you explain it, right? You're still acting that way and it's, it's just based in survival. It's not a problem, but we tend to make it a problem. And the way that you start to kind of reduce this problem and lessen its effect in your life is to understand how your brain is working and see that when circumstances change, especially very quickly like they did with coronavirus, it's just very hard for your prefrontal cortex to stay online. It's a very hard to stay out of survival mode.

So it's very normal for your brain to be triggered and think that death is imminent, even if it's not true. Because when your brain sees something new and different and it's uncertain about the outcome, it can't make sense of it. It's just a lot harder for it to come up with likely outcomes. It's not impossible, but your imagination, your brain isn't used to doing that. And so it's a lot harder for you to stay calm. It's a lot harder for you to keep your prefrontal in charge. And so then your primitive lizard brain comes out and takes over. Right? So we don't need that reaction of fight or flight in the way that we're seeing it today. Right. No one is physically attacking us and holding us down.

What I'm finding is that we don't have the awareness of what's going on in our brains and so instead of doing what we need to do, which is relax into it and have awareness of what's going on, and I'll, I'll teach you how to do that in a second. I want to talk with you first about what most people do and how it's a really, really big mistake. Most people will resist their anxiety and make it worse and then they will avoid it by escaping it with external false pleasures.

So let me give you an example. I'm using a lot of big life coaching terms here. If you're feeling a little bit uncertain about the future, that's just not a problem, right? It's okay. You can feel uncertain, you can feel anxious, you could feel a little worried. It's totally not a problem. But if you don't know that it's not a problem, right, your primitive brain is going to go into survival mode and you're going to think it's a huge problem. And then you're going to think about all the

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possibilities that are riddled in fear and you're going to start to increase your anxiety and then you're going to start to do things that make it worse. Maybe you go turn on the news and you find news that validates your worst fears or even make you know new fears up for you that you hadn't even thought of yet. And then what happens is you turn this small feeling of discomfort or anxiety or uncertainty into panic.

And I looked up the definition of panic and panic is defined as a sudden uncomfortable fear or anxiety often causing wildly unthinking behavior. Such a good definition. It's magnifying that anxiety, it's making it worse. Your compounding anxiety and turning it into panic, right? So at best what you do, if you don't have this awareness of what's going on is you will escape that negative emotion, meaning you will avoid it. Meaning you will seek some sort of external something to make you feel better. This might be eating, drinking alcohol, shopping, Netflixing. It could even be, you know, overworking could be anything that you seek externally to kind of numb or dull out that negative emotion.

And that's at best, I think, at worst you amplify that feeling so much that you get sick or hospitalized about it. I coached one of my beloved students about how she wants to move forward with respect to stress. And she had had a situation where she increased her stress so much that she went to the hospital. And so she wanted to kind of manage her mind around it going forward. So you can really affect your body with your thinking. And this happens when you don't have the awareness of what's going on. So you really think and believe that it's your circumstances and then you make it worse and your survival brain just goes wild and thinks that you're going to die and it magnifies it and turns it into panic. And I think that we can all help ourselves by understanding what's really going on in the brain and by learning how to process our emotions without making them worse.

So, now I have a process for you for what to do about your anxiety. Now there is a complete bonus course in Grow You that everyone has access to about how to process your emotions that I have everyone go through when they join. This is kind of a very shortened, quick summary of that. So if you want more, you can join us in Grow You and get that. So here's what you will need to do, or what I suggest doing to help you when you feel anxious.

The first thing I want you to do is name the emotion. And what I mean by this is you name it in one word. So it would be anxiety or fear or panic. And you can do this with any emotion. So I'm talking here about anxiety, but really it could be frustration or anger. So you name it, and the reason that this is so important is that it gives you some authority over it. I really don't want you to skip this step because it's so powerful when you just name it in one word. You're like, oh, it's anxiety instead of this vague, uncomfortable feeling that your really scared about, so you're like, this is anxiety. I've seen you before.

The second step is to describe the emotion. Describe it in detail. Now, I don't want you to explain it. I want you to describe the characteristics of it. This is the step that I think most of us have never done before. You might say, oh yeah, I feel anxious, but then you're looking for reasons outside of you as to why you feel anxious and what I want you to do is go inside of you. Where do you feel it in your body? Is it in your chest? Is it in your jaw? Is it in your hands? Like

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describe the characteristics of the vibration in your body. The reason this is important is because it connects you with your body so that you can see the emotion itself is harmless and you're essentially separating yourself from the emotion. You're becoming the watcher of it instead of being it.

The third step after you've named it and described it is to allow it. This is the part where you can break up the intensity of the feeling by actively breathing into the emotion, right? Remind yourself, this is an emotion and you can feel any emotion. I like to think of it as befriending the emotion, even if it's uncomfortable. When you actively observe your anxiety or your anxiousness, you will experience a moment of relief and perspective. You will feel empowered.

When I first started doing this, I remember thinking, oh my gosh, I'm not my feelings and this feeling isn't so bad, right? I can feel this even if it feels really uncomfortable. It's important that you completely allow the emotion before you move on to the next step because the next step is explaining it and you're going to get back into your mind and your thoughts. And I find that if you haven't processed the emotion in your body and allowed it to move through you, yet, you will be rushing to escape it and you kind of end up magnifying it and it could take you an hour to allow the emotion. It could take you a day or two. So you're like, I'm just gonna let this emotion come with me today. It's like I see you anxiety, let's go, right. I see you, I feel you. It's not a problem.

But then once you have allowed it, then you can explain it. And the way that you explain it is you ask yourself what thought is causing me to experience the emotion of anxiety? What am I thinking that's causing me to feel this way? It's really important that you identify your thought because it's the thought that's creating the feeling. So for example, you might be thinking, I'm scared. Everything is so uncertain right now and I don't know what to do. So write down whatever it is that you're thinking because I find that without writing it down, we have all of these random thoughts firing. You have over 60,000 thoughts per day and without writing it down, there's this lack of clarity and it's very vague. So write down the exact thought, the one sentence thought that is causing the feeling of anxiety. Don't try and change your thought. Simply just notice it. Be curious and compassionate.

Like, I like to think of it as my brain kind of being like funny or silly or wild or crazy. I'm like, oh my gosh, I cannot believe my brain thought that. That's so interesting what's going on. Do you see how that's so much more compassionate and curious instead of what I see a lot with my clients is that's so ridiculous. I'm thinking that or you know, something very harsh where they're not very nice to themselves. So I want you to be really compassionate with yourself and don't rush to change your thoughts. It's really important, especially if you're new to this work what I'm teaching you right now is really a deeper level of coaching and I find that the newer clients always want to change their thoughts, but you don't want to be someone who is happy all the time. You have to have the contrast of life. There is no bad without good. There is no good without bad. So you want to interpret some things as bad. You want to interpret coronavirus as something you don't like. Right? So I don't want you to rush to change your thought. I just want

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you to know what the thought is and take responsibility for you being the creator of your emotions.

The next step is for you to decide how to think about your anxiety. So this kind of gets a little bit meta, right? So you've processed your emotion and now you have identified the thought that caused it. But now what thought do you want to think about your anxiety? How you think about anxiety matters? I've kind of dripped it in here throughout. I've been saying that anxiety is not a problem. It's our reaction and resistance to it that is a problem. It's fighting it. That's the issue. So when you feel anxious, how do you want to think about it? I like to say, oh, hi, anxiety. I see you there. It's okay. You can come along with me today. I know you're just trying to protect me. Nothing's gone wrong. I'm safe today. I have today. I don't need to think about all the, you know, stories of uncertainty for the future. Let's bring it back to today. I can handle today I got today, I got this anxiety.

It's deciding on purpose that you're going to accept your emotions, you're going to accept the anxiety, you're going to befriend it, you're not going to see it as a problem. When you see it as a problem and you resist it and you avoid it, you become dependent on external pleasures like alcohol or food or spending money or working, whatever it is to feel better, right? And that's at best. And then you magnify it at worse such that you hurt your own body.

So after you've decided what you want to think about the emotion of anxiety, the last step that I want you to do is to think about how you want to think about your circumstances. So when you feel anxiety, and it kind of came out of nowhere, you're going to do this process right? You're going to name it, you're going to describe it in your body, you're going to allow it, and then you're going to go kind of in this self discovery phase of identifying that thought that caused it. And you're going to decide that you're gonna think positively about your own anxiety. But then you can actually think about what you want your thoughts to be about that circumstance in the future.

So let's say that you run into someone on the street accidentally after turning a corner when you're walking your dog. So initially you might be really anxious about getting sick if you know this is during coronavirus and you're not knowing where that person has been or whether they have it or how they've been taking care of themselves, right? So you go into anxiety after you named the emotion, you describe it, you allow it, right after you do that process and you find the thought that was causing it, which was, oh my gosh, he might be sick and now I might get sick. Something like that. And then you decide to allow it and think positively about your anxiety. You can decide to tell a different story. You can decide to think in a different way about what happened. You don't have to keep your old thought.

Now I say this as the last step because as I talked about earlier, if you rush to change the thought quickly, which is what most people do when they're introduced to thought work, you don't get the deeper understanding. You don't connect with your body, you don't allow it, and your constantly trying to just feel better instead of being willing to accept the negative emotion and be with it.

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So I really want you to do this only after you've done all of the other steps and then you can decide to tell a different story. Such as my body always wants to heal. I take good care of my body. I've been washing my hands and staying clean and I'm healthy now. And if I get any illness in the future, I will be able to take care of myself. I don't need to worry about it prematurely.

Now notice that saying that could create a feeling of calm for you, but if you don't believe it, and you just borrowed that story from from me and you don't think it's true, it could actually increase your anxiety, right? I talked about this before where you're kind of piling negative or you're piling positive thoughts on top of negative thoughts. You're trying to resist the negative instead of accepting it and allowing it. This will work if you choose a new story that you believe. So like the one I just offered, if that happened to you and you don't believe that story, then come up with a different story that you do believe, right? That actually serves you. It might just be something more neutral instead of something as positive as I just said, like it might just be I ran into someone on the street. I know that was supposed to happen. How do I know? Because it did. Right? And anything else is neutral, something like that. You know, it's up to you. I just want to offer to you that you can create new stories. It's not like you running into the person on the street has any meaning other than the meaning that you choose to give it and your brain on default is going to go to the, you know, prefrontal cortex going offline. You're getting in fight or flight mode. So what you want to do is kind of train your brain to get the prefrontal cortex back online and decide on purpose, a story that really, really serves you.

So that my friend is how you manage your anxiety. You do it by managing your mind and by accepting your feelings and allowing them instead of resisting them and escaping them. All right? I want to encourage you through this time to be really, really kind to yourself. I noticed that the clients I'm coaching are just being really hard on themselves and, and I want you to know that your body always wants to heal and take care of itself. And you can choose your thoughts and manage your mind and your body regardless of what's going on in the world. And in fact, when the circumstances show up that you don't want, such as a stay and shelter or covid19, it's often the best opportunity to do this work, right? Because it's the hardest. You can't change your circumstances, but you can change your mind. Is it easy? No. Is it worth it? 100% of the time? You got this friend. I love you and I'll talk with you next week.

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