Winning the Anxiety Game
Brief Strategic Treatment for the Anxiety Disorders

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Anxiety Disorders

- Panic Disorder
  - With or without agoraphobia
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Social Anxiety Disorder
- Specific Phobias
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
- Acute Stress Disorder
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

The Problems

- Attentional bias to perceived threat
  - Lower threshold of probable danger
  - Negative models of future over-represented
- Need for certainty & control
  - Unrealistic expectation for outcome, expressed in absolute terms
  - Separation anxiety
- Need for comfort
- Minimize coping ability
  - Believe they lack control or are helpless
  - Minimizing safety factors

Their Strategies

- Rely on crutches
  - Dependency
  - Rituals
  - High evidence requirements
- Vigilance
- Resist & avoid
  - Resist emotional & physical arousal
  - Risk aversion
  - Resistant to change
  - Separation anxiety

Change these!

Poor strategy

It’s all defense!
Primary Therapeutic Goal: Seek out doubt & distress

- It is counter-productive to try to stay relaxed &/or confident
- Let emotional & physical arousal come forward, without resistance

How do you recover from Anxiety Disorders?

- Change your frame of reference
- Frame-up the action
- Act!

“Change your frame of reference”

“This is serious!”

- If a fearful thought pops up, take it seriously
- I must get rid of my doubt
- I must get rid of my distress

“This is a mental game”

- The content of my worries is irrelevant
- I want to be uncertain
- I want to be distressed

Leveraging the Habituation Model

- Frequency
- Intensity
- Duration

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Honest Stance toward symptoms/worry/uncertainty...

Purposely, voluntarily, choose to want it!

✓ want more of it
✓ want it to last
✓ want it strong

Clients’ Orientation Toward Doubt & Distress

ABSURD!

This is horrible, I lose if this happens!
I don’t want this to happen
I can’t tolerate this happening
I’m willing for this to happen
I want it to happen
I win when it happens

RESIST ➔ PERMIT ➔ PROVOKE

Anxiety wins ➔ Client wins

Your Job

Disorder’s Job

Frequency ➔

Intensity ➔

Duration ➔

The amygdala

“I want this”

The amygdala

Terrified of it

Detached

“Give it to me!”

OBJECT OF FEAR
Try to feel sure that everything’s OK
Try to get comfortable
Treat fearful thoughts seriously
Protect & defend yourself
Stay safe
seek out doubt
Provoke your own discomfort
treat fearful thoughts absurdly
aggress into new, unfamiliar territory
Take a risk; scare yourself

Anxiety dominates

The Gameboard

WORRIES

“watch out!”

UNCERTAINTY

DEFENSES

avoid, fight, run, brace

anxiety’s moves

The Gameboard

your moves

WINNING STRATEGY

1. Do NOT pay attention to your content

WINNING STRATEGY

2. Decide that you will handle whatever might happen (even highly unlikely, terrible outcomes.)
However...

They can only say, “I can handle it” if they stop catastrophizing!

threat = \( \frac{\text{Cost}}{\text{Ability to cope}} \)

“No, but, really… what if it DOES happen?!”

“But, wait… it IS possible that that COULD happen!”

“But… what if it really means something this time?”

“Oh, well.”

Winning Strategy

3. Accept the worry when it pops up

“It’s fine I just had that thought.”

“There’s anxiety, giving me that obsession again. I expected that.”

Winning Strategy

4. WANT to make yourself uncertain

Winning Strategy

5. WANT to be anxious & stay anxious
### Winning Strategy

6. If necessary, make plans & follow them

“Here’s how I am going to [prepare for the talk, manage my anxiety in church, drive to the store]”

“Here’s how I am going to [wash my hands, shower, check the doors, protect my family from salmonella].”

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### Frame-up the action for motivation

“… Good opportunity to practice”

“I want this”

“I can take this hit”

“I can handle this”

“I want to be uncertain”

“I want to be clumsy”

“Gimme your best shot”

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### The art of persuasion

- **Open discussion**
  - Be curious about an opinion

- **Support an opinion**
  - Persuasively argue an opinion

- **Declare opinion as the right one**
  - Give a command

- **(Surgeon) (rowing) (panic, worry moment)**

- **Permissive**
- **Dominant**

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### “Run hills hard.”

- “Look 5-6 feet ahead”
- “Shorten stride”
- “Pick up tempo”

Once commands relegated to unconscious...

### Step 1: Create Your Strategy:
1) get body forward by dropping head & raising arms
2) apply energy to task 3) push forward & up
4) get faster turnover of legs

### Step 2: Generate Commands:
- “Raise the arms”
- “Look 5-6 feet ahead”
- “Swing the arms”
- “Shorten stride”
- “Pick up tempo”

### Step 3: Frame the Action

“Run hills hard”
Frame-up the action as commands

- “Keep moving; don’t pull over”
- “Don’t go into the bathroom”
- “Don’t figure it out”
- “Leave the room now!”
- “Call someone”
- “I must risk”

What happens to frequency, intensity, duration (habituation) when playing the game?

Self-Help Forms from Facing Panic: Self-Help for People With Panic Attacks

- Chart 1: Practicing the Calming Skills
- Chart 2: Practice Creating Symptoms
- Chart 3: Practice Creating Symptoms
- Chart 4: Listing & Ranking My Feared Situations
- Chart 5: Details of My Feared Situations
- Chart 6: Preparing to Practice
- Chart 7: Learning from Practice

Self-Help Forms from Don’t Panic: Taking Control of Anxiety Attacks

1: OPPORTUNITIES TO PRACTICE
2: COPING WITH FEARS
3: SAFETY CRUTCHES
4: PRACTICING CALMING SKILLS
5: PRACTICING CALMING SKILLS
6: SUPPORT STATEMENTS
7: TOLERATING SENSATIONS
8: TOLERATING SENSATIONS
9: LISTING LONG-TERM GOALS
10: RANK LONG-TERM GOALS
11: SHORT-TERM TO LONG-TERM
12: CREATE SHORT-TERM TASKS
13: PLANNING EACH TASK

Formal Relaxation and Breathing Skills transcripts to record your own

1: PRACTICING YOUR BREATHING SKILLS
2: CUE-CONTROLLED DEEP MUSCLE RELAXATION
3: GENERALIZED RELAXATION & IMAGERY

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