The Anxiety Disorder Game: How to Win

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Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment

- Relaxation & breathing skills
- Cognitive restructuring
- Exposure strategies
- Ritual prevention

Interferences with Success in Current Treatment

- Our belief systems—about how to handle arousal & solve problems—overpower therapeutic suggestions
- We all worry
- Errors in anxiety disorder thinking

We all worry

- Provides us drive
- Motivates us to prioritize tasks
- Motivates us to get tasks done
- Use it to kick-start problem-solving process
- Worry becomes our talisman to ward off discomfort

Common Anxiety Disorder Thinking & Acting

- Exaggerate worry
  - Brace for worst
  - Worry to prepare for trouble
  - Worry to be sure of decisions & to increase comfort
- Hold back from acting to avoid mistake
- Keep your mind off distressing thoughts
- Stop uncomfortable symptoms as soon as they arise (don’t get tense!)
These moves increase problems that they are designed to prevent

- When we resist physical symptoms of anxiety, we ensure that anxiety will continue
- Anytime we generate fearful thought like, “I better not get anxious here,” we essentially say, “uh, oh” in cortex

Primary Therapeutic Goal:
Look for Chances to Get Anxious

- It is counter-productive to try to stay relaxed
- It is best to seek out discomfort, & then take care of yourself
- Let emotional & physical arousal come forward, without resistance
  - Don’t try to think your way out of anxiety
  - Learn to tolerate symptoms: “It’s OK that I’m anxious right now”

Leveraging the Habitual Model

Frequency
Intensity
Duration

“Please stay!”: Modifying the Habituation Model

- Systematic Desensitization (Reciprocal Inhibition)
  - Evoke response that is physiologically incompatible with anxiety
- Flooding
  - Intense exposure to feared stimulus
- This Model
  - Flooding plus emotion that is incompatible with anxiety
  - The “as if” scenario

Clients’ relationships with three variables

Worry: fearful thoughts anticipating a dreaded experience
Uncertainty: anxiety-provoking state of not-knowing
Distressing symptoms: physical aspect of anxiety & panic

Stances people take against anxiety

- “I don’t want to be anxious.”
- “I don’t want to be worried.”
- “I want the anxiety to stop.”
- “I want the worry to stop.”
- “I should be worrying.”
- “I want to know how things will be resolved.”
- “I don’t want to take any risk.”
- “What’s wrong with me! I shouldn’t feel/think this way.”
The Existential Game

The symptoms of anxiety are not wrong. They are valueless. They just are.

We are free to choose our judgments in this neutral situation.

The disorders win when we choose the negative.

So... Choose the positive and become a subject in the Game instead of an Object.

Goal: in face of symptoms/worry/uncertainty...

...to express any emotion synonymous to:

- Being excited that worry, uncertainty or distress is present,
- Encouraging it to continue, &
- Hoping, if possible, for it to grow stronger

Clients’ Orientation Toward Doubt and Distress

This is/or will be horrible. I’ll lose if this happens!

Really don’t want this to happen.

Can I want this? I really want this to happen. I choose it happening. happening

RESIST PERMIT PROVOKE

Anxiety wins Client wins

Feeling States That We Are Shooting For

- Being excited
- Desiring
- Seeking out
- Encouraging
- Wanting
- Pleading for more
- Cajoling
- Urging
- Demanding more

The Anxiety Disorder Game

- As if: You are in a relationship with anxiety symptom (distress, worry or uncertainty)
- As if: You have direct request of anxiety symptom
- As if: You will stop at nothing in your quest to create that change in anxiety symptom
- As if: You are requesting that symptom do something opposite of what it expects
- As if: You are trying to convince anxiety symptom of your sincerity (not trying to literally have a feeling)

Keep in mind...

- There is a pre-existing “as if” scenario in place: they are operating as if there is something dangerous about to occur!
- We are working to replace that, not to invent something brand new.
### Trumping Anxiety: The Game

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Experience</th>
<th>Client's Expected Move: Resist (Anxiety Disorder Wins)</th>
<th>Client's Unexpected Move: Stand Down (Client Wins)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling scared</td>
<td>&quot;Please, no!&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;It's irrelevant.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing discomfort</td>
<td>&quot;I can't tolerate it.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Don't be distracted by it.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassed</td>
<td>&quot;Stop!&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;It is just noise.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling threatened</td>
<td>&quot;I can't allow that to continue.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Don't respond to it.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noticing symptoms getting stronger</td>
<td>&quot;I don't have to stop it.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I can handle this.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doubt/uncertainty</td>
<td>&quot;I'm wanting this.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I'm OK.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going toward threat</td>
<td>&quot;More! Please!&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;It's OK.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The Experience

1. Notice I'm anxious/scared, uncertain or worried in public or approaching public situation
2. Decide to be glad about that and reflect it (small smile)
3. Ask symptoms to stay and mean it

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content of worry</th>
<th>Permit</th>
<th>Provoke</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;It's important!&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;It's a signal!&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Pay attention to it!&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Address it!&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;It's irrelevant.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Don't be distracted by it.&quot;</td>
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### Free self-help website

[Website Image]

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