

Dealing with anxiety

When I ask people who come to an 8 week Mindfulness course why they're there, lots of them tell me it's because they suffer from anxiety regularly, most of them on a daily if not hourly basis. All of them want to get rid of this feeling and live anxiety free, hence their presence in Mindfulness classes.

I've been surprised at the amount of people who tell me this; it seems that anxiety is getting more and more common.

Anxiety is a difficult emotion as it's often a general feeling and not always based on one thing or event in particular. Most people can't put their finger on it and say *"that's what's causing me anxiety"* from what I'm seeing and hearing it's more like *"my whole life is causing me anxiety."*

NOTE: Whether this is you to a greater or lesser degree or someone you know, know this: you will never be without anxiety.

Sorry if that's depressing or disappointing.

You are after all a human being subject to all emotions. To block any and allow the others isn't feasible, after all anxiety can be positive as it helps us prepare for some upcoming task or event.

The problem is when we repress (run away from) or suppress (bury it) anxiety as it builds up.

However once you know you will never really be totally beyond it, you can ask yourself *"Well if anxiety won't go away, how can I live with it?" "How can I be in a different relationship with it, one that will be better for me?"*

Consider our native language for a moment, when we're sad we say: "Tá brón orm" or "Sadness is upon me" In English we say "I am sad" the latter implying that this is who I am, sadness. The former says sadness is visiting me, but it's not all of me.

This is the first step in changing our relationship with anxiety and when we take this perspective and put it into operation it makes it easier for the emotion to pass.

How? Well next time that you're feeling anxious.....

1. Put your hand on your heart and say *"A part of me is anxious or Anxiety is visiting me."* Tune into where you're feeling it. E.g. Stomach, jaw, heart etc Get to know it. What thoughts do you have when you're anxious? What actions do you take? Once you're aware of these you can catch them the next

time. (When we're anxious we tend to make more mistakes! And we don't think clearly as blood is taken away from the logical part of the brain)

The next step is to acknowledge that it's there and then give yourself permission to feel this emotion Without looking into the reasons *why* you're feeling this way or going into the story of what happened to cause it etc (you can analyse after if that's helpful to you)

2. *"It's ok for this part of me to feel this way, I give myself permission to feel this"*

When we stop struggling against an emotion by feeling that we shouldn't feel a particular way or someone tells us to stop worrying, or stop being anxious it only serves to make the intensity of the emotion bigger.

By bringing permission to the emotion we stop struggling and then the e-motion (energy in motion) can begin to dissipate.

3. Breathe, take a couple of long deep breaths and keep saying *"It's ok for me to feel this"*,

Remember, our breath rate and depth tells us our stress levels. Soften and change it ...make it longer and deeper.

4. Do some mindfulness – either a full practice (any of the recordings I've shared) or a shorter one such as this: Count your inbreath and count your outbreath. Make them the same length for 5 - 10 breaths and then make the outbreath 1 to 2 beats longer than the inbreath. Repeat for 3 to 4 minutes.

This little routine helps you to cultivate some self-compassion as you let go of the struggle against feeling the anxiety (*"I shouldn't feel like this"* *"This is ridiculous"* etc) Accept it, and then breathe, and you will find that the feeling dramatically reduces and then leaves. Sometimes it requires a few rotations through this process to be totally free but the more you do it the easier it will be and then the anxiety will be gone!

So in summary to deal with anxiety:

- Know that you will always have it (to a greater or lesser degree) - so change your relationship to it.
- When it arises welcome it and know that it's only visiting (non-judgement). "Anxiety is upon me or A part of me is feeling anxious"
- Acceptance - "It's ok for me to feel this, let me feel this"
- Breathe.

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