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Letting Of Things Not Within Your Control: Letting Go & Anxiety

Letting go might seem like an obvious thing to someone suffering from panic attacks; however, it is the often one of the most overlooked things.

What do I mean by letting go of things not within your control?

Letting go is the opposite of the anxiety sufferer's tendency to attempt to control situations encountered, i.e. avoiding places that cause anxiety, avoiding people you don't know, etc.

It's certainly understandable that an anxiety sufferer would do so because it seems logical to assume that by avoiding the situations that cause anxiety one can avoid the anxiety provoked by them. The problem is that over time you might develop agoraphobia if you avoid social situations and other uncomfortable ones. Simply put, agoraphobia is fear of fear. People with agoraphobia are very fearful of leaving their home.

When you encounter situations or interactions with other people that aren't consistent with your "should" beliefs, your anxiety increases.

I will explain what I mean by "should" beliefs but first want to make something perfectly clear: This entire process (the attempting to control your reality (or desirability of doing so) by avoiding uncomfortable situations is not necessarily intentional but rather a reactionary tendency that has been learned over time.

What is a "should" belief?

It's a rule or standard you hold people or situations to. To put it another way, it's how you expect other people to react or behave in a particular situation.

The Cognitive Behavioral Therapy approach (CBT), which has been discussed in previous installments, considers "should" statements to be one of the cognitive distortions which bring on anxiety and panic attacks. The formal description of a should statement is: "Concentrating on what you think 'should' or ought to be rather than the actual

situation you are faced with, or having **rigid rules** which you think should always apply no matter what the circumstances are.”

For example, let's say that you are about to enter a building and the person ahead of you doesn't hold the door. If your expectation (in other words your “should” belief) is that he/she should have held the door for you, you'll notice your anxiety level increases by this situation. This is a very simple and basic example, but the point is that these standards and rules (“should” beliefs) are often a distortion very often held by the anxiety sufferer in a number of situations.

What can you do about these beliefs?

The key for all of us is to become aware that “should” beliefs (such as the above example), which we impose on others, really ignores the reality that people are diverse; people are individuals and will work from their belief system or “should” belief system, which isn't necessarily yours BUT that's okay.

While we might consider it rude to let the door go instead of holding it for the person behind us, the person in front of you may have had a different belief system or “should” belief about how to act in this situation. Just today I had an experience with an individual known for being difficult; this installment was really helpful to put it into perspective.

By realizing that people are individuals and will behave individually because they are working from their own belief system, it becomes clear that there is no point in becoming stressed when people don't behave according to your “should” beliefs. When situations do not unfold exactly how you'd like them to, there is a more effective approach than getting stressed.

A good reason to change your thinking with respect to your “should” beliefs and avoidance of situations is that the payoff is much greater. That is, you will live a much fuller and happier life with less anxiety than if you were to continue to impose your “should” beliefs to others' behaviours and situations.

Changing how you process these events and behaviours with the above realizations will result in a lot less stress and anxiety in your life and the need to avoid situations simply because they might be uncomfortable. This applies to many situations in your life. For example, if you've been struggling with a problem and really worked hard at solving it and you've really done all that you can do, it's time to let go.

The process of letting go can really only occur when you begin to restructure your anxiety producing “should” thoughts and beliefs. This will happen by looking at things

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from healthier and a more realistic frame of reference which can occur through the Cognitive Behavioral approach which I've been discussing.

This kind of thought restructuring allows you to restructure your beliefs, which, in my opinion, is a necessary part of the holistic approach required in a recovery from anxiety, panic attacks and agoraphobia. I urge you to give this a try.

The best up-to-date resource available on Cognitive Therapy and comprehensive approach to anxiety and panic attacks is by Dr. David Burns, M.D. Dr. Burns' recently released book is called: "When Panic Attacks: The New, Drug-Free Anxiety Therapy That Can Change Your Life"

His book is based on very comprehensive research, case studies and his vast experience with anxiety, panic attacks and agoraphobia and depression. Dr. Burns is a very distinguished psychiatrist who has written many extremely helpful books on anxiety and depression.

Take Care,

Matthew Wagner

For more information on Dr. Burns, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), even Vignettes concerning CBT, and more information concerning panic attacks, agoraphobia, and anxiety, please sign up for our free newsletter by simply visiting www.PanicAttackRecovery.com and providing your email address in the sign-up box. Subscribers can opt out of our newsletter at any time.

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