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Thoughts & Panic Attacks

Many times when we become anxious, the feelings of anxiety may seem to come out of nowhere. We may conclude that our feelings of uneasiness have no basis in our thinking.

As I've previously discussed, the truth is, that many times, feelings of distress have been brought on by something that has happened, which might not be obvious at first. At the same time, though, it's not necessarily a particular event, but rather, a thought or series of thoughts that are causing your distress. And that's what I want to talk about to day.

What do I mean?

I think I could do a better job of explaining this if you allow me to make use of an analogy.

If you've ever had the pleasure (sarcasm!) of studying either logic or computer based logic, you'll notice that a part of it involves the use of rules, for example: if X then Y. It's like a command to a computer that says: if this happens, then do this.

Let me look at a specific example:

Let's say that I work for a company and one of my tasks involves retrieving all customers' names who were born throughout the month of July. (Let's say I want to send them a birthday card).

In order for me to be able to retrieve such information from my database requires it to run a command. The command might go something like this: If X is born between July 1 – July 31st then list names. This command will allow me to obtain a report from my database that lists all customers who were born in the month of July. So these are very effective for computer functions.

Humans too have certain logical functions in their head that conclusions are drawn from. The problem is that such conclusions are not necessarily true and can lead to anxiety and panic attacks.

Below are some examples of such thoughts:

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If I feel anxious THEN I'm going to have a panic attack.

If I have a panic attack, THEN I will lose control and everyone will laugh at me.

If I have a panic attack THEN I will lose control and lose my mind.

Now these are basic and simple examples of thoughts that contain Cognitive Distortions.

In reality, you probably have a series of thoughts, specific to you, that you'll need to get a handle on. Once you do so you can certainly reduce or eliminate some or all of the panic attacks from your life.

When I say "get a handle on" I'm not simply suggesting that you just need to locate a few thoughts, their distortions, and then generate a few alternate thoughts and you're done. No, this takes time but it's well worth the effort.

So to "get a handle on" these things you need to constantly talk back to your thoughts and in a sense the process is like you are rewriting the computer program that is causing your anxiety.

I've previously discussed that you have to learn to become a detective with your thoughts and I've also discussed the importance of monitoring your thoughts. Monitoring itself can be a useful thing to do and can bring about results. But in addition learning to constantly "talk back" to your negative thoughts can alleviate the feelings of distress that are caused by them.

Getting a handle on things involves using the process of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) that I've discussed many times.

By using CBT you are creating alternate "if then" conclusions. Rather than ending your "if then" statements with a tragic conclusion which causes anxiety or panic attacks you have consistently retrained your mind to employ new logical arguments and conclusions. You've written new rules. This is the power of thoughts and working constantly with them.

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