

## Some Thoughts About Anxiety

Most of us feel anxious from time to time, usually related to something specific. Our anxieties can be focused on a whole range of things from missing a train, to concern for the welfare or safety of someone close to us, or feeling under threat or out of our depth in some way. Anxiety is often based on our fear of the consequences of doing something, or not doing something: we worry about what might happen if we miss our train, or if we don't support someone enough. When this anxiety is harnessed to a vivid imagination, it can make a catastrophe out of something quite minor ie. we are quite capable of distorting the reality of our situation.

Healthy anxiety is part of our instinctive survival mechanism and links us back to a more primitive age when survival was at the forefront of our existence, as it still is for animals living in the wild. Most of us have not lost our in-built "flight or fight" response to situations where we feel threatened or sense danger. When we feel threatened our instinct tells us that we need to take **action**, either to challenge whatever it is we are confronted with (fight); or to retreat and back down because we realise – or imagine – that our capabilities, or resources, are not as powerful as the thing that threatens us (flight).

But what if we are unable to confront or retreat from whatever is making us feel anxious, because the circumstances we find ourselves in are not under our control? What if we are experiencing a non-specific anxiety: ie. We are unable to put our finger on why we are feeling anxious? This is much more difficult to deal with because we don't know what the source of our anxiety is and this can make us feel stressed as well as anxious. It can also lead to disrupted sleep patterns.

Psychodynamic thinking links the levels of anxiety we experience, to our own sense of security: the less secure we feel inside, the more likely we are to feel anxious. This pattern is thought to be laid down in childhood, influenced by the nature of our attachments to our parents, or our primary care givers: the more secure we felt as children, in relation to those looking after us, the less anxiety we are likely to feel now. So we have developed an in-built template as to how anxious we feel in given situations and also how we deal with our anxieties.

So how can we deal more effectively with our anxieties, so that we are able to manage them better and not feel overwhelmed by them? One thing that can help in dealing with anxiety is to try and mentally contain it: to create a space inside yourself that is anxiety free, or at least less anxious. Meditation and breathing techniques will help you achieve this, though it may be very difficult to learn these on your own. Getting a relaxation tape or DVD might be one way of trying them out, though it is often a good idea to go to meditation or relaxation class. These classes will help you begin to build a space inside that feels calmer and more solid – an inner resource to help sustain you.

Another option might be to find a counsellor or psychotherapist who can help you understand what is going on inside: someone who might have more insight into the nature of your anxieties and their origins and who would also be able to provide you with emotional support and understanding. This may in turn help you to be better equipped to manage your own anxieties.

### Books:

"Calming Your Anxious Mind", Jeffery Brantley and Jon Kabat-Zinn; New Harbinger Publications Inc. (2007)

"Beginning Mindfulness", Andrew Weiss; New World Library (2004)

### Websites:

[www.freemeditations.com](http://www.freemeditations.com)