DON'T FEED THE MONKEY MIND

HOW *to* STOP THE CYCLE *of* ANXIETY, FEAR & WORRY

JENNIFER SHANNON, LMFT

Illustrations by DOUG SHANNON

Foreword by MICHAEL A. TOMPKINS, PHD

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"If you are ready to turn the tables on your anxiety, you can find no better book than Don't Feed the Monkey Mind. Jennifer Shannon will help you turn away from the enticing tactics of fearful worry and teach you how to return to the life you love."

—Reid Wilson, PhD, author of *Stopping the Noise in Your Head*

"This book is a gem for people seeking to tame runaway anxiety and upset. Jennifer Shannon takes the simple metaphor of 'monkey mind' and fleshes it out with wisdom and simple steps that anyone can follow. Here, in plain language, is a comprehensive set of concrete steps to let your anxiety run its course and then fade. Jennifer Shannon has blended the best of cognitive behavioral methods and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) to produce a great contribution to the self-help literature. Here you can learn to return your energy and attention back to your voyage through life, rather than the worries and fears that have hijacked your focus. Professional psychotherapists will also find it useful. I highly recommend it!"

—David Carbonell, PhD, Chicago-based psychologist specializing in treating fears and phobias; author of *Panic Attacks Workbook* and *The Worry Trick*; and "coach" at www.anxietycoach.com

"Don't Feed the Monkey Mind is clear and easy to understand. The book will teach you simple and powerful strategies to harness fear and worry. Jennifer Shannon teaches you how to transform your life by taking the 'monkey' out of your mind."

—Dennis Greenberger, PhD, coauthor of *Mind Over Mood*

"Don't Feed the Monkey Mind begins with a well-written synopsis of basic attitudes and mental habits that perpetuate anxiety. The

book follows with a set of clear, concise changes in mind-set and behavioral strategies to overcome anxiety at its roots. The 'monkey mind' concept is an apt, original contribution. Examples of points provided by the author as well as references to her personal story help make the book accessible to readers of all kinds."

—Edmund J. Bourne, PhD, author of *The Anxiety & Phobia Workbook* and *Coping with Anxiety*

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Contents

Foreword

What makes a great self-help book? Over these many years I have searched for the answer, and now I've found it in this book. The formula comes down to three things: expert knowledge, a unique spin on the subject, and most importantly, a deep understanding, beyond the professional, about the subject—in this case, anxiety, and what it is like to struggle with it.

By her own admission, Jennifer Shannon knows her way around the subject. Through her own personal struggle with anxiety, and her years of professional practice, she has learned a few things that she is eager to pass along to her readers. Her message is timely, perfectly suited for the anxiety-ridden society we live in.

In this her third book, Jennifer presents her own unique spin on the problem of anxiety and its treatment in straightforward, inspiring language. Her central metaphor for the source of anxiety, the monkey mind, is an ancient one, but in her hands, it feels both original and fresh. In the first chapter she introduces the three basic tricks the monkey mind plays on us, and the book takes off from there, describing a host of strategies that you can use to break the cycle of anxiety and calm that frisky creature within.

Do not assume, however, that because Jennifer presents anxiety management strategies in a way that is fun and accessible that they are less powerful. We have over thirty years of research that tell us that these techniques are not smoke and mirrors. They are the real deal.

This book lays out a clear and consistent message that will help you overcome any kind of anxiety. If you are suffering, it will touch you. Here is an author who mastered her own monkey mind and who now wishes to help you master yours.

—Michael Tompkins, PhD

Introduction

This book will show you, in a clear and memorable way, everything you need to know to alleviate your anxiety, worry, and stress.

That's a bold promise, and it's one that I don't take lightly. One reason I feel qualified to make it is that I'm a therapist who has specialized in treating anxiety disorders for twenty years. My second qualification is that I was not blessed with a relaxed, easygoing nervous system. Like you, I am hardwired for anxiety and worry.

I was an anxious child as far back as I can remember—I'll skip the gory details about chronic nightmares, mysterious stomachaches, and endless worrying. When my anxiety persisted as a young adult I turned to therapy for help. My therapist had a psychodynamic orientation, commonly known as "talk therapy," which is based on the premise that our problems originate in childhood and that once we have insight into them we naturally progress toward a healthier state. After a number of sessions, my therapist and I theorized that my anxiety began with my relationship with a distant and critical father, and that I developed a fear of being judged and criticized. This and other similar insights were comforting to me. It made good sense that I was anxious and it wasn't my fault. My anxiety, however, continued.

Several years later, shortly after the birth of my first child, Max, I started having panic attacks. If you've ever experienced a panic attack—almost 50% of the adult population has had at least one—you know what I mean when I say they are really, really horrible. My entire body was seized with crippling fear, my heart pounded, and I got almost instant diarrhea. My vision became distorted, my hearing was altered—everything seemed unreal.

Soon I was having panic attacks at random times throughout the day. Sometimes they woke me up in the middle of the night. I thought I might be going crazy. I had a child to take care of and I was beginning my professional career as a therapist. I was terrified that

my panic attacks would interfere with the things that were most important to me: raising a family and working. I knew I needed help.

My new therapist and I decided that the responsibility of a newborn was probably what triggered my anxiety. We explored how my past made me vulnerable for developing anxiety. Once again I was getting all sorts of insights. But the panic attacks just kept coming.

My therapist and I thought relaxation would help, so I committed myself to practicing relaxation every day. I faithfully tried one relaxation tape after another, thinking the next might do the trick. Still, there was no relief. I found someone who did biofeedback, a type of relaxation training where you are hooked up to a machine that gives you an immediate reading as to how relaxed your body is. I was a very motivated participant, but still, the panic attacks came.

I was desperate. Everything I was doing to figure out why this was happening to me and to stop it from happening was not working. I began to have serious doubts about my career choice. How could I help others if I couldn't help myself?

Then in a local bookstore one day I saw a title that jumped off the shelf at me: *Don't Panic* by Reid Wilson. I started to read it right then and there, and within a few minutes I was standing in the aisle fighting back tears of relief. I had finally found someone who understood what was happening to me.

What I discovered from reading Wilson's book was that the reason why I was having panic attacks was not nearly as important as how I was reacting to them. My attempts to fix the problem—analyzing it, figuring it out, trying to get rid of it with relaxation training—were actually making things worse. I needed to respond completely differently to my panic attacks. Once I learned to take a different stance toward panic, I was able to cure myself from it.

Don't Panic was my first introduction to cognitive behavioral therapy. CBT is not concerned so much with how your problems developed, but what is maintaining them now. Inspired by my personal experience, I retrained myself with books and workshops, and by consultation with some of the best CBT therapists in the field.

Changing my professional orientation to CBT has transformed my job effectiveness and satisfaction immeasurably.

It was not until later in my career that I realized that focusing on what is maintaining problems is not only effective for all types of anxiety and depression, but for living a fuller, more self-actualized life. Whether you want to free yourself from a specific problem, like me and my panic attacks, or you simply want to live a happier, more successful, and more peaceful life, the tools to use are the same.

I often tell my clients who suffer from anxiety disorders that they are the lucky ones. They are lucky in the sense that, unlike most people whose anxieties can be tolerated, their anxiety is too serious to ignore. They have a real motivation to seek help. What I have to teach them will not only help them with their anxiety, it will help them with whatever problems arise in the future.

Do you have the motivation to change? If you do, read on! Everything you need to know is right here in this book.

Chapter 1

Perception of Threat

Do you ever feel as though you were living your life hooked up to an IV drip of fear? 6:00 a.m.: *I couldn't get to sleep last night. Now I'll be too groggy to be productive*. 6:01 a.m.: *Did I check whether the kids did their homework?* 6:02 a.m.: *God, I hope the market holds!* And so on throughout your day.

The fact is, you *are* living with a virtual IV drip of fear, a steady dose of stress hormones that you experience as anxiety and worry. It's a prescription written for you and delivered to you by your own brain. And trying to do something about it has only made it worse.

This book will show you why you can't control your anxiety. Indeed, it will show you that the very things you've been doing to try to control your anxiety are actually what maintain your anxiety. Resisting, avoiding, and distracting yourself from your anxiety are behaviors that send the wrong message to your brain. These behaviors fuel a cycle of anxiety that always leads to a bigger dose. I call it *feeding the monkey*. By the monkey, I mean the *monkey mind*, a metaphor as old as the behavior itself. Let me explain what I mean.

For thousands of years, sages have likened the human mind to a monkey—leaping into thin air from one branch of thought to another,

never content, never at rest. Worries echo in our heads like so much monkey chatter. Powerful emotions have us jumping at anything that promises a little relief. Yet somehow relief always lies just beyond our reach.

Whether due to genetic traits or traumatic life events, millions of us suffer from excess anxiety. But regardless of what variety or intensity our anxiety manifests, there is one thing that is true for all of us. We cannot relax and be at peace unless we feel safe. Humans and all other creatures, regardless of species, are first and foremost survival machines. Maintaining safety is, by necessity, our highest priority. When we feel that our safety is at stake, everything else—appreciating the beauty and wonder of life, pursuing the heart's desires, or simply being "present in the moment"—becomes expendable.

Whether or not you believe your personal safety is at stake, you've been living as if it were. The way we anxious folks are wired, we don't feel like we have any choice. In order to understand how this has happened to us, let's take a brief trip to what is sometimes called the "fear center" of the brain.

Deep within the core of your skull, at the top of your spinal column, is a pair of almond-sized nuclei called the *amygdalae*. All experience—everything you see, smell, hear, touch, feel, or think—passes through the amygdalae like travelers passing through airport security. There in the amygdalae each experience is instantly and automatically screened for threat.

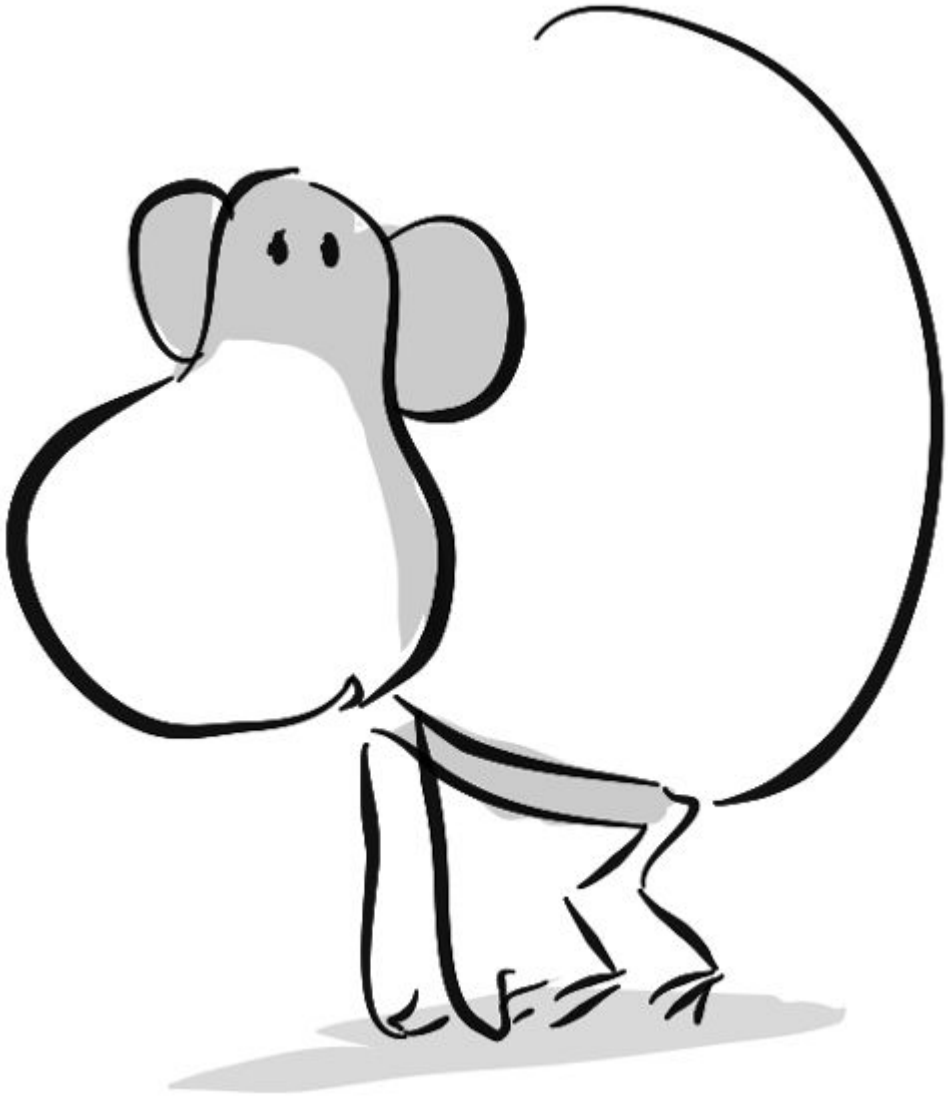
When there is a perception of threat, the amygdalae set off an alarm system that alerts their neighbors, the *hypothalamus* and the *adrenal glands*, which in turn send hormonal and neurological signals to the sympathetic nervous system, instructing it to accelerate the heart rate and breathing, bathe you in stress hormones, and shut down digestion and other unnecessary functions—in short, to go into survival mode.

How we experience survival mode—what it feels like to us—is crucial not only to our safety but to our sense of well-being. Depending on the perception of threat, we may experience these alarms as uncomfortable physical sensations, like heart palpitations

and sweating, and negative emotions like fear, anger, and shame. These feelings are not conducive to our peace of mind. They can override everything else we want to think about and act upon—in effect, they hijack the rest of the brain.

If you are unable to enjoy the higher functions you are capable of—the ability to relax, to experience joy, to move toward your dreams—that alarm system is being overused. You are living with an IV drip of low-level negative emotion, otherwise known as anxiety. You are surviving, but not thriving. Your purpose on earth is being trumped by the misperceptions of threat and the false alarms of the amygdalae or, to borrow the sages' metaphor, the *monkey mind.*

Why a monkey? Isn't the source of our fear and anxiety more like a monster to be vanquished, a demon to be exorcised? Hardly. This part of your brain is a loyal, hardworking component dedicated to your safety. It just gets a little wild and overreactive sometimes, like a monkey.



A Call to Action

Imagine you are crossing a busy intersection on your way to work in the morning when a truck runs a red light and heads straight in your direction. Instinctively, in a fraction of a second, you leap to the curb, out of the truck's path. Your heart is pounding and your hand is shaking so hard your coffee is spattering on your sleeve. This is the *fight-or-flight response*, and while you may not enjoy the feeling, it has kept us alive for thousands of years.

This early warning system is so quick and powerful that it overrides the rest of your brain. Whatever else you were focusing on—watching the walk light, thinking about the meeting you are heading to—falls away so dealing with the threat can take center stage. This is as it should be, for after all, the number one job of the brain is staying alive. The fight-or-flight response is the call to action of the monkey mind. Without it, we'd all be busy cliff diving and petting snakes.

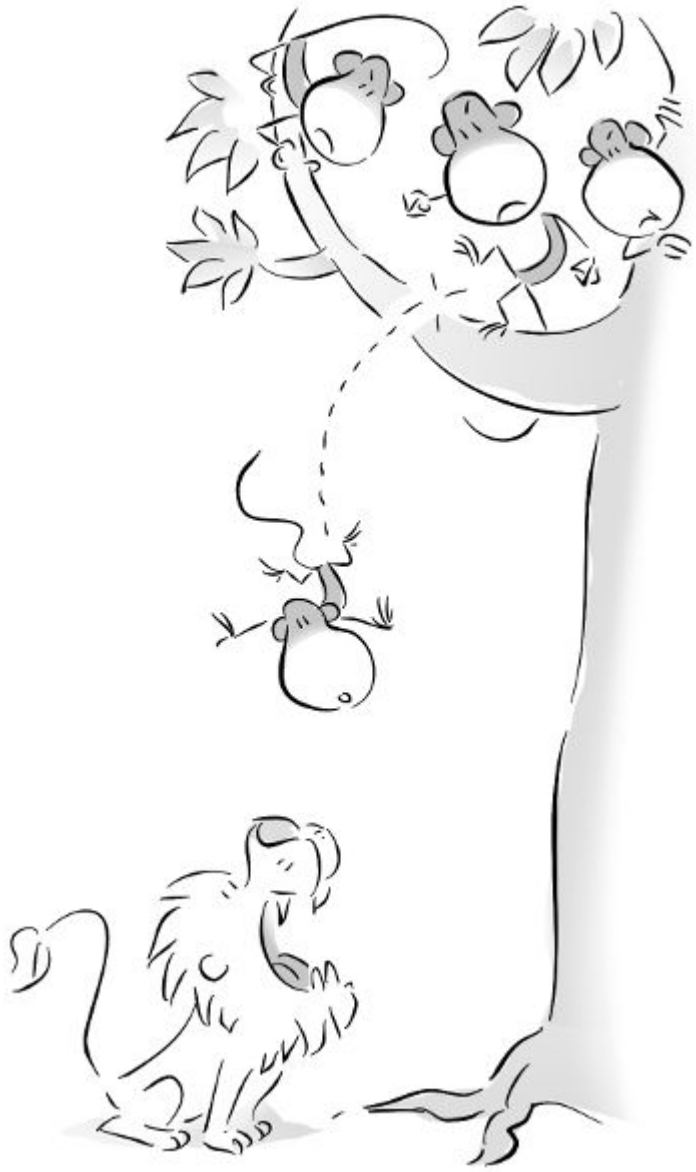
As if keeping us safe were not a big enough responsibility, the monkey mind is also instrumental in performing the number two job of the brain, that of keeping us connected to each other. In addition

to threats like charging wild boars, club-wielding rivals, and speeding trucks, the monkey mind can recognize social threats to our survival. It's hardwired to do so. Even in our earliest stage of life, infancy, we can perceive safety or danger in the facial expressions of our parents. Why is this necessary? We humans are thin-skinned, without sharp teeth or claws, and not very strong—what other predatory animals might call a soft target. We have always hunted and housed ourselves together in packs, so we can watch out for each other. Your ancestors' social status within their families and tribes was crucial to their survival.

In order to protect your social status, your monkey mind is always watching and listening to those around you, looking for signals telling whether you are respected, whether you are loved, and whether you belong. If you are alienating your neighbors, irritating your friends and family, or a subject of scorn to your community, even if you are not aware of it, the monkey reads the signals and sounds the alarm. A serving of fear, with a side order of shame, will focus your attention and remind you that you need to play well with others.

Primordial Threat

These two ever-present possibilities—death, and losing social status or being kicked out of the tribe—are universal, what I call *primordial threats*. The ability to recognize primordial threats is so important that it is built into our brains, part of our operating system. You don't have to teach a toddler not to put her hand in the fire or walk off a cliff. The ability to recognize heights, loud noises, snakes, bared teeth, and other dangerous situations as potential threats is universal. The hard-learned lessons of our ancestors are bequeathed to us in our DNA, informing the monkey mind's ability to perceive threats and thus enabling humanity to survive.



Unfortunately, the monkey is also the source of all our modern anxieties. Why? Because when the monkey is presented with something it hasn't been programmed to recognize, it has to guess whether or not it's a threat. For those of us with a lot of anxiety, our monkey mind's guesses err on the side of safety. This makes for plenty of misperceptions.

If on the day after your close call with a speeding truck, you find yourself standing anxiously at the curb, clutching your coffee, waiting for the walk sign to turn, you may wonder why you're feeling so jumpy. You remember the vivid image of that speeding, homicidal

truck clearly, but you know very well that incident was an anomaly. There is statistically little risk crossing the street when the walk sign is on. Nevertheless, you are anxious. That's because the monkey mind cannot do risk assessment. Just like a real monkey, it is no good at math.

When that memory of the oncoming truck flashes across your mind, the monkey notices and makes a guess at your danger level. Without pausing to reflect (because it can't reflect), it sounds the alarm. When the monkey mind hits the fear button, we are as simple and single-minded as our forebears. Anxiety is a call to action. The monkey is screaming, *Woo-woo-woo! Something is wrong. Do something!*

How you react depends on how you've learned to react in the past. You might stand frozen in fear for a few moments, waiting until others cross safely. You might avoid that corner in the future, or you might white-knuckle your way across the street, shaming yourself for your fear, muttering *This is ridiculous!*

When the monkey uses its trump card, usually *whatever* we do is ridiculous. Once your fight-or-flight reflex is activated, the chemicals, hormones, and emotions at work in your body hijack the rest of your brain.

This is quite an accomplishment for such a little critter. The prefrontal cortex, known as the executive brain, is the size of an elephant compared to the monkey mind. It's the greatest cognitive engine in history: the primary tool used in the writing of *Hamlet*, invention of the iPhone, and perhaps someday, a cure for cancer. Yet with the help of a little anxiety, the monkey can make the elephant stand on its hind legs and trumpet its snout in terror. No matter how smart you are, no matter how crystal clear your vision, everything is distorted when viewed through the lens of fear.

Hijacked

When we are hijacked by the monkey mind, we make two simple mistakes. First, we overestimate the threat. What are the actual odds of another homicidal truck appearing the moment you step into the street today? The chance is practically nil, but you're trusting a wild guess of the monkey: *Woo-woo-woo! Looks likely to me!*

The second mistake is that we underestimate our ability to cope with both the negative emotions in the monkey's alarm, and with the threat should it actually occur. Whether we're crossing the street or climbing a ladder, accidents happen. When you attempt any task, you can fail. When you open your mouth to speak you may offend someone. But life doesn't stop when threats manifest as reality. We cope. We recover. We can learn from our mistakes and move on. Nor should life stop when we're feeling the negative emotions and sensations of the monkey's alarms.

But many of us have our lives on hold. The ambient background of anxiety keeps us paralyzed, unable to follow our dreams. We spend our days—and for some of us, nights—reviewing the past for errors and looking into the future to prevent making more. We debate decisions we've already made, recycle old concerns, indulge endless regrets, obsess over things we can't control. It's all in response to a constant stream of negative feelings and monkey chatter. *Woo-woo-woo! Something is wrong. Do something!*

We try to manage things. We check our smartphones or turn on the TV. We pour ourselves a drink, we get a snack, we go shopping. We triple-check the report for errors. We say yes to things when we want to say no. We look up symptoms on the Internet to reassure ourselves the mole is not cancerous.

These distractions and strategies offer only short-term relief. The monkey mind is always on the job, hypervigilant, waiting for an opening. If you've ever tried meditating, and given up in frustration, you know exactly what I'm talking about. The moment your focus wavers, the monkey elbows in with something compelling to feel anxious about and occupy your mind.

When it comes to the monkey mind, the cliché *resistance is futile* is actually true. The monkey mind is an ancient brain-within-a-brain—simple, focused, and hardwired to be autonomous, beyond our direct control. The monkey is always there, even when you most want to enjoy the moment without it—when you're alone just trying to relax, when you're in your lover's arms, when you are trying to pursue your dreams.

While this may sound discouraging, it is actually good news. If you can conceptualize your anxiety as a false alarm, and your anxious thoughts as being like the chattering of a monkey, you have already begun your healing. You understand that the monkey mind is a working part of you, but *you are not the monkey*.

In cognitive behavioral therapy we call this *defusion*. Becoming aware of this difference *de*-fuses—creates a distance between—the part of you that is hyperreactive to threat and the rational part of you that can notice your thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations, and learn to override them when necessary. Working with patients, I've learned that defusion is a lot easier when we conceptualize the source of anxiety not as a monster within, but only as a frightened little monkey trying to do its job.

This book will teach you how to develop resilience to the monkey's alarms so that you can think and act clearly in situations where you are usually hijacked. Having more resilience will also allow you to be more resourceful and flexible when real threats arise. With practice you will eventually experience less anxiety, which I imagine is why you are reading this book. And there's a bonus. While following this practice you'll also reclaim your personal values and reorient yourself toward what your heart desires.

With your new awareness of the monkey mind, you've taken the first step on your path to recovery. You understand now that your

anxiety does not define you. It is a distinct part of you that is beyond your direct control. Coming up, step two: recognizing how anxiety affects your thinking. What happens to your point of view when you get hijacked by the monkey?

Chapter 1 Takeaway

Our anxiety is a call to action generated by the monkey mind's perception of threat.

Chapter 2

The Three Assumptions

One morning several years ago I sat down with my laptop to begin writing my first book: a workbook for teens with social anxiety. I'd never attempted to write anything of this scale before and I could hardly believe I was doing it. As a therapist I talked about anxiety every day with my clients, but writing about it was a different matter.

As I reached for the keyboard my heart began to race and my stomach clenched up. *I'm not really sure how to say what I want to say,* I thought to myself, adding, *and an author should be*. Looking at my fingers hovering above the keyboard, I noticed that my nails needed filing.

What if my premise isn't fully formed yet? I continued. *What if my conceptualization is unsuitable for a book, or worse yet, just plain wrong? If I am wrong the whole world will know that I am a fraud!* I suddenly remembered an article I had meant to read. *Would a bit more research give me some clarity?*

If this book isn't good I'll disappoint my editor, my readers, and my friends and family. I'll let everybody down! I thought. At this point my hands were visibly trembling. Looking out the window I noticed that someone really should pick up that dog poop in the backyard.

None of the tasks that were calling me away from my laptop were truly important or time sensitive. What made them suddenly compelling was that both my body and my brain were telling me that something was wrong. I was experiencing the very thing I considered myself an expert on: anxiety. I was hijacked.

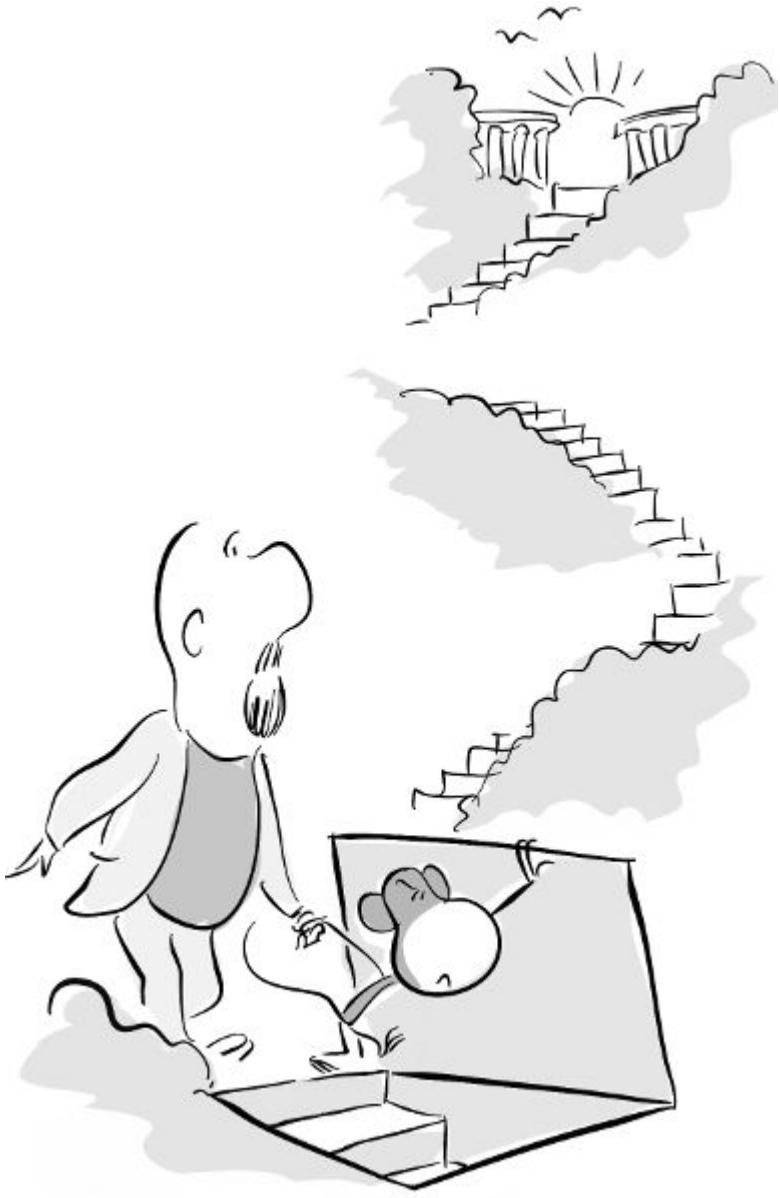
If we examine my anxious thoughts that morning, we can recognize three assumptions I had made. First, I thought I had to be certain about what I was going to write. Second, I thought that if I got anything wrong I would be exposed as a fraud. Third, I thought if the book wasn't successful I would disappoint everyone.

These three assumptions are universally shared by all anxious people. (Yes, reader, as you know if you read the introduction, I am one of you!) Because they echo the survival agenda of the monkey mind, I call them collectively the *monkey mind-set*.

- Intolerance of uncertainty: *I must be 100% certain.*
- Perfectionism: *I must not make mistakes.*
- Over-responsibility: *I am responsible for everyone's happiness and safety.*

These assumptions are impossible standards. The more we attempt to live by them, the more anxious we will be, and the less likely we will be to take the risks that are necessary to take in order to live freely and follow our dreams.

That morning in the backyard, I stopped and took a look at myself. *To write this book is my heart's desire,* I thought. *Why am I holding a pooper scooper instead?* The monkey mind-set seldom takes us anywhere we want to go. In fact, it almost always holds us back from what we long for in life.



You will recognize at least one, if not all three of these assumptions, as a central pillar of your own belief system. The first is particularly widespread. In fact, you can't be anxious without it!

Intolerance of Uncertainty

The ability to plan for the future—to anticipate problems and opportunities—is one of the most important, if not *the* most important, adaptations of our *Homo sapiens* brains. Whether the

issue is our health, our finances, or our family, we like to know what lies ahead. *What if I get sick? Will the market crash? Will my loved ones arrive safely?* These are our constant concerns, and we plan with them in mind. But when does reasonable planning turn into worry and obsession?

Your monkey's central mission—keeping you alive and safe within your tribe—is best accomplished by eliminating all uncertainty. The monkey motto is *What you don't know might kill you.* From its perspective, the only time it's safe for you to relax is when you can anticipate and control *every* outcome. *Be certain or die!*

Yet the only thing we know for certain is that the sun will come up tomorrow. If we cannot tolerate not knowing what will unfold in that morning light, we won't be able to sleep. Until we've eliminated every threat, we will be unable to relax or feel any pleasure. We'll agonize over decisions because we think that with enough research and caution we can always make the right choice. Presented with

something new, we'll assume it is dangerous unless it's proven to be safe. We're always preparing for the worst because the worst is probably just around the corner.

This mind-set takes its toll. Constant hypervigilance keeps us worried and stressed—especially problematic at night when we are trying to sleep. Making decisions is difficult because we believe we need to be sure we are making the right one. Big decisions like choosing a college or a job are paralyzing. Even something as simple as choosing a pair of shoes can become a labyrinth of pros and cons.

Difficulty tolerating doubt can lead to compulsive checking behaviors like making sure doors are locked and appliances are turned off. You'll tend to overplan things; even weekends and vacations have a to-do list. And when the list doesn't get finished or things don't go as you planned them, you become upset and have difficulty enjoying the moment.

The problem with needing to be certain is there's a never diminishing supply of things to make certain of. Every waking minute you'll be striving for that which is unattainable: complete certainty about all things. When your default protocol is to guarantee a good outcome in every situation, you wind up treating life itself as a threat—something to be checked on, analyzed, evaluated, controlled, and conquered. Instead of living fully and dealing with whatever may go wrong, you spend your precious days on earth worrying about what *might* happen.

Maria

Let me introduce a composite client of mine with this monkey mind-set. Maria's presenting problem was her sensitivity to physical sensations, typically a sudden stabbing pain in her heart area, pressure in her head, flashes of light in her eyes, or tingling in her extremities. When she had one of these sensations, she worried that it might be a sign something was wrong, like a heart attack, a brain tumor, a detached retina, or a nervous system disorder. To ease her anxiety, she monitored the symptoms closely and looked them up on

the Internet. Her doctor reassured her that they were harmless, and her tests showed that she was healthy, but Maria was spending more and more time and energy dealing with these sensations and she felt they were ruining her life. “I knew the pain I was having was probably harmless,” she told me after a trip to the ER, “but what if it *was* an aneurysm?”

Although Maria was smart enough to recognize that random sensations are seldom pathological, her assumption was, *I must be certain.* Every sensation was guilty until proven innocent, and the cost of investigating them was wearing Maria down. Maria was hijacked, acting out of an intolerance of uncertainty.

Nearly every anxiety sufferer I have met shares Maria’s mind-set: this assumption that certainty is not only possible, but necessary for our peace and happiness. The truth is just the opposite. No amount of preparedness can control every outcome. Life always provides adversity, for which we need flexibility and resilience. And life also provides pleasant surprises—joyous and peaceful moments that we can’t anticipate. These are wasted, sadly, on those of us who are only open to what we can be certain about.

Some of the problems that those of us with a need to be certain have are: difficulty relaxing; difficulty making decisions; difficulty forming opinions; worrying about health, family, and finances; overplanning and getting upset when things don’t go as planned; inflexibility; obsessive-compulsive tendencies; and being overcontrolling.

To assess how active this mind-set is for you, download the *Intolerance of Uncertainty* quiz at http://www.newharbinger.com/35067.

Perfectionism

Many of us like to think we have high standards. We don’t settle for ordinary; we aim for the stars. We expect the best for, and of, ourselves. This is the popular conception of perfectionist thinking.

Alas, true perfectionists rarely feel this way. With the perfectionist monkey mind-set, you *have* to hit what you are aiming at. There is no room for error. Anything less than a perfect outcome means failure.

While others find motivation from challenge, a higher purpose, a promised prize, or simply the joy of doing the thing itself, if you are a perfectionist your motivation is a fear of failing. Your mantra is, *Don't screw it up*! Only when you've completed the social interaction or task without making any mistakes will you be able to relax.

This mind-set is often triggered when the perception of threat is centered on your status within your tribe. If the outcome of a situation could result in you being judged negatively by your family, friends, peers, or superiors, your monkey mind will sound the alarm. To the monkey, losing status could mean fewer allies, less money, fewer choices for a mate, even total rejection—all potentially serious threats to your survival.

When we are hijacked with anxiety we tend to think with the monkey. We overestimate the threat and underestimate our ability to cope with whatever rejection may result if the threat were to manifest. As a result, our daily agenda consists of a hundred little failings that need to be prevented. In social situations we must not get a fact wrong in a conversation, or worse, have nothing intelligent or funny to say. We dare not arrive late, dress incorrectly, or forget to use mouthwash. We must never make a fool of ourselves or be criticized for our behavior. We wonder, *Did I make a good impression?* Our social life is like a house of cards—one sneeze and everything tumbles down.

The perfectionist strives to be the best, thinking that when you are the best nobody can criticize you. But since there is always someone who is better, or threatening to become better, you'll always have something to prove. So you compare yourself to others, hoping to find that you are as good or better.

More often you come up short. Perfect is pretty hard to pull off. The result is that you feel like an impostor and you work harder so that no one will suspect it. You put in extra hours at work yet never quite feel secure. The perfectionist can't seem to hit the sweet spot where she just fits in.

Yet our culture glorifies perfection. Successful business leaders are often self-proclaimed perfectionists, treating the label as a badge of honor. The great artist, musician, or sports hero's "quest for perfection" sounds noble, but in fact, relatively few high achievers expect perfection from themselves. They may aim for the stars, but they are comfortable coming up short and don't let it stop them from trying again.

By contrast, perfectionists often hedge their bets, only doing things they know they'll be good at. You'll take the assignment if it plays to your strengths. You'll join the team so long as you'll be the best at your position. If you do get saddled with something you aren't good at, you may just put it off until the last minute, where you'll have an excuse—not enough time—to be less than perfect.

Since the perfectionist can't make mistakes, you need to play it safe. You'll set a goal so long as the steps to get there are clear. You'll avoid tasks that are outside your experience or that will tax your skill set. You'll avoid problems that require creativity because creativity requires experimentation and failed attempts.

Yet failure is always looming. There is risk involved in every decision or action we take. When we allow for some risk we give ourselves more choices and we prepare ourselves for when things go wrong. If we deny ourselves the privilege of being wrong or failing, we'll be unable to take the risks that are necessary for meeting our personal goals. This is why, in addition to anxiety, perfectionism is associated with depression, procrastination, addiction, and low self-esteem.

Eric

Eric—like Maria, a composite case—came to me with two problems. He was having difficulty making important decisions at work, and as a result was falling behind despite spending sixty hours a week there. In his dwindling free time he was, as he put it, "holing up at home" instead of going out to meet people. Things culminated when he was so ashamed of his recent job performance, and so afraid of "blowing it by saying something dumb," that he skipped his annual office holiday party despite the fact that he was one of the company's founders.

It wasn't difficult to see the common thread in both of Eric's problems. While he professed to love his IT management job, he'd turned it into a performance for others. Everyone at work, from his partners right down to the file clerk, was in the audience watching

him standing in a bright spotlight on the stage. One mistake and their reviews would close the show.

Socially he was performing too. Eric was overweight, and he felt unattractive. He believed he wasn't good at small talk and every word that came out of his mouth felt false. People around him seemed so relaxed and natural with each other. Eric felt like an actor without a script, improvising to a tough crowd. He was sure they were judging him harshly.

Eric was on a treadwheel. He believed he needed to prove himself every minute of the day. He judged any mistakes he made, and any judgment or criticism he received, to mean that he was not good enough or he had failed in some way. In Eric's mind, his shortcomings made him less worthy as a human being, a candidate for rejection by those he loved and depended on. He believed that as long as he turned the perfectionist treadwheel, he could keep that from happening. If you share the perfectionist mind-set, you have your own treadwheel. There are endless threats to your status, every one of them a problem for you to fix.

Some of the problems those of us with the perfectionist mind-set have are overworking, underachieving (due to not trying things you are not good at), believing if people saw the real you they would think you are a fraud (Impostor syndrome), rumination over past mistakes, low self-esteem, procrastination, difficulty making decisions and being overly conservative in choices you do make, rumination over social interactions, shyness, and a tendency to hold back for fear of making a fool of yourself or being judged harshly by others. You can take a quiz to help evaluate your own tendency toward a *Perfectionist* mind-set at http://www.newharbinger.com/35067.

Over-responsibility

One of the best compliments anyone can give you is that you are a responsible person. At home, responsible people support their loved ones both emotionally and financially, building strong families. At

work, responsible people look at their own weaknesses and mistakes, and instead of making excuses, learn from them to develop new skills and strengths, and get promoted. In society, responsibility is what allows us to strive for a more equal and just world. Responsibility leads us to care about poverty and pollution. Taking responsibility means not making things worse, and taking actions to solve problems.

So what's the problem with a little *over*-responsibility? Can you have too much of a good thing? Oh, can we ever!

My daughter Rose has always been disorganized and forgetful. When she was growing up, mornings were her worst time. She would get up a half hour before the bus, eat a leisurely breakfast, then rush around at the last minute getting ready for school. Naturally she forgot things like her coat, her lunch, or her homework, and I made myself crazy trying to "help" her. I pushed, I reminded, I scolded. Worst of all, when I got the inevitable call from her that she had left an important assignment at home and needed it desperately or else she would get a failing grade, *I drove it to school!*

To some this may look like good parenting. When we love someone, we should protect her from bad things happening, shouldn't we? That's the cultural assumption we share, but the truth was that for Rose to ever understand her own responsibilities and what she'd need to do to survive and thrive, she would have to suffer the consequences of her own actions. She'd have to get an "F," possibly even flunk the course. That was the only way she would learn, but I was too over-responsible to allow her do it.

Under the guise of being responsible for my daughter, I was being *ir*responsible to myself. Thinking we are capable of changing others or keeping them happy leads to burnout, both personal and professional.

Are you a "people pleaser" who can't say no and can't set limits? Are you always staying late to wrap things up or arriving early to set things up? Are you the "volunteer" who's left standing alone when everybody else takes a step back? Have you "got people's back" even if it means doing more than your fair share? Can others count on you to never let them down? And how about family gatherings? Are you the "good hostess," worried about everyone having a good time? I certainly know that one!

Over-responsible folks are afraid of losing connection. We direct our responsibility toward those we feel we cannot risk displeasing—the boss, coworkers, friends and relatives, and even in some cases, complete strangers. In the process we neglect *ourselves*.

Perhaps you've been aware that you are doing too much and tried to set limits with others. If they seem disappointed, do you feel guilty or selfish for your assertiveness? If others get upset with you,

do you think it's your fault that they feel this way? Even when others are upset about something you had nothing to do with, with an over-responsible mind-set you think it's your job to do something about it. The over-responsible mind-set calls for bending over backward to accommodate others' needs and expectations, whatever it takes to preserve the connection.

This isn't to say that we all don't share certain responsibilities. The environment, world hunger, and wars are good examples of real threats against human health and safety, and every individual plays a part in resolving these problems. But if you cannot rest until the world is well fed, every country is at peace, and the environment is safe, you're thinking over-responsibly.

Where over-responsibility becomes the biggest burden and the most difficult to recognize is when the perceived threat is to others' well-being and safety. We are taught to care, to lend a hand when needed, to look out for one another. When someone you care about is making a poor choice, do you think it is wise for you to set him straight, to point out what he can do instead? When someone you love is in pain, do you believe you cannot feel better until she does?

Samantha

Over-responsible people have difficulty recognizing what is within their control and what is not. Even when you have a strong personal stake in a conflict, if a solution is beyond your control, it is not your responsibility. By way of example, consider Samantha, a composite client of mine, whose thirty-year-old son, who had an alcohol problem, was causing her great distress. For ten years before she came to see me she whittled away at her savings and neglected her own health trying to save him from his addiction, doing everything from paying his overdue rent to pushing him into rehab. Samantha didn't think she had any choice. Her son was a binge drinker, and he could easily pass out and hurt himself, or he could lose his job and wind up on the street.

She thought:

As long as my son in pain, I need to do something to fix his problem.

My son's needs are more important than mine.

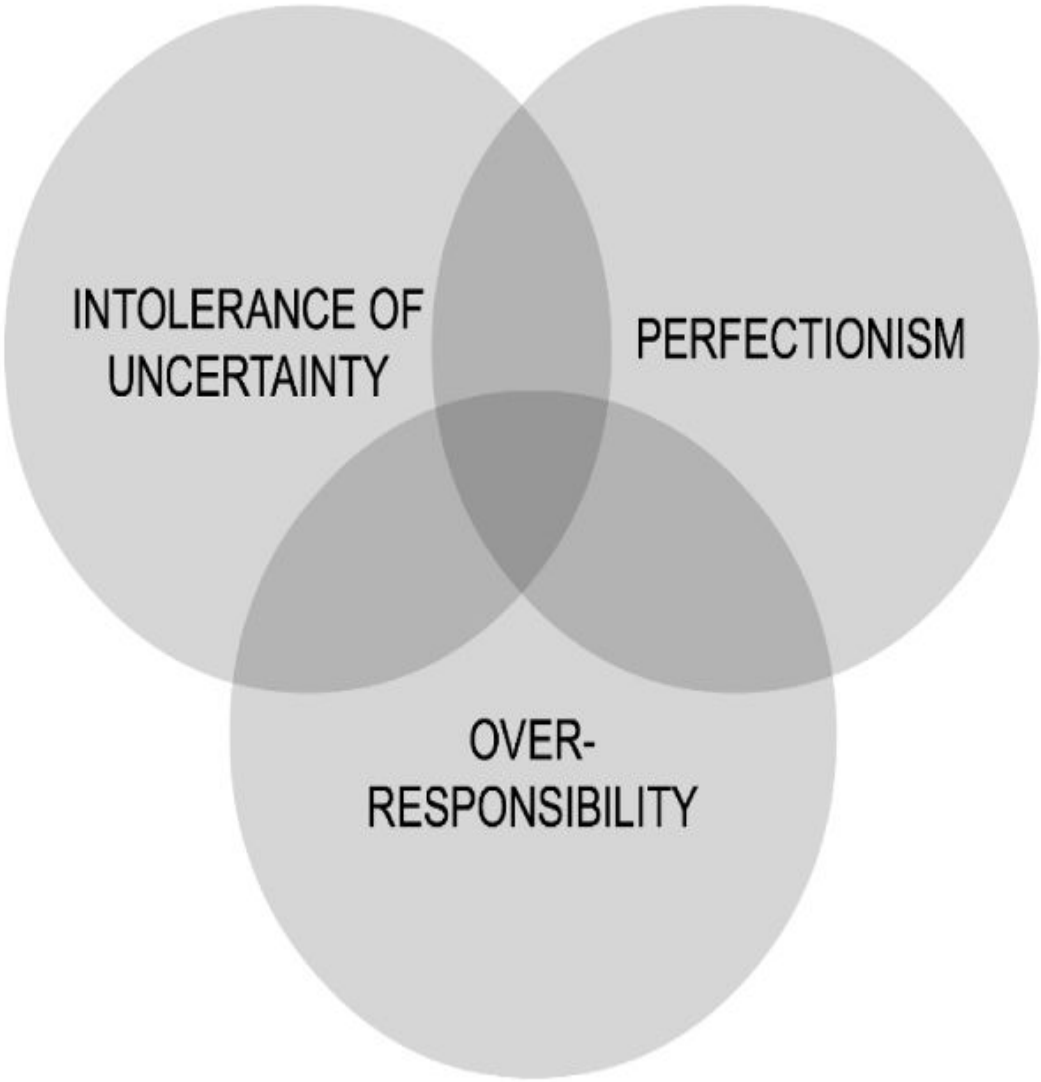
If I set a limit with my son and he becomes upset, it is my fault.

If something bad happens to my son and I could have stopped it somehow, it will be my fault.

Thinking that the only way you'll be happy and safe is if others are happy and safe burdens you with infinite tasks and problems—too much responsibility for anyone to handle. While you can try to make others happy and you can try to keep them safe, you cannot change them. They will continue to rely on you as long as you keep it up. Bottom line: if taking care of your own needs is a casualty of taking care of others, you're being over-responsible.

Problems that arise from the over-responsible mind-set include: working harder than others, taking on other people's problems, poor self-care, burnout, constant worry and rumination about others, giving advice to others to the point of pushing them away, blaming yourself for things that are not your fault, difficulty setting limits, and difficulty with asserting yourself. To help you recognize this mind-set in your own life take the *Over-responsibility* quiz at http://www.newharbinger.com/35067.

These are the three false assumptions of the monkey mind-set. *As long as I am certain, as long as I am perfect, and as long as others are okay I will be safe, able to relax, and happy.* Each of these assumptions overestimates the threat and underestimates our ability to cope. Each of them treats the perception of threat as accurate, a problem to be fixed.



Whether you are overly anxious or suffering from an anxiety disorder, you will recognize at least one in your own thinking. You may have a combination of a need for certainty and perfectionist thinking, or like me, a combination of all three.

Because this mind-set is always present when we are anxious, it is tempting to think that it is the cause of all our anxieties. Most therapy and self-help is based on the premise that changing how we think will change everything. As any scientist will tell you, however, there is a big difference between association and causation.

I view the relationship between the monkey mind-set and our anxiety as more of a chicken-and-egg conundrum. What matters, and what the next chapter will address, is not which came first—the mind-set or the anxiety—but what is *maintaining* them both. Here's a hint: *The very things you are doing to control your anxiety are feeding the monkey!*

Chapter 2 Takeaway

When hijacked by anxiety, we adopt the monkey mind-set, which assumes that in order to be safe we must be certain of all outcomes, we must be perfect, and we must be responsible for others' feelings and actions.

Chapter 3

Feeding the Monkey

Remember in chapter 1 how I used the expression “leaping into thin air” to describe our reaction to anxiety? I was hardly exaggerating. Whether it is literally leaping out of the way of a speeding truck, or merely postponing an important decision, you are acting with abandon, without regard for later consequences. Whether calling your doctor about a new spot on your arm or calling your son to make certain he’s sober, you are acting to keep yourself or a loved one safe *now*. The things we do reflexively in order to avoid, resist, or distract ourselves from negative feelings are what I call *safety strategies*.

When I chose to do more research, file my nails, and clean up after the dog instead of writing my book, I was performing safety strategies. These were behaviors that would keep me safe from the perceived primordial threats: loss of social status and being kicked out of the tribe.

I wasn't thinking all this through, of course. In a hijacked state of mind, self-awareness is difficult if not impossible. We employ safety strategies unconsciously, in response to anxiety—the monkey mind's call to action. *Something is wrong. Do something!* And when we *do something* the monkey rewards us. It takes its finger off the anxiety button and we feel relief. When I closed the laptop lid and stood up I immediately felt better. My stomach relaxed and my heart rate

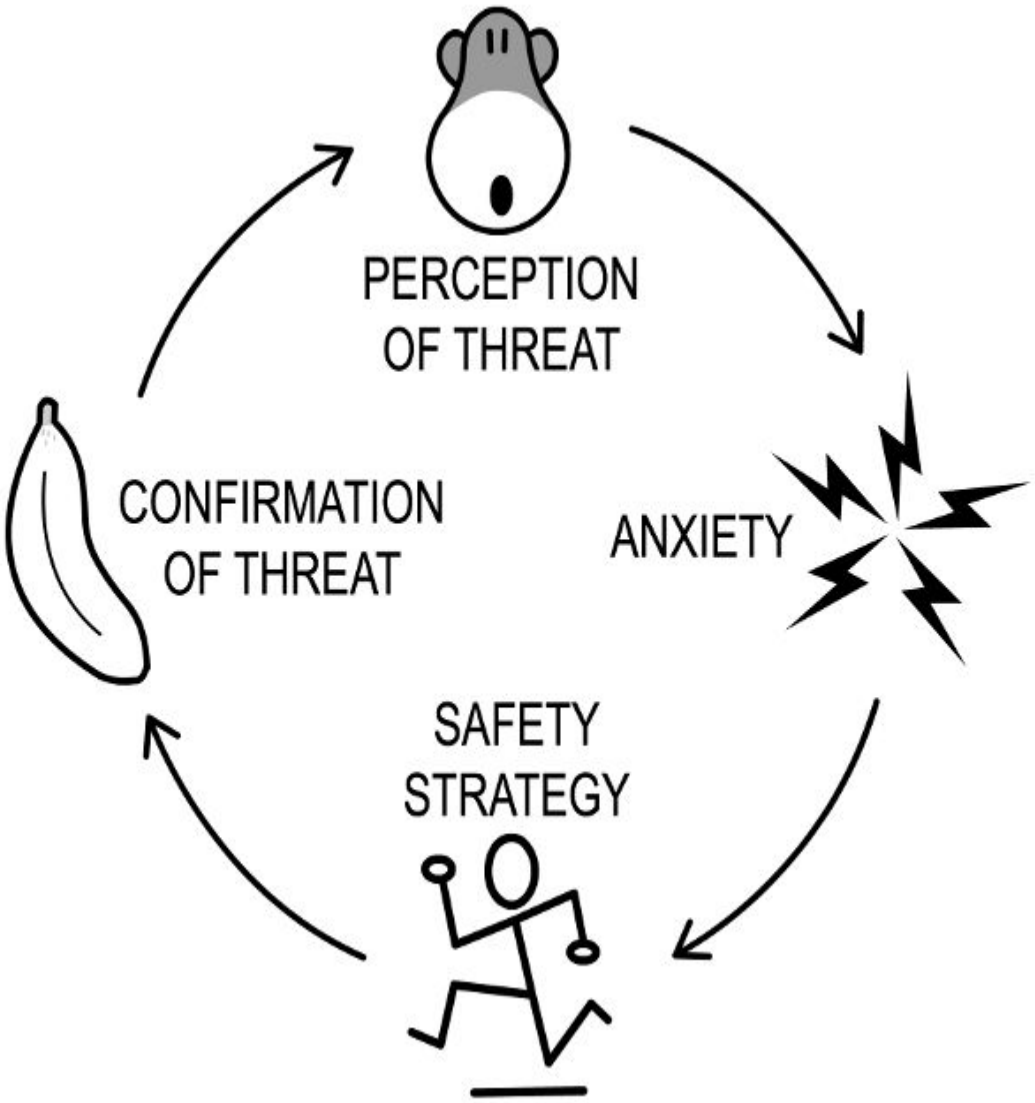
returned to normal. I was no longer anxious and I was still getting stuff done. After a little rest I could return to my writing for a fresh start and everything would be better, right?

Wrong! The monkey mind wasn't only watching my thoughts for signs of threat, it was also watching my behavior. When I closed the lid of my laptop I sent a message to my monkey. The message was, *Good call! Writing is dangerous to my survival*.

I confirmed the threat. I agreed with my monkey that writing the book at that point was an activity to be avoided. The monkey mind likes confirmations. As I pointed out in chapter 2, it isn't good at risk assessment, and generally relies on wild guesses. My confirmation of the threat was a reward. I was *feeding the monkey*.

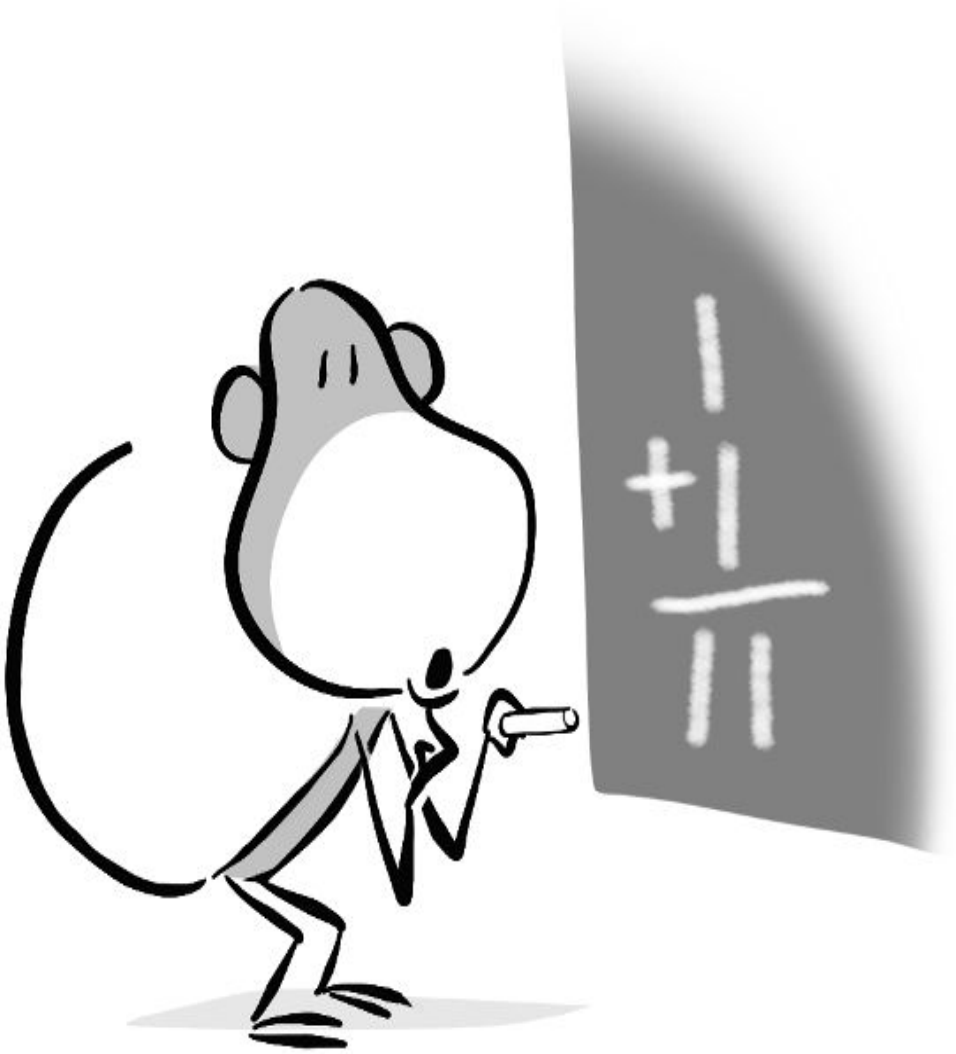
You can guess what the monkey did later that morning when I sat down again to write. I got hammered again with a tsunami of anxious thoughts and feelings. My safety strategy was maintaining a *cycle of anxiety*. Every time I fed the monkey, with every repetition of the cycle, in exchange for a temporary relief from anxiety, I guaranteed myself more anxiety in the future.

Here's what the anxiety cycle looks like.



When dealing with speeding trucks, rattlesnakes, and bears, an anxiety cycle is a good thing to feed, but most situations we face on a daily basis are more ambiguous. *Was* there a real threat that I could lose status with my friends, family, and fellow professionals by writing a lousy book?

Possibly. But when calculating how much of a threat it may be, the monkey has a problem. Estimating odds and making risk assessments are done elsewhere in the brain. The monkey doesn't do math.



It can only guess. As it does so often for the anxious person, it guesses on the side of safety. And why should it change its guess after my behavior just confirmed it?

The monkey mind is like a small child or a pet watching you for guidance. I emphasize the word “watch.” You cannot tell this part of your brain anything. The monkey can’t be reasoned with, comforted, or distracted from its mission. The only way we can get what we want in life is to override its warnings with our behavior.

In my case it would mean continuing to write despite the anxiety I was feeling. If I were able to do that long enough, over time the monkey would get the message that I can handle writing a book, and

tolerate the risk involved. Yet how could I do that when I was operating with a monkey mind-set, when I shared the same perception of the “threat”?

The monkey mind-set will have to be overridden, temporarily at least, before any change of strategy can be employed. And unfortunately, every time we use a safety strategy we reinforce the monkey mind-set too.

Feeding the Mind-set

Remember how as a child you used to cross your fingers in hopes that your parents would stop for ice cream? If they didn’t stop you’d forget about it, but if they did stop, you concluded, *Because I crossed my fingers, we’re having ice cream!* Or perhaps you remember feeling responsible for something you didn’t actually cause, like *Because I disobeyed my mother she got a stomach flu.*

In an anxious, hijacked state of mind our thinking becomes childlike and superstitious. We attribute all outcomes to our own behavior. If you perform a safety strategy and happen to end up safe, unconsciously you conclude, *Because I took precautions I am safe!* I call this *monkey logic*.

Monkey logic works great when there is a real threat to your safety. But when there is a misperception of threat, it merely supports your monkey mind-set. When I closed my laptop that morning, I reconfirmed the assumptions of my monkey mind-set: *I must be certain! I cannot make mistakes! I’m responsible for everybody!* When we feed the monkey, we feed the monkey mind-set.

So long as I clung to my monkey mind-set and used safety strategies I was safe—safe from being wrong, from failing and letting everyone down. I was preventing the worst—losing social status—from happening. But in doing so, I was also preventing the best thing I could imagine from happening: writing my book.

When clients come to see me they too are missing out on their best. Let’s take a closer look at the anxiety cycles that keep them

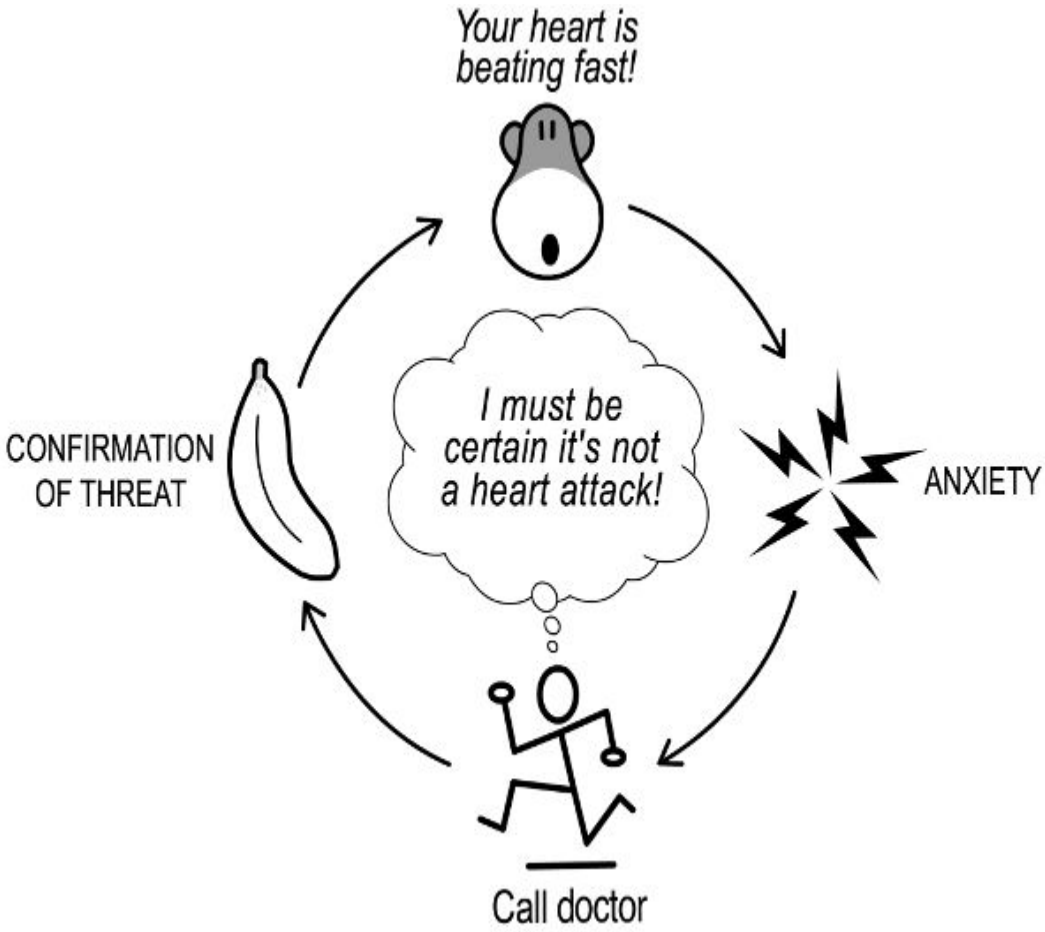
anxious and stuck in a monkey mind-set.

Maria's Intolerance of Uncertainty

Maria, who worried that her physical sensitivities signaled serious illness, was not particularly active, and her sedentary lifestyle made her prone to more than her share of the usual aches and pains. Chest pain in particular triggered a perception of threat. Thinking she was having a heart attack, she made numerous trips to her doctor and the ER, only to find that she had pulled a muscle on her rib cage, or that she had a cramp that disappeared on its own.

No matter how many times this pattern repeated, Maria's anxiety only worsened. It seemed to her that her body was a battlefield, a highly uncomfortable place to be. Maria's monkey was working overtime alerting her to threats to her safety. What was feeding the frenzy was Maria's reaction to the anxiety alarm. Every time Maria took steps to be certain she was safe, she confirmed the threat, awarding her monkey mind a nice ripe banana. With impeccable monkey logic, it deduced, *Because I alerted Maria to the possibility of a heart attack, she went to the doctor and prevented it!*

Maria's cycle of anxiety was completed and ready to roll again. Here's what it looked like:



Maria, of course, was not only feeding her monkey. She was thinking *with* it. Monkey logic dictated, *Because I went to the emergency room and confirmed that my heart is okay, it is okay.* Each turn of her anxiety cycle reinforced the *I must be certain* assumption of the monkey mind-set.

Maria thought she needed certainty about her physical symptoms. What do you think you need to be certain about?

Eric's Perfectionism

Eric's anxiety was triggered by doubts about whether he was good enough to be accepted by others. Since he thought he needed to be perfect in order to be accepted at his management job, as well as socially, he had plenty of doubts. A great example was the time he

had to make a decision about which vendor to contract with for a major software upgrade for his office. While they all promised to make things more efficient, there would be a potentially difficult transition period where everyone would have to learn whatever system he picked. To Eric, making the right choice was essential for maintaining his status in the company. To his monkey mind the decision was a primordial threat. If he were to pick a solution with a difficult learning curve, or one that didn't work as well as everyone hoped, he would be judged a failure and in effect, be kicked out of the tribe.

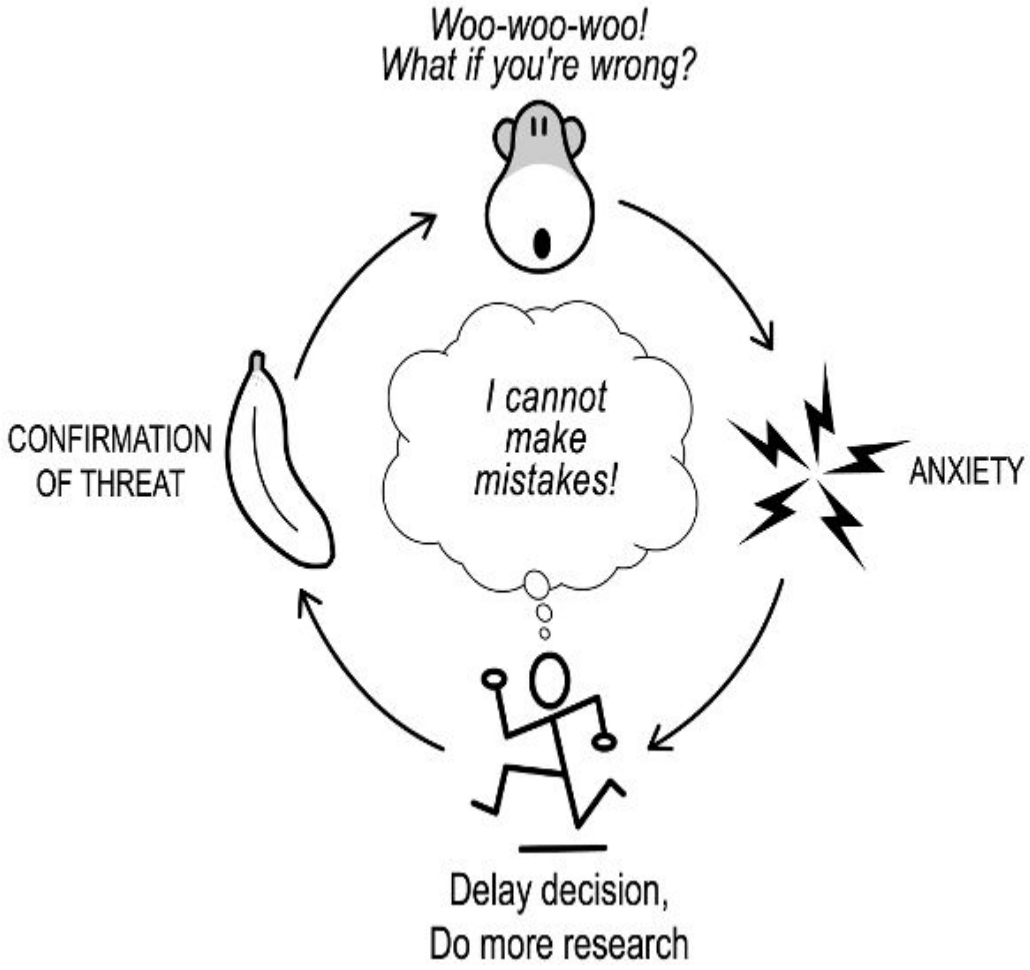
Eric managed his anxiety by working overtime researching the options. He interviewed reps from the various vendors extensively, compiled notes, and made multiple projections. After months of working overtime and fielding questions from his increasingly impatient team, he was still no closer to committing.

Eric was in a cycle of anxiety. Every time the subject of the software decision came up his monkey mind flagged it as a threat and turned on the anxiety alarm. *You must get this right. Do something!* Instead of making the decision, Eric made another phone call to one of the reps, or did some more research, or made another pros and cons list. When he engaged in these safety strategies, his anxiety went down and, for the moment anyway, the crisis was abated.

Eric's safety strategies were keeping him not only from making a less-than-perfect choice, but from making any choice. Every time he delayed a decision in response to the monkey's alarm, he fed the monkey. Confirming the perception of threat around decision making programmed his monkey for more anxiety alarms in the future.

Every monkey feeding also fed Eric's perfectionist mind-set. Monkey logic dictated, *Because I delayed the decision, I did not make a mistake and am safe.*

Here is Eric's anxiety cycle in a diagram:



Samantha's Over-responsibility

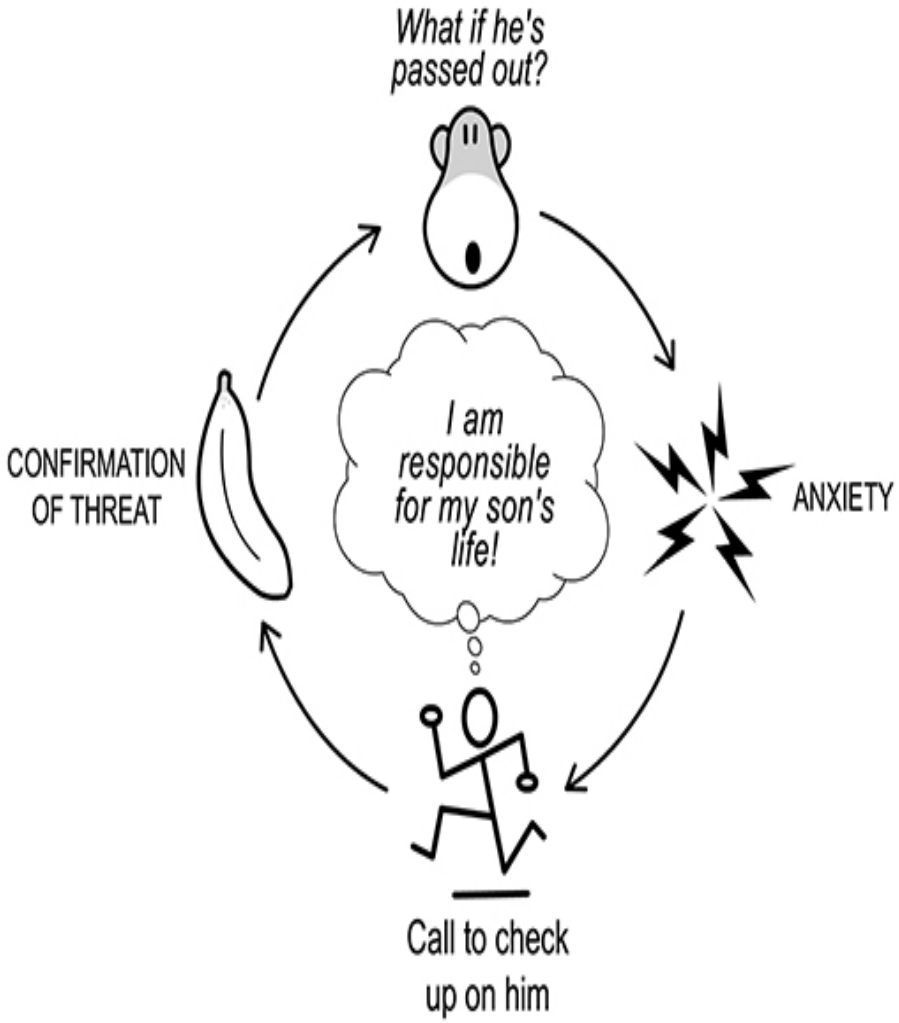
For Samantha, mother of an alcoholic son, the cycle of anxiety was gut-wrenching. As I noted before, the perceived threat was real. Her only son was in jeopardy of losing his job, his home, his life, and there isn't a parent on earth who wouldn't feel anxious about that. But Samantha was depleting her savings trying to cover for his expenses and paying for his unsuccessful rehabs. She had high blood pressure and she wasn't sleeping well. Her doctor told her she needed to take better care of herself or she wouldn't be of much use to anybody. The question was, thirty years after the birth of her son, how was Samantha maintaining such a high level of maternal anxiety?

To answer that, let's start with the most common threat perception in Samantha's daily life. When she hadn't heard from her son in a while, images often popped into her head—horror scenes like her son passed out on the floor with blood flowing out of his ear. These images are normal, perfectly harmless, and no indication that the threat is any more imminent than it was before she had the image. But when the monkey sees these images it sounds the alarm, sending Samantha into a painful state of apprehension. She's immediately hijacked. *What if he is passed out and needs medical attention? If I don't do something he could die*.

What Samantha does next is automatic. She calls him to check on him. If she hears his voice, she'll know he's okay and she can stop feeling this way. This is Samantha's safety strategy. She's keeping her son safe, and as soon as she hears his voice—even though he sounds irritated and is short with her—she feels she can breathe again. The crisis is canceled—or rather, postponed.

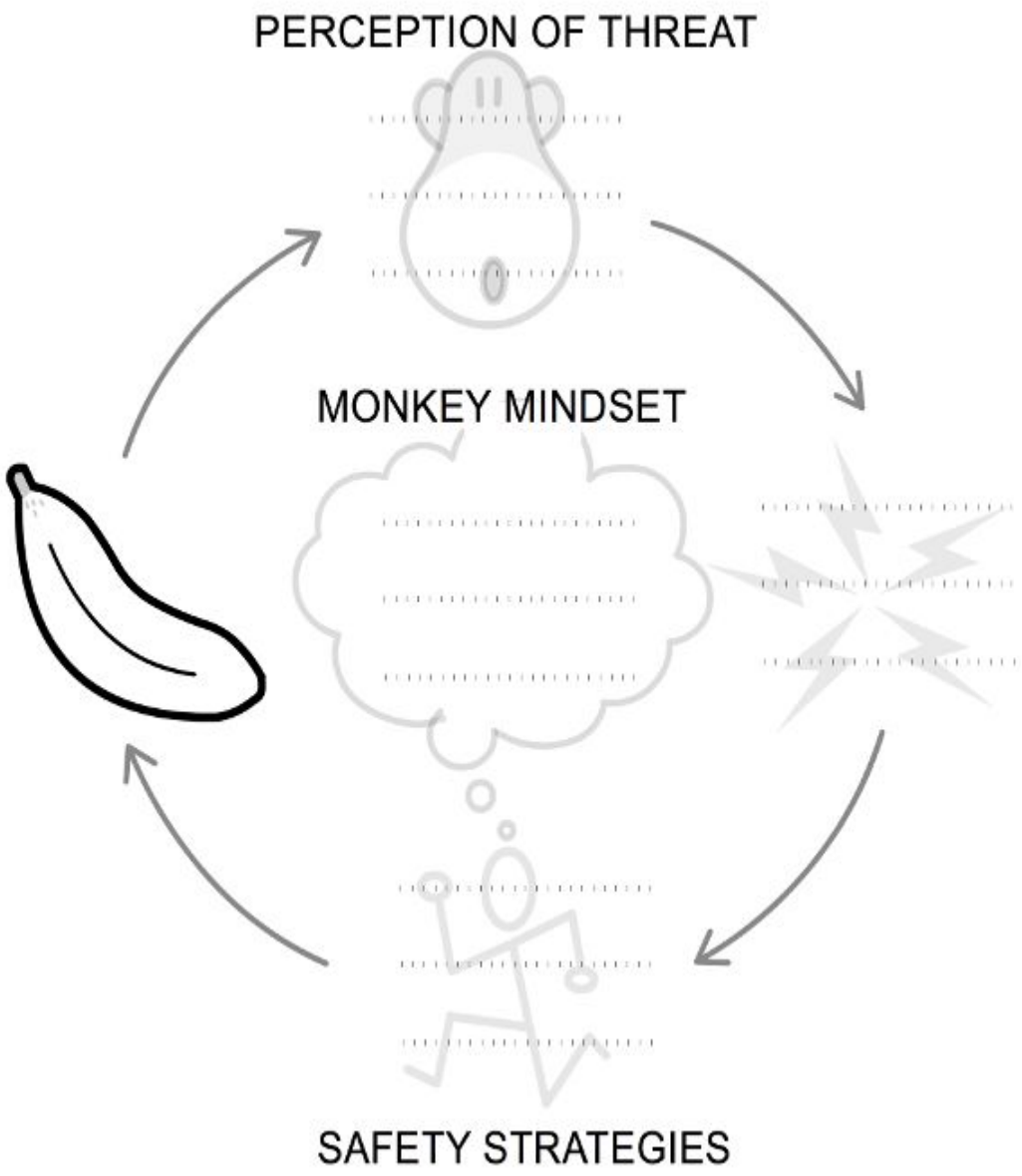
By calling her son for confirmation that he is alive and well, Samantha is telling her monkey that the threat perception is real, that her son could indeed have been passed out and bleeding. In effect she told her monkey, *Thanks for the heads up! Making me anxious really got my attention and saved my son. Be sure to do the same thing next time I get a thought like that!*

Here it is all in one picture.



Feeding her monkey fueled the cycle and each turn not only reinforced the perception of threat, but also reinforced her monkey mind-set. Her monkey logic said *Because I called my son, he is alive,* supporting her monkey's belief that she was responsible for keeping him alive.

Can you identify an anxiety cycle of your own? It's a powerful exercise to visualize any cycle you are trapped in. First, download a blank *Anxiety Cycle* chart like the one below at http://www.newharbinger.com/35067.



Begin by thinking of a situation that makes you anxious. It could be a physical sensation like in the case of Maria, or it may be a situation that happens at work, or it may be related to your home life and family. Once you have a situation in mind, ask yourself these three questions:

What am I afraid of?

What's the worst thing that could happen if this comes true?

What would this mean about me, my life, or my future?

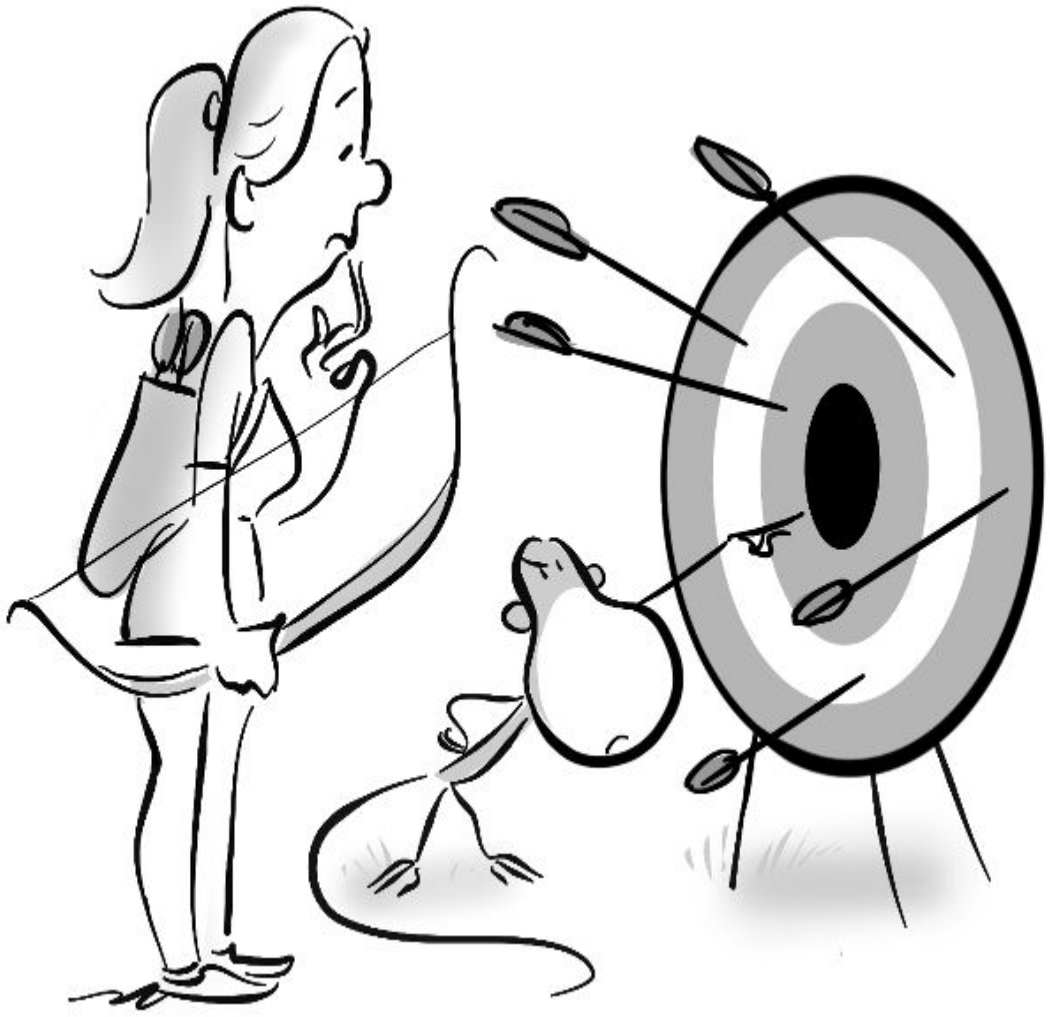
Using the answers to these questions, determine your *perception of threat*.

Next, describe how these thoughts make you feel. What negative emotions and sensations can you identify? What parts of your body are affected? Make note of them in your chart.

Once you've got a good handle on what you're thinking and feeling, ask yourself, *What do I do to keep the worst from happening?* This behavior is your safety strategy. When you've written it in, the cycle is complete—almost.

When you perform your safety strategy, which monkey mind-set or combination of mind-sets is activated? Write that in the center bubble. To keep it simple you can use whichever of the three assumptions fits best with the situation: "I must be 100% certain," "I must not make mistakes," or "I am responsible for everyone's happiness and safety."

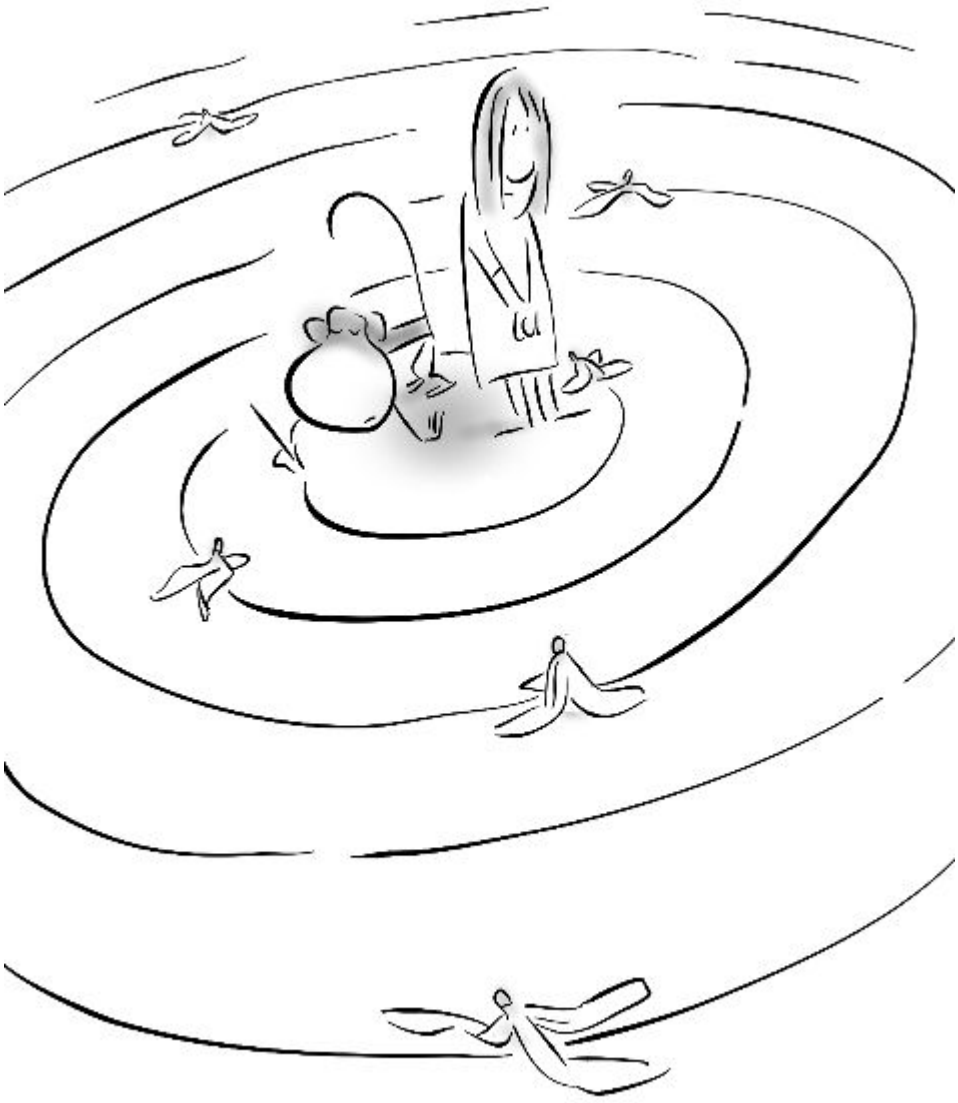
Neither Maria, Eric, nor Samantha were living the lives they wanted to live. Thinking with the monkey mind-set is like being an archer who thinks she must hit the bull's-eye. The rest of the target counts as a miss. Only when her arrow lands dead center, within the circle of safety, will she allow herself any satisfaction, and even then only until her next "miss." It's an all-or-nothing mentality, and we usually wind up with nothing.



The Downward Cycle

Safety strategies and their monkey mind-sets are aimed at eliminating risk. Yet without some risk, new experiences and learning are impossible. Our thoughts, our behavior, and our level of anxiety become rigid and predictable. Over time, the heart's desires are forgotten. Eric dreaded going to work at the company he himself had founded. Marie gave up the thing she loved the most—travel—because she didn't dare stray from her hospital. Samantha would never be able to retire because her responsibility to her son was draining both her bank account and her health. Within the cycle of

anxiety, the joy of being alive is lost. Our world gets smaller and smaller.



“Doesn’t the monkey mind realize there is more to life than just surviving?” you may ask. “Can it be so primitive and stupid that it doesn’t get what’s important to me? Can’t it learn anything? Can’t it see what I want for myself and just turn the anxiety down a notch so I can get it?”

No, it can’t. Reasoning with the monkey mind is impossible. It’s too simple and too primitive to see the big picture that you can see

with the rest of your brain. The monkey has a narrow little view of the world. Its perception of what is a threat and what isn't can only be altered by one thing. It learns by watching what you do. If you want to stop being ruled by the monkey, *you* are the one who will have to change.

This is my promise to you: Once you learn how to respond to anxiety wisely, rather than reacting to it, not only will you become resilient to anxiety but infinite possibilities will open up for you. New experiences and learning will expand your world and enrich your life beyond what you can now imagine.

Before you can change anything, however, you'll need to be very aware of what you're doing now. In the next chapter we'll learn how to identify the strategies you're presently using to avoid negative feelings and stay safe.

Chapter 3 Takeaway

When we respond to anxiety with avoidance or resistance, we confirm the perception of threat—we feed the monkey—which maintains both our cycle of anxiety and our monkey mind-set.

Chapter 4

Playing It Safe

We've all observed the classic supermarket scene where a frazzled parent, in an attempt to quiet the tantrums of a three-year-old, grabs a box of animal crackers off the shelf to quiet the child. Perhaps you have played the role of the parent in this drama yourself. Every observer, as well as the parent, understands the futility of this transaction. While a temporary peace is assured, the takeaway for the child is, *If I cry in the supermarket I will get a treat*.

We can't expect the monkey mind to stop making us anxious if we continue to give it treats for doing so. If you are truly serious about gaining freedom from your anxiety, an examination of your present monkey-feeding habits is in order. As an experiment, begin to observe yourself as you go through your daily life. When are you feeling anxious? How are you responding to the monkey's call to action?

For example, if you encounter bad traffic driving to work, do you drive any differently? If you are late for an appointment, does that change how you enter the room? If someone says something that contradicts you, how do you react?

Don’t try to change anything just yet. Simply watch and listen to yourself without judging anything as good or bad. Just by noticing your present safety strategies you are taking a giant step toward freedom. Why? Because when you notice safety strategies you are noticing the monkey mind. This creates space between you and the little critter, helping you to see the difference between “it” and “you.” Every thought, feeling, or action you notice helps build awareness of what I will call, for lack of a better term, the “higher self.”

Don’t let the simplicity of this assignment fool you. My clients have a difficult time recognizing safety strategies at first, as will you. Safety strategies are so embedded in your daily routine and so commonplace in our culture that they will be difficult to spot. But trust me, once you get the hang of it, you’ll see plenty. If you make an

honest assessment of yourself, I believe you will be shocked at how much of your daily activity maintains your anxiety.

So what exactly are we looking for? Certainly not behaviors that actually do keep us safe from real danger. I want you to continue to brush your teeth twice daily and drive on the correct side of the road. A safety strategy, for the purposes of this book, is *whatever you do to feel less anxious or to neutralize a misperceived threat*. If you're overestimating the threat, or underestimating your ability to cope with the threat, trying to neutralize the threat is a safety strategy.

But it is often difficult for us to judge whether our anxiety is the result of a wild monkey guess that something is wrong—*woo-woo-woo*—or a signal that something really needs to be done. When we are hijacked in a monkey mind-set our judgment is clouded. We both overestimate the threat and underestimate our ability to cope if the worst should actually happen.

To help you determine whether a suspect strategy is feeding the monkey, here are two criteria:

> The strategy gives only temporary relief and must be repeated.
>
> The strategy takes you away from either your goals or your values in life.

When you are examining a questionable strategy, these are the questions to ask: Are you repeating the behavior? Safety strategies are always part of a pattern—a *cycle* of anxiety. Are you giving up your long-term interests or compromising your personal values in exchange for short-term anxiety relief? If the answer is yes to these questions, you've found a safety strategy.

Behavior and Mental Strategies

There are two types of safety strategies. The first type consists of *behavioral safety strategies,* the actions we take that feed the monkey mind. These behaviors can be obvious, like not going to a

party because you feel uncomfortable meeting new people, or subtle, like going to the party but waiting for people to approach you instead of approaching them. My doing chores instead of writing, Eric's avoiding decisions, Maria's Googling symptoms, and Samantha's checking up on her son were all behavioral safety strategies.

The second type of safety strategy is not easily observable in our behavior. I am speaking of the *mental safety strategies* we employ to keep anxiety at bay. Rehearsing what you are going to say before engaging with someone at the party or second-guessing what stupid thing you may have said or done at the party the following day are mental safety strategies.

Other common mental safety strategies include making lists in your mind so that you don't forget something, reviewing your actions to make sure you did not forget to do something important (such as turning off the stove), and monitoring physical sensations that might be linked in your mind to a health concern or possibly to a panic attack. But the most universal mental safety strategy is worry.

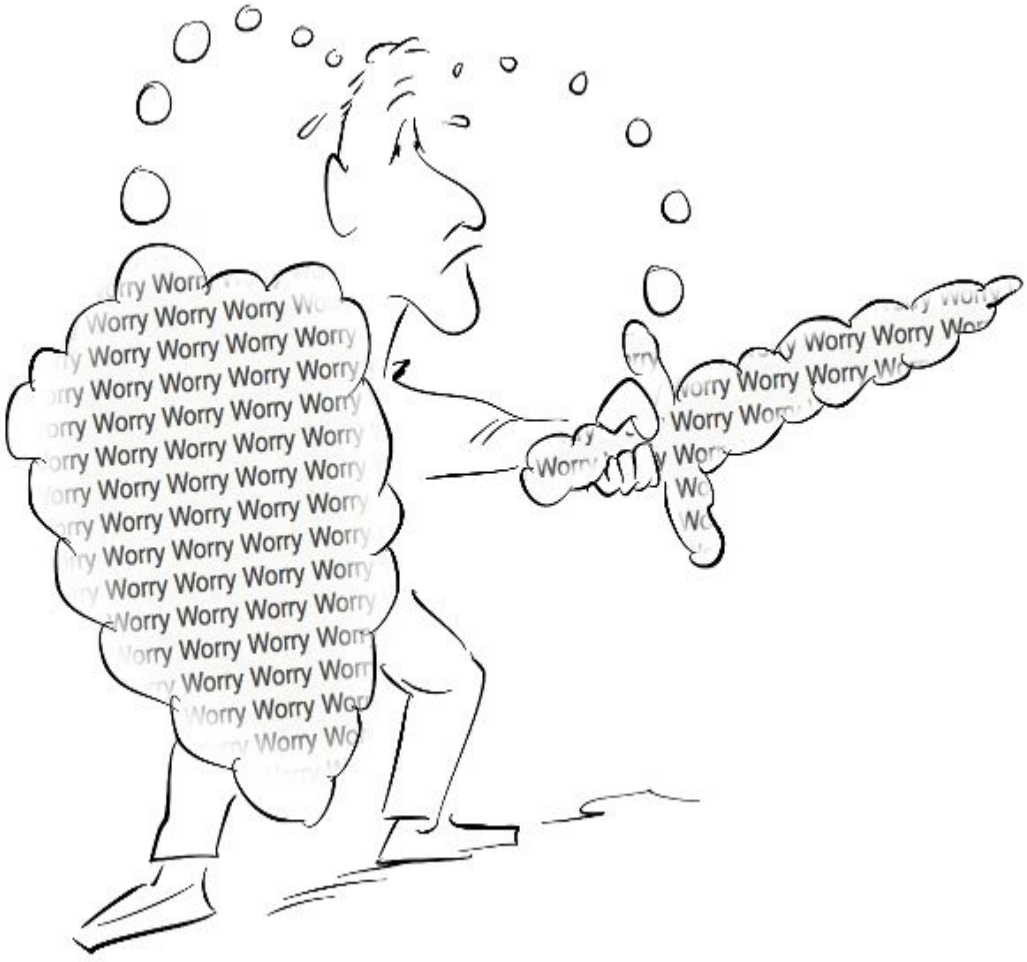
I know it is counterintuitive to think about worry as a safety strategy. Worrying certainly doesn't make us *feel* any safer…or does it?

When I first started writing books I worried about my writing skills, as well as whether my message was fresh and accurate. I ruminated over past efforts I'd made to write in high school and college. My husband had always teased me about my grammar and spelling, and getting what was perfectly clear in my head down on paper was always a challenge.

Did my worrying keep me safe from writing poorly? No. What it kept me safe from was actually feeling the risk that I was taking. By worrying I was attempting to solve the problem, which kept me from experiencing the full force of my fear. Agonizing over what I wanted to say was better than the agony I would feel if I accepted the possibility that I'd embarrass myself and let everybody down by writing a lousy book.

The truth was, writing the book would actually help me clarify my message, and even if it wasn't especially book-worthy, I would

survive. The threat was only a perception of my monkey mind, a perception I confirmed when I worried. The more I worried, the more I joined with my monkey. Together we agreed that writing a book was dangerous—it could lead to me losing status in my tribe.



Worry is so ubiquitous that we are largely unaware of when we are doing it. Revisiting the same challenges and problems over and over in our heads doesn't resolve them or make them go away. It is our instinctive response to the monkey's call to action: *Something is wrong. Do something!* Worrying is *doing something*.

It is important to remember that safety strategies, both behavioral and mental, do actually alleviate anxiety in the short term. They keep us safe from the monkey's perceived threats, and the anxiety that perception triggers. If we could trust the threat perceptions of the monkey mind, we would have no reason to examine our safety

strategies. We would get anxious only when the threat warranted it and we would simply do what's natural to be safe.

But, since we can't trust the wild guesses of the monkey, and you are experiencing chronic anxiety and stress, isn't it in your interest to look at your strategy? What are you doing to try to control your anxiety? How are you feeding the monkey?

"I Must Be Certain" Strategies

My favorite example of intolerance of uncertainty, and the one I have the most personal experience with, is overplanning. Do you also need to have all your ducks in a row? When your wedding plans are so time-consuming you forget what your fiancé looks like, when your vacation agenda is so rigid that an unforeseen event ruins everything for you, or when your meeting agenda doesn't allow for the possibility of a new idea surfacing, your strategy is a safety strategy.

Right up there with overplanning is compulsive list making. We list the chores we need to do, the things we don't want to forget, what to pack for an upcoming trip, what to ask the doctor, or what to do in our free time. And don't forget the list of all your lists!

When you cannot be happy until everything on your list is checked off, you are not allowing much opportunity for yourself to be happy. Not only will there likely be something you couldn't quite get done, but there will be another list waiting for you to start on. When everything has to be nailed down and under control, what you're trying to control is anxiety.

Are you an over-checker? To ward off fears of financial disaster we monitor our stocks and the business news. To avoid feeling left out we check our social media, favorite sports team's posts, or our text messages. These behaviors are perfectly acceptable in our culture. *Are the kids safe at their friend's house?* Text them (again) and find out. Our smartphones make it possible to seek certainty whenever the urge hits, wherever we happen to be. But if you need to do a particular behavior in order to not feel anxious, that urge is a safety strategy, employed to neutralize perceived threats.

There is also mental checking. When you left the house, did you remember *everything* you need? Did you close the garage door? Do

you review things in your mind to be sure? Do you mentally monitor your physical sensations looking for signs that something is wrong?

Lots of these behaviors do work, and they aren't always problems. But when they are employed to reduce anxiety about a threat you're overestimating or that you are underestimating your ability to cope with, the behavior is a safety strategy. For example, if your anxiety about feeling trapped in your seat keeps you from flying, then taking the train is a safety strategy. If you can't tolerate the possibility that the train might be late, then renting a car is a safety strategy. And what about that recent terrorist attack? You never know where terrorists will strike. Maybe you shouldn't be traveling at all right now, since you can't be sure.

"I Cannot Make a Mistake" Strategies

For the perfectionist, not being allowed to make a mistake brings up a lot of anxiety. Picking a college, a job, a mate, or even a dessert could prove fatal if your choice turns out to be less than perfect. Your safety strategy might be to consult another friend, put the decision off, or in the case of the dessert, observe what others are ordering and choose the same. If everything you do on the job has to be perfect, safety strategies might include rewriting reports, repeating research, putting in overtime, or making excuses in advance for what you imagine might not be good enough.

When you cannot make a misstep, interacting with others is like walking through a minefield. Don't approach anyone; let them come to you. (It's safer when you know they are already interested in you.) Think before you speak, and make sure you're not misunderstood. Don't ask questions that could make you sound stupid. Best not to state your opinion unless everybody shares it. *Make a toast? Are you kidding? I haven't had time to prepare!*

Like the quest for certainty, the quest for perfection can include overplanning and list making. It can mean spending too much time on clothing and grooming, as well as decorating and cleaning. If you've got the biggest screen, the coolest kitchen, and the latest smartphone, who can criticize? As long as everything is "just right," you won't have to feel "less than."

Mistakes, of course, are inevitable. So your safety strategies will also include damage control. Mentally review everything you've said or done that might disappoint or offend. Justify your actions, first to

yourself, then to everybody else. Everything can be explained if you put your mind to it. Once they understand what you're up against, nobody can blame you.

The safety strategies associated with perfectionism all share the same objective: neutralize the perceived threat and the anxiety that comes with it. If you can use these strategies occasionally without maintaining an anxiety cycle, good for you! For the rest of us, they bring only temporary relief. The cycle repeats and the quest for perfection continues.

Over-responsible Strategies

One of the great truisms in our culture is the assumption that caring for others' needs is what brings the greatest happiness. But if you are saddled with a responsibility that is straining your resources —a chronically sick or mentally ill relative, for example—you can testify that taking care of others when you cannot take care of yourself can be a joyless burden that burns you out. When you are acting out of obligation or fear of disappointing others, caretaking is a safety strategy.

Perhaps your partner has problems that you take on and try to manage, like poor diet, lack of exercise, or substance abuse. Unless he or she is happy and healthy, you can't be happy and healthy.

Are you the essential person in your work environment, someone everyone can depend on? Maybe things fall apart unless you pick up the slack, so you wind up working overtime and filling in whenever someone else is sick. Have you been doing more than your fair share for so long that you've become irreplaceable?

Or maybe you're stuck in a relationship where, if you stand up for yourself or set a limit, you're afraid your partner may become upset with you. When you believe your partner's feelings are your responsibility, you'll need to keep him or her happy. Needing to please your mate can have you engaging in activities you don't enjoy, compromising on decisions like vacations and purchases, or constantly uprooting yourself and moving to enable his or her career.

With this mind-set you are ultimately responsible for everyone and everything. Your actions are designed to keep everyone happy except you. When care of others takes precedence over care of oneself, it is often motivated out of anxiety and not just love. When you say yes to something in order not to displease others, when you go along with the crowd so as not to risk feeling left out, when you accept a task that is more than you can handle so you won't be judged as selfish or not a team player, or simply so you won't lose the connection, you are performing a safety strategy. You are attempting to neutralize the negative emotion that would accompany the risk of displeasing others, which is a primordial threat to the monkey mind.

This “need to please” can also manifest in parents who can’t set limits for their children, or who try to protect them from any pain or hardship by trying to pave the way for them. Offering unsolicited advice, probing for personal information, and constantly checking in can feel intrusive to children. And needing to please your parents can put you in the wrong church, sports program, or college, or keep you in your hometown. These behaviors have the outward appearance of demonstrating loyalty, but when they get in the way of being honest and authentic they are safety strategies to keep us from feeling disconnected and out of the loop.

As you examine your association with others, a good question to ask is, *Am I taking care of myself in this transaction?* If the answer is no, or if you’re not sure, there is a good possibility you are trying to please.

What would happen if you did take care of yourself? If the answer scares you, you’ve found the monkey you’ve been feeding. While this safety strategy keeps you temporarily free of anxiety, it is not sustainable. More anxiety, and less personal health and peace, lie ahead.

Common Safety Strategies

Here’s a list of some common safety strategies. I’ve labeled each with a code for the monkey mind-set they are associated with.

IOU = Intolerance of Uncertainty

P = Perfectionism

OR = Over-responsibility

You will notice that some are very obviously something you would want to change, while others appear perfectly reasonable and normal. Remember, what makes a “normal” behavior a safety strategy is that it 1) only gives temporary relief of anxiety and needs to be repeated, and 2) takes us away from what we value and where

we want to go. As you read through these safety strategies, which do you recognize as yours? You can download a complete list of safety strategies at http://www.newharbinger.com/35067.

Behavioral Safety Strategies

Checking (if appliances are turned off, if people are alive, that you did not make a mistake, your body to make sure it is okay, your heart rate and shakiness) **IOU/P/OR**

Repeating things over and over because they are not perfect, or rereading or rewriting things to make sure you have them right **P**

Spending too much time on things in order to get them right **P**

Seeking information (on the Internet, from doctors) **IOU**

Washing/cleaning so that you or someone else does not get sick **IOU/OR**

Excessive list making and/or planning **IOU/P**

Making excuses for yourself when saying no to something **OR**

Defending and/or justifying yourself and your actions **P/OR**

Prioritizing others' needs over your own **OR**

Procrastinating **P**

Avoiding initiating conversations **IOU/P/OR**

Avoiding speaking up in meetings **P**

Avoiding being the center of attention **P**

Avoiding situations where you feel trapped, like being a passenger in a car or sitting in a movie theater, or looking for escape routes **IOU**

Pointing people's mistakes out to them (kids, spouse) **OR**

Trying to solve other people's problems for them. **OR**

Avoiding taking time for yourself (exercise, yoga, doctor's appointments) **OR**

Asking for reassurance for decisions you have made **IOU/P**

Avoiding giving opinions that others may not agree with **P/OR**

Mental Safety Strategies

Reviewing events, what you might have said or done **IOU/P**

Making mental lists **IOU/P**

Monitoring physical sensations, analyzing what might be wrong or what is causing you to feel a certain way **IOU**

Worrying, and attempting to figure out, fix, and problem solve situations **IOU/P/OR**

Trying to remember things that might be important **IOU/OR**

Mentally checking that you remembered to do something like turning off the stove **IOU/P**

There are two other safety strategies that I want to make special note of here. The first is so ubiquitous and embedded in our culture that a list long enough to cover all its variations would fill several books. The default, go-to strategy to fend off anxiety in our everyday lives is, drumroll please…

Distraction

Distraction is not a problem in and of itself. For example, a hobby like quilting, photography, or playing guitar can distract you from the normal pressure of daily life. The same could also be said for the e-mails and texts, news feeds and social media, computer games and movies that compete for our attention day and night.

A distraction becomes a costly safety strategy when it is done in response to a perceived threat. This perceived threat could be in the form of a thought, a negative emotion, and/or a situation.

Maria was worried her headache was possibly an aneurysm, and this thought was highly distressing to her. When she was not monitoring the sensation or Googling it, she tried to distract herself. Reading a book or watching television often worked, temporarily. But unless the headache went away, the thought that it might be an aneurysm inevitably returned just as strong as ever. Trying not to think it by distracting herself only confirmed the threat that the thought was dangerous. Ultimately her distraction was feeding her monkey.

Faced with a decision or project that caused him performance anxiety, Eric procrastinated. Distracting himself by responding to e-mails, incoming phone calls, and employee requests was an attempt to avoid the anxiety he would feel if he actually made a decision or started on a project. The message he sent to his monkey mind by distracting himself was that the threat was real and too much to bear.

When Samantha thought about her son, she felt not only anxiety, but a profound sadness. She found that these emotions were less distressing for her if she kept herself busy, so she often brought work home with her and did extra cleaning and organizing around her house and yard. At best, these distractions worked only as long as she kept them up. The painful feelings returned in full force as soon as she stopped. Samantha's distraction was sending a clear message to her monkey mind that the feelings themselves were dangerous, something that she could not handle.

Even seemingly harmless little activities like me doing my nails and other household chores, when employed to distract me from the anxiety waiting for me at my laptop, become safety strategies. They confirm the threat that sitting down to write is dangerous. When we

use distraction to avoid a perceived threat, whether that threat is triggered by a thought, a feeling, or a situation, it comes at a high cost. It not only guarantees anxiety in the future but it keeps us from following our heart's desires.

Here is a short list of common distractions that are used as safety strategies. Which of them do you use to feed your monkey?

- Media like TV, computer games, online searches, e-mail
- Staying busy with tasks at home or at work
- Engaging with others in person, texting, or using social media
- Staying busy with hobbies

The second special safety strategy I want to highlight is, like worry and distraction, something you wouldn't normally think of as a strategy to keep you safe.

Trying to Relax

When the perceived threat is anxiety itself, the safety strategy of choice is *trying to relax.* While it may sound nonsensical to suggest that trying to enter a state of relaxation might maintain anxiety rather than reduce it, unfortunately that is often the case.

As I said in chapter 1, the monkey mind monitors everything going on in your head and body—not only what you take in with your senses from the outside but what you are thinking and feeling on the inside. When you are thinking anxious thoughts and feeling negative emotion for an extended duration, or at a high level of intensity, such as in a panic attack, your monkey mind notices that too, and will misperceive it as a threat. You may interpret this anxiety about your anxiety as losing control, as going crazy, or as death itself. Your reaction? *I need to relax to get rid of this threatening sensation.*

In the introduction, I described my own experience with panic attacks, specifically how the relaxation exercises my therapist

prescribed did nothing to ease my attacks. We didn't realize that trying *not* to feel anxious sensations—even the extremely uncomfortable ones like the pounding heart, dizziness, tightness in chest, tingling or numbness, nausea, blushing, sweating, or shaking you feel during a panic attack—only confirms the perception that they are dangerous.

I have nothing against relaxing. Relaxation is essential for our overall health, both mental and physical. But if you are trying to relax because you are afraid of anxiety itself and see your anxious sensations as a threat, it is a safety strategy. This is a problem because you are feeding your monkey mind. If you reinforce what you are trying to decrease, you are trapped, and have little to look forward to except more of the same.

How we try to relax varies from person to person. You might take a warm bath, go for a hike, pour a glass of wine, watch a movie, talk with a friend, pick up a book, or even meditate. Your behavior itself isn't nearly as important as your motive and the message you are sending to your monkey. If your relaxation is an attempt to reduce or avoid anxious thoughts and feelings, that message is, *You are right, little monkey, feeling anxious is dangerous. Thank you for alerting me that I need to relax.* The more you try to relax, the more impossible relaxing becomes.

Here are a few common activities we often employ to relax. They may be harmless in and of themselves, but when they are used to ward off negative emotion and uncomfortable physical sensations, they are safety strategies. Which apply to you?

- Using distractions as an attempt to relax
- Using substances like alcohol, prescription drugs, or non-prescription drugs

- Being with someone you consider safe
- Relaxation techniques
- Meditation
- Exercise

During the next week start a list of the safety strategies you employ throughout your day. The more you examine your own thoughts and behavior, the more traces of the monkey—and of your feeding the little guy—you are likely to find. As your list grows, which it inevitably will, a question is likely to arise. How much control of your life are you willing to hand over to the monkey in order to temporarily stay safe from negative emotion?

The price you are paying is huge. If you do not reclaim the responsibility to determine what are reasonable risks to take in each situation, your monkey will continue to determine that for you. Your life will continue to disappear into a black hole of safety strategies. Here's an example.

With the advent of SARS and Ebola, many of us were afraid we would pick up a virus from something we had touched. Every time we washed our hands with antibacterial soap we confirmed the threat, telling the monkey mind, *You're right, touching things is dangerous!* Thanks to our *need-to-be-certain* mind-set and our safety strategy, sales and profits from anti-bacterial soaps soared.

The fact was, these were airborne diseases and the threat was misperceived. All that washing was unnecessary, and after the dust settled, most of us returned to washing our hands just as we had before, with regular old soap. But some of us have a cycle going. If we don't have access to antibacterial soap, we get anxious. Or we might take precautions touching things. After you're done rinsing, how do you turn the water off without recontaminating your hands from the faucet? With your elbow? And what about that public restroom door—do you want to touch that now? Better use a paper towel.

There is no limit to how far off course an anxiety cycle can take you. I've had OCD clients who were washing their hands with bleach. That was an undeniable problem. How will you decide which safety strategies are working for you and which are working against you? Are you ready to find out?

I cannot begin to tell you how much I love spotting safety strategies. Seeing how we feed the monkey, whether through my clients' eyes when I share in their process of discovery, or with my own eyes when I see safety strategies in my own life, is an insight I never tire of. To me, there is nothing more exciting and empowering than to shine the light on the little critter we've been feeding, and to realize exactly what we are doing that maintains anxiety. Once we know how we contribute to our pain, we have the power to change!

Your present mind-set and your present behavior are keeping you safe. Yet a bigger life is beckoning. You want more and you deserve more than “more of the same.” In the next chapter we’ll find out what happens when we stop feeding the monkey with safety behaviors. We don’t just stop the cycle of anxiety. We start something new!

You can download a comprehensive *Checklist of Safety Strategies* at http://www.newharbinger.com/35067.

Chapter 4 Takeaway

We feed the monkey constantly throughout the day by performing safety strategies—actions that keep us temporarily safe from the monkey's perceived threats and anxiety alarms.

Chapter 5

The World Is Round

For the majority of human history, most people believed the world was flat, and that when you reached the edge you'd drop off into space. No one, of course, had ever been to the edge. This perception of threat was a property of the collective monkey mind, which operates under the principle, *What you don't know might kill you*.

The prevailing mind-set among ship captains was, "If there is an edge, I must be certain not to sail off." Their strategy of choice was to stay close to shore. When Europeans wanted to reach the Orient they sailed east, following the African shoreline, and vice versa. Every time a ship returned from a shore-hugging voyage this perception of threat was confirmed. Collective monkey logic concluded that *because you stayed close to the shore, you returned safely.*

Each of us has an ocean of possibility and discovery directly in front of us—the rest of our lives. If your concessions to the monkey have kept you hugging the shoreline, your choice is clear. Keep maintaining the cycle and your options remain limited. Break the cycle and expand your world. In that infinitely expanding world all things are possible. In the words of Dr. Seuss, “Oh, the places you’ll go!”

Breaking the Cycle

To break your cycle of anxiety the first step is to turn the monkey mind-set on its head. Assumptions like *I must be certain, I must be perfect,* and *I am responsible for everything and everybody* must be

flipped to *I am willing to be uncertain, I can make mistakes,* and *I am responsible for myself.*

Easier said than done, of course. Like all of us, I've tried to change my thinking in the past and I know how difficult it is to make it stick. One can easily decide to adopt a new way of thinking within the sanctuary of a therapist's office, while meditating at the top of a mountain, or while reading a self-help book. Maintaining that new way of thinking is another matter. The first time something comes along that triggers a perception of threat, we're slammed with anxiety and our resolve is shattered.

You've spent your lifetime feeding and reinforcing your present mind-set. Any new one you adopt—without a new expansive cycle to maintain it—will last about as long as a New Year's resolution.

What I've found in my practice, both professional and personal, is that before your new mind-set can become the default, it needs to be informed with new experience. Experiential learning blazes new trails in the brain, that with additional new experience can widen into superhighways. There is no substitute for actually "doing it." You may dream of running a marathon, but you won't actually start to believe you can until you've put some serious mileage on your Nikes.

So how do we get new experience to support our new *expansive mind-set*? We stop feeding the monkey! When we replace strategies that keep us safe with strategies that help us expand, we disrupt the cycle of anxiety and make new things happen. Strategies that help us expand—*expansive strategies*—are not intended to reduce anxiety, but rather to override it: to trump your monkey's trump card.

An expansive strategy is the active ingredient in your recipe to break the cycle of anxiety. Expansive strategies enable you to have new experiences that counter the perceptions of the monkey mind and solidify a new mind-set. And, as an added bonus, strategies that build or strengthen a cycle of expansion will teach you how to override anxiety, which will eventually lead to actually feeling less anxious.

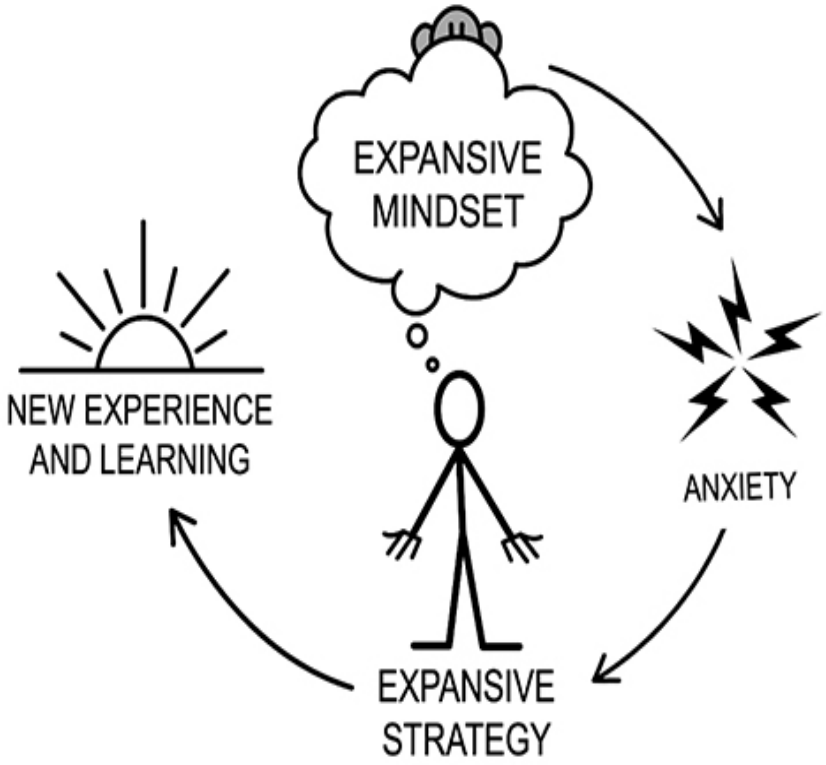
Expansive strategies are easy to come up with because they are usually the mirror opposite of safety strategies. For example, one safety strategy popular with shy people at social gatherings is to

position themselves in one spot and wait for others to approach them in conversation. This strategy ensures that whomever you talk with is interested in you and thus not likely to reject you. Every time someone else takes the initiative and you are not rejected, your monkey gets fed and your cycle is maintained.

To break that cycle, your new, expansive strategy at a social gathering might be to simply approach someone and say “Hello.” You could follow up by asking her a question about herself, or by sharing something about yourself. Do you need to be smart and funny, the life of the party? No! That would be a bull’s-eye. By simply putting yourself out there you are right where you belong, *on the target.*

Be aware that if you employ a new strategy with an old mind-set —*I need to sound confident, show no signs of anxiety,* in other words be perfect—you will not make progress. You must create an expansive mind-set to go with your expansive strategy. Something like, *I can sometimes be boring or sound stupid. I don’t need to hit the bull’s-eye; I just need to be on the target.*

Will you really believe this? Not at this point. You’ve been thinking with the perfectionist monkey mind-set for most, if not all of your life. You can, however, adopt a mind-set that *seems* truer, even if you do not trust it yet. The gardener who faithfully waters and weeds will see the seed sprout and grow into a lush plant. In the same way you, as you repeat your expansive strategy, will come to believe the mind-set you’ve been cultivating.



The beautiful thing about expansive mind-sets and strategies is that they maintain cycles of expansion. Not having to hit the bull's-eye every time opens up the whole target. There's no limit to where you'll be able to go. There's a big world out there!

Of course, thinking about a bigger world is going to mean greater anxiety. If you are feeling anxious right now, good! That means you are getting it. Yes, you will be more anxious when you drop a safety strategy and replace it with an expansive strategy. But in the short run, becoming more anxious is exactly what you need. You are standing up to your monkey mind by saying, *I choose to be more anxious. I am willing to be imperfect.* You are discrediting the perception of threat, something your monkey mind definitely notices because it means your monkey gets no banana!

When you do this over and over again, your anxiety alarms will decrease and you will become more comfortable being yourself in social situations. You will also learn how to deal with occasional rejection, which makes you much more resilient.

While all this may sound challenging, be assured that even my most anxiety-ridden clients have changed their strategies. So can you. I'll be addressing the issue of handling anxiety through this transition in more detail in the next chapter. Right now, I want to present to you what some common expansive mind-sets and strategies can look like and how they work.

The rule of thumb is that expansive mind-sets and strategies are, for the most part, the opposite of what you have been thinking and doing. You've been playing it safe; now you're going to look for trouble. Let me demonstrate by starting with Maria.

Beyond Certainty

Maria's most obvious safety strategy was looking up physical sensations on the Internet to see if they might be a sign of a serious disease. After some discussion she decided on a new expansion

strategy. She would refrain from Googling any symptoms for one week.

Another safety strategy Maria regularly employed was asking her husband for reassurance. He wasn't a doctor, but hearing his sensible opinion had a temporarily calming effect on her fears. The expansive strategy she chose was to stop reporting any physical sensations she might be having to him.

Maria considered dropping some of her other safety strategies, like not calling her doctor and asking for tests, but decided she was not ready to tackle those yet. This is fine. It is wise to start small, knowing that you can tackle the bigger challenges with time. My clients get less overwhelmed when they set clear and realistic expectations for themselves.

The strategies Maria did choose were still ambitious. I was careful to review with her the expansive mind-set she would use whenever she noticed any sign of, for example, a headache: *I am choosing to live with uncertainty.*

Remember that the mind-set and strategy go hand in hand. Your mind-set enables your strategy and vice versa. If either one is biased toward safety, you won't disrupt your anxiety cycle. If Maria approached this weeklong trial clinging to the monkey mind-set, *I must be certain*, the practice would fail.

Although Maria's anxiety problem was acute, her challenge was by no means unique. Everybody with the intolerance of uncertainty mind-set, when faced with an unknown, assumes there is danger. We cannot relax until the situation is proven safe.

With the invention of cell phones, many of us have developed what I consider a checking compulsion. We tell our loved ones to "call when you get there," and if they don't call us when we expect them to we get nervous and call them. Although this may make us feel less anxious is the short run, we are feeding the monkey and maintaining an intolerance of uncertainty.

If your family is going hang gliding, of course it's reasonable to check on them, but if you notice that your texts and calls have increased in frequency and that without them you get very anxious,

an expansive strategy such as limiting the number and times you can check may serve you.

Whether you are over-checking your own safety status like Maria, or the safety status of others, simply reverse the monkey mind-set. *Tolerate uncertainty and assume safety unless there is clear evidence of danger.* Eventually, after much practice this will allow you to feel more comfortable, even when you're not sure what will happen.

Do you attempt to control outcomes by being overly cautious and prepared? Funny how that approach still makes us feel anxious. That's because it feeds the monkey. Turn the strategy on its head and plan to be flexible, taking minimal precautions. For example, when you go on your next trip, whether it is a picnic at a park or a vacation to another country, underplan and under-pack. Choose to deal with any adversity that may crop up as an opportunity to practice resilience and creative problem solving. Your new expansive mind-set will sound something like, *I choose not to plan every detail. I choose to not know how everything will turn out. I choose uncertainty and spontaneity.*

Here are some examples of *I must be certain* mind-sets and some alternative expansive beliefs to counter them.

Monkey Mind-set: What I don't know could kill me. I must predict and plan for what might go wrong.

Expansive Mind-set: It is more important to live life fully in the present moment than to spend time predicting what might go wrong in the future.

Monkey Mind-set: I must be certain that I and others I care about are safe.

Expansive Mind-set: I will assume safety unless there is clear evidence of danger.

Monkey Mind-set: If things don't go as planned, my day is ruined.

Expansive Mind-set: It is more important to practice flexibility and learn to cope when things do not go as planned.

Monkey Mind-set: If I am not very careful, bad things might happen.

Expansive Mind-set: I can take reasonable precautions, knowing that I can influence but not control outcomes.

To help you change your mind-set into something more expansive, visit the website for this book, http://www.newharbinger.com/35067, and download the *Intolerance of Uncertainty Mind-set* chart.

Beyond Perfect

Eric's most common safety strategy at work was to postpone completing any project or finalizing any decision until he was sure it couldn't be criticized. With his *I cannot make a mistake* mind-set, anything less than universal approval would be complete failure. Although he was unsure how he would do it, Eric decided, as a weeklong experiment, to set firm time limits on one of the decisions he was working on. He chose a decision that, while stressful, would have fewer negative consequences than the others if he got it wrong. He promised himself that when the predetermined time came, he would make the decision whether he felt ready or not.

Eric also wanted to do something about his social perfectionism. He felt self-conscious about his weight and shyness, and was avoiding situations that might expose him to the judgments of others. He was in a cycle that kept him alienated and alone. Eric decided on a new strategy: to accept any invitation or opportunity to spend time with others. His coworkers had an ongoing lunch together on Thursdays, which he'd always avoided, so he put it on his calendar.

We both knew that unless he was willing to risk making mistakes —being seen as a failure—Eric wouldn't follow through with his self-imposed work deadlines or social commitments. For those of us with

the perfectionist strain of the monkey mind-set, fear of failure is the motivation for much of what we do. We don't see fallibility as a normal part of the human condition, but as a personal shortcoming. If we do something poorly it defines us completely as unworthy, "less than" everyone else. Eric needed a new expansive mind-set to support his new strategies.

What would an expansive mind-set for a perfectionist look like? You could say, *Making mistakes, and allowing others' judgments and criticism, are reasonable risks to take and opportunities for growth.*

Or, as Eric put it so succinctly on his way out of the office, *I am willing to screw up.*

Here are a few examples of the *I cannot make a mistake* mind-set, coupled with alternative expansive ways of thinking to replace them.

Monkey Mind-set: Mistakes, judgments, and criticism are signs that I am not good enough, am less than, or have failed.

Expansive Mind-set: Mistakes, judgments, and criticism are signs that I have taken a risk, and are opportunities for growth.

Monkey Mind-set: I only feel good about myself if I have done something well (conditional self-acceptance).

Expansive Mind-set: I know I will do some things well and other things poorly, and neither reflects my worth as a person (unconditional self-acceptance).

Monkey Mind-set: I am motivated by my fear of failure.

Expansive Mind-set: I am motivated by excellence, creativity, and purpose.

Monkey Mind-set: Being imperfect and fallible is a sign of inferiority.

Expansive Mind-set: Being imperfect and fallible is part of being human.

Monkey Mind-set: If others are better than I am at something, it means I am not good enough.

Expansive Mind-set: It is more important to do my personal best than to measure myself against others' accomplishments.

Use the *Perfectionist Mind-set* chart available at http://www.newharbinger.com/35067 to help turn your own perfectionist mind-set into a more expansive way of thinking.

Beyond Over-responsible

Samantha's primary safety strategy was calling to check on her alcoholic son. Her new expansive strategy was simple: *Don't call and check*.

In order to follow through with her plan, Samantha would need to change her default mind-set. She had always operated under the assumption that *If something bad happens to him and I didn't do anything to prevent it, it would be my fault*. Her new way of thinking would have to be, *I cannot prevent my son from hurting himself*.

Naturally this was challenging for Samantha to contemplate. As a mother, the stakes felt overwhelmingly high. If she didn't check on him and something happened, her pain and guilt would be enormous. But Samantha's present mind-set and safety strategies were seriously affecting her mental and physical health. She knew she had to change.

Together we came up with an expansive strategy she could try: to check up on her son no more than once daily. This may not seem significant, but for Samantha it would be a challenge. She was in the habit of calling or texting him three or four times a day.

Even if she carried this through, she would likely have to face other challenges. What if her son called her, as he often did, with a request for another “loan” to keep him afloat? Samantha decided that she would offer to pay for a treatment program for substance abuse, but would not give him money he needed as a result of his substance abuse. Although it sounded cold and heartless, she knew

her over-responsible mind-set and strategy were helping neither of them in the long run. But if she did refuse him money, she knew it would upset him, which would be a challenge for her. Samantha's monkey mind-set held her accountable whenever anyone got upset with her.

After much deliberation Samantha decided to commit to both expansive strategies. They would support an expanded mind-set that she envisioned for herself, one that said *I am responsible for my own actions and not the actions of others*, and *If someone becomes upset with me, it does not mean I have done something wrong. I am not responsible for other people's emotions.*

Expansive strategies for those with an over-responsible mind-set can sound selfish, especially in a culture that values loyalty and family. But being responsible for your own health and well-being is not being selfish. In fact, it is your primary duty. In an airplane emergency you put on your own oxygen mask first, before your child's, for good reason. If you are depleted, you will be unable to help those you love even when they genuinely need and deserve your help.

Other traps that over-responsible mind-sets pull us into are pointing out others' poor choices to them, stepping up when there's a task nobody's willing to do, and failing to set limits with those who disrespect or take advantage of us. While these strategies may make you feel better in the short run, you cannot grow by continuing to use them.

Employing strategies that take responsibility for yourself first will reinforce a healthier, more sustainable mind-set, one that will help you cultivate health and peace of mind regardless of how others are doing. When you stop trying to control others, and offer them compassion instead, they will feel the difference. In time they will be more likely to accept the support you have to give them.

Here are a few examples of expansive alternatives to some common over-responsible beliefs of the monkey mind-set.

> **Monkey Mind-set:** I believe that if someone I care about is not making a good choice, it is my responsibility to do

something about it. If I don't, I am partly responsible for the consequence.

Expansive Mind-set: I believe that people are responsible for their own lives and the choices they make. Consequences of their actions are not my fault.

Monkey Mind-set: If I set a limit with someone or state a preference, I feel responsible for the other person's feelings.

Expansive Mind-set: When I set a limit or state a preference, I can be sensitive to others' feelings without taking responsibility for them.

Monkey Mind-set: If others do not do their fair share of the work, it is my responsibility to take up the slack.

Expansive Mind-set: If others do not do their fair share of the work, it is not my responsibility to step up. I am willing to allow the consequences of other people's action or inaction.

Monkey Mind-set: I tend to put other people's needs before my own.

Expansive Mind-set: I believe that taking care of myself is as or more important than taking care of others.

Monkey Mind-set: When others are in pain, I become upset and try to fix their problem and/or point out what they are doing wrong.

Expansive Mind-set: When others are in pain, I can listen with compassion, but it is not my job to fix or solve their problem.

To gauge how over-responsible your mind-set presently is, and how you can turn it into an expansive one, complete the *Over-*

responsibility Mind-Set chart, available at http://www.newharbinger.com/35067.

A Bigger World

The first rationale for choosing expansive strategies over safety strategies is that it breaks the cycle of anxiety. When you stop feeding the monkey you are showing the monkey that you can handle the situation, and in the future there is no cause for alarm. Over time the monkey mind will learn to perceive that particular situation as nonthreatening.

The second rationale for using expansive strategies is just as, if not more, important. Expansive strategies create new experience, experience that will actually transform your mind-set. The more expansive your mind-set is, the better you'll be able to handle *all* situations. You'll be able to approach new people, places, and things with more confidence. Your options widen. Your world grows bigger.

Just imagine what your life would be like if you actually believed you could handle things whether or not they turned out like you planned, if you didn't have to be 100% perfect in every action you took, and if you didn't have to fix everyone else's problems.

If you're with me this far, great! You understand how your behavior has been reinforcing a mind-set that not only isn't serving you, but actually maintains your anxiety. With this new insight you have the capability to disrupt a system that your monkey has spent years refining but that is getting you nowhere. In its place you can discover a bigger world where the sky is the limit.

As you read this, can you hear some chatter and howling in the background? The monkey is not about to give up on its mission of 100% safety. In the next chapter we will look at the powerful tool the monkey uses to implement that mission, and the equally powerful means you have to counter it.

Chapter 5 Takeaway

In order to support a mind-set that allows us to thrive, we must create new experience and learning by replacing safety strategies with expansive strategies.

Chapter 6

Necessary Feelings

One morning a few days into her summer vacation before her sophomore year, a girl I knew named Julie woke up in pain. Julie's joints and limbs ached and, thinking she had the flu, she pulled the covers over her head and stayed in bed. When the pains persisted for a couple of days she began to get concerned. Softball season was starting, and although Julie was the team's best shortstop, she didn't feel up for it. Julie lay in bed, confused and depressed as the mysterious aches and pains ebbed and flowed throughout her limbs.

Julie finally made a doctor's appointment, and as she was getting dressed she noticed her jeans seemed to have shrunk a little. An hour later, she had her diagnosis. Growing pains. Although a bit extreme, her case was perfectly normal. There was nothing she could do but ride it out. Except to sleep at night, Julie never returned to her bed that summer. Although her discomfort persisted, she played softball, went camping, dated, and did everything she'd normally do over the summer without complaining. Julie returned to school in the fall with a whole new wardrobe. It was necessary, seeing how over the summer she had grown four full inches!

What is of special interest to me about this story is how Julie's attitude toward her pain changed once she understood what it was. Her initial reaction to mystery pain was to stay in bed and avoid her summer activities. When she learned the context of that pain—that it was a harbinger of growth—she responded differently. Her resilience to the pain shot up once she understood that it was necessary.

You will find your expansion practice also features growing pains. These negative feelings come in two forms: 1) uncomfortable fight-or-flight sensations like a racing heart rate, sweaty palms, or nervous stomach, and 2) painful emotions like anxiety, frustration, and sadness. Both of these types of feelings are the monkey mind calling you to action. If you stop reacting to the monkey's call, it will deliver

more of the same discomfort, which will be as difficult to ignore as a fire alarm.

For you to grow it will be necessary to override the monkey's call to action, to replace your safety strategies with strategies that will, in the short run, elicit *more* negative feelings. Negative feelings, the very feelings that we find the most uncomfortable and challenging, are the feelings we need to process in order to grow. This is why I like to think of negative feelings as *necessary feelings.* If you want to expand your life beyond the monkey's circle of safety, it is necessary that you feel them rather than try to distract yourself from them or bottle them up.

When we choose to accept negative feelings as necessary, as simply a part of our growing process, three amazing things happen:

- We learn that we can handle the feelings.
- We contradict the monkey's perception of threat, training it that we can handle the situation.
- We free ourselves to move with purpose, not allowing anxiety to dictate our actions.

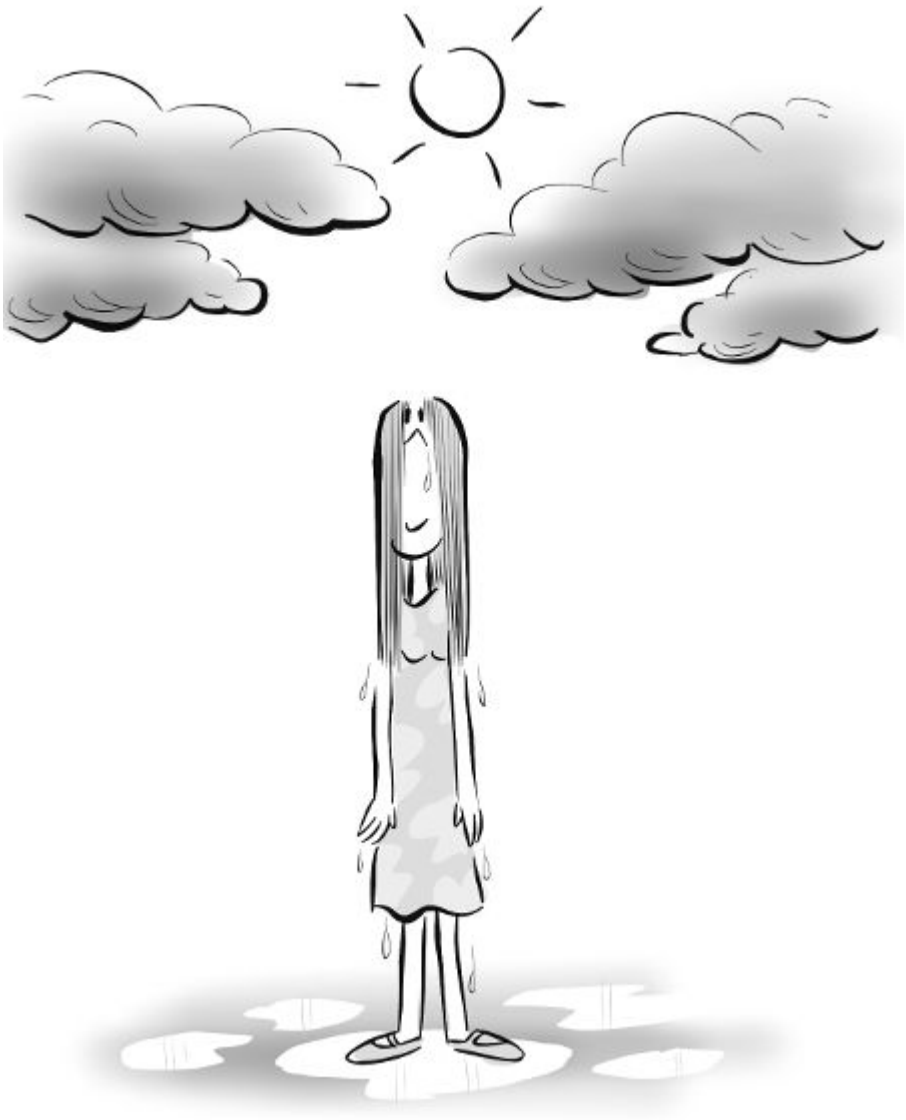
This is my challenge to you: Bring a new response to these necessary sensations and emotions. Rather than treating them as an alarm that something is wrong or a call to action, accept them as something to tolerate, a monkey's tantrum. This response will build your resilience, allowing for new experience and learning that will feed your expansive mind-set and let you pursue your heart's desires.

A Course to Run

For many of us the notion of purposely feeling negative sensations and emotions is so contrary to our experience and way of thinking that it sounds preposterous. It would be reasonable to ask, *If I allow myself to feel these things, will they ever go away?*

It's the *only* way they will ever go away. When we allow ourselves to simply feel, without responding to the monkey's call to *do something*, whatever we are feeling can run its course. All sensations and emotions, even the ones that overwhelm us, have a beginning, a middle, and an end. They will pass like a thunderstorm. Eventually the clouds disperse and the sun shines through.

The weather, like most of nature, is beyond our direct control. Because we know it will change—time and time again it has demonstrated that it will—we accept bad patches as necessary and we ride them out. If only we had the same faith and trust that our sensations and emotions, too, will burn themselves out and that we don't need to control them.



Because safety behaviors bring quick, reliable relief, they give us the illusion of control. We think, *If I do something, I won't have to feel this*. This is what we've learned growing up in a culture that values the force of will and controlling outcomes as much as ours does.

As I have shown in this book, and as you have undoubtedly experienced in your own life, *doing something* provides only temporary relief and keeps us trapped in a cycle. Trying to control necessary feelings is exactly what maintains them. As the saying goes, *what we resist persists*. Yet we cling to this illusion of control

because the alternative, feeling pain, is so counterintuitive and has no short-term rewards.

Because anxiety doesn't accommodate us, we need to accommodate it. We need a new response to anxiety. Open up and welcome whatever emotions and sensations arise. Let them run their course. While this may be difficult, the more you do it, the better you will get at it. My clients and I call this *getting good at feeling bad*.

The more we allow for necessary feelings, the more resilient to them we become. A high tolerance for anxiety frees us from the tyranny of answering the monkey's call to action. Building this tolerance will not happen if, like shuttering your windows before a storm, you close down your body to insulate yourself against feelings. You will need to open up and feel whatever is necessary for you to feel, surrendering control completely, in order to build resilience.

This task would be as impossible as it sounds were it not for two terrific tools each of us has at our disposal. These techniques are counterintuitive, in that they appear to be the opposite of what you need, but as I have seen in my practice over and over again, they are extremely effective at helping us to metabolize negative sensations and emotions. The first of these resilience-boosting tools is the foundational tool for dealing with anxiety, the essential go-to technique that you can use in every situation.

Welcoming Breath

The next time you notice yourself feeling anxious, stop for a moment and pay attention to where you are experiencing the most discomfort. Is it in your chest or in your stomach? Does it make your head ache or your heart palpitate? Once you have located where that discomfort is, begin to breathe intentionally into that part of your body. Imagine greeting that discomfort with a stream of fresh healing air. This is your Welcoming Breath, a powerful way you can express your new expansive mind-set.

Continue to breathe with the intention to welcome rather than resist. Each inhalation supports the space for this uncomfortable feeling to exist. With each exhale, let go of any control you may be hanging on to. Remind yourself as often as you need to that *this feeling is necessary,* and *I can welcome it as long as it is there.*

The Welcoming Breath will feel awkward at first. Unless we are exercising, we tend to breathe in a shallow manner with only a small portion of our lungs. But go ahead and breathe deeply, even though you are not doing anything strenuous. You cannot hurt yourself by taking in more oxygen.

As you continue this Welcoming Breath you will notice that your feelings will change. They may intensify or they may decrease. They may move to a different part of your body. Other feelings may arise to accompany them. If that happens, welcome them too. Whatever happens, just keep breathing and welcoming, allowing the feelings to be there, allowing them to change, allowing them to stop, and even allowing them to start again.

To facilitate this process, open your whole body to make space for whatever needs to happen. Whether standing, sitting, or lying down, keep your back straight to allow maximum lung expansion. You want plenty of room for the feelings to move. You may also find it useful to hold your palms open; it's another physical way of reminding yourself that you are welcoming what is happening, that you are surrendering control, that you are willing to feel what there is to feel, however it changes, moment by moment, breath by breath.

Don't be surprised when the monkey, just like the child in the supermarket, throws a tantrum, showering you with additional anxious thoughts and feelings. In fact, you can expect it. When that happens, return your attention to your breath. Be a relentlessly welcoming host. If you keep refocusing on your breath, you will surprise yourself at how well you can accommodate whatever sensations or emotions arise.

Don't be discouraged if you get overwhelmed or distracted and don't see the feeling through to the end. You likely won't at first. The Welcoming Breath, like any technique, will require practice, and most sensations and feelings will arise many times before you will begin to

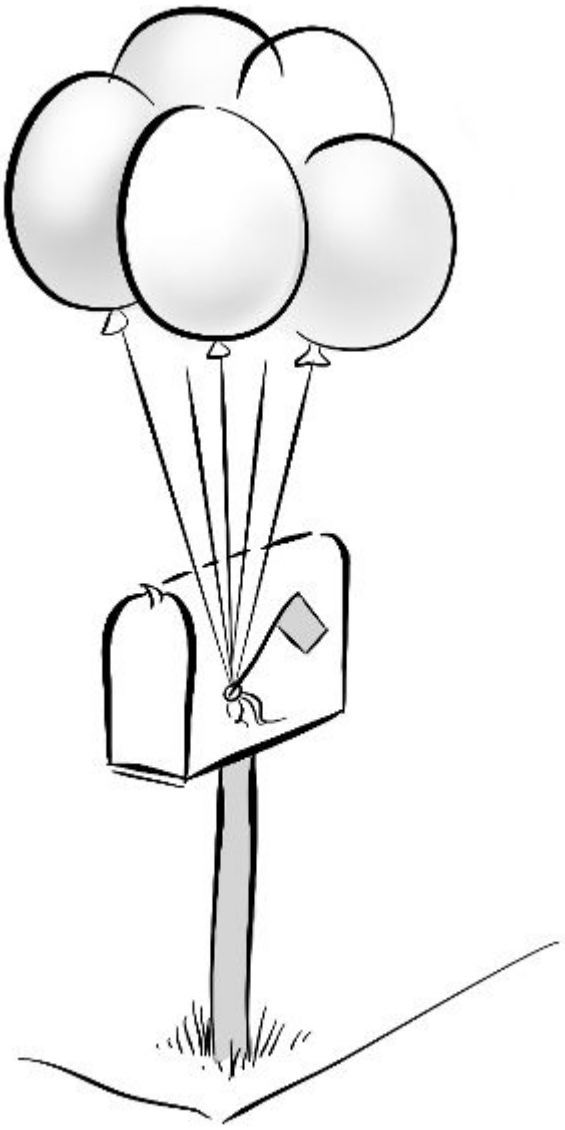
experience significant resilience to them, or noticeable decrease in them. As long as you think of them as opportunities to be welcomed, you will be growing and expanding.

Welcoming what you are accustomed to resisting will be a challenge for you. The key is to set the intention to have uncomfortable feelings. Most of us have spent our whole lives trying not to feel discomfort, so it's a big leap to actually welcome uncomfortable feelings. But that's exactly what we need to do.

> A necessary feeling is like an uninvited guest who always shows up anyway. Since you know it is coming, you'll be better able to handle it if you send an invitation.

Welcoming Fight-or-Flight Sensations

Negative emotions aren't the only difficult guests at the party when the monkey is the host. Uncomfortable physical sensations are likely to show up too. When fight-or-flight sensations are triggered, the neurological and biochemical changes that happen in your brain can amount to a virtual hijacking.



You can lose your ability to reason or make wise decisions. You may believe not only that the situation that triggered them is dangerous to you, but that the uncomfortable feelings themselves are dangerous. This is especially true for those of us who experience panic attacks. Here are a few common physical sensations that are especially difficult to welcome.

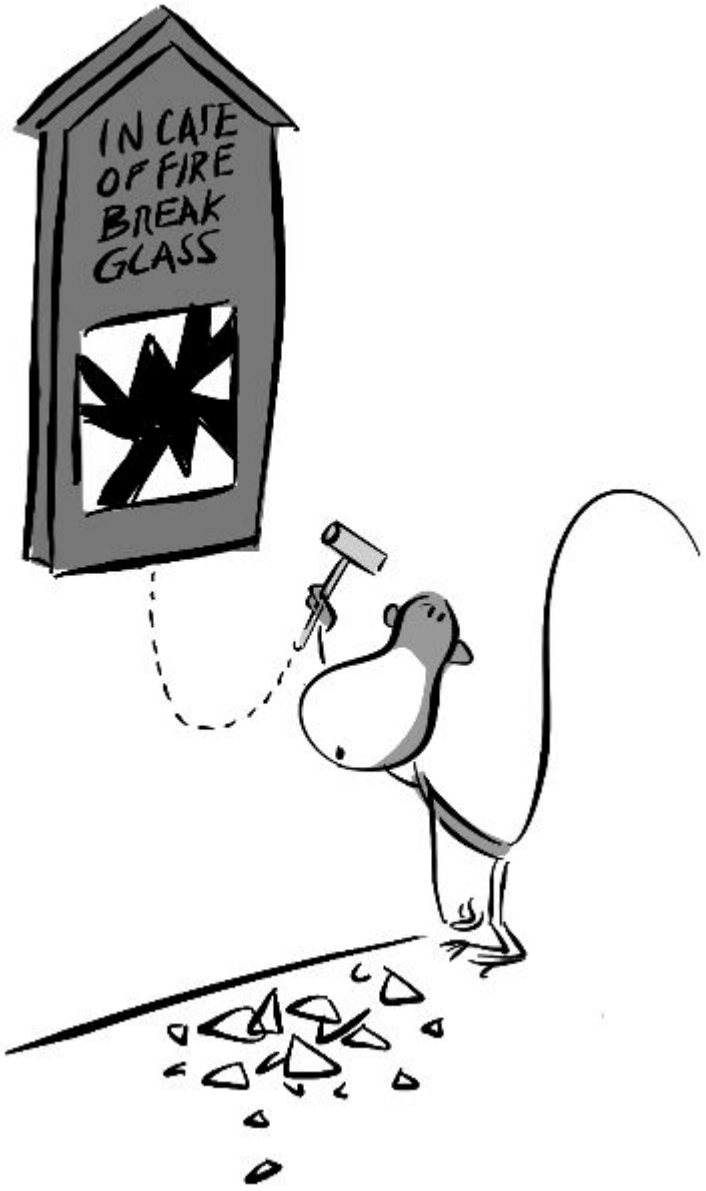
- Tightness in the chest
- Dizziness or light-headedness

- Increased heart rate
- Nervous stomach
- Feeling hot and sweaty
- Numbness and tingling
- Distorted vision

When experiencing intense and uncomfortable bodily sensations it is easy to be convinced that something actually *is* wrong. For example, when your heart beats fast, this may cause significant anxiety because your monkey mind is perceiving the threat as a possible heart attack. If you get light-headed your monkey may think you are going to faint, or if you get vision changes it may think you are going crazy or will lose control in some way. It is not uncommon to feel as if you are literally dying or going crazy, which is why panic symptoms like chest pain, dizziness, and shortness of breath are common reasons given for emergency room visits.

Although these uncomfortable sensations usually happen in response to a perceived threat situation, they can also happen completely out of the blue. This can be especially alarming. But the truth is, our bodies are perfectly equipped to handle these uncomfortable sensations, even when we don't understand the reason for them.

When you experience fight-or-flight sensations but there is no immediate threat, it is a false alarm. Regardless of how urgent these sensations seem, resisting them will only prolong them. Pointless as they seem to be, uncomfortable sensations, like negative emotions, are necessary. The more we can welcome them, the more easily they will metabolize.



When you make it clear to yourself that you are welcoming anxiety alarms, both with your intention and your breath, you are far less likely to be hijacked by them. Since you can't grow without learning how to process fight-or-flight sensations, take charge by welcoming them!

Opportunities to Practice Welcoming

You won't have to look too hard for situations that will trigger uncomfortable feelings. They will come looking for you. This is a good thing. These situations are opportunities because you need to master them in order to grow.

The most obvious situations are the ones that you are most afraid of and have been avoiding. For Eric it was making decisions, confronting employees, or going to the gym. For Maria it was traveling any distance from a hospital, and for Samantha it was saying no to her son, or to anyone who might become upset with her. In later chapters I will be addressing how you can learn to welcome these high-stakes situations. For now, let's focus on moderately uncomfortable situations that you can learn to welcome rather than resist, avoid, or distract yourself from.

Here are a few unpleasant situations that you likely find yourself in on a regular basis:

- Sitting at a long red light
- Waiting in line
- Dealing with rude drivers
- Arriving late
- Doing a task you dislike
- Listening to someone complain to you
- Sitting in a boring meeting or class

If the situations you encounter throughout your day don't make you anxious or uncomfortable, you can always notch things up a bit by actually triggering your own negative feelings to welcome. You can get really creative with this. Here are a few suggestions:

- Listen to a political candidate you dislike
- Turn on some music that you find distasteful

- Watch a movie you know you won't like
- Order food you have never tried and that doesn't appeal
- Go someplace without your cell phone
- Wear something you don't usually wear
- Read or listen to something that will make you sad

Welcoming is more than an idea or an intention. It is like a muscle that needs to be exercised. You will find it very helpful to track your welcoming exercises, and for that I've provided a *Welcoming Worksheet* at http://www.newharbinger.com/35067. Take a few minutes each evening to update your worksheet with the situations you chose to practice welcoming that day. It might look something like this:

Day of Week/ Date	Necessary Feeling I Am Provoking	Length of Time	Sensation Intensity (1–10)	Emotion Level (1–10)	Welcoming (1–10)
Monday	Frustration Waiting at a red light	30 sec.	4	4	4
Tuesday	Boredom, irritation Sitting in a boring meeting	1 hour	6	7	6
Thursday	Anxiety Taking a walk without my cell phone	15 min.	2	5	5
Saturday	Anxiety, guilt Arriving five minutes late to meet a friend for dinner	NA	6	7	4
Monday	Anger Driver cut me off in traffic	5 sec.	5	8	3

The “Sensation Intensity” column is for rating the strength of your physical sensations. How rapidly is your heart beating? How tense are your muscles? How queasy or nauseous does your stomach feel? A 10 would be the most intense sensation you’ve ever felt. A 1 would be a mild sensation that, unless you were paying attention, you might not even notice.

The “Emotion Level” column is for tracking the strength of your emotional response to the situation you are in. Typical emotions may include sadness, anxiety, dread and guilt. Often the intensity of the emotion you are feeling will correspond to the intensity of your physical sensations so much that they blur together. In this practice you are learning to differentiate between what is a physical sensation and what is an emotional experience.

Learning to gauge how well you are welcoming these necessary feelings is the most difficult part of this exercise. Welcoming necessary feelings requires changing your stance toward anxiety. What you had been resisting you are now allowing to be, accepting as necessary, softening toward, and surrendering to. In the beginning your "Welcoming" score will be low. This is normal. With repeated purposeful exposure to anxiety you will learn to relax into the feelings themselves and your "Welcoming" score will reflect that.

Remember that when you do welcoming exercises, you are not attempting to get rid of or control the feeling, nor are you trying to like the feeling. You are simply welcoming whatever emotion arises in that moment with your breath. Breathe in to accept the feeling. Breathe out to let go of control. Repeat as necessary, knowing that with every breath you are cultivating resilience and expansion. You are getting good at feeling bad!

You can also download an audio exercise to assist in your practice, *Welcoming Necessary Emotion*, at http://www.newharbinger.com/35067.

Welcoming Breath is an amazing physical tool for building resilience to necessary feelings. However, there is a second tool you'll want to know about that, if used properly, can greatly accelerate your resilience. This tool really gets the monkey's attention, and it puts the brakes on the anxiety cycle.

Ask for More

Anyone who has tried "reverse psychology" knows that it is very much like a dare. The parent who tells the child who is throwing a tantrum, "Go ahead, scream as loud as you want," had better be prepared for some earth-shattering screams, as well as some angry stares from fellow shoppers. However, if the parent is truly committed to this new expansive strategy and rides out the wave of discomfort and embarrassment, her reward will eventually be a child who has learned that tantrums do not deliver treats.

This is your long-term goal. You want the monkey to learn that hammering you with more negative feelings will go unrewarded. This is monkey training, and the more often the monkey's call to action is overridden, the faster it will learn.

But remember that how fast or how well the monkey learns is beyond your control. Expansion practice is really about training yourself! As you welcome necessary feelings you will learn that you can tolerate them. You will discover that you can cope with whatever happens. This allows you to have new experiences, new learning, and new confidence. So, when you Ask for More, you send yourself the message, *I can handle this!* and you accelerate your own training.

I cannot overemphasize how important this point is. It is crucial that you not "put the cart in front of the horse." The tantrum-throwing child in the supermarket cannot learn anything new unless the parent first learns how to tolerate the tantrum. The monkey cannot learn that you can actually handle a situation unless you first learn how to handle it.

That's why, to accelerate our training, we ask for more. The more necessary emotion we can tolerate, the more new experiences and learning we can have. As an example, here is how asking for more might sound for a hypochondriac like Maria.

Uncomfortable sensation: Accelerated heartbeat

Maria: Good, I want my heart to beat faster.

Uncomfortable sensation: Sweating and shaking

Maria: Good, I want to sweat and shake more!

Uncomfortable sensation: Feeling numb

Maria: Good, let me feel more numbness!

Uncomfortable sensation: Nausea, cramp in bowels

Maria: Good, let me feel more nauseous and crampy!

Yes, I know. Literally asking to feel bad sounds crazy. But then you've spent your life thus far trying *not* to feel bad. Are you feeling any better as a result?

Here's why "crazy" works. Asking for more of the discomfort you've resisted in the past undermines any resistance to it you may have in the moment. Repeating such a strong command keeps you focused on your new mission. You can't become absorbed in your monkey's orders when you're busy giving it orders of your own. The more purposeful you are in choosing to experience negative sensations and emotions, the more powerful your expansion will be.

In Control

As each of us has learned over and over again in our lives battling anxiety, resistance is futile. Anxiety is literally beyond our control. It is a force of nature no less inevitable than the sunrise, no less formidable than a summer thunderstorm. With regard to anxiety the question we must ask is, *What can I control?*

You can control your *response* to anxiety. You can open your body and make room for it to run its course with your breath. You can ask for more of it to train yourself—and the monkey—that you can handle it. Remember that negative feelings are inevitable, and thus necessary, and by making room for them you will, with time and practice, build resilience to them in your body. When you control your response to the monkey, it loses its control over you.

I've devoted this chapter to the physical process of feeling what is necessary to expand your world. As we are well aware, the necessary sensations and emotions don't happen in a vacuum. They are, after all, evidence of the monkey's perception of threat. The anxious thoughts that accompany anxious feelings can be very compelling and numerous, coming at you in a torrent. Resisting them is as futile as resisting necessary feelings. In the next chapter we will learn how to welcome worry, or what I call *monkey chatter*.

Chapter 6 Takeaway

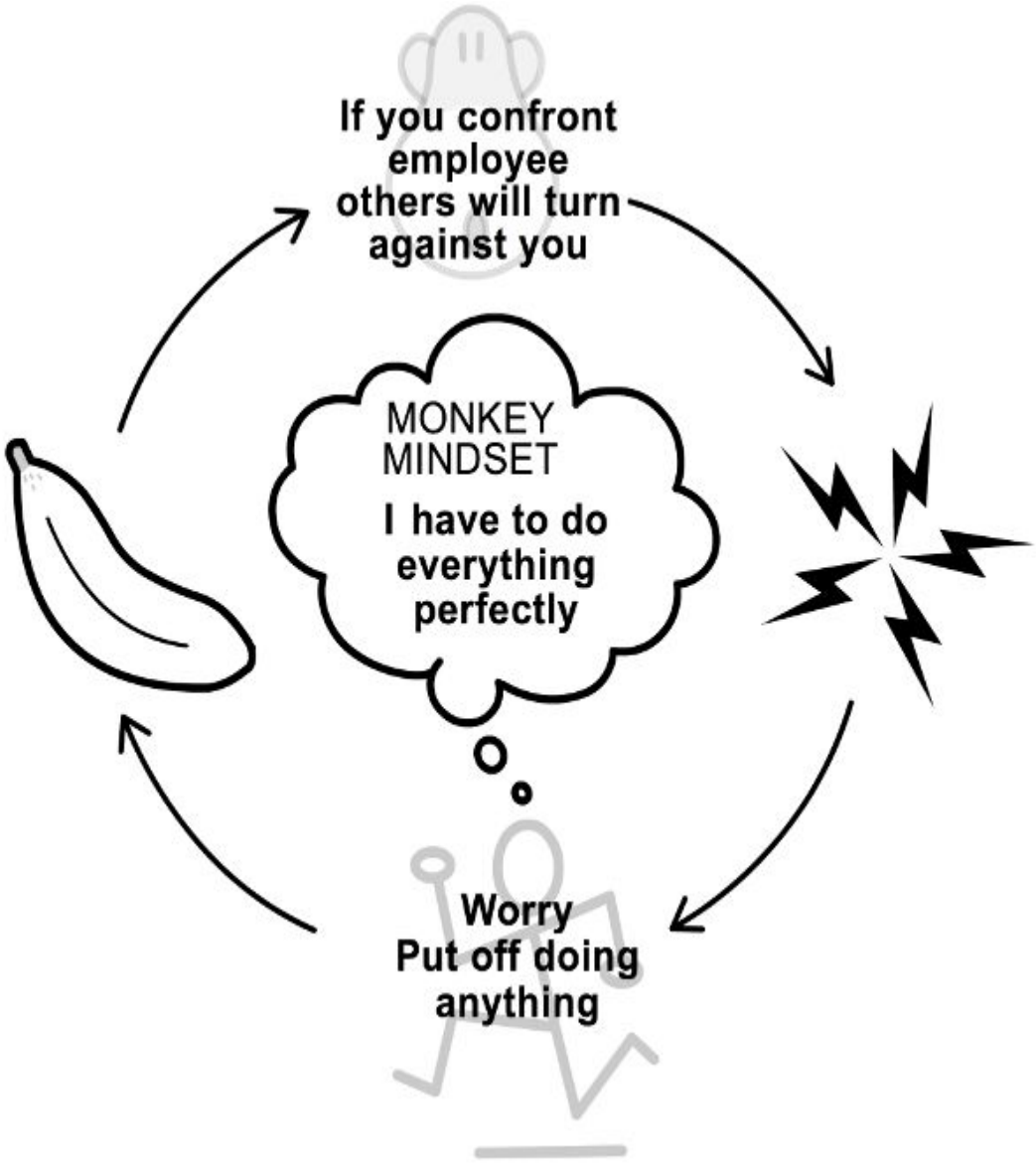
In order for the uncomfortable emotions and sensations associated with anxiety to run their course, it is not only necessary to feel them, but advisable to welcome them.

Chapter 7

Monkey Chatter

Eric came into our session one week looking very stressed. He described an incident he'd had with one of his employees a few days before that was upsetting him. The employee had made a careless error that cost the company a customer, and it was the second time this had happened. What made this more upsetting to Eric was that this employee was the wife of a good friend of his and Eric was the one who originally suggested she come and work for his company. Eric hated the idea of confronting the employee and was worried that if he did he would lose his friend. He'd slept very little the previous two nights, worrying about what to do.

Eric was hijacked. His anxious thoughts were all based on perceptions of primordial threat. *If I fire her everyone in the office will hate me! I'll lose my friends! I'll lose my business! I'll be alone!* No wonder he couldn't sleep. When you are hijacked by the monkey you simply can't think straight. All your thoughts are like monkey chatter, all based on the perception of a primordial threat. To help Eric sort through this I asked him to chart his cycle.



Looking at Eric's chart helped him see that he was overestimating the primordial threat. Would everyone turn against him for simply doing his job? Probably not. He also saw that he might be underestimating his ability to cope if some people, including his good friend, got angry.

This was helpful. However, even though the situation probably wasn't a primordial threat, Eric did have a problem that needed to be solved. Anxious thoughts can be a signal that something really is wrong and that action is required. But with all the monkey chatter in

his head, Eric was having difficulty deciding what action he should take.

To help Eric determine that, I introduced him to the following exercise. It is designed to help you sort through the noise so you can act on the signal. (You can download a worksheet for it from http://www.newharbinger.com/35067.)

Five-Step Problem Solving

Identify the problem.

List four possible actions to solve it.

Review short- and long-term consequences of each possible action.

Choose the best action and do it.

Evaluate how it worked. Pat yourself on the back for trying something new!

Beginning with step 1, I asked Eric to state his presenting problem in the simplest terms. Here's what he said: "The employee I hired is alienating customers."

Step 2 was to think of four possible actions he could take to address the problem. During this step it is good to think freely, not trying to find the best solution, just brainstorming what comes to mind. Eric came up with four that covered his options pretty well. He could fire the employee, put the employee on probation, talk to his friend (the husband of the employee) about the problem, or simply not do anything.

Next, step 3. I asked Eric to evaluate these possible actions, looking at what both the short-term and long-term consequences of each might be.

Eric said that not doing anything would be the easiest now, but without intervention of some kind, the employee could lose him more customers in the future. Firing her would certainly prevent future

mistakes, but it would feel extremely uncomfortable and would put a strain on his friendship with her husband. Talking to his friend, the husband of his employee, without talking to his employee did not make sense for the short run or the long run. He couldn't outsource his responsibility, burden his friend, and expect the problem to be solved.

The last option, giving his employee a formal warning that included consequences for future mistakes, would certainly make him feel uncomfortable in the short term, but if she repeated her mistake in the future, firing her would be easier, and at least he would have his justification for the firing documented in her personnel record. Eric decided that probation for the employee was the best option, especially if he combined it with more training to help prevent future mistakes.

With an action plan in place, Eric was ready for step 4 of the Five-Step Problem Solving exercise, which was to take action. But he still felt uneasy. He had hoped that he would be able to come up with the perfect solution that would not threaten his friendship with the employee's husband, nor cause any further loss of customers for his company. This was Eric's perfectionist monkey mind-set at work. When problem solving there is never a perfect solution. If there were, it wouldn't be a problem!

If the action Eric chose to take didn't solve the problem, I explained, he could go back to step 4 and pick another action. Until then it wouldn't be useful to think about the others. For now, he should focus on the action he'd chosen to employ.

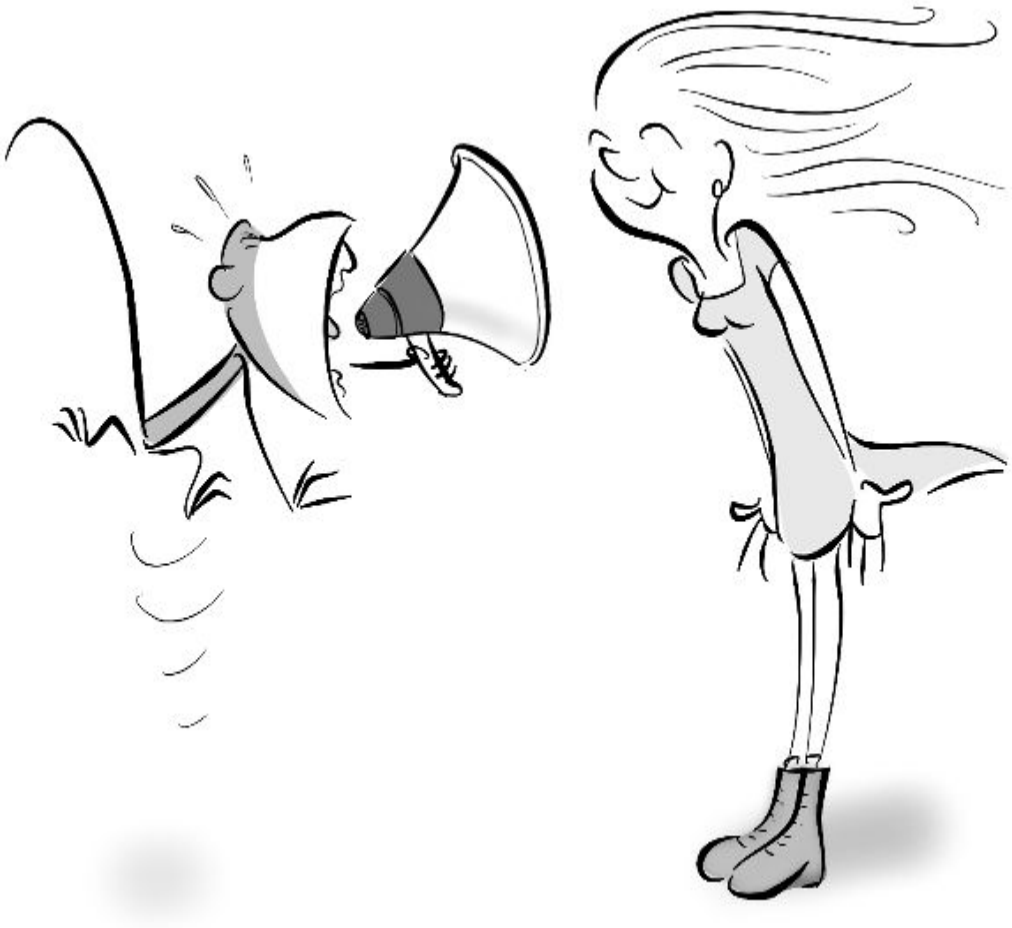
Eric said he felt a little better, but he was concerned that he would continue to worry. Having decided on a course of action did not mean Eric's monkey would not continue to chatter away; in fact we were both sure it would. So I introduced him to my favorite all-purpose tool to answer monkey chatter.

Thank the Monkey

Like all my clients, when dealing with anxious thoughts, Eric's instinct was to block them out. When that didn't work he'd argue back, coming up with rationales for why there was no need to worry. And like all of us, Eric seldom had much success.

The monkey is a force of nature, and like with all irrepressible forces, what we resist persists. You cannot ignore, suppress, or debate with the monkey! To the monkey, your attempts to *not* think about the perceived threat will only confirm the threat, guaranteeing more chatter. To send the monkey the message you want to send it, that *I am aware of this problem and I can handle it*, you must give it full voice.

Giving the monkey full voice, of course, does not mean following its lead. Simply notice the chatter without judging it or reacting to it. Notice the monkey like you notice the announcement at the airport warning you not to leave your baggage unattended. No matter how troubling or repetitive a thought is, just keep noticing it, over and over again.



By simply noticing, you are allowing yourself to have negative thoughts—yes, even big bad scary ones you'd be embarrassed to share with anyone—and training yourself not to treat them as a call to action. You are creating a healthier distance between you and the monkey, becoming an observer rather than a participant in the worry process.

Therefore, when monkey chatter becomes loud enough to distract you, which it most certainly will, your practice will be to observe the anxious thought and move on. To remind yourself that you are declining to engage with your monkey's chatter rather than trying to shut it up, I suggest you acknowledge these thoughts with a simple *thank you*.

That's right, be polite! The little critter, misguided as it is, is just trying to do its job of keeping you safe. Like a tantrum-throwing toddler, the monkey will not be quieted with reason. Like a fire alarm,

it cannot be ignored. So acknowledge the monkey politely and move forward. Here's what it sounded like for Eric when he got a barrage of chatter about his upcoming talk with his employee.

Monkey chatter: She may have made an honest mistake. Confronting her will be unfair!

Eric: Thank you, monkey.

Monkey chatter: If you confront employees, they will hate you and you'll be a pariah in your own company!

Eric: Thank you, monkey.

Monkey chatter: You can't threaten to fire the wife of a friend. That would be an unforgivable betrayal!

Eric: Thank you, monkey.

Remember that it is only a thought you are observing, a thought that is the product of a hijacked brain. Every time you observe it and decline to act on it, the distance between you and that thought grows, and the more you regain control of your cognitions. Each repetition of observing chatter, acknowledging chatter, and letting go of chatter will, like any exercise, make you stronger and more skillful at reclaiming your own brain.

If you find yourself countering the monkey's chatter with arguments of your own, stop. The monkey does not learn from reason or debate. The monkey mind learns by either 1) receiving confirmation of its perception of threat, or 2*)* not receiving confirmation of its perception of threat. You've been teaching the monkey the wrong lesson your whole life by confirming its perceptions with resistance. It's time to stop. The clearest message you can send a chattering monkey mind is to observe it, thank it, and return—over and over again—to your new expansive strategy and mind-set.

Your goal is to override the monkey's call to action, not to drown it out or undermine it in any way. You are building immunity, so that no matter how loudly or how often the chatter strikes, you can continue

to move purposely toward your personal goals and expand your world.

Worry Time

The next week during my session with Eric, he reported that due to scheduling conflicts, his meeting with his employee was still several days away. This had given his monkey lots of additional time to chatter in anticipation of the confrontation.

Eric was able to observe, acknowledge, and let go of his anxious thoughts with a *Thank you, monkey* fairly consistently, at least during the day. But at night when he was tired he fell back into a worry cycle. Lying alone in the dark, thanking the monkey seemed silly to him and it did not help him get sleep. Eric was ready for the industrial strength anti-chatter tool, *Worry Time.*

Hopefully you've become accustomed to paradox in this book. Worry Time is just what it sounds like, a time for you to worry, on purpose no less! The difference is that Worry Time is *your* time. You decide when to worry and what to worry about, not the monkey.

This makes a bigger difference than it sounds. Worry is a mental action we take in response to a perceived threat. As such it is a safety behavior, designed to forestall the negative emotions that accompany the thoughts. When you decide on your own, without any monkey input, to designate a time to allow the anxious thought to be expressed—without trying to fix or problem solve anything—you are setting the agenda. You are taking a different stance towards worry.

With this new stance you level the playing field. It's a little like standing up to a bully. The message is, *This is* my *neighborhood. Bring it on! I can handle it.*

Worry done this way, with a plan and purpose, is transformed from a safety strategy to an expansive strategy. You bring up the anxious thought yourself and don't try to resist it. And the monkey goes hungry.

Worry Time

Designate a block of time in your day that you will devote to full-on worrying. Set your alarm or mark it on your calendar just like you would for any other important commitment. Since, as you've already guessed, it won't be something you'll be looking forward to, I suggest you plan a block of time

shortly before you expect to do something fun, like meeting a friend, watching a movie, or some other form of entertainment.

When your appointment with worry arrives, find a spot where you won't be disturbed, set your timer for 10 to 20 minutes, and go to it. Worry your head off. Don't stop until the timer rings.

Remember not to argue against or suppress the thoughts and feelings that emerge. You are in charge and this is what you asked for. You've chosen to open the gates, letting everything you are thinking and feeling pass freely through you, resisting nothing. You'll be tempted to problem solve some of your worries, but don't go there. No fixing, just feeling!

Conversely, your mind may stray away from anxious thoughts and you'll find yourself thinking about benign things that have no emotion attached. Refocus on an anxious thought. This is Worry Time, when your intention is to worry. The more often you return to worrying, the better!

To maximize the effectiveness of your Worry Time you may find it helpful to make a script to read aloud or record and listen to. That's what Eric did. To make the script I asked him two questions and I had him answer them as specifically as possible, with no sugarcoating.

What is the worst that might happen?

If it comes true, what would it mean about me, my life, and my future?

I told him to really let go, as if he were writing a horror movie—his *worst-case scenario*. Here's what he wrote:

My employee will offend another customer and we'll lose the customer. When I confront her she will become angry with me. She'll cry and deny everything, saying it wasn't her fault. Everyone in the office will side with her. She'll

go home and tell her husband what a jerk I am. He'll get angry too and confront me in person, telling me that I'm unfair and out of line and that our friendship is over. Then he'll tell everybody we know what a jerk I am, and they will all turn against me. Everyone I work with as well as my friends that I care about will hate me and I'll be alone.

When Eric read what he'd written, he could see that it was a little far-fetched. "But that won't stop me from worrying about it," he said. "Good," I told him. As long as it provokes the monkey into sounding the alarm it will be great to use at Worry Time.

Like all tools, Worry Time will be most effective if practiced often and regularly. With my clients I recommend scheduling a Worry Time daily for at least a week. Remember that resilience builds with repetition. For a downloadable worksheet version of this exercise, visit http://www.newharbinger.com/35067.

In addition to the resilience you will accrue from the exercise itself, you will have the added benefit of another kind of expansive strategy to use when you get blindsided by monkey chatter. You can say to yourself, *I will worry about this during Worry Time tomorrow*. Postponing worry until you are in control works because you've stopped feeding the monkey.

When you don't feed the monkey, *you* get the banana. You get new experience and learning that creates new neural pathways in your brain. You are learning that the content of anxious thoughts is not important and you don't need to act on them. Those pressing *what ifs* and *what abouts* that once echoed in your head are beginning to sound more like what they are: *Woo-woo-woo!* Monkey chatter. You can tolerate them. You are expanding!

Mix and Match

Dealing with worry isn't just a brain exercise, it's a full body workout. When you use the monkey chatter tools in this chapter, the necessary feelings I described in the last chapter will rise up in force. You'll need to employ the tools in that chapter, Welcoming Breath and Ask for More, in conjunction with Thank the Monkey and Worry Time.

What's more, the tools in these two chapters can not only be used individually and collectively, but also interchangeably. For example, you can respond to monkey chatter with Welcoming Breath. You can Thank the Monkey for negative feelings and you can Ask for More uncomfortable physical sensations during Worry Time. Mix and match these tools freely. The more you use them, and the more situations you use them in, the more resilience you will eventually develop.

Note the word "eventually" in that sentence. New tools require a new skill set. Processing necessary feelings works muscles that have long atrophied for most of us, and since your present monkey mind-set influences every situation in your life to one degree or another, you have a lot of *expansion practice* ahead. Any change you make in how you think and behave will take plenty of repetition to become your default.

While that may seem like bad news, it's really good. Remember what we're practicing here—expanding your life! The more you expand, the more freely you can pursue your goals and the more flexible and resilient you will be when you encounter obstacles.

In the next chapter I will talk about two more tools for your expansion practice, each very different in nature. One is conceptual, the other concrete. One will inspire your practice and the other will ground it. Individually they are powerful; together they are unstoppable. Once you understand their synergetic strength, you won't want to practice without them.

Chapter 7 Takeaway

Worry is often nothing more than
monkey chatter, and it will dissipate
if it is welcomed and tolerated,
rather than resisted or acted upon.

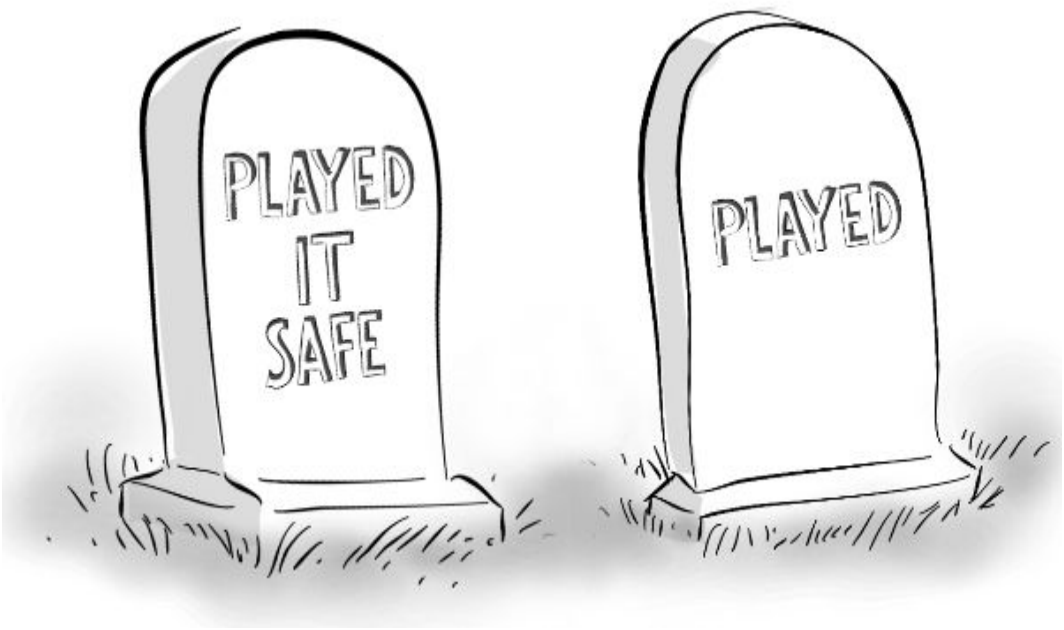
Chapter 8

Purpose and Plan

Remember the first time a grade school teacher or classmate looked at your lovingly crafted crayon drawing and said, “That doesn’t look like a horse!”? Or the first time a friend or sibling overheard you singing to yourself and made a face? In those tender moments we first realized that the joys of self-expression come at a cost. The price of creativity is the judgment of others.

If we cannot tolerate the primordial fear that others’ judgments trigger—that of being kicked out of the tribe—we learn to anticipate those judgments and internalize them. We put the crayons down. We stop singing. We proclaim that we don’t have any talent. “Every child is an artist,” Pablo Picasso famously said. “The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.”

We are not all meant to be visual artists, of course, but what about the art of living? Are we so bound by the necessity of survival that none of our higher values can be indulged? Perpetually prompted by the monkey’s *Woo-woo-woo!* and hijacked by negative feelings, we are caught in a game with impossibly strict rules. We try to be certain, to be perfect, to please others, but these are poor substitutes for the real purpose of being alive. If we continue to devote our lives to mere survival, while sacrificing values like creativity and spontaneity—and the personal goals that living according to those values will help us accomplish—sooner or later we are bound to feel regret.



Whether you are an artist or an accountant, this is your challenge. Will you live according to the monkey's value—safety at all costs—or according to your own? I don't know for certain our purpose on this planet, but I'm sure we are meant to do more than merely survive.

The child humming along as she crayons her personal masterpiece, and the artist in his studio, boldly creating genres of painting that didn't exist before, are living according to their own personal values: self-expression, authenticity, curiosity, independence, communication, courage, and pleasure, to name a few. We are all artists, practicing the art of living. What are the values that will inspire your practice?

To help you answer that question, here is a list of some expansive human values. Any one, or combination of them, will give your practice purpose and direction. Circle those that most appeal to you, or better yet, write down your own short list and keep it somewhere it will be handy to refer to in the future. You can also download a *Values List* at http://www.newharbinger.com/35067.

SELF-ACCEPTANCE

COMMITMENT

FLEXIBILITY

GROWTH

RESILIENCE

HUMOR

OPENNESS

ADVENTURE

PRESENCE/
MINDFULNESS

CREATIVITY

HEALTH

COURAGE

SPIRITUALITY

HONESTY

INDEPENDENCE

FUN/PLEASURE

SELF-EXPRESSION

PEACE

RESPONSIBILITY

COMPASSION

HONOR

AUTHENTICITY

LOVE

TRUST

Values at Work

Values out of context are only words with little meaning. To see how they work as inspiration and direction in expansion practice, let's revisit Maria, Eric, and Samantha.

Maria wanted to move beyond her hypochondriasis and she was willing to feel more anxiety in the short run by dropping some of her safety strategies of checking and seeking reassurance. She'd identified a more expansive mind-set to cultivate, one that allowed

for uncertainty about her physical sensations. It was a good, sound plan. Tired of hugging the shore, Maria was ready to push off for uncharted waters. But what about when the water got rough? What were the values that would inspire Maria and help her stay on course?

When I asked Maria what values were more important to her than feeling safe and certain, she was surprised at how hard it was to identify them. But when I showed her the values chart she had no trouble naming them.

Fun, Flexibility, Adventure, Resilience, Presence

I suggested Maria enter them in her smartphone, so when she felt lost and needed to get her bearings, they would serve to remind her of what inspired her practice. And that's exactly what they did.

Eric's expansion practice was to restrict the time he allowed himself to making decisions, and to accept invitations to social events. Both intentions threatened his monkey mind-set—that if he made mistakes he'd be judged and rejected by others. I asked Eric why he was willing to do this. What was more important to him than safety? Here are the values that he came up with:

Self-Acceptance, Commitment, Authenticity, Growth, Resilience, Courage

Eric kept a list of these values on the back of his business card in his wallet where they'd always be in reach. And over the course of his practice he reached for them often.

The only value Samantha had been honoring was safety for her son. While it sounded noble, Samantha knew it wasn't leading her in the direction she wanted—usually just to her phone or her checkbook. When she looked over the Values List she was able to find some worthy replacements. And for clarity's sake, she refined them a bit.

Health (my own), Trust (in my son), and Responsibility (to myself)

To remind herself of her values, she changed the home screen on her phone from a photo of her son to a photo of herself. When she was tempted to dial him to check up on him, she was reminded to whom her real responsibility was. She planned to change the photo back someday but only after she had her values straight.

Is your *I must be certain, I cannot make mistakes, I am responsible for everybody* mind-set leading you away from your values? What is the toll this is taking in your life? What are the values you want to be directed by?

Just for practice, imagine yourself in the following situations, choosing directions based on different values.

You are walking in a city that is new to you, you're hungry, and you have an hour to kill.

Value: Safety **Direction:** Consult Yelp for a five-star restaurant.

Value: Adventure **Direction:** Ask a local for a recommendation and follow it regardless.

Your boss is leading a meeting that is going in a direction you don't agree with.

Value: Safety **Direction:** Don't say anything and allow the meeting to run its course.

Value: Authenticity **Direction:** Inform the group of your objection and suggest an alternate course of action.

Your partner is unhappy with the untidiness of your shared living space.

Value: Safety **Direction:** Surprise partner by cleaning up while he or she is away.

Value: Fun **Direction:** Begin "Tidy Friday" tradition, where you both houseclean together while you play your favorite music.

You see someone at an event whose name you cannot remember.

Value: Safety **Direction:** Avoid the person until you remember or find it out.

Value: Spontaneity **Direction:** Approach the person, hand proffered, and remind him or her what your name is.

These are only a few examples of situations we commonly find ourselves in, where our values are easily forgotten. Most of us face dozens of them in a typical day, some formidable enough to make us wonder, *How will I remember my values when the monkey sounds the alarm?*

Charting the Course

The entrepreneur has a business plan, schools have charters, politicians have platforms, organizations have mission statements, and countries have constitutions. You, too, will benefit greatly by planning and documenting the purpose of your practice, as well as how you intend to exercise your values.

I've put together an Expansion Chart for my clients that helps them keep their practices on course. It embodies all the components of an expansion practice: the situation you've chosen as an opportunity for growth, the personal values that will guide you, your old monkey mind-set and strategies, your new expansive mind-set and strategies, and finally, the necessary feelings you'll face. When my clients are beginning any practice, we fill it out together and I encourage them to read it every day.

Expansion Charts helped my clients so much that I use them regularly in my own personal practice. I'd like to share one of them with you. You'll remember how my fear of making mistakes was getting in the way of my writing. Below is an Expansion Chart I completed to help me practice disrupting my perfectionist monkey mind-set.

Problem/Opportunity: Writing	
Values: Authenticity, Self-Acceptance, Creativity, Courage	
Monkey Mind-set	**Expansive Mind-set**
I must know what I am going to say, say it clearly, and it must be good.	Creativity involves risk.
If I don't do it perfectly it will show I am not good enough.	Doing well and poorly at things does not define my worth as a person.
Safety Strategies	**Expansive Strategies**
Research more.	Restrict amount of time I will write to 30 minutes.
Wait until I feel clear minded.	Write freely, allow for imperfection.
When I get frustrated, quit.	Use a Welcoming Breath.
Necessary Feelings: Anxiety, confusion, and frustration	

The power of the Expansion Chart derives from the fact that before you complete each field, you have to think. Expansion practice deserves, in fact requires, thoughtful preparation. To approach any practice situation without a plan invites a monkey hijacking. It would be like trying to quarterback a football team without a playbook.

I don't normally walk into situations thinking, *I want to be authentic, creative, and forgiving toward myself.* By actually writing down those values, I made them more real and an integral part of my overall goal. Similarly, documenting both my monkey mind-set and safety strategies and their expansive alternatives illuminated them in high relief, making the choices that awaited me clearly apparent. Anticipating my necessary feelings and committing them to paper helped prepare me for the job of welcoming and tolerating those feelings. Note that I reminded myself that welcoming anxiety with my breath is an expansion strategy. It's a great reminder that processing anxiety is as normal as breathing.

I'd like you to take a few minutes to practice filling out an Expansion Chart of your own. Download the *Expansion Chart* worksheet at http://www.newharbinger.com/35067 and follow the steps below to fill it out. With the insight this exercise gives you, you'll have a huge advantage over what you've had in the past. When the monkey sounds the alarm, you'll be prepared!

Expansion Chart

Think of a difficult situation. This could be a task or activity that you have been procrastinating on, a decision you are having trouble making, an upcoming event that is making you nervous, a situation where saying "no" or standing up for yourself is hard, or a chronic worry that has been troubling you. Write this situation in the first box labeled "Opportunity."

Identify the values that are truly important to you in this situation. They represent the direction that you want to be moving in and what you want to

strengthen or cultivate by working on this problem. I find it very helpful to use the list of values you saw earlier in this chapter as a reference.

Identify the monkey mind-sets that are activated in this situation. This is a good time to review the examples of monkey mind-sets that are found in chapter 5. (They are labeled *Beyond Certainty*, *Beyond Perfect,* and *Beyond Over-Responsibility*. You can also download them at http://www.newharbinger.com/35067.)

Identify the expansive mind-set that can counter the monkey mind-set. You can consult the same passages in chapter 5 or downloads cited in step 3.

List the safety strategies that you've used in the past. A good question to ask yourself is, *What do I do to keep the worst from happening?* You can also consult the list of common safety strategies found in chapter 4, or download them at http://www.newharbinger.com/35067.

List the expansive strategies you intend to use instead. (They are often exactly the opposite of your safety strategies.)

Finally, write down the necessary feelings that you will need to experience and welcome in order to grow. This includes both fight-or-flight sensations and negative emotions. Here is a short list of necessary emotions to help you anticipate what they might be.

Anxiety Embarrassment

Anger Guilt

Panic Hopelessness

Frustration Shame

Filling out an Expansion Chart is the beginning of mastery over a situation you've previously been overwhelmed by. You reclaim the values you've been sacrificing for safety. You acknowledge your old mind-set and strategies, and define your new ones. You choose the necessary feelings you're willing to welcome in order to meet your goal.

What is perhaps most empowering about completing an Expansion Chart is that when you are fully prepared for what is coming, you take away a crucial advantage of the monkey—the element of surprise. The monkey commands a neural alarm system that travels at speeds up to 200 miles per hour. Without warning, it can hijack you before you can draw a breath—unless you are expecting it. When you are fully prepared, it will be you who will be doing the surprising.

When you have a plan and a purpose, even the smallest situation that makes you anxious is an opportunity to expand your life. In the next chapter we'll learn how to create these opportunities to practice with rather than wait for the monkey to surprise us.

Chapter 8 Takeaway

When we override the monkey's value of safety with our own personal values, and plan situations to practice honoring those values, we expand our lives.

Chapter 9

Lowering the Stakes

A few decades ago when video games were in their infancy, my six-year-old son was playing a cute game called *Lemmings* one day when my husband walked in. “Wow, this looks like fun,” he said. “Can I play?” In less than a minute he was thoroughly crushed. “I guess I’m no good at video games,” he sighed.

Our little sage turned and put his hand on his father’s shoulder. “It’s okay, Dad. You’re just not ready for level 34.”

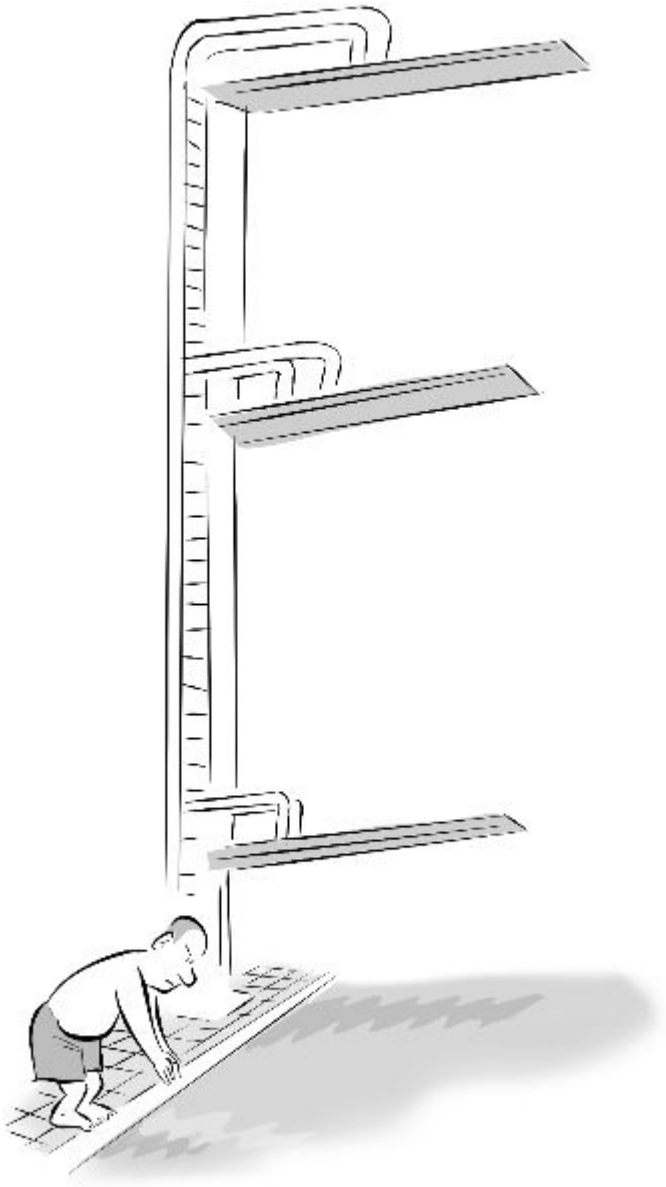
Level One

You may begin your day tomorrow morning with the best of intentions, to meet each alarm of the monkey mind with a new response, welcoming necessary emotions as they arise. Determined as you may be, however, your chances of completing the day without being hijacked are similar to those my husband had of completing level 34 of *Lemmings*. To keep an expansive mind-set is exceedingly difficult when you are blindsided by the monkey with high doses of anxiety.

Until you develop some resilience to anxiety, the best leverage you have with the monkey during your practice is to begin at level one. This means choosing situations for your practice that you know are not major threats to your survival. Low-stakes situations are less

likely to trigger overwhelming anxiety, and you'll be more capable of maintaining your new expansive mind-set and strategies.

For example, does your over-responsibility have you doing too much overtime? While you could make an appointment with your boss tomorrow to set some clear limits, you'd be better off at a lower level like planning to leave work on time that day. If you have difficulty making decisions because you need to be certain, before you take on retirement planning, go into an ice cream parlor and try a flavor you've never tried before. You don't need to present at *TED Talks* to tackle performance anxiety. Try cooking dinner for friends, which will also challenge your perfectionist monkey mind-set. While these small-stakes situations may seem of little consequence, you will be learning more than you think. Here's why.



Since your monkey mind-set is system wide, the safety strategies you use in low-anxiety situations are the same that you use in high-anxiety situations. Whether you are negotiating a million-dollar deal at work or negotiating which movie to stream with your spouse, the monkey is there. Whether you are choosing a college or choosing a pair of earrings, safety beckons. Nearly every situation throughout your day pits your values against the monkey's. All situations, no matter how routine or inconsequential, are opportunities to practice your new mind-set. Here are some situations my clients chose to practice with.

Eric's perfectionism exhibited itself not only at his workplace, but in his personal life. He wasn't going to the gym because he was overweight. He never cooked for himself because he might forget an ingredient or burn something. He >didn't engage in small talk with his neighbors because he might say the wrong thing. All these situations became low-level practices for him.

Maria needed to be certain not only about her health, but about her finances, her friends, and her shopping purchases. She only invested T-bills, associated only with people from her church, and had difficulty deciding even on a pair of shoes to buy. Likewise, Samantha felt responsible for the lost pets she saw on posters, and was reluctant to bother the barista by asking for more half-and-half when the pitcher was empty. Neither of them had to look far to find suitable practice situations.

What's your level one? There are lots of suggestions ahead, but it will be up to you to choose. Try to hit the sweet spot, where enough anxiety or fight-or-flight sensations are aroused that you are challenged, but not so much that you will revert to a safety strategy.

By now you've likely got a pretty good idea of which of the three monkey mind-sets you have been operating under. Each of them has its own particular set of opportunities for expansion. I hope those that I've listed here will inspire you. You may be surprised at how simple, or even playful, some appear to be. Others may look completely formidable to you. Regardless how big or small, each opportunity will present a challenge. If you remember to choose opportunities that are just outside your present zone of comfort, with stakes that you can handle, your practice will be both rewarding and sustainable.

Celebrating Imperfection

Here are some opportunities for the perfectionist monkey mind-set, which does not allow for making mistakes. Values that you are looking to nourish include *creativity, risk,* and *adventure*. Add *acceptance* and *compassion* to the list—they'll be needed when your

inevitable mistakes are made. You'll also want *flexibility* and *resilience* in order to recover from them.

A mind-set that celebrates imperfection is characterized by these beliefs:

- I know I will do some things well and other things poorly, and neither reflects my worth as a person. (Unconditional self-acceptance)

- Mistakes, judgments, and criticism are signs that I have taken a risk and seized an opportunity for growth.
- I am motivated by excellence, creativity, and purpose.
- It is more important to do my personal best than measure myself against others' accomplishments.
- Being imperfect and fallible is part of being human.

>Here are some examples of perfectionist safety strategies we use in common situations, as well as alternative expansive strategies you can practice using instead.

Safety strategy: Repeatedly check an e-mail for errors.

Expansive strategy: Write and send.

Safety strategy: Organize workspace so it is neat.

Expansive strategy: Leave some clutter.

Safety strategy: Put off doing taxes, or anything else you hate.

Expansive strategy: Set a time and spend five minutes on that task.

Safety strategy: Attempt to cook the perfect meal.

Expansive strategy: When cooking for others, allow for mistakes.

The preceding strategies were behavioral. Here are a few opportunities to practice mental expansion strategies:

Safety strategy: Review the past, looking for mistakes.

Expansive strategy: Allow yourself to be uncertain about whether you made mistakes in the past.

Safety strategy: Worry when reminded of a problem.

Expansive strategy: Use the five-step problem-solving process.

For a complete list of *Safety Strategies versus Expansive Strategies for the Perfectionist*, visit http://www.newharbinger.com/35067.

Here are a few all-purpose Expansion Charts to help your practice. Each of them addresses a specific problem area common to those of us with a perfectionist mind-set.

Opportunity: Impostor syndrome—Feeling like I have to prove myself or I'll be discovered as a fraud	
Values: Authenticity, Creativity, Self-Acceptance	
Monkey Mind-set	**Expansive Mind-set**
Mistakes equal incompetence.	Mistakes are part of being human.
If people see weakness, I'll look inadequate.	I don't need to prove myself.
Safety Strategies	**Expansive Strategies**
Hide mistakes.	Reveal minor mistakes.
Don't ask questions or for help.	Ask for help or ask a question once a day.
Overwork to prevent mistakes.	Restrict time on tasks, leave work on time.
Don't take risks.	Try something new and allow for mistakes.
Don't share details about yourself.	Share one thing about yourself every day.
Necessary Feelings: Anxiety, shame, and embarrassment	

Opportunity: Procrastination	
Values: Commitment, Self-Acceptance, Growth, Courage, Authenticity	
Monkey Mind-set	**Expansive Mind-set**
I must do things perfectly.	Humans aren't perfect.
I should know what I am doing.	I can learn as I go. Mistakes help me grow.
I should not feel confused.	Confusion is part of the process.
I must be at my best.	It is more important that I get started than to put things off until I am at my best.
Safety Strategies	**Expansive Strategies**
Delay starting task.	Set timer for just five minutes to get started.
Spend hours researching instead of starting task.	Set limit on research time and on time on task.
Only work when I am 100%.	Purposely work when I feel tired or confused.
Necessary Feelings: Anxiety, confusion, and frustration	

Opportunity: Fear of public speaking, whether in a meeting, class, or conversation with others	
Values: Self-Acceptance, Courage, Authenticity, Creativity	
Monkey Mind-set	**Expansive Mind-set**
I must be smart, funny, interesting.	If I am talking I am on target.
I must not say anything wrong or incorrect.	Being wrong or incorrect is normal.
Anxiety is a sign of weakness and inadequacy.	My anxiety is a part of me that makes me human.
Safety Strategies	**Expansive Strategies**
Rehearse what I am going to say.	Say whatever random thing comes to mind.
Avoid speaking up or answering questions.	Ask or say one thing in every social encounter.
Hide sweating/blushing with clothing/ makeup.	Allow for physical signs of anxiety.
Necessary Feelings: Anxiety, shame, embarrassment, and dread	

Opportunity: Worry and rumination over past mistakes	
Values: Self-Acceptance, Risk, Fun, Presence	
Monkey Mind-set	**Expansive Mind-set**
I should not make mistakes.	Everyone makes mistakes, including me.
Mistakes equal failure.	"Putting myself out there" equals success.
Safety Strategies	**Expansive Strategies**
Beat myself up for mistakes to prevent future ones.	Absolve self, knowing more will occur.
Worry about past errors whenever I recall them.	Plan specific Worry Time.
Necessary Feelings: Anxiety, shame, embarrassment, and dread	

Seeking Uncertainty

If you're someone who really needs to know what's going on, and can't relax until you know for certain, some values you might want to

practice are *acceptance* of the inherent chaos of life on this planet, *flexibility* when things do go wrong, and, should you get blindsided by something you don't expect, *resilience.* And let's not forget *gratitude* for what goes right!

The expansive mind-set that seeks uncertainty is characterized by these beliefs:

- It is more important to live life fully in the present moment than to spend time predicting what might go wrong in the future.

- I will assume safety unless there is clear evidence of danger.
- It is important to practice flexibility and learn to cope when things do not go as planned.
- I can take reasonable precautions knowing that I can influence but not control outcomes.

Here are some examples of safety strategies commonly used in anxiety-producing situations and expansive strategies you might use as alternatives.

Safety strategy: Check to see if loved ones arrive safely.

Expansive strategy: Assume safety and allow for uncertainty.

Safety strategy: Research uncomfortable sensations online.

Expansive strategy: Breathe into uncomfortable situations.

Safety strategy: Make sure you packed everything for a trip.

Expansive strategy: Limit packing time.

Safety strategy: Postpone decisions until you are sure.

Expansive strategy: Set a time to make a decision even if you're unsure.

The strategies above are behavioral. Here are a few opportunities to practice mental expansion strategies:

Safety strategy: Weigh pros and cons over and over in your mind to make sure you're making the best decision.

Expansive strategy: Allow for uncertainty. Ask for uncertainty. Ask for more anxiety too.

Safety strategy: Worry over the same problem repeatedly.

Expansive strategy: Thank your monkey, and ask for more. Or schedule yourself a Worry Time.

For a complete list of *Safety Strategies versus Expansive Strategies for Intolerance of Uncertainty*, visit http://www.newharbinger.com/35067.

Certain problem areas come up over and over again for my clients with a need for certainty. I've put together a few Expansion Charts you can use with those problems too.

Opportunity: Difficulty making decisions	
Values: Courage, Flexibility, Commitment, Autonomy, Self-Acceptance	
Monkey Mind-set	**Expansive Mind-set**
I need to be certain of my decisions.	I don't need to be 100% certain. If I make a decision that has a poor outcome, I can learn to cope with that.
I need to be certain I am making the best choice.	Being flexible and resilient is more important than being certain.
Safety Strategies	**Expansive Strategies**
Don't try new things.	Try something new.
Put off making decisions.	Pick something every day to make a decision on.
Spend excess time researching.	Limit amount of time for research.
Ask for others' help making decisions.	Make decisions on my own.
Necessary Feelings: Anxiety, shame, embarrassment, and dread	

Opportunity: Excessive checking—making sure people you love are okay, that you did not forget to bring something or do something like lock a door or turn off the stove, that sensations you are having are not dangerous	
Values: Presence, Fun/Pleasure, Resilience, Courage	
Monkey Mind-set	**Expansive Mind-set**
I must be certain that people are safe.	Assume safety unless there is evidence of danger.
I must be sure that I didn't forget anything.	Forgetting things builds flexibility and resilience.
I must be certain that I have enough money.	Once I invest wisely, the market is beyond my control.
I must be certain a sensation isn't a symptom.	Being uncertain doesn't equal being sick.

Safety Strategies	Expansive Strategies
Call and check on people or get them to call me.	Reduce or stop checking in with people.
Check numerous times to make sure.	Check once and then walk away.
Monitor accounts and investments closely.	Allow myself to check finances once per week.
Look up symptoms online; see doctors.	Allow myself to check symptoms once per week.
Necessary Feelings: Doubt and anxiety	

Opportunity: Overplanning and excessive list making	
Values: Flexibility, Fun, Resilience, Presence	
Monkey Mind-set	**Expansive Mind-set**
To feel okay, everything must go as planned.	I am cultivating flexibility.
If I forget something it will be terrible.	Forgetting something is an opportunity to develop resilience.
I must be prepared for and prevent bad outcomes.	I cannot make life 100% safe and trying to do so keeps me from being present in the moment.
Safety Strategies	**Expansive Strategies**
Spend excessive time planning things.	Restrict time allowed to plan something.
Always plan everything myself.	Allow others to plan things.
Control others so things go according to plan.	Don't remind or correct people.
Write everything down.	Go without lists for a day.
Make mental lists. Review future plans.	Remind myself that I am seeking uncertainty.
Worry: try to anticipate, fix, and problem solve.	Say, "Thank you monkey" and schedule Worry Time.
Necessary Feelings: Anxiety, frustration, anger, irritation, and shame (believing you did something wrong when things don't go as planned)	

Letting Go of Over-responsibility

For those of us with the mind-set that we are responsible for the health and happiness of everyone we love, some values you will be cultivating are *health* and *autonomy*, pertaining to taking care of yourself, *trust* in others to be responsible for themselves and learn from their own mistakes, and *honesty, respect*, and *compassion* toward both yourself and others.

A mind-set of letting go of over-responsibility will be characterized by these beliefs:

- People are responsible for their own lives and choices they make. Consequences of their actions are not my fault.
- My primary responsibility is for myself, not others.
- It is not my job to step up when others fail to do their fair share. I am willing to allow the consequences of other people's action or inaction.
- When people are in pain I can listen with compassion, but it is not my job to fix or solve their problem.
- I can be sensitive to other people's problems without taking responsibility for them.
- Saying no and setting limits is my right.

Here are a few safety strategies we often use in common situations. Paired to each safety strategy is one expansive strategy; can you think of others you could employ?

Safety strategy: Fill in for others' lapses.

Expansive strategy: Let others do things themselves.

Safety strategy: Prioritize others' needs over your own.

Expansive strategy: Prioritize your own needs three times per week.

Safety strategy: Provide solutions to others' problems.

Expansive strategy: Listen with compassion; don't problem solve.

Safety strategy: Step up to compensate for others' failings.

Expansive strategy: Don't assume others' workload.

Visit http://www.newharbinger.com/35067 for more examples.

Just as important as changing behavioral strategies is changing mental safety strategies, like reviewing and worrying over other people's problems when you are away from them. An expansive mental strategy to counter this is to accept the uncertainty of not knowing if they are okay. Remind yourself that you cannot control how others live their lives. Then focus on your own self-care, putting your higher brain to work on some of your own needs that you've been neglecting. Here are a few examples of mental expansion strategies you can use to counter *I am responsible for everyone's happiness and safety* beliefs.

Safety strategy: Think about others' problems when alone.

Expansive strategy: Purposely focus on self-care.

Safety strategy: Review in your mind what you could or should have done differently to help someone.

Expansive strategy: Interrupt this review by accepting the possibility that you made mistakes.

Remember that every time you practice an expansion strategy, breathing into the necessary emotions that arise will be crucial to your success.

Here are a few sample expansive charts based on problems—otherwise known as opportunities—common among those of us with an over-responsible mind-set. They are meant to offer you ideas of areas that you may want to work on.

Opportunity: Chronic worry about people you care about	
Values: Respect, Self-Care, Health, Independence, Pleasure/Fun, Resilience	
Monkey Mind-set	**Expansive Mind-set**
I must prevent bad things from happening to people I care about.	People learn from being responsible for their own lives. It is useless to try to control others. I cannot prevent every bad outcome. "Letting go" will allow me to be healthier/happier.
Safety Strategies	**Expansive Strategies**
Point things out to them. Give people advice. Offer others help in solving their problems.	Allow others to make mistakes. Listen instead of problem solving. Consider helping only when someone asks for it.
Necessary Feelings: Guilt, anxiety, frustration, anger, and sadness	

Opportunity: Lack of assertiveness	
Values: Authenticity, Courage, Respect, Health	
Monkey Mind-set	**Expansive Mind-set**
I am responsible for other people's feelings. If I set a limit and it upsets another, I'm at fault. If others don't agree with me, I'm to blame.	It is not my responsibility to keep people happy at the expense of expressing myself. Saying no and setting limits is part of good self-care. If people become upset with me, it does not mean it is my fault or that I am responsible for their feelings.

Safety Strategies	Expansive Strategies
Put others' needs and wants before mine.	Express what I want to do.
If someone is displeased with me, back down.	Say no to something every day.
If others disagree with me, change my opinion.	Give an opinion that I think others do not hold.
Necessary Feelings: Guilt, anxiety, frustration, anger, and sadness	

Opportunity: Taking on more than your fair share and having poor self-care	
Values: Self-Acceptance, Health, Growth, Compassion, Courage	
Monkey Mind-set	**Expansive Mind-set**
If others do not step up, I must do something.	If others don't step up, I am not at fault.
If it's not getting done right, I must step in.	Everything does not need to be done my way.
Once everything's done I can do what I want.	"Everything" is never done, so don't wait for that.
After everyone's cared for I can take care of me.	Taking care of myself is my first obligation.
Safety Strategies	**Expansive Strategies**
Volunteer to do things when others are not doing them.	Do not volunteer and if asked politely decline.
Step in for others struggling with a task.	Allow others to struggle and to learn from it.
Put other people's needs first.	Devote five minutes to self-care before responding to anything you think needs to get done.
Put off taking care of myself.	
Necessary Feelings: Irritation, frustration, anxiety, and guilt	

At this point I've given you all the tools you need to begin to transform your life from one that is defined by fear to a life defined by your values. There is nothing better you can do for yourself than to take up this challenge. Remember to keep the stakes low at first. Give your new mind-set a chance to take hold before proceeding to the next level. Over time you will see big results, including resilience

to anxiety that enables you to master situations that were problems for you in the past. Once you get a taste of this I bet you'll want to keep expanding your world.

Taking Off

It has been estimated that on average, up to 25% of a plane's fuel is burned during takeoff and ascent. This is due to the drag of the earth's atmosphere—at higher altitudes air travel becomes more efficient. Right now in this moment you are sitting in your practice plane at the beginning of the runway, wondering if you'll be able to get off the ground. Your atmospheric drag will be all of the habits and momentum of your past. What's going to fuel your practice during this crucial takeoff?

In the next chapter I'm going to introduce you to what, in the context of sustaining your expansion practice, is the equivalent of jet fuel. It's powerful and is in endless supply. Read on and learn how you can mix up some for yourself.

Chapter 9 Takeaway

While we can practice expansion strategies in nearly every situation we encounter, we will be most successful in low-stakes situations that are less threatening to the monkey.

Chapter 10

Practicing Praise

Joey was having problems in preschool. He wanted to feel connected with the other children, but when he touched and grabbed them during circle time they pulled away. After repeatedly correcting him, his teachers resorted to taking Joey out of the circle, making him feel even more alone.

Before I entered private practice as a therapist, one of the positions I held was directing an early intervention program for preschools. When a child was having emotional or behavioral problems at a preschool—being disruptive or not complying with teachers' directions—we provided a therapist and an early education specialist to come in, observe, and help to solve the problem.

What we consistently observed was that the teachers gave the "acting out" children like Joey the most attention when they were acting out. This attention usually took the form of scolding the child or removing him or her from the group. We also confirmed what the teachers already knew: what they were doing wasn't working. In fact it seemed to be making matters worse. All of us, especially preschoolers, need attention, and if positive attention isn't available, we'll settle for—and even seek out—the negative kind.

Our primary intervention at these preschools began with helping the teachers identify the behaviors they *wanted* to see in the children who were acting out. Joey's teachers said that mostly, they wanted Joey "to keep his hands to himself." So we encouraged the teachers to begin a new practice.

Whenever the teachers noticed Joey with his hands in his lap, or occupied in a way that was not disturbing others, even if it was only for a few seconds, they looked at him and smiled, saying "Joey, good job keeping your hands to yourself!" They also looked for other instances of desired behavior from Joey, as well as from the other children, and gave attention to those behaviors too.

As this strategy became part of normal classroom protocol, all the children who had been acting out, including Joey, began doing it less. This strategy improved the entire atmosphere of the classrooms, helping to create a culture of inclusion where everyone tended to progress, regardless how far along they were.

Positive Focus

Conventional wisdom is that we should be punished for doing wrong so that we will want to do right instead. In every situation we encounter we tend to keep our focus on noticing what we are doing wrong. While negative reinforcement does help us learn when it comes from our environment, for instance learning not to grab a rose by the stem, it is rarely effective when it comes from other people or from ourselves. As I have seen over and over in my professional and personal practices, we learn best when we are consistently rewarded for what we are doing right.

This is true for learning anything new and difficult. A pianist who is praised by her teacher for her focus and her expression—even when she misses notes—will ultimately make better music than an equally talented pianist who is praised only when she performs flawlessly. A basketball player who is praised by his coach for shooting with correct form—regardless of whether he hits the basket—is more likely to develop a good shot than a similar player who is praised only when his attempts are successful.

When it comes to changing your own behavior, the lesson is the same, except you are the one who has to give the praise. In your practice you are both teacher and student, both player and coach. As teacher, you make the lesson plan. You set a conscious intention that you, the student, will practice thinking and acting expansively. Just as Joey's teachers tried to see how many times they could catch Joey keeping his hands to himself, you the teacher must zero in on what you're doing correctly. The questions to ask are: *Did I honor my values? Did I employ expansive strategies? Did I welcome necessary feelings?*

Acting as a teacher or a coach for yourself may feel awkward, but it is a role you need to be aggressive about. Remember that the default coach is the monkey. The monkey mind will not sit quietly while you are failing to respond to its alarms. The monkey will be pacing along the sidelines blowing its whistle, screaming *You're in danger! Look what you're doing! This is a disaster!* By coaching yourself you will keep your focus on your agenda and not the monkey's.

Process Over Payoff

If you read the Expansion Chart I shared with you in chapter 8, you may remember my expansion strategy was to write for only a 30-minute time period. During much of those 30 minutes I felt as though I was writing nonsense. I imagined my husband and my editor reading it and I forgot what I was practicing. I was evaluating what I was writing by the monkey's standards—anything that wasn't book-worthy was a primordial threat.

I was hijacked. I'd forgotten that the monkey's requirements are impossible to meet. I was thinking that my output had to be good, without any mistakes to blemish me, and worthy of universal approval from everyone. What a bunch of bull's-eyes!

When this happens to you it's time to pull out your Expansion Chart. As soon as I completed the exercise, that's what I did. I've reprinted it here to demonstrate.

☑ **Opportunity:** *Writing for 30 minutes*	
☑ **Values:** *Authenticity, Self-Acceptance, Creativity, Courage*	
Monkey Mind-set	☑ **Expansive Mind-set**
I must know what I am going to say, say it clearly, and it must be good.	*Creativity involves risk.* *Doing well and poorly at things does not define my worth as a person.*
Safety Strategies	☑ **Expansive Strategies**
Research more. *Wait until I feel clear minded.* *Keep writing until I think I have it right.*	*Restrict amount of time I will write to 30 minutes.* *Write freely, and allow for imperfection.* *Use a Welcoming Breath.*
☑ **Necessary Feelings:** *Anxiety, confusion, and frustration*	

Rereading the chart, I remembered that writing coherently was nowhere on my chart. My goal was to make sentences for 30 minutes, while practicing honoring my values, using expansive strategies, and feeling whatever was necessary for me to feel.

I thought for a minute. Had I been creative? Had I been authentic? Had I been courageous? Yes, yes, and yes! Had I stuck to the time frame? Allowed for imperfection? Welcomed necessary feelings? Yes, yes, and yes again.

There was plenty of success in my practice session, and to acknowledge that, I check-marked everywhere I had practiced successfully. Until my new expansive strategies and mind-set became the new default, I would have to make it part of my practice to be my own wise teacher, my own consistent coach.

This kind of hijacking happens all the time in my work as a therapist. Let's look at an exercise I use with my clients who have a fear of public speaking. The practice is to give a five-minute oral presentation in my office. There's little point in doing the exercise without being prepared, so before the exercise I have each client complete an Expansion Chart.

No amount of preparation, however, can quiet the monkey. Once the client begins to speak and those necessary emotions kick in, some hijacking inevitably occurs. When I ask the clients to give themselves a letter grade for how well they did, it is very common for them to tell me they presented terribly and give themselves a low grade. They will say things like, "My mind went blank. I was so nervous and I stuttered over my words."

When we revisit their Expansion Charts, however, and evaluate their presentation as a practice opportunity, they are surprised and relieved. When they ask themselves *What values did I honor? What mind-sets did I employ? What strategies did I use?* they realize the successful work they've done.

☑ **Opportunity:** *Oral presentation*	
☑ **Values:** *Courage, Authenticity, Growth, Risk*	
Monkey Mind-set	☑ **Expansive Mind-set**
I must know what I am going to say, say it clearly, and it must be good. *If I mess up or show signs of anxiety people will see me as a failure.*	*It is more important for me to be on the target than to hit a bull's-eye.* *Doing well and poorly at things does not define my worth as a person.*
Safety Strategies	☑ **Expansive Strategies**
Don't do it! *Avoid looking at the audience.* *Try to sound intelligent.* *Hide signs of anxiety.* *Stop or escape if I get too anxious.*	*Make eye contact with Jennifer.* *Make three points in five minutes.* *Allow Jennifer to see signs of anxiety like blushing, sweating, and shaking.* *Keep talking even if anxious.*
☑ **Necessary Feelings:** *Anxiety, panic, sweating, shaking, and blushing*	

As they check off each feature of the practice they were able to employ, they are transformed from frightened students into wise teachers. With every check mark, they are giving themselves recognition and praise. They almost always deserve an "A" when grading on new criteria.

Less commonly, the opposite can happen. Sometimes a client will deliver a surprisingly smooth presentation, and give herself an "A" right away for looking confident, not feeling very anxious, and remembering everything she wanted to say. This is grading on hitting a bull's-eye, which is monkey mind-set criteria.

Evaluate your practice session on the process, not the outcome. Did you honor your values? Did you cultivate an expansive mindset and employ expansive strategies? These are the things you can control, and it is your focus on them that will bring you new experience and learning.

When you hit a bull's-eye or have less anxiety in a practice situation, it is an indication that you are ready for the next level. If you aren't being challenged with necessary feelings, you are not building resilience to future anxiety. Don't let a bull's-eye distract you from your expansive mission! You can download your own *Expansion Chart* to practice with at http://www.newharbinger.com/35067.

Checking off the fields of our Expansion Chart isn't the only way we can give ourselves positive feedback. For example, I give some of my clients points. I tell them, "Good job! You get a point for that." We don't necessarily keep a tally, but it is effective just the same. When my clients are welcoming necessary feelings in my office, I keep a running commentary using words like "awesome," "excellent," and "keep it up." I get to see the power of praise firsthand, which is very rewarding.

When you practice, be your own coach and teacher. Praise your planning, praise your execution, praise your courage welcoming negative feelings. Praise everything about your practice except the outcome!

To help you understand the role of praise in expansion practice, let's follow along with my clients during the first few weeks of their practices. Each met their own unique challenges with their own unique brand of praise.

Eric's Refocus

In the session after Eric's appointed confrontation with his employee, I asked him how it had gone. "Not great," he said. He began talking about how anxious he'd felt during the meeting and how defensive the employee had been. He wanted to focus on what had not gone well and what the employee's husband—who was also his friend—would say about him when he found out.

Eric was hijacked. In his anxious state he was thinking that he should be confident, sure of himself, and show no signs of anxiety. He also thought that because the employee responded negatively, he must have handled the situation poorly. He felt like he'd failed and it was only a matter of time before everybody knew. It was his old perfectionist mind-set at work. I could have spent the session reassuring him and problem solving his relationship with his employee, but would that have furthered Eric's expansion practice?

Instead I asked Eric what his new expansion strategy was. It took him a moment to remember—*talk honestly to the employee and offer additional training*. Although he'd been very anxious and the employee hadn't responded well, Eric had done exactly that. He needed to refocus on what he did right and give himself a pat on the back. I often have my clients literally pat themselves on the back for accomplishing a desired behavior, and I do it to myself all the time. Sure, patting yourself on the back seems silly, but it's nowhere near as silly as kicking yourself in the butt for not being perfect. That is just plain ridiculous.

Maria's Big Score

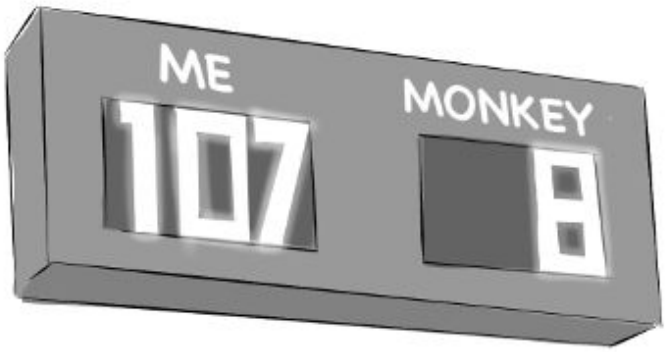
Maria described her first week of practicing tolerating uncertainty as a "mixed bag." She had set the limit on looking up symptoms on the web to only once a day, but on several days she'd done it more than once. She'd decided not to call her doctor or discuss symptoms with her husband either, but she'd done those a number of times too. She came into session unsure if she'd really made any progress.

I asked Maria how many times her monkey mind began chattering that by not checking a sensation out she might be missing something deadly. “Dozens,” she answered.

I asked her how often her monkey screeched that this was a new sensation or that it was stronger than ones she had experienced in the past. “Lots,” she said, smiling.

Then I asked her how many times that week she thanked her monkey and said, “I am choosing to live with uncertainty.” This was, after all, the essence of the expansive mind-set and strategy we’d planned the week before. Maria’s eyes lit up from within. “Too many times to count,” she said. “I’m giving myself a hundred points this week!”

Maria had a great week of practice. By continually reminding herself what her new expansive mind-set was, she had been feeding that mind-set. By reviewing how well she had welcomed her fight-or-flight sensations and negative emotions, she had been rewarding what she did right instead of punishing herself for falling back into safety strategies.



Samantha's Star Quality

For my over-responsible client Samantha, it was a real challenge to resist checking up on her son, and she invented a whimsical way to reward herself when she was successful. Recalling how good she felt when she found a star sticker on a grade school paper, she decided to reward herself that way. Every time she was faced with an overwhelming urge to check on her son and she reminded herself that she was not responsible for his choices in life, she gave herself a star.

Every time she used a Welcoming Breath to process her anxiety she gave herself another star. Every time she was able to resist checking on him she got another star, and so on.

Although she sometimes broke down and checked up on him anyway, and would continue to do so for many weeks, as long as she was able to follow through with some element of her practice, she got some stars. By the end of each week she had a constellation of proof to herself that her practice was progressing.

Co-coaching

Patting yourself on the back, awarding yourself imaginary points, and drawing stars or happy faces on your Expansion Chart are only some of the many ways you can coach and reward yourself for practicing expansion. If your friend or partner is also practicing, you can support each other.

After a trying day it's tempting to treat our friends and partners as a kind of dumpster for our frustrations, but when we've been practicing expansion, our stories are more positive. Descriptions of the challenges we faced, the negative emotion we processed, and the new experience and learning we had are exciting to recount and inspiring to hear. When I am doing my practices, I look forward to sharing them with my husband that evening at dinner. And yes, I love it when he says "Wow! That was inspiring."

Whether you are receiving praise from a friend or loved one, from a therapist or from yourself, you are keeping your focus on what matters—*your* values, *your* strategies, *your* process—not those of the monkey. Praise is the jet fuel that will do the heavy lifting, getting your practice off the ground. Don't be stingy with yourself. Make giving and receiving praise a permanent part of your practice. In fact, why not begin right now? Reach your hand around your shoulder and give yourself a pat on the back for your willingness to read this far in the book!

Cruising

Since I used the analogy of flight for your practice—using praise as your jet fuel—you may be wondering, *Do I ever get to cruise at altitude?*

Yes, one day you'll look out your metaphorical window and see you're above the clouds, and the problems that once loomed so large will appear as tiny specks below. Your old behavior of constantly second-guessing your stock picks, with practice, may be replaced by reevaluating investments on an annual basis. Being afraid to be heard at meetings might evolve into speaking up when you have something

to say. Or perhaps the need to get your husband's approval for everything will change to following your heart even if he may disapprove. Maybe you'll find yourself falling asleep at night without a worry in the world. You might be tempted to think, *I've made it*.

Don't. Expansive living is a lifelong journey with unbounded challenges as well as rewards. I cannot predict how high or how far your practice will take you. What living beyond the limitations of the monkey mind-set will look like for you is for you alone to discover. But I can outline some of the many rewards your expansion practice has to offer you, which is what I've done in the next and final chapter.

Chapter 10 Takeaway

Identify and praise every facet of your practice where you do well.

Chapter 11

The Expanding Life

I began this book by declaring that the things you've been doing to try to control your anxiety are actually what maintain your anxiety. It follows that when you stop trying to control your anxiety, it will no longer be maintained. What exactly does that imply?

Without maintenance—regular monkey feedings—the anxiety cycle breaks down. When, after setting off anxiety alarms, it repeatedly gets no confirmation of the threat it had perceived, the monkey learns that the situation is something that you can handle. The less reactive you are to the alarms of the monkey, the less active the monkey is. When you stop feeding the monkey, you will eventually experience less anxiety and worry.

For those of us who have suffered all our lives with the ambient background of monkey chatter and an IV drip of fear, the promise of less anxiety is almost too far-fetched to imagine. What would life be like without the ambient background of anxiety? Well, for one thing, you'll be thinking in a whole new way.

An Expansive Mind-set

The monkey mind-set is a formidable structure, one we've all spent years constructing and reinforcing. Is it possible to overwrite it with something new?

Most of us have tried endless variations of positive thinking and affirmations, and we've learned through experience that changing one's mind isn't comparable to changing clothes or changing oil.

Learning a new way of thinking is like learning a new language. We need to use it. We need to experience living with it.

This is especially true when there are real worries in your life, actual primordial threats like Samantha had. Telling herself that she was not responsible for her son's safety just wasn't believable until Samantha began to stop checking up on him and began checking in with herself.

The first few times that Samantha chose not to check on her son were agony for her. When her son got angry with her for setting limits on borrowing money, that was even more painful. But Samantha continued her practice, tolerating the discomfort it caused her, and praising herself for taking care of herself.

She joined Al-Anon, where she met others with similar situations. It was easier to see the limits of personal responsibility in others' lives than in her own. She got lots of support for taking responsibility for herself rather than for her son and his illness. After a few months of trying on these new ideas, she noticed that her health was improving and she was able to do things for herself—and even have a little fun once in a while.

Coping with her son's illness turned out to be an opportunity for Samantha to change basic assumptions that she had operated from her whole life. She actually believes now that she is responsible for herself and that her son is responsible for himself. She has a stake in something she can control—her own health and well-being—which she is not going to sacrifice for something she can't control—her son's. She doesn't assume responsibility for him even when he fails.

Whatever your anxiety and worries are based on, when you choose to act with a mind-set based on your personal values—and not the monkey's—you will get new experience that supports that mind-set. Your consciousness will integrate this new experience and expand. With repeated new experiences, your old perfectionist, need-to-be-certain, over-responsible mind-sets will break down. You'll learn to believe in the new expansive mind-set you have chosen. Expansive thinking will become your new default.

Living with Purpose, Achieving Your Goals

As you become less limited by the monkey's bias toward safety and more resilient to its alarms of perceived threats, you will begin to take the risks necessary to meet your larger personal goals. Things you only dreamed about doing before will begin to appear doable.

Maria, as you recall, longed to travel. The values she cherished most were curiosity and spontaneity, but she was afraid to go more than ten miles or so from her doctor and her hospital. All that has changed now.

First of all, Maria is delighted to report that she has far fewer uncomfortable physical sensations. This is partially because she isn't constantly scanning her body for them anymore. It's also because when she does happen to feel something uncomfortable, she doesn't look it up on the Internet. When she doesn't feed her worry, there's less to worry about. She feels healthier and less stressed.

After all her practicing tolerance for uncertainty regarding physical symptoms, Maria has noticed she is more willing to be uncertain in other areas of her life. She doesn't second-guess her financial investments anymore, she is bold and decisive when shopping, and the number one thing she Googles now is travel locations. After years of hugging the shoreline Maria is making up for lost time. She just returned from a month in South America, a destination she would have been terrified to travel to before. Maria is living according to her own values now—*explore, explore, explore!*

Increased Compassion and Self-Esteem

Eric, like all perfectionists, held himself to an impossible standard. He wasn't allowed to make mistakes. Trying to live this way meant he'd never succeed and predictably, he felt pretty bad about himself. But Eric's practice has changed all that.

Now that he allows himself the possibility of being wrong, Eric has become much more decisive. He's stopped over-researching and putting off making decisions, and as a result he gets lots more

done at work. He actually enjoys his job now and it shows in his interactions with others. He has become more assertive, more clear, and more honest, which makes him a better boss. Rather than avoiding interventions with his employees, he deals with them directly, nipping most problems in the bud.

As he gained confidence, Eric expanded his practice to other areas of his life too, like the gym. Although he's still overweight, he doesn't feel so out of place there anymore. His regular workouts have made him a little stronger and a lot more confident. It's much easier being Eric these days now that he can forgive himself for being less than perfect.

As we learn to be compassionate toward ourselves we are learning compassion toward others. Comparisons and criticisms will become less relevant to us as we begin to recognize our common humanity and fallibility. How light we can feel when we shed the burden of perfection!

Resilience to Setbacks

What if things go wrong? What if, despite your new willingness to take risks, you do not get what you're after? What if, despite your practice, a primordial threat does manifest itself in your life? Your practice cannot prevent the loss of a job, a home, or a loved one. It can't insulate you from natural disasters, wars, or economic upheaval.

All three of my clients faced significant personal hardships at some point during their practice. Samantha's son did wind up hospitalized, just as she feared he would. Eric eventually had to fire his employee and lost his friendship with her husband as a result. Maria did develop symptoms that required medical attention. What each of them found was that their personal expansion practice—experiencing and welcoming small-stakes opportunities for expansion—brought them greater resilience than they dreamed possible, enough to withstand large-stakes pain and loss.

The ability to tolerate your own necessary feelings is a superpower, allowing you to do things you once thought impossible. With enough resilience, every threat, perceived or genuine, can be handled. As your own personal path to resilience becomes more well-worn and familiar, you are preparing yourself for the inevitable ups and downs in life. Your resilience is a core of strength to draw upon when bad things happen. When the hurricane hits, you will be in the eye, resilient and grounded in your new expansive mind-set.

Room for Pleasure

As you continue to breathe deep into your feelings and sensations and welcome whatever you feel, you will encounter something you likely didn't expect—more positive feelings.

Both pain and pleasure reside together in the same vessel of the body and both share the same pathways to and from your brain. When you open your body with your breath and make space for pain, you are also allowing more room for pleasure. When you cultivate an expansive mind-set that allows painful feelings to be physically experienced, the same neurological circuitry will carry pleasant feelings as well.

When you act on your values, not only does the pain of loss become more tolerable, but positive emotions long atrophied are revived. Expressions like joy of discovery, pride in independence, warm compassion, desire for pleasure, passion for self-expression, gratitude for generosity, awe of mastery, and love of adventure cease to be merely ideas. They are full-blown emotions you actually experience!

Just be careful not to get attached to these pleasant feelings or try to get more. Trying to feel good is feeding the monkey. Just let these pleasant feelings flow through you, like you let the unpleasant ones flow through. As long as you keep expanding, there's more where they are coming from!

Peace and Presence

I happen to be writing this segment of the book on an airplane. A couple of hours ago as I approached the TSA checkpoint at the airport, there were five different lines to choose from. Although I had plenty of time before my flight, soon after I chose a line, I noticed I felt a little tense. The line to my left was moving much more quickly than mine, and the people who were behind me before were now ahead of me. I noticed feeling resentment toward them, as well as some shame for my stupidity choosing the line I did. My monkey was

definitely on the job. Others were getting ahead of me, “threatening” my social status.

The only threat here was to the quality of my life. If I treated the monkey’s alarm as important I would continue to feel stressed, annoyed, and ashamed. Instead I thought, *Yay! An opportunity for expansion*. I opened my hands as a reminder to myself that I was willing to allow others to go ahead of me. I took deep welcoming breaths, relaxing into the feeling of tension in my chest and the sense of competition with others. By doing this I sent a message to my monkey mind that I could handle this “threat.” I got the banana and reclaimed the moment. Freed from the “what should be” assumptions of my monkey mind-set, I was fully present with “what is.” With the resilience to let my necessary feelings run their course, I felt at peace.

I have been reluctant to use expressions like “in the moment,” “peace,” and “presence” in this book. This language has spiritual connotations and I do not pretend to be a spiritual teacher. But I have practiced enough with both psychological and spiritual tools to know that although the tools in this book and the tools that spiritual teachers offer go by different names, they are essentially the same.

The Buddhist teacher Shinzen Young defined suffering in a mathematical formula. Pain × Resistance = Suffering. Most of us would agree; we’ve resisted and suffered enough to prove it. I would like to tweak that formula just a bit to reflect my fundamental message to you in this book.

Anxiety × Welcoming = Resilience

My message to you is to welcome anxiety and grow resilience. With resilience to anxiety, peace and presence are waiting to be claimed every moment of the day.

Let your practice become your lifestyle. Make reviewing your values, treating problems and anxiety as opportunities, and choosing expansion strategies become as second nature to you as picking up your phone when it rings or opening the door when there’s a knock.

Each small step of your practice will compound daily, bringing unforeseeable and amazing changes in your life.

Remember also that wherever you go, however far you progress, the monkey is along for the ride and always on alert. Even in the most expanded world there is always a frontier, a line beyond which you will not feel safe. As you approach that edge you will encounter familiar things: perceived threats, negative feelings, and a need for certainty, perfection, and/or over-responsibility toward others. You will feel like retreating to safety.

But you will know what to do. You'll take a deep Welcoming Breath and say, *Thank you, monkey!* Then you'll take another step toward new experience and learning.

Chapter 11 Takeaway

Where your expansion practice will lead you and how it will reward you nobody can say, but so long as you continue your practice there is no limit to what is possible.

Key Takeaways

Our anxiety is a call to action generated by the monkey mind's perception of threat.

When hijacked by anxiety, we adopt the monkey mind-set, which assumes that in order to be safe we must be certain of all outcomes, we must be perfect, and we must be responsible for others' feelings and actions.

When we respond to anxiety with avoidance or resistance, we confirm the perception of threat—we feed the monkey—which maintains both our cycle of anxiety and our monkey mind-set.

We feed the monkey constantly throughout the day by performing safety strategies—actions that keep us temporarily safe from the monkey's perceived threats and anxiety alarms.

In order to support a mind-set that allows us to thrive, we must create new experience and learning by replacing safety strategies with expansive strategies.

In order for the uncomfortable emotions and sensations associated with anxiety to run their course, it is not only necessary to feel them, but advisable to welcome them.

Worry is often nothing more than monkey chatter, and it will dissipate if it is welcomed and tolerated, rather than resisted or acted upon.

When we override the monkey's value of safety with our own personal values, and plan situations to practice honoring those values, we expand our lives.

While we can practice expansion strategies in nearly every situation we encounter, we will be most successful in low-stakes situations that are less threatening to the monkey.

Identify and praise every facet of your practice where you do well.

Where your expansion practice will lead you and how it will reward you nobody can say, but so long as you continue your practice there is no limit to what is possible.

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