

Cognitive strategies for coping with anxiety provoking thoughts

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- 1)** Realize that you have a tendency to see things in a negative light. Be aware of that and if you see something negative, determine if it is really as negative as you see it or if you are limiting your perspective to just seeing the negative side when there is much to the positive side as well. Likewise, there is a good likelihood that your fear of a catastrophic result is highly exaggerated.

- 2)** Realize that you have a lot to lose if you don't face your fear. If you avoid relationships because of a fear of getting hurt, for example, it is helpful to focus on the thought that you don't want to be alone for the rest of your life. In addition, your conviction that you are incapable of overcoming the problem is likely not completely based on facts. Others, who were not necessarily more competent than you, have had this fear and gotten through it. There is no reason why you shouldn't be able to get through it as well. Realize that the fears are normal for you to have because of your particular history, but you CAN get through it, none-the-less. (A doctor related that when he was deciding whether to go to medical school, one of his professors emphasized the hard work that was required, implying that he shouldn't do it. He was pretty much convinced not to go for it but then he realized that others who were not any more capable than him were able to get through it. He didn't see a reason why he would not be able to do it. So he went and did it!)

- 3)** Realize that you don't have to jump right into the situation that is most anxiety provoking for you. You can face your fear in steps. If you become more knowledgeable of your issues then you will know how to deal with it better if the fear comes up again. For example, try going out on one date without imagining yourself already married and being overwhelmed by all the issues you fear. Rather, focus just on the first step. See how you feel with the person after one or two dates. Do you feel comfortable or not? If not, try to differentiate between the more and less rational fears. Even when contemplating the irrational fears do not be dismissive of them or yourself. Understand what it is in your history that made it almost inevitable that you would have this fear. Only then can you try to see the situation in a more rational light using your new found self-understanding. If after all this you are still not comfortable with the date then end it without feeling guilty or defeated. You probably gained in your self-knowledge from the experience. If you are feeling reasonably comfortable, continue and see what happens.

- 4)** Realize that you don't have to be passive and helpless - reacting to what the environment sends your way as you had no choice doing when you were a child. You can be active in shaping your environment in many ways. For example, you don't have to be passive in allowing your friends to expect you to do favors for them whenever they ask. You can discuss it assertively etc.). This should help make the future seem less dangerous and therefore reduce the need for avoidance.

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