

Anxiety



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Anxiety is very different from fear. The purpose of anxiety is to find something to fear in an ambiguous environment. The purpose of anger and fear are to deal appropriately with that thing by means of fight or flight. Anxiety reflects an intuition that something is wrong without knowing what it is. Fear and anger always have definite objects. Anxiety is rigid and thoughtful. Fear and anger are dynamic and automatic. Anxiety is incompatible with fear and anger, which therefore constitute a cure for anxiety. Having served their brief but important purpose, anger and fear can then be put to rest themselves and you can relax.

Think about an anxious squirrel named Rocky. There he sits at the edge of the clearing, up on his hind legs with a nut in his paws; paralyzed and trembling except for his head, which jerks from side to side like a lawn sprinkler, scanning the horizon. Rocky heard something but he doesn't know what or where. He continues his sprinkler imitation for a long time, until Boomer the dog crashes through the brush on the opposite side of the clearing, headed straight at him! Rocky's bloodstream is flooded with adrenalin and he briefly considers taking Boomer on, but then flees in terror instead. Assuming that Rocky is not eaten but escapes or trounces Boomer, either flight or fight resolves his anxiety. If Rocky had not identified a concrete outlet for his anxiety he might still sit paralyzed and trembling at the edge of the clearing with the uneaten nut in his paws. That's no way to live!

Take some time to examine your anxiety *while you are feeling it* in order to identify your fears as specifically as you can. Don't be taken in by your standard conversational sound-bites about why you are anxious; look again. If you identify and confront your actual fears you may or may not continue to be afraid, but you will no longer be anxious and you will have the option to take decisive action if you choose to do so. Call me.

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