

How to Face Your Fears and Win: A Summary of Our Recent Webinar on Anxiety

Hey everyone! Dr. Jill Levitt here, and I wanted to share some powerful insights from our recent webinar with David Burns on treating anxiety. If you've been struggling with panic attacks, phobias, or any kind of anxiety, this summary is for you.

What We Covered: The Big Picture

We spent two hours diving deep into how anxiety works and, more importantly, how to overcome it. The main message? **You can completely recover from anxiety** - not just cope with it or manage it, but actually be free from it. I know that might sound impossible if you've been struggling for years, but stick with me.

Terry's Story: From 10 Years of Panic to Freedom in 6 Minutes

Let me tell you about Terry. She'd been having five panic attacks every week for TEN YEARS. She'd been to countless doctors, tried every medication, spent years in therapy. During her panic attacks, she was absolutely convinced she was dying - her chest would tighten, she'd get dizzy, and she truly believed she was having a heart attack.

Here's where it gets interesting. David didn't try to calm her down. In fact, he did the opposite - he deliberately triggered a panic attack in his office! Then, while she was sobbing and begging him to stop, convinced she was dying, he asked her to do... jumping jacks.

Yes, jumping jacks!

Key Learning Point: Terry realized on a deep gut level that she is safe; That people having heart attacks don't do jumping jacks in the emergency room! She went from sobbing uncontrollably to laughing hysterically when she realized how silly her fear was. The "monster" she'd been running from for 10 years had no teeth.

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Why We Avoid Things (And Why That Makes Everything Worse)

Here's a simple truth: **Avoidance creates anxiety. Facing your fears cures it.**

Think about it:

- Afraid of dogs? You avoid dogs, which keeps the fear alive
- Scared of driving? You stop driving, which makes it scarier
- Worried about judgment? You avoid social situations, which makes them more intimidating

Every time we avoid something we're afraid of, we're essentially telling our brain: "Yes, this IS dangerous! Good job protecting me from real danger!"

The Counterintuitive Approach: More Anxiety = Better Results

This might blow your mind, but when treating anxiety, we actually want you to feel MORE anxious, not less. Why? Because:

1. **You learn you can handle it** - The anxiety always comes down eventually
2. **You discover you're actually safe** - Nothing terrible actually happens
3. **You break the fear cycle** - Once you face it fully, the fear loses its power

Safety Behaviors: The Hidden Saboteurs

Do any of these sound familiar?

- Carrying medication "just in case"
- Doing breathing exercises when anxious
- Keeping your phone handy for distraction
- Saying mantras like "I'm okay, I'm okay"
- Always having water nearby

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These might feel helpful, but they're actually keeping your anxiety alive! They prevent you from learning that you're safe WITHOUT these crutches.

The Four Models of Anxiety (In Plain English)

We use four different approaches to understand anxiety:

1. **The Motivation Model:** Part of you doesn't want to give up the anxiety (sounds crazy, but it's true!)
2. **The Cognitive Model:** Your scary thoughts create the anxiety
3. **The Exposure Model:** Avoiding things makes you more afraid; facing them cures you
4. **The Hidden Emotion Model:** Being "too nice" and avoiding conflict creates anxiety

Real Stories of Recovery

Sarah's Contamination Fear: She couldn't touch doorknobs for 25 years. David had her stick her hands in a garbage can and rub that black grime all over them. Five years later? Still completely free from OCD.

The Perfect Attorney: Won every case but one in his career, never experienced happiness. His fear? That if he failed, he'd end up homeless. The cure? Telling colleagues he lost a case. Their response? Half didn't even notice, the other half thanked him for being human and opened up about their own struggles. He felt joy for the first time at age 60.

The TEAM Approach (Without the Jargon)

We follow a simple process:

T - Testing: We measure how you're feeling (you can't manage what you don't measure)

E - Empathy: We really listen and understand your struggle

A - Assessment: We look at why part of you might not want to change or do the work necessary for change (this is normal and important!)

M - Methods: We use specific techniques to help you overcome the anxiety

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The Bottom Line

Recovery from anxiety isn't about learning to cope or manage symptoms. It's about complete freedom. The path there might seem scary - it involves facing the very things you've been avoiding. But here's what I know after years of doing this work:

1. **You're stronger than you think**
2. **The fear is always worse than the reality**
3. **Complete recovery is possible**

Remember Terry? She went from five panic attacks a week to being panic-free for over 35 years. Sarah stuck her hands in a garbage can and hasn't worried about germs since. The attorney discovered that vulnerability brought him closer to others, not further away.

Your Next Step

Pick one small thing you've been avoiding because of anxiety. Something manageable but meaningful. This week, face it. No safety behaviors, no escape routes, no trying to calm yourself down. Just face it fully and watch what happens.

The monster you've been running from? It probably doesn't have any teeth.

With warmth and encouragement,

Jill (and David)

P.S. - If you found yourself thinking "This sounds too simple" or "This wouldn't work for MY anxiety," congratulations! You've just identified your resistance. That's actually the first step toward change. Now ask yourself: What if it really could be this simple? What would that mean for your life?

Want to overcome your anxiety? Visit feelinggoodinstitute.com for a free 15 minute phone conversation with a therapist

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