

ANXIETY, PHOBIAS, AND PANIC

Revised and Updated



Reneau Z. Peurifoy, M.A., M.F.T.



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Warner Books Edition

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The circumstances of certain events depicted and the names of individuals have been altered and/or deleted to protect the privacy of the people involved.

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Preface

What a pleasure it is to be able to update a work that has stood the test of time. In looking back over the last twenty years, it is amazing to see the advances that have been made in our understanding of anxiety disorders. When I first wrote *Anxiety, Phobias, and Panic*, research into anxiety disorders had just begun. At that time the main focus was panic disorder, and the first edition focused on that problem. With the second edition, I expanded the book to include the other types of anxiety disorders, but many of the examples still focused on panic disorder. Much has been learned over the past ten years, and in this edition I have updated the various lessons to include this, along with more examples of the other types of anxiety disorders.

The evolution of this book began decades ago when I was beginning my career as a therapist. I heard two people on the radio who suffered from what was then called agoraphobia but is now known as panic disorder. Their story intrigued me. I soon discovered that there weren't many people working with agoraphobia at that time. I found a group in another city working with agoraphobia and spent a week there studying their approach. This included visiting support groups they had organized for agoraphobics.

Upon returning to Sacramento, I held two lectures where I shared my newfound knowledge and was surprised to find that

enough people attended to enable me to begin two therapy groups of my own. Within two weeks it became evident that the approach I had studied was woefully inadequate. This is when I began developing the program that has evolved into the one described in this book.

I went to a local university and reviewed all of the current research on agoraphobia. This was relatively easy, because the explosion of research that is available today had not yet begun; there also weren't many good books written on the subject. Still, I took what I had found, combined it with material from several workshops I had conducted, and put together a set of twenty lessons. After several years of refining this material, I wrote the first edition of *Anxiety, Phobias, and Panic*, which was published in 1988.

It was gratifying to see not only individuals, but also self-help groups and therapists across the nation use the book as the basic text for their groups and report back how well it was working. This new edition includes many suggestions made by groups using the first edition as well as new insights I have gained while using the original work with my own clients.

As with any author, my work and ideas are an extension of work done by many people. My main goal while writing this book was to produce a practical manual that would help people struggling with anxiety live full and satisfying lives. As a result, I have not used extensive footnotes to credit my sources; I felt it would detract from my overall purpose. Instead, I will discuss a little of my background and acknowledge those sources of inspiration who have most directly influenced this work.

When I was a child, my family had a dog, several cats, and a parrot. I raised chickens and rabbits and collected insects. By the time I entered high school, a keen interest in animal behavior had developed. I was especially fascinated by the work of Konrad Lorenz, the founder of modern ethology (the study of animal behavior). In college I majored in biology and graduated with minors in chemistry and math. I then studied to be a teacher and taught junior high and high school science and math for five years before deciding to become a therapist. During the time when I trained to be a teacher, self-directed learning modules were in vogue. Both this training and my experience as a teacher are reflected in the organization of this work.

During this time I was also actively involved in what was then referred to as the human potential movement. Many of the exercises that are included in the Recommended Activities evolved out of things I learned during this period.

When I began my training to be a therapist, I was especially interested in hypnosis and the techniques of neurolinguistic programming. As my training progressed, however, I was introduced to theory and techniques from most of the major schools of psychology. This opened up many new doors for me. In my work as a therapist, I draw from many different schools of psychology. The strongest source of influence for this work comes from the ideas developed by cognitive psychologists such as Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck. Adlerian psychology provides a strong secondary source of inspiration.

In closing I would like to add that I have always been involved in teaching in one form or another. One of my greatest thrills has always been when a struggling student, a person in therapy, or a workshop participant grasps a new concept or skill that opens up new vistas for that person. My sincere hope is that this work will help you master ideas and skills that will enable you to travel the path to freedom.

Reneau Z. Peurifoy, M.A., M.F.T.

The Path to Freedom

by Reneau Z. Peurifoy

As each day passes,

*I am better able to embrace and love myself,
all of myself,
and to more fully embrace and love others;*

*I am better able to understand
that feelings are friendly,
and this understanding allows them to flow freely through me;*

*I am better able to think rationally and realistically,
to look at life as a series of choices
and to stop and look before choosing;*

*I am better able to know
that perfection is a direction rather than a place,
and to laugh at my mistakes and imperfections;*

*I am better able to be patient with time
and face my world with courage,
knowing that each day*

I take another step on The Path to Freedom.

Getting Started

This book describes a self-help program that has been used successfully by many people. For good results, the program has to be used correctly. The following guidelines describe how to achieve the most success possible.

Do not read the book from front to back quickly like a novel. Instead, spend at least one week on each lesson. Since each lesson builds on the ones before, do not skip around unless a lesson directs you to do so. If you wish to preview the program, read the contents and take a day or two to skim through the book. This will give you a general idea of the book's format and the areas in which you will be working. Then start with the first lesson and work through the book in the systematic way in which it is designed to be used.

When you start a new lesson, read the headings to get an overview of the material. Then read it word by word at your usual rate. Read each lesson at least three times; more, if you find the information difficult. The second and third readings will increase your understanding of the material and reveal ideas that were missed during the first reading.

Overcoming anxiety-related problems requires more than a general understanding of ideas. Your goal is to internalize the information and skills presented in each lesson, to make them a natural and automatic part of your behavior. The Recommended Activities play a

key role in this process. The more time and energy you spend on them, the more successful you will be.

There may be times when you could spend several weeks on a lesson. While it is important to be thorough, it is also important to keep your momentum going. Spend no more than two weeks on a lesson and do as many of the Recommended Activities as possible. After completing the program, you can spend additional time on those areas where you feel more work is needed.

This may sound like a lot of work; it is. But keep in mind that it took all your life to develop the behaviors and thinking patterns that produced your condition. It will take time, energy, and commitment to learn new and effective ways of thinking and acting. If you work through the material in the manner outlined, chances are excellent that you will be as successful as the many others who have used this program to overcome severe anxiety.

LESSON 1

What, Why, and How

Congratulations! You are about to start a journey along the path to freedom. During this journey you will meet many people just like yourself. Like most who traveled this path before you, your first questions are probably: “What has happened to me?” “Why me?” and “How can I overcome these anxiety-related problems?” This lesson answers the first two questions and starts you on the path that leads to freedom from anxiety-related problems.

I’m Not Alone

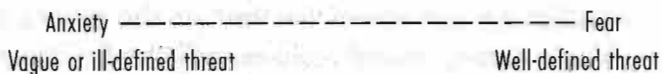
People with anxiety-related problems often feel that they alone suffer from this problem. Nothing could be further from the truth. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) ranks anxiety disorders as the most common mental health problem in the United States. The NIMH has found that more than nineteen million adults suffer from anxiety-related problems. While reliable figures for the number of children and adolescents suffering from anxiety-related problems are not currently available, it is now known that they can also develop anxiety-related problems. Anxiety-related problems will also frequently occur with other issues such as depression, eating disorders, and substance abuse. The following table, based on statistics from the NIMH, shows how common the six basic types of anxiety-related problems are:

NUMBER OF AMERICANS EXPERIENCING AN ANXIETY-RELATED PROBLEM IN A GIVEN YEAR		
	Population Estimate (in millions)	Percentage
Panic disorder	2.4	1.7
Obsessive-compulsive disorder	3.3	2.3
Post-traumatic stress disorder	5.2	3.6
Specific phobia	6.3	4.4
Social phobia	5.3	3.7
Generalized anxiety disorder	4.0	2.8

One of the big changes that has taken place since I first began working in this field is that most medical personnel are now familiar with the different types of anxiety-related problems that people can experience. As a result, most of the readers of this book who suffer from an anxiety-related problem will have already been diagnosed and read some literature that describes their specific problem. If you have not been formally diagnosed, however, or if you are reading this book because a friend or relative suffers from anxiety, descriptions of each of the above anxiety disorders are given in Appendix 1.

Anxiety and Fear

Anxiety and fear are normal responses to a perceived threat. For the purposes of this program, anxiety and fear are considered as opposite ends of a spectrum. Anxiety is usually triggered by a vague or ill-defined threat, while fear is usually triggered by a well-defined threat, such as a car skidding on wet pavement. This relationship between anxiety and fear can be diagrammed as follows:



Both anxiety and fear trigger unpleasant mental symptoms such as a sense of helplessness, confusion, apprehension, worry, and repeated

Recommended Activities for Lesson 1

How to Get the Most Out of This Section

Each lesson in this book concludes with a set of Recommended Activities. Each activity is something many people have found valuable in overcoming anxiety-related problems. You may find that some of the activities are already a part of your normal behavior and feel very natural to you. Others may seem awkward, uncomfortable, or difficult. This is to be expected, since this program is designed to meet the needs of many people and you are unique with your own personal needs and abilities. Spend less time with activities you find easy and more time with those that seem difficult.

The easy activities probably involve skills you have already practiced. The difficult activities probably involve skills you have not developed and are more important for you. If a particular activity causes undue stress or anxiety, it means you are not ready for it. Skip it and work on it again after a few weeks.

You do not have to apply every idea in this book or do every activity immediately. The point of this program is to learn how to live a comfortable and enjoyable life and do things in a manner that is right for you. People who are successful with this program frequently do not do everything suggested. Still, they usually find they have done *most* of the recommended activities, even though many are not done until long after the last lesson has been read. That is fine. Do things at your own rate.

People who are working through this program will often stop doing the exercises as soon as they start to feel better. This is a mistake. Continue working through the program until you feel that you have mastered all the areas it covers. This will ensure that you master all the skills needed to prevent the return of your symptoms.

No one can say exactly how long it will take for you to overcome your anxiety-related problems. It depends on how severe your symptoms are, how long you have experienced them, and how hard you work on the program. If you have a strong commitment to use the program as it is designed, do the reading, and apply as many of the suggestions to your life as is possible (even though you may think they

are silly or may not understand why they are suggested), it is very likely you will succeed.

Rule Out Possible Medical Problems

This lesson stated that the first step in overcoming anxiety-related problems is to rule out all possible medical causes. If you have not had a complete physical examination and discussed your symptoms with a physician recently, make an appointment this week to do so. Be sure to provide your physician with a complete medical history and discuss your diet as well as any medications you are taking. If you find it difficult to talk to a physician, write down the information you believe is important along with the questions you want to have answered. Be sure to take two copies of your notes and questions with you when you go to your appointment. This allows both you and your physician to look at your observations and concerns while you go over them.

If you have been diagnosed with a specific anxiety disorder, it is often a good idea to avoid mentioning this to your physician. I've worked with many clients with medical problems that were overlooked because all of their symptoms were being attributed to anxiety and worry. When these clients went to a new physician and simply described their symptoms, the symptoms were investigated more carefully and the medical problems were then found.

Make a List of Personality Traits and Childhood Experiences That Play a Role in Your Anxiety

Take time to review the sections that describe personality traits and childhood experiences that can contribute to anxiety-related problems. For each one you identify, list ways in which it contributes to your anxiety. When you're done, put this list in a safe place so you can review it as you work through the lessons. When a lesson has a section that addresses an item on your list, spend extra time with that section.

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