

FREE REPORT

The Cause of Anxiety, Stress and Depression and How To Relieve It!



DID YOU KNOW THAT THE main cause of your anxiety, stress and depression is probably not:

- Your job
- Your relationship
- Your financial situation
- Your medical condition
- Your.....

Contrary to what you might believe, the main cause of your suffering is probably similar to most people: **how you relate to your feelings!** That's right. How you think about your feelings and what you do with your feelings create stress, anxiety and depression.

Let me explain.

Often when we experience difficult feelings, we don't understand them and we don't know what to do with them. So we try to avoid our feelings by tuning them out or by numbing or disconnecting ourselves. We do this through a few drinks, food, drugs, gambling, pornography, staying busy or other distractions such as TV or video games. We use whatever means we can to distract ourselves from what's happening on the inside.

Another way we disconnect from our feelings is by having very little tolerance or compassion for them. We often relate to our feelings by judging or condemning them, saying to ourselves things like:

- I hate feeling this way.
- I don't have time for this.
- I shouldn't feel this way; there's really nothing wrong in my life.
- I should be over this by now.
- I should know better.
- What's wrong with me for feeling this way?
- I must be weak if I can't shake this feeling.

We learned this attitude growing up, most likely because in our family, feelings were viewed as either dangerous, unpredictable, ugly, weak, inconvenient, untrustworthy, private, manipulative, irrational, unholy or embarrassing. Any of these judgments about emotions would have led to our feelings either being denied, reprimanded, rejected or ridiculed and consequently to us being told to:

- Move on.
- Suck it up.
- Don't dwell on it.

Suffering is
caused by how
you relate to
your feelings.

- Stop making a big deal out of it.
- Grin and bear it.
- Roll with the punches and get on with life.
- Don't feel sorry for yourself.
- Don't be such a cry baby.
- Don't feel that way. It's not that bad. Others have it way worse.

We learned how to deal with our own feelings today, by how our caregivers dealt with us when we cried or were in pain or distress as a child. Whether it's what we were told as a child or what we tell ourselves today about our feelings, these judgments may cause us to deny, turn away from, or reject the way we feel. Given that feelings are part of who we are, when we reject our feelings we reject ourselves.

IT'S IRONIC THAT SO MANY of us spend time and energy and sacrifice ourselves trying not to be rejected by others; however, we willingly and readily go ahead and reject ourselves. Over time, when we reject our feelings, push them away, hope they'll go away, they turn into depression, anxiety and stress. In other words, anxiety, stress and depression are states of 'being' or states of mind that are the result of feelings that have been dismissed, suppressed, or ignored.

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Anxiety, for instance, is primarily caused by feelings of fear, frustration, abandonment or rejection that usually have to do with thoughts about the future: "What if I fail? What if he says no? What if I get hurt?"

Depression is primarily caused by feelings of guilt, shame, helplessness and sorrow that mostly have to do with thoughts of the past. This includes events that have happened that you wish had not happened as well as events that didn't happen that you wish would have happened: "Why didn't my mother ever praise me or give me affection? How will I deal with the loss of this person?"

When we disconnect from, rather than feel the feelings, we experience what we call anxiety, stress or depression. I like to describe the symptoms of anxiety and depression to people as your inner wisdom trying to say to you, "Listen to me. Something doesn't feel right inside. Since you haven't been listening to me, I'll have to make life difficult and send you a panic attack or depression so you can listen to me. I'll have to make it so uncomfortable that you will need to get help so that you can finally attend to me. Sorry to do this, but it seems so far there is no other way." This is often when we seek help—out of necessity—so that we can finally have a chance to validate and listen to our own inner experience.

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Some of you may be thinking “but I do feel my feelings, in fact I feel them too much”. That’s true. You are likely feeling a lot; however, these are often what we call ‘cover-up’ or secondary feelings. They are the feelings that are on the surface that keep you busy from experiencing the deeper, primary feelings. For example, some people will experience sadness instead of anger or constant worry instead of fear of abandonment or guilt instead of loneliness. Given that we can’t heal what we can’t feel, in order to heal from anxiety, stress and depression, it is imperative that we are able to feel all of our feelings—the good, the bad, and the ugly—in a way that is safe, manageable and keeps us in control.

THE SOLUTION:

Developing Skillful Means To Work with Feelings

SUZIE IS FOUR YEARS OLD and is playing around on the chair by the kitchen table, pushing herself off the table with her feet. This is risky as the chair may get stuck in the grooves of the tiles and she might fall backwards. Mom warns her not to play around like that. As a normal four year old, Suzie doesn’t take much notice, and sure enough, her chair gets stuck in the groove and she goes flying back, hitting her head on the hard tile floor.

At that point, mom has two choices as to how she will respond to Suzie’s feelings and this choice will impact how Suzie will choose to deal with her own feelings later on. Mom can say as she watches Suzie try to get up, “I told you not to play around on the chair like that. It’s your fault you hurt yourself. That will teach you a lesson... Now stop crying or I’ll give you something to cry about.” Alternatively, she can take Suzie in her arms, comfort her, and say “it’s ok, it’s over now. Tell me are you crying because your head is hurting or because you are afraid. You don’t have to be afraid anymore. I’m here”.

How mom responds to Suzie’s feelings will teach Suzie either that it’s ok to have feelings, that someone will be there to comfort her when she is in pain so she doesn’t have to be alone or that she is wrong or bad for feeling the way she does, that she can’t depend on others to comfort her and that she is alone in her suffering. This in turn will determine how Suzie will learn to deal with her own feelings as she grows up.

This example demonstrates ways you can begin to work more skillfully with your feelings and facilitate your healing. The key to healing is to provide for ourselves what we may not have received from our caregivers.

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NO MATTER WHAT OUR LEGACY is from the past, today as an adult, it's now our job to attend to our feelings in a way that will be supportive, caring and healing. We need to be the first to make our feelings matter, our voice heard, so that others in our life can do the same. Others will treat us the way we treat ourselves.

We first begin to do this by learning to befriend our feelings. Rather than pushing them away, judging them or hating them, we learn to bring more understanding and tenderness to what we feel.

This doesn't mean we must act based on what we feel. Just because we feel anger doesn't mean we have a right to shout or criticize. Feelings and behaviour are two separate issues. Feelings are never right or wrong but behaviour can be.

Rather, when we begin to learn to work more skillfully with our feelings, there is less of a need to act upon negative feelings with mean or destructive behaviour. This attitude of understanding provides the foundation for the healing we need to overcome anxiety, stress and depression.

WE DON'T CHOOSE WHAT WE FEEL, we only choose what we do with what we feel. What we do with what we feel will determine if we get better or bitter. In other words, we can't control what feelings arise within us; however, we can control what we do with what we feel. So rather than berating ourselves for how we are reacting internally to situations, it's more productive to look at ways that we can cultivate a more understanding and compassionate relationship towards our feelings that foster empathy and acceptance and that we can start taking better care of ourselves—ways in which we can more effectively and compassionately look after our suffering that will foster understanding and empathy. Instead, we want to validate our experience in ways it was possibly never validated for us before. This helps us be more at peace with them and stop trying to change the feelings or try to ignore them or make them go away.

We don't have to like or agree with what we feel, but we must be able to acknowledge, validate and attend to our feelings because they don't just go away. We do this by watching the judgments 'about' our feelings, and being willing to set them aside. Rather than thinking "I hate this feeling. What's wrong with me? I must be weak", we simply acknowledge, "ok, this is how I am feeling right now. I can't help it. I'm not bad for feeling this way, and I'll just take care of myself by staying with these feelings."

WHEN WE ARE ABLE TO stay present with our feelings, we weaken the power they have over us. In a sense, we disarm them by not running away from ourselves. You can do this by putting your hand over where you feel your feelings in your

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body and just gently breathing into that space, without any expectations or any need to fix things—just holding that space. It's not the feeling that's a problem, but rather the judgment and reaction we have about our feeling.

In other words, what we are telling ourselves about the feeling is what creates pain and suffering. Therefore, it's the opinion we hold about our feeling that needs to change, not the feeling itself.

Often people fear that if they let themselves feel the feelings, either they will drown in them, feel overwhelmed by them, or they will become weak and powerless. In fact, the opposite happens. We are powerless when we can't feel what's happening inside. We lose control and may feel as though we are ruled by hidden forces.

When we resist our feelings, we give them more power. So the first and most important step in overcoming anxiety, stress and depression is to learn and practice skillful means of relating more effectively and compassionately to our feelings.

ABOUT THE CLINIC

The Alpine Anxiety and Stress Relief Clinic provides counselling for adults, teens, couples and families. We also offer a variety of lectures, seminars and workshops which we announce regularly on our website and through emails.

Our unique mind/body approach helps address not just the symptoms but also the underlying cause from which those symptoms arose. We are trained to work with you as a whole person. That means we work with both the mind and an awareness of your body experiences, because it helps you tap into what's right in you, what works, and what's healthy, helping you to unlock your own inner potential for healing and well-being.

If you find that your symptoms persist and would like assistance with some of your difficulties, contact us at info@anxietyandstressrelief.com or call us at (604) 732-3930.

Your feedback, comments and testimonials are welcome at:
claire@anxietyandstressrelief.com

For further information about our counselling services, visit our website:
www.anxietyandstressrelief.com