

A dark, textured circular shape, resembling a watercolor blot or a shadow, is centered on a solid blue background. The text is overlaid on this shape.

welcome to  
**OVERCOMING HEALTH  
ANXIETY**

# I am Lindsey Lockett.

Fave Movies:

- > Captain Fantastic
- > Professor Marston & The Wonder Women
- > Avatar 1
- > Lonesome Dove mini series

Fave TV Shows: The Office, Outlander, Great British Baking Show



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Basically, don't steal my shit. ;)

**OVERCOMING HEALTH ANXIETY is the third workshop in the Feel Without Fear series.**

The group coaching call for this workshop  
is next week:  
MONDAY, June 3 @ 10am

# **EXPAND: WIDENING YOUR WINDOW OF TOLERANCE**

**6/19 @ 5pm CST**

**Group coaching call on Tuesday, 6/25 @ 10am CST**

This workshop is about increasing the capacity of your nervous system to hold more. You will learn how to begin widening your Window of Tolerance through conscious choice, intentional stressors, titration, and sovereign safety,

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# **HEALTH ANXIETY IN A SYMPTOM-PHOBIC CULTURE**

# HEALTH ANXIETY

a.k.a illness anxiety disorder

a.k.a. hypochondria

According to the DSM (psych diagnosis bible), illness anxiety disorder is characterized by "obsession with the idea of having a serious but undiagnosed medical condition and worry that minor symptoms indicate something serious"



# HEALTH ANXIETY

I'm going to show you that health anxiety is not a disorder. It is a natural, unconscious reaction to nervous system dysregulation and Complex PTSD.

Health anxiety is just one way CPTSD manifests. ALL OTHER FORMS OF ANXIETY ARE ALSO MANIFESTATIONS OF CPTSD.

Isn't it interesting that the focus on  
and fear of symptoms and  
sensations is pathologized,  
diagnosed, and treated as a "mental  
illness" or "disorder" but our  
conventional sick care system,  
wellness culture, and society as a  
whole is obsessed with symptoms?

I strongly believe that most health anxiety is perpetuated by our symptom-focused culture. Especially in wellness culture, it seems that the more chronic and mysterious the issues, the better. That guarantees that you'll get on the Hamster Wheel of Wellness, and in your efforts to find and fix what's wrong, you're guaranteed to spend your time and money on practitioners, supplements, and health gadgets.

Or, in the case of folks who aren't interested in natural approaches, we're guaranteed to spend our time and money on doctor's appointments, labs, imaging, and pharmaceuticals.

Your health anxiety ONLY BENEFITS corporations and companies that promise you relief or healing in exchange for money.

And, if you don't get better, then you're told to find something else, which requires more time and money.

It is outside the scope of this workshop to discuss capitalism, however, please do not discount the influence that capitalism plays in the healthcare industry. It is an industry, focused on turning a profit off of you being anxious about your own body in a system that told you to focus on your symptoms.

# Symptom Obsession

- >> rate symptoms/pain on a scale from 1-10
- >> keep a journal or log of symptoms and potential associations with food, substances, etc.
- >> emphasis on pharmaceuticals to reduce or stop symptoms w/o addressing root cause
- >> emphasis on wellness culture to fix symptoms with supplements and restrictive diets
- >> symptoms are bad and need to be suppressed, fixed, controlled, and gotten rid of

Not to mention COVID-19 that forced people to be hypervigilant about their own symptoms as well as others' symptoms.

We weren't always so hypervigilant about runny noses, sneezing, and sore throats until 2020. Many people who didn't have health anxiety prior to COVID-19 have health anxiety now.

**With all the controlling,  
micro-managing, fixing, suppressing,  
and medicating of symptoms...**

**is it any wonder why our bodies are  
screaming at us?**

**Of course you're anxious about it!**

Of course...

- >> every new feeling or sound from your body feels threatening
- >> resurgences of old symptoms trigger fear that that thing is "back"
- >> you want to avoid feeling in your body because it's scary



**HEALTH ANXIETY ISN'T  
ABOUT SYMPTOMS.**

**People often believe that if their symptoms go away, their health anxiety will go away. This is false.**

# **Your symptoms are not the cause of health anxiety.**

Until you address the root cause of health anxiety — nervous system dysregulation caused by C-PTSD — you will continue to experience anxiety. If not about your health, then it will transfer to something else: your romantic relationship, friendships, money, business, and/or social settings.

**Do you notice any resistance in  
your body?**

**What objections does the voice  
in your head have when I say,  
"Your symptoms are not the  
cause of your health anxiety"?**

# Let's talk about the voice in our heads...

With health anxiety, the fear usually does not come from the actual sensation or symptom itself. The fear actually comes from the **meaning that the voice in your head is making** about the sensation or symptom and/or the gut-wrenching feeling of uncertainty about what's happening in your body.

**Let's take a moment...**

**Tell me what the voice in your head  
says about your symptoms and  
sensations.**

- > What if you never figure this out?
- > What if this goes on and you get worse, maybe even lose ability?
- > What if you can't afford to fix this?
- > What if this means I'm getting an autoimmune illness/cancer/insert other catastrophic condition
- > What if I can't take care of myself?
- > Why won't my body just do what I need/want it to do?!
- > I can't live my life until this thing is gone/fixed/better.
- > Don't complain. People will think you're a hypochondriac.



If this voice in your head — which is a part of you — wasn't a fearful, critical, or shaming voice, if it was truly integrated into your WHOLE SELF, here's what your Self would say:

- > Even though this feeling/sensation/symptom is really scary, I trust myself to feel it and seek help if/when necessary.
- > Even without certainty, I trust myself to feel this and meet my needs.
- > It serves no purpose to speculate and catastrophize about this. I choose to focus on my love and safety instead.
- > My body is doing exactly what it needs to do, even if I don't understand what's happening. My body is a miracle!
- > I choose to live my life to the fullest, to do what I am capable of doing, even if this symptom is still present.

The fearful voice in your head is a master storyteller.

It will take the sensations in your body and weave all kinds of stories and tall tales about them.

It will convince you that you are dying, on the road to disability and loss of joy in life.

It will tell you that you need to take drastic steps to control and fix the sensations.

It believes that sensations mean there's always something wrong.

**And when you don't have AWARENESS  
of this voice, you will live in fear and  
reactivity.**

People with health anxiety feel so triggered by what's happening in their bodies and their lack of control that they are constantly looking for certainty. This looks like:

- >> frequent "checking in" w/ their bodies/symptoms
- >> excessive googling
- >> multiple dr. appts
- >> practitioner-hopping
- >> hypervigilance about new symptoms or recurrence of old symptoms

- >> micromanaging self/kids' health
- >> Hamster Wheel of Wellness
- >> sense of urgency
- >> FB support groups for mystery illnesses

Picture a 5 or 6-year-old child who feels funny sensations in their body and doesn't know what's going on.

They want a caring parent or other trusted adult to reassure them, let them know they're ok, that they're taken care of and safe.

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Now, imagine that child is you — you NOW, as an adult, looking for someone to reassure you, let them know you're ok, that you're taken care of and safe.

Close your eyes. Picture your Inner Child obsessively googling to find answers because there's no parent there to provide care and reassurance.

Picture your Inner Child feeling so scared of their bodies that they're always checking in, making doctor's appointments, trying to micromanage their bodies with a sense of doom and urgency.

Picture your Inner Child joining FB support groups and following multiple IG accounts because they're so desperate for help and certainty.

**What do you feel for that little kid  
inside you?**



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# HEALTH ANXIETY & C-PTSD

# COMPLEX PTSD

- >> usually, but not always, forms in childhood
- >> "the water we were swimming in"
- >> did not have the ability to understand that our caregivers' inability to attune to our needs and co-regulate with us wasn't our fault
- >> deep core beliefs that there's something wrong with me

# COMPLEX PTSD

- >> can form alongside Adverse Childhood Experiences, but not always
- >> hypervigilance about environment & communication cues
- >> nervous system state is usually immobilization + fawn/appease
- >> common to second-guess, doubt, and even gaslight yourself
- >> seems nebulous, like you can't quite put your finger on what's "wrong"

"It (C-PTSD) is a learned set of responses, and a failure to complete numerous important developmental tasks. This means that it is environmentally, not genetically, caused. C-PTSD is neither inborn nor characterological. As such, it is learned. It is not inscribed in your DNA. It is a disorder caused by nurture (or rather lack of it) not nature.

"What is learned can be unlearned and vice versa. What was not provided by your parents can now be provided by yourself and others." (Source: Complex-PTSD by Pete Walker, p. 1-2)

# C-PTSD "SYMPTOMS"

## \*common characteristics of health anxiety

- > emotional flashbacks\*
- > tyrannical Inner Critic\*
- > toxic shame\*
- > self-abandonment\*
- > anxiety\* (social, health, relationship, general)
- > feels lonely/abandoned
- > hypervigilance\*, catastrophization\*
- > fragile self-esteem
- > developmental arrests
- > relationship difficulties
- > dissociation\*
- > over-sensitivity\* & intolerance to stress\*
- > perfectionism\*
- > mood swings
- > negative noticing\*
- > control\*
- > suicidal ideation

It's important not to get attached to labels and diagnoses, such as C-PTSD.

C-PTSD is not genetic. It is learned. Therefore, it can be unlearned. And it is your sovereign responsibility to use your agency to become aware of your C-PTSD patterns, behaviors, triggers, and beliefs and unlearn them.

When I use the term C-PTSD, it is not in an attempt to identify with a diagnosis or to feel like a victim. It is simply language that succinctly describes a collection of beliefs, nervous system states, emotional states, and behavioral patterns that stem from emotional abandonment and neglect.

Complex PTSD is different from PTSD in 2 main ways:

1. It forms over longer periods of time with prolonged exposure to emotional abandonment and/or abuse. It's the "water you're swimming in".

2. It is ALWAYS relational. C-PTSD usually, but not always, forms in childhood; it can also form in a long-term intimate relationship. And, it can form in relationship to yourself.

# PUNISHING PARENTS

- > took things away when you misbehaved
- > isolated you by sending you to/locking you in your room
- > expected perfection: grades, behavior, etc./punished "mistakes" (ie. normal childhood behavior)
- > controlled you through punishment
- > withdrew loving presence if you were "bad"
- > made you feel shame or guilt when you were "bad"
- > forced you to earn their love back (either through actual physical labor or emotional labor)



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## SELF PUNISHING

- > take things away from Self (food, fun, pleasure, rest)
- > self-isolate
- > expect perfection from body, punish Self or body when it "misbehaves"
- > attempt to control body/force it to "heal"
- > withdraw your own loving presence from yourself when your body is "bad"
- > feel shame when your controlling, forcing, & fixing don't "work"
- > feel guilt for how your health or anxiety is a burden on others
- > feel guilt when you indulge, call it "cheating"

# PERFECTIONISM FLASHBACKS LOOK LIKE...

- > all or nothing/black and white thinking
- > self-hate, shame that you've "done all this" & you're still not fixed
- > micromanagement, worry, obsessing, thought-looping, projecting into the future
- > unfairly comparing yourself/your body to others or a past version of yourself
- > guilt — for what you feel, if you eat/drink something "bad", for "cheating"
- > shoulding (I should eat this/take that/do this)

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- > harsh judgments of Self/body
- > drasticizing, catastrophizing, blowing symptoms out of proportion
- > negative focus
- > time urgency
- > procrastination
- > victim consciousness (Why me? Of course this happened to me. Nothing ever goes my way. My body never behaves like I want/like others' bodies.)
- > belief that you've done something to deserve your symptoms

# DISSOCIATION

**In his book *Complex PTSD: from Surviving to Thriving*, Pete Walker refers to 2 types of dissociation:**

**LEFT-BRAINED DISSOCIATION**

**RIGHT-BRAINED DISSOCIATION**

## LEFT-BRAIN DISSOCIATION:

- > swings between obsessive/compulsive doing and worrying/planning about doing
- > Human Doing
- > constant thinking/doom googling to distract from underlying pain & plan what to do next
- > stay one step ahead
- > severely traumatized flight types may develop OCD

- > stuck in your head with over-analysis
- > self-medicates with busyness (googling, dr. appts, protocols, research)
- > "chicken with its head cut off"
- > rushing and flitting about aimlessly, as if motion itself is the only important thing
- > "Don't just stand there! Do something!"
- >> high on your own adrenaline

"Extreme flight types are like machines with the switch stuck in the 'on' position. They are obsessively and compulsively driven by the belief that perfection will make them safe and loveable. They rush to achieve. They rush just as much in thought [obsession] as they do in action [compulsion]."

"Left-brain dissociation is using constant thinking to distract yourself from underlying abandonment pain." — Complex PTSD, p. 114-115

# HELP FOR LEFT-BRAIN DISSOCIATION

(extreme, OCD-like flight state)

> **AWARENESS:** when engaging in typical obsessive behaviors (doom-googling, FB groups, IG, researching) and thoughts (trying to stay one step ahead, catastrophizing, futuristic thinking, stuck in head)

> **SOMATIC AWARENESS:** what am I feeling in my body when I'm doom-googling, researching, catastrophizing, futuristic thinking, etc.?



# HELP FOR LEFT-BRAIN DISSOCIATION

(extreme, OCD-like flight state)

## **CURIOSITY QUESTIONS:**

- > What hurt am I running from right now?
- > What is the most important priority for me in this moment?
- > Can I stay present in this feeling for a few more moments or minutes?
- > What sort of comfort and soothing is my Inner Child asking for right now?

# HELP FOR LEFT-BRAIN DISSOCIATION

(extreme, OCD-like flight state)

> **GRIEF WORK:** grieving childhood wounds and losses such as emotionally unavailable parents or a parent who only cared tenderly for you if you were sick, self compassionate crying, imagined reprocessing with grief

> **SLOWING DOWN:** familiarize nervous system with a less frantic pace; short meditations, slow breathwork, and/or intentionally slow walks can help with this

# RIGHT-BRAIN DISSOCIATION

- > weren't allowed to use fight, flight, or fawn responses
- > seeks refuge in dissociative behaviors such as excessive sleeping, watching TV, scrolling, online browsing, video games, & daydreaming
- > may present with symptoms of ADD
- > "master the art of changing the internal channel whenever inner experience becomes uncomfortable
- > project perfectionism onto others

- > use imperfections of others to justify self-isolating
- > may exhibit extreme detachment from reality when in an emotional flashback
- > may have very few to no positive relationship experiences/skeptical & scared of intimate relationships
- > less likely to seek therapeutic help
- > denial of how their adaptations have narrowed their lives
- > self-medicating w/ alcohol, narcotics, weed, kratom, etc.

"It is often the scapegoat or the most profoundly abandoned child, "the lost child" who is forced to habituate to the freeze response. Now allowed to successfully employ fight, flight, or fawn responses, the freeze type's defenses develop around classical or right-brain dissociation. Dissociation allows the freeze type to disconnect from experiencing his abandonment pain, and protects him from risky social interactions — any of which might trigger feelings of being retraumatized."  
— Complex PTSD, p. 118

# HELP FOR RIGHT-BRAIN DISSOCIATION

## > THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP &

**CO-REGULATION** : must be able to heal in safe relationship, preferably w/ a professional who is familiar w/ this state; co-regulation w/ mammal pets

> **AWARENESS**: of childhood wounding of being the scapegoat or most abandoned child, of habits such as excessive sleeping, gaming, or watching TV, of self-isolation, of being so stuck you do nothing

# HELP FOR RIGHT-BRAIN DISSOCIATION

> **SOMATIC AWARENESS:** what am I feeling in my body? What does dissociation feel like? What does self-isolation feel like?

> **NERVOUS SYSTEM MOBILIZATION:**  
co-regulation coupled with mobilizing  
breathwork or other somatic tools

**DISEMBODIMENT**

Whether in LEFT-BRAIN DISSOCIATION or RIGHT-BRAIN DISSOCIATION, you are not EMBODIED when you have health anxiety.

100% of the time, a DISEMBODIED person will have anxiety of some sort.

DISEMBODIED = not connected to body  
(hyperfocus on symptoms is NOT embodiment)



Every client with any type of anxiety — relationship, health, social, money, generalized — who has ever come to work with me has had ONE thing in common:

They hope that by working with me, the troubling sensations and symptoms they experience will be gotten rid of, fixed, or resolved.

They believe that NO SYMPTOMS = "HEALED"

**But... NO SYMPTOMS doesn't heal health anxiety.**

Just like not having a relationship doesn't heal relationship anxiety. Not having money or having more than enough money doesn't heal money anxiety. Not having friends doesn't heal social anxiety.

# **ANY KIND OF ANXIETY IS MARKED BY:**

## **HYPERVIGILANCE**

about environment, other people, facial expressions, body language, danger, and/or internal sensations

## **HYPERSENSITIVITY**

to lights, sounds, smells, other people, facial expressions, body language, perceptions, and/or internal sensations

## **CATASTROPHIZING**

about belonging, behavior, what others' behavior or communication means, and/or internal sensations

# **ANY KIND OF ANXIETY IS MARKED BY:**

## **OBSESSIVE THINKING & WORRYING**

about environment, other people, facial expressions, body language, danger, and/or internal sensations

## **ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL & MICROMANAGE**

environment, other people, situations, and/or internal sensations

## **PERFECTIONISM**

about your own behavior, others' behavior, work, projected on to others, your own health/body

# HEALTH ANXIETY IS JUST LIKE ANY OTHER KIND OF ANXIETY.

Except...

Health anxiety doesn't involve a relationship with another person, group, or entity (such as money or a business). Health anxiety occurs in relationship to one's own body.

(And often, people with health anxiety are also very anxious, hypervigilant, and controlling of the health of their partner, kids, and/or pets.)

## Overcoming health anxiety is NOT about...

- X troubleshooting symptoms
- X diet changes
- X supplement recommendations or protocols
- X learning more health information
- X joining different FB support groups
- X following more IG accounts
- X finding a different health practitioner

## Overcoming health anxiety IS about...

- ✓widening window of tolerance to hold uncomfortable sensations
- ✓reducing reactivity, catastrophization, & hypervigilance through creating safety in the body
- ✓changing the energy with with you approach your healthcare
- ✓acceptance of whatever is happening
- ✓cultivating self-trust

**BUT WHAT IF THERE'S  
SOMETHING REALLY WRONG  
WITH ME?!**





It's true... there's always the possibility that there is something medically, physiologically wrong in your body. It may require treatment, such as pharmaceuticals, medication, or surgery.

Feeling sensation/symptoms and noticing the stories in our heads about them doesn't mean we can't or shouldn't seek medical care or that medical help isn't necessary.

It might be... and that's ok.

The point of feeling without fear isn't to fix, get rid of, micromanage, or control sensation or symptoms.

We can experience painful symptoms without fear. That may seem impossible to you today, but it is possible.

**Feeling without fear changes the energy with which you approach healthcare.**

**(UNCONSCIOUS)**

**Instead of...**

**REACTING**

**URGENCY**

**ANXIOUS ENERGY**

**CLOSING**

**RESISTING**

**BEING ANGRY @**

**BODY**

**(CONSCIOUS)**

**We can...**

**RESPOND**

**SLOW DOWN**

**PEACEFUL ENERGY**

**OPENING**

**ACCEPT & SURRENDER**

**LEARN TO TAKE**

**BETTER CARE OF BODY**

**When triggered by health symptoms (or really anything), the suffering is in the RESISTANCE.**

Avoidance of/panic about feeling = you'll keep fighting against your body

Feeling w/o fear = listening to your body

Avoidance of/panic about feeling = trying to think and fix your way out of pain, illness, discomfort

Feeling w/o fear = settle into your body and create the best reality you can by working with your body

Avoidance of/panic about feeling = living in  
panicked, anxious resistance

Feeling w/o fear = living in calm  
acceptance of what is happening

Avoidance of/panic about feeling = fighting to get help/get it fixed ASAP, possibly spending \$ you don't have to force it

Feeling w/o fear = choosing the help you seek with ease, trusting that if it's what you need, you won't have to force it and fight for it

Avoidance of/panic about feeling =  
panicking and forcing your way into the  
doctor, testing, etc.

Feeling w/o fear = grounded waiting to see  
if your body resolves the sensation or  
symptom on its own (Obviously, you will  
likely know if your situation is an  
emergency.)



In 2019, I went to the ER and urgent care 4 separate times with really painful sensations and symptoms in my pelvis. My urethra spasmed for 5 months like I had a UTI, except I didn't have a UTI. My pelvis felt heavy, like something was going to fall out of me. At the same time, I was also experiencing debilitating anxiety and insomnia.

I panicked for 5 straight months. This resulted in a quick decline in my mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health.

The pain and sensations improved when I was lying down, so I spent almost all of that 5 months bed-ridden.

All of the sensations and symptoms were  
TOO MUCH.

Not only was I dealing with pelvic pain and symptoms, I had the anxiety and insomnia on top of it. My entire life was consumed with researching, calling my doctors, going to the ER/urgent care, teaching myself to read my own CT scans, joining FB groups, etc. It was a miserable existence. I was fighting against and desperately trying to fix both my mind and my body.

Turns out, going to the ER/urgent care 4 times was totally unnecessary. What was wrong with me was never going to be solved in the ER.

It wasn't an emergency. It seemed like an emergency because the story in my head was that something was terribly wrong with me and no one could figure it out. So, I forced and pushed and resisted trying to find answers.

Our cognitively driven culture also reinforces this disconnection from our bodies because it praises intellectualism and reason over felt sense. And so, we are a collectively disembodied people.

When we learn to FEEL and NOTICE sensation in the body with CURIOSITY and not FEAR, we are listening to our bodies.



**All SENSATION happens via ELECTRICAL SIGNALS that travel up and down the NERVOUS SYSTEM.**

**Some sensations are to alert us to take care of our basic needs.**

hunger = sensation that tells you to eat

thirst = sensation that tells you to drink

sleepy = sensation that tells you it's time to sleep

## **Some sensations are connected to our EMOTIONS.**

hot flushing of your face = feeling humiliated  
lump in your throat = anxiety about public  
speaking

tension in your neck = feeling stressed about an  
upcoming deadline

# INTEROCEPTION

This is a sense — like smell, sight, hearing, taste, touch, and proprioception.

*Interoception is the sense of noticing and feeling sensation in the body.*



**SENSATION = how the body  
speaks**

**INTEROCEPTION = how we listen**

The trap of the mind and ego is to assign meaning to sensation, to create stories about it, and to pathologize certain sensations (ie. symptoms) and make them "bad".

When we believe these mind-made stories — especially if we aren't in awareness of those stories — we can become afraid of feeling sensation.

Before we begin re-establishing a connection with our bodies, I believe it is crucial that we understand why that connection was severed in the first place.

When our needs for connection, love, and secure attachment were not met by our parents, we did not have the consciousness to realize that the disconnection wasn't our fault.

We internalized the disconnect and lack of secure attachment as a fundamental flaw in ourselves.

Then, our egos developed the voice or voices in our heads (parts) that worries and keep us ruminating and over-thinking, trying to figure out why and what's wrong with us. Mind chatter is our ego's way of trying to protect us by telling stories that match the state of our nervous systems (Story follows state.)

It's constantly confirming what we feel, but are too afraid to actually feel.

Re-connecting with the body is a PRACTICE of noticing the voice in the head and stories and choosing to drop into the body to notice what sensations are present without believing those ego stories.

So, we connect to the body over and over until we are literally walking around in our bodies instead of in our heads. This is what it means to be EMBODIED.

You FEEL whatever is present. You ALLOW the sensations, even and especially when they're uncomfortable.

**Feel, allow, stay present with whatever is there.**

While feeling, allowing, and staying present,  
also notice the stories of the voice in your head  
with CURIOSITY.

You get curious instead of believing them as  
fact or truth. You notice how those thoughts  
feed into the sensations of the body, perhaps  
even intensifying sensation.

If the sensation feels contracted and uncomfortable, offer BREATH to those places. Place your hand on that part of yourself and HOLD yourself in your fear and discomfort.

REPEAT, REPEAT, REPEAT

**The KNOWING of what your body needs comes. But first, you must LISTEN.**

Without CONSCIOUS AWARENESS, our only option is to be unconscious of these mind-made ego stories. This results in fear, catastrophization, hypervigilance, and even dissociation from the body.

When it comes to our triggers, the mind tells stories such as, "Oh, I could never face that. It's too painful." and "I've always avoided that. It's just the way I am."



The mind tells the story that the body is a painful, uncomfortable place to be. The mind may even have a story that the body has betrayed you.

Believing these stories or not being conscious of them forces us into disembodiment — disconnected from our bodies and living in our minds all the time. Thinking and thinking, but rarely feeling.

So, connecting with the body requires being willing to NOTICE and FEEL the sensations of the body while also NOTICING the STORIES of the MIND with curiosity instead of judgment or unquestioning belief.

With practice, we can learn to notice sensation, feel it, and then cognitively describe it with language.

Our bodies do not speak with cognitive language.

The language of our bodies is sensation and sometimes, symptoms.

Interoception is how we listen. We can "talk" back to our bodies through PRESENCE, HOLDING OURSELVES, MEETING OUR BASIC NEEDS, and NERVOUS SYSTEM HYGIENE.

If you have a sensation or symptom that's concerning you, it's ok to get checked out by your doctor. In fact, I recommend it.

If everything checks out medically ok, the sensation or symptom is likely just your body speaking to you and you're interocepting it and attaching a story to it, such as,

"Oh this must be really bad. I'm sure something is really wrong with me. What if it's a mystery illness and no doctor figures it out?? What if I feel this forever?"

I get it...

Sensations and symptoms are sometimes really uncomfortable. We want to avoid them, fix them, reject them, and get rid of them. This is unrealistic.

As long as you are alive in your human body, sensation and symptoms are going to be part of your existence.

**What if... instead of avoiding your body and judging your body, you learned to listen and not be afraid of what you feel?**

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# **OVERCOMING HEALTH ANXIETY**

The voice in your head (Inner Critic) gets off on shaming you as a failure or "never going to heal" when you go back into unconscious patterns.

**No real or lasting change comes from a place of shame. You will not shame yourself out of health anxiety. You CAN, however, love yourself through health anxiety.**

**Bring awareness to the shaming, critical voice in your head. Just notice it curiously. You don't have to listen to it or believe it.**

## **AWARENESS + CURIOSITY ABOUT VOICE(S) IN YOUR HEAD**

We judge because we are attached — to a story, a belief, an outcome, an identity, a diagnosis, etc.

Unless we are aware of our attachments & judgments & can meet those attachments with non-judgmental, neutral curiosity, we will continue in our patterns & stay stuck.



**The stories we tell ourselves about the things are usually much more harmful than the things themselves.**

("the things" = the symptom, the sensation, the trigger, the appointment, the feeling, the emotion)

These voices are TRICKY.  
They are very BELIEVABLE.  
And, we all have the life experiences to PROVE  
that what the voice(s) say is really TRUE.

**This is why awareness is non-negotiable.  
We have to become aware of these voices  
before we can question or challenge them.**

# **AWARENESS + CURIOSITY ABOUT VOICE(S) IN YOUR HEAD**

**Curiosity is the antidote to judgment.**

Isn't it interesting that the voice in my head is saying \_\_\_\_\_?

What meaning am I making out of this sensation/symptom?

Is this sensation/symptom actually a problem? Or is the voice in my head just scared and trying to convince me there's a problem?

Can I be open to the possibility that this sensation isn't an indication of a problem in my physiology but is, instead, my body speaking to me about some unfelt emotions?

The voice(s) in your head aren't bad or wrong. They're part of you. They're allowed to be there; they just can't be allowed to take over. That's your Highest Self's job.

You cannot reject them or get rid of them, as much as you might want to.

You are not a victim to the voice(s) in your head. You also are not a victim of health anxiety or of your own body. You may not have had awareness of the voice(s) before now, and that's ok.

# **SOMATIC TRACKING TO FEEL WITHOUT FEAR**

## **With health anxiety, the voice(s) is always telling a story of FEAR.**

- > fear of death
- > fear of suffering
- > fear of loss of quality of life or ability
- > fear that the condition is incurable
- > fear of aging
- > fear of the "healing journey"
- > fear of being a burden to others
- > fear of being alone in your condition
- > fear of pain
- > fear of mystery illnesses

## **Somatic Tracking for health anxiety is:**

>> feeling the actual sensation/symptom with complete presence & non-reactivity

AND

>> feeling the FEAR because the voice in the head creates stories and makes meaning out of the sensations/symptoms

# SOMATIC TRACKING

shared by Alan Gordon in *The Way Out*

We are "paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally". (Jon Kabat-Zinn)

The goal is to be present with sensation without fear. That may be hard if you've lived in fear of sensation for a long time or if you have big stories attached to sensation.

Then we send messages of safety to the brain and body.



# SOMATIC TRACKING

shared by Alan Gordon in *The Way Out*

Sending messages of safety such as:

"It is safe to feel the sensations of my body."

"My body is not against me."

"This is a completely safe sensation."

is called "safety reappraisal" and has been studied and proven to significantly decrease fear.

# **1. Notice the sensation and then explore it curiously.**

It helps if you'll close your eyes so you're able to go completely inward to feel. Get comfortable. Lie or sit down if that helps. Bring your attention to the sensation, whatever it is.

How would you describe the sensation? Is it hot or cold? Tingly? Pulsing? Throbbing? Painful? Tense? Does it have a color? Is it moving or still? Get as familiar with this sensation as you can.

## **2. Place your hand on this area of your body if you can.**

This is not part of how Alan Gordon teaches Somatic Tracking, but I have added it to the process because I've seen how powerful holding ourselves and our pain can be.

Continue to be aware and mindful of the sensation you're noticing, feeling, and holding.

### **3. Send messages of safety to your brain and body.**

"It is safe to feel the sensations of my body."

"My body is not against me. My body is just communicating to me."

"This is a safe sensation even if it doesn't feel safe."

"My nervous system is telling me something. I don't have to fix anything. I only need to listen."

## **4. Continue noticing the sensation.**

What happens to it as you notice it? Does it shift or change? Does it intensify or subside? Is it moving to a totally different part of your body? Is the color different? Is the sensation different?

Whatever happens to the sensation is ok. Let it do its thing; all you have to do is notice.

You can do this for a few seconds or a few minutes. You can do Somatic Tracking once a day or multiple times a day — use your sovereignty and agency to choose.

If you notice a lot of resistance to Somatic Tracking, it's likely that doing it more often in the beginning can widen your window of tolerance (more on this later!) to this exercise.

## **DON'T WATCH SENSATION LIKE A HAWK.**

Alan Gordon says, "When I first began leading patients in ST exercises, I noticed a common theme. While paying attention to their pain, many of them looked at it with intensity and a laser focus. They watched it like a hawk. And nothing about a hawk's burning gaze says safety" (pg. 72).

"But there's another way to pay attention. A less intense way. Like when you're enjoying a colorful sunset or lying in a field watching the clouds drift by overhead. You're still observing, but with a sense of effortlessness and curiosity. That's the kind of lightness we want to bring to Somatic Tracking" (*The Way Out*, p. 72).



**IMPORTANT: We do Somatic Tracking to notice and feel curiously. That's it.**

**Somatic Tracking is not meant to get rid of or fix sensation or pain.**

**WHAT IF YOU COULD BE MORE  
PLEASURE-FOCUSED?**

# SYMPTOM-FOCUSED SOCIETY

- >> rate pain/symptoms on a 1-10 scale
- >> log or journal about symptoms + possible triggers such as foods, environment, etc.
- >> pharmaceutical ads to fix symptoms
- >> focus on symptoms for seeking out natural practitioners
- >> supplements to relieve or fix symptoms
- >> commiserating with others about symptoms
- >> wanting validation and/or diagnosis for symptoms
- >> medications to suppress symptoms

**No, seriously...**

**What if we were as pleasure-focused  
as we are symptom-focused?**

**What if, instead of keeping a log and  
rating symptoms from 1-10, we kept a  
log of all the ways we sought out  
pleasure and rated how that felt?**

## **OF COURSE we dissociate from our bodies!**

Most of us only know a painful relationship with our bodies.

Our brains and nervous systems aren't dumb. Dissociation is protection. Except your brain and nervous system are protecting you from your own sensations because your own sensations are dysregulating and painful to feel.

Think of what would be different in your life if your relationship with your body wasn't only based in your pain (anxiety, grief, depression, etc. are all pain, too, in their own way)? What would your relationship with your body be then?

Do you think that a pleasure-based relationship with your body is as dysregulating or threatening to your brain and nervous system as all of your pain?

Maybe the idea of this is inconceivable right now...

That's ok.

*Could you be open to the possibility that your relationship with your body could be based in pleasure — or at least have room for pleasure alongside your pain?*

*But what if...*

*I have a diagnosed condition that's really painful?*

*I have chronic pain/fatigue?*

*I am anxious or depressed?*

*I'm disabled?*

*I have an autoimmune illness or other health condition?*



Even if...

you have a diagnosed condition that's really painful

you have chronic pain/fatigue

you're anxious or depressed

you're disabled

you have an autoimmune illness or other health  
condition

**You can still experience pleasure,  
yes?**

# You can still...

- >> enjoy how a massage or foot rub feels
- >> love the sensation of slowly rubbing lotion on your hands or other part of your body
- >> relish the scent of your coffee or hot tea as you slowly enjoy sipping it
- >> give yourself 5 extra warm minutes in the shower
  - >> enjoy the softness of a sheepskin rug
  - >> admire a sunrise or sunset
- >> give yourself the tingles when you brush your hair

**Even if you are in a lot of pain, physically or emotionally, you have the ability right now to connect with your body in pleasureable ways... if you choose to do so.**

Focusing on pain IS dysregulating to your nervous system. It elevates the stress hormone cortisol, which leads to inflammation, a weaker immune system (autoimmune), sleep issues, imbalances in insulin, estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone (hormone and blood sugar issues), and weight gain (slower metabolism).

Orienting to pleasure REDUCES dysregulation,  
which REDUCES cortisol.

The body can return to allostasis then homeostasis  
BECAUSE the nervous system isn't signalling to the  
adrenal glands to pump out cortisol and  
adrenaline. When stress hormones are lower,  
inflammation goes down, immune function  
increases, hormones balance, blood sugar  
balances, weight balances, sleep and digestion  
improve.

Let's see what it's like to drop our judgments,  
our eye-rolling that this is too simple to  
"work", our grumbling that we've "tried  
everything", and our conditioning to focus on  
pain.

Come on, go there with me. Let's get curious!

Pleasure allows us to re-connect with and inhabit our bodies. When we pair connecting with our bodies through pleasure instead of pain and suffering, we are re-patterning and showing our brains and nervous systems that being IN the body and FEELING are safe.



If your pattern with your body is constant stress response and nervous system activation because you're so worried about and focused on pain and symptoms, of course you don't want to be EMBODIED (in body).

THIS CAN BE RE-PATTERNED THROUGH PLEASURE.

If we're only ever focused on pain, then our relationships with our bodies is a painful one.

If we can start to invite in more pleasure, we can start to balance our relationships with our bodies so it's not only pain-focused.

Let's stop trying to go so deeply into our pain when we haven't actually connected with our bodies through pleasure.

When pleasure becomes safe, we can gradually introduce noticing and feeling pain and it can become safe, too.


If the pain is psychosomatic, it's possible that it may reduce or resolve on its own because it was simply there to get your attention and re-unite you with your body.

As you're noticing, it may be helpful  
to remind yourself of what  
overcoming health anxiety actually  
means.

It's NOT having a symptom-free  
existence.

## **You are overcoming health anxiety IF...**

- > you are changing, even slowly, the energy with which you approach your healthcare (from panic, urgent to grounded, calm)
  - > you are checking in less with your body
  - > you're confronting your resistance, your stories, your attachments
- > you're relating with your body with pleasure just as much if not more than with pain
- > you're aware of how you've imposed perfectionism on your body
  - > you're accepting whatever is present in your body without resistance
- > your window of tolerance for pain and discomfort is widening

A dark, textured circular shape, resembling a charcoal or chalk smudge, is centered on a solid blue background. The text is written in white, bold, sans-serif font within this circle.

**quick break  
then Q&A!**