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STRESS & ANXIETY GROUP

7 of 7: Breath: I Can't Stop Worrying

Take the power away from your worries.

People often wonder why being present or in the moment reduces stress and anxiety. The very simple explanation for this is that most of our stress and worry comes from thinking about what happened in the past or worrying about what might happen in the future. For example, we have all had a time when something happened, maybe something relatively minor like when someone was abrupt with us or we were abrupt with someone else. And, later we replay this situation over and over again in our minds until it takes on all sorts of different meanings. Each time we think of it, we get more and more upset.

The same thing happens when we project into the future all sorts of consequences from not making a deadline or making a mistake. We automatically assume the worst.

You are not alone. We all do this. Here is a four-step process on how to take the power away from those re-occurring destructive thoughts - helping you to reduce stress, worry, and anxiety.

1. Step One is to acknowledge these thoughts. Instead of letting them continue to run on replay in our heads, push pause on them. Now take a moment to bring them into focus by examining them with a sense of curiosity and distance. Sometimes writing them down helps you look at them objectively.
2. Step two. See if you can identify what underlying emotions are attached to these thoughts. Identifying the underlying emotions isn't always easy. These emotions might be driven by wanting control, security, approval, or wanting to run away due to fear. It could even be a combination of all of these. By pinning down the motivating drivers, you may be able to see why you're so attached to these thoughts.
3. Step three. Once you've acknowledged these thoughts and identified why they have such a hold on you, you can begin to accept them as they are. Try not to judge them, alter, analyze, or, feel guilty about thinking them. Simply accept them unconditionally. Opposing these thoughts simply energizes them more.
4. Step four is to forgive yourself for having these thoughts. If another person is involved in your reoccurring thoughts, you may also have to forgive the other person to release these unproductive thoughts. Just know that forgiving is not easy. Our mind takes pleasure from holding on to negativity and we enjoy the feeling of being right or being a victim of circumstances. Forgiveness is a process. Start small and gentle. It might be something as gentle as silently saying to yourself, "I forgive myself for whatever it is that resulted in me having these thoughts" or "I forgive the other person or persons for whatever they may have done to cause me this stress and anxiety. After all, we are all human.... we are all doing the very best we can."

The next time you feel one of these negative, reoccurring thoughts start to circulate in your head, mentally "push pause" and try this exercise. It may be just what you need to prevent you from hours...and maybe days of negative, unproductive thinking. Page 43