

TOLERATING UNCERTAINTY



Our human brains HATE change and the unknown! Knowing what to expect and how to solve problems is how we've stayed safe all these years. Uncertainty meant danger. When we aren't sure about something, our brain will do its best to fill in the blanks, even if it means guessing or assuming the worst. We're hardwired to overestimate threats and underestimate our ability to manage those threats, which is when anxiety kicks in, hoping to save the day. It's important to remember that feeling anxious is **NORMAL**. It's how you respond to the anxiety from uncertainty that determines how things will go.

ANXIETY ABOUT UNCERTAINTY SHOWS ITSELF AS...

- Getting stuck in cycles of, "What if...?"
- Seeking reassurance through obsessively thinking or asking others for advice
- Struggling with plans that aren't fully formed or changes to routine
- Fear of new experiences because you don't know what to expect
- Struggling with transitions between routine changes
- Dichotomous thinking or having very firm opinions about how things should be
- Over-preparing and not allowing others to help or support you
- Deferring to others to make decisions for you
- Impulsively making a decision to get it over with



SO NOW WHAT? PLOT TWIST!

- 1 Recognize Signs of Frustration**
Know your physical and cognitive cues that signal when you are starting to get frustrated. Frustration stops you from thinking clearly and creatively. Take 5-10 deep breaths to stop the downward spiral and allow your wiser mind to prevail.
- 2 Challenge Your Thinking**
Notice when a fear about your abilities occurs (e.g. "There's nothing I can do about this. I'm helpless."). Then push back on it by focusing on what is within your control ("I may not know how to do XXX but, for now at least, I can do YYY."). Seek out a friend, family member or mentor for support to help you maintain perspective and ground yourself in what is within your control and what to try and let go.
- 3 Celebrate Past Success**
The current situation may indeed be challenging. Fortunately for you, you have faced challenges before! Think back on a time when things were uncertain and you weren't sure it would work out. What strategies and skills did you use to overcome a past challenge?
- 4 Practice Acceptance**
Acknowledge that we may not have the control to fulfill our desired outcomes. We can allow reality to be true without fighting against it, which leads to exhaustion and frustration in addition to the pain of the problem itself. Use mindfulness to help you ground yourself each time the struggle to accept arises.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does anxiety manifest itself for you – physically, emotionally & mentally?
- What situations (people, environments, etc.) tend to provoke the most anxiety about uncertainty for you?
- What is a mantra or phrase that you could say to yourself for comfort in the midst of uncertainty?