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Quieting the Anxious, Unquiet Mind A New Tip for Interrupting the Most Anxious Turmoil©

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On Assertive Interruption

Every method I encountered for interrupting anxious states required a self-observing, internal place within to “stand” so to speak, and from which to observe one’s mental experience. That means getting outside of the anxiety.

But what if the amount of anxious thinking – while not a panic level – floods the mind? I looked at a almost two dozen other methods such as grounding and self-hypnosis.

With some experimentation, I came upon this exercise to bring the level of ruminative or anxious thinking and emotional stimulation down to a manageable level. At that point, then many of the 20 other tips in my other articles on the Unquiet Mind have a good chance of working.

I labeled this method assertive interruption. I experimented with interrupting a client’s panic attack. I used it to clear troubling dreams that awakened the dreamer. Here is the method.

1. Cross the arms. Tap in an alternating pattern and firmly high on the chest or the front of the shoulders. Tap as hard as necessary to begin interruption.
2. Count the pairs of taps with a strong inner voice. E.g., with a fist, tap the left shoulder, “One,” tap the right, then the left, “Two,” then the right, and so on. I found that speaking the count aloud was distracting compared to a strong inner voice.
3. Keep tapping and start breathing in an exaggerated way, even breathing noisily, with big breaths, big expansion of the chest and abdomen.

4. Start to focus the mind on breaths. Keep counting firm taps until the awareness of breathing equals or exceeds the strength of the thoughts. Then, keep tapping, but more lightly, and focus on counting breaths instead of taps.

5. As the thoughts focus more and more on the counting, the tapping, and the breaths, which don't need to be so big, and then begin to slow them down and tap more gently and slowly. It may take from 45 seconds to 5 minutes before starting to slow the pace.

6. Eventually, slow the *exhalations*, slowing them down as much as possible, while counting the seconds, to exhaling for 4 seconds, then to 8 seconds, then 10, even 12. So, you switched the counting from number of breaths to roughly, approximately the number of seconds.

In sum, counting taps, then counting breaths, then counting the time of exhalations.

6. Mentally, slowly say, "I'm relaxing." "I... a....m..... re.....la.....x....ing." Connect your mind with the slowing state. If distractions pop up, as they tend to do, bring your mind back to the stimuli of the tapping, the counting of the seconds elapsing when you exhale, and the affirmation, "I'm relaxing." "I... a....m..... re.....la.....x....ing."

7. Mentally, say, "I starting to be at ease. I am ease." Concentrate on that feeling. Think,

*Time will pass.

*Moods will pass like clouds blowing away.

*I will be myself again soon.

*I coming back to feeling normal.

*I am relaxing.

*I am at ease.

8. Connect with your body beyond your breathing. Stop tapping and put your hands in your lap or on the arms of a chair. If in bed, put them to your sides. Pay attention to them and think very slowly, "My arms are heavy. My arms are heavy. My arms are heavy." Connect to the feeling in your arms. Then, "I am at ease." Repeat this until you sense the heaviness or feel your pulse in your resting arms.

9. At this point, you should be ready for one of the other techniques for quieting the unquiet mind, such as grounding, analysis of what stimulated the anxiety, etc. These steps should calm the mind sufficiently to move on to some of the other methods of shifting away from anxious thoughts.

The focus on breathe and the tapping are grounding methods.

We do not try to fight the thoughts. Let them be there while focusing on the tapping, the

counting, and breathing. Judging your thoughts as bad or troublesome has the ironic effect of reinforcing them!

So, rather than relying solely on a quieting or meditative method, interrupting strong anxious rumination requires an approach that disrupts the cycle of anxiety.

Internally, anxious rumination is primarily learned behavior. While a small percentage of people have higher reactivity than others, that only creates a tendency towards anxiety. Anxiety develops when our brains associate some imagined future event with threat or fear. When we think back, we realize how rarely these worrisome, predicted outcomes actually occur. It's as if we devote most of our time to reacting to something that happens only a few percent of the time. We would prefer to switch it so we respond to what happens most of the time and just be prepared to those times the outcome may be more troubling.

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