

Fighting Worry and Anxiety Fuels It

EXERCISE

Blue Monkeys

Think about blue monkeys. Now stop thinking about blue monkeys. Put the book down for about 30 seconds.

What have you been thinking about? If you are like most people, you thought about blue monkeys. In the space below, write down what you've been worried about.

Now, stop worrying about that. Put it out of your mind. Again, put down the book for about 30 seconds.

If you're like most people, you are now worrying about the topic I asked you to put out of your mind and the intensity of your thoughts is greater than with the monkeys. Daniel Wegner (1989) showed people a picture of a white bear and told half of them not to think about the white bear. People told not to think about the bear were much more likely to be thinking about the bear 10 minutes later. After the white bear research, Wegner did a similar experiment with worries. When people were told not to worry about something they had been worrying about, of course, they worried about it more than those who were simply asked what they worried about. Furthermore, the effect with the worry was much greater than with the neutral white bear. And what is it that others tell us when we're worried? What is it that we tell ourselves when we are worried? "Don't think about it," or "Put it out of your mind."

If trying to put it out of your mind doesn't work, what does? Fortunately, there are several coping strategies that are helpful. For example, the opposite of trying to put it out of your mind is helpful. This means accepting the worry and accepting the physical sensation of anxiety, sadness, and anger. However, keep in mind that some emotion is healthy, such as crying when your pet dies or feeling anxious when there is actual threat. When emotions are healthy, it's best to do the same thing—accept them—but expect that when they are healthy, you'll continue to feel them (for more on healthy emotion, see Chapter 11). Other things to do instead of fighting anxiety include using process words, moving toward relaxation rather than fighting anxiety, problem-solving, cognitive therapy, and postponing worry. All of these concepts will be introduced in later chapters of this book.

There are a number of audio tracks for use with this book. There are two groups of tracks. One group is free and the other group is optional and can be purchased for a small fee (\$4.99). The book contains scripts if you prefer to use them in lieu of the free recordings. Most of the recordings that are available for purchase also have scripts. Some of the scripts do not match the recordings but are similar. The first script is found in the next chapter.

If you wish to use the scripts as a template to make your own recordings, see Chapter 12 of the Therapists' Guide, Relaxation & Making Recordings, for information on how to do this. **The link for both sets of recordings is AnxietyStLouisPsychologist.com/free.**