

Flipping the Switch on Anxiety

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Disclaimer

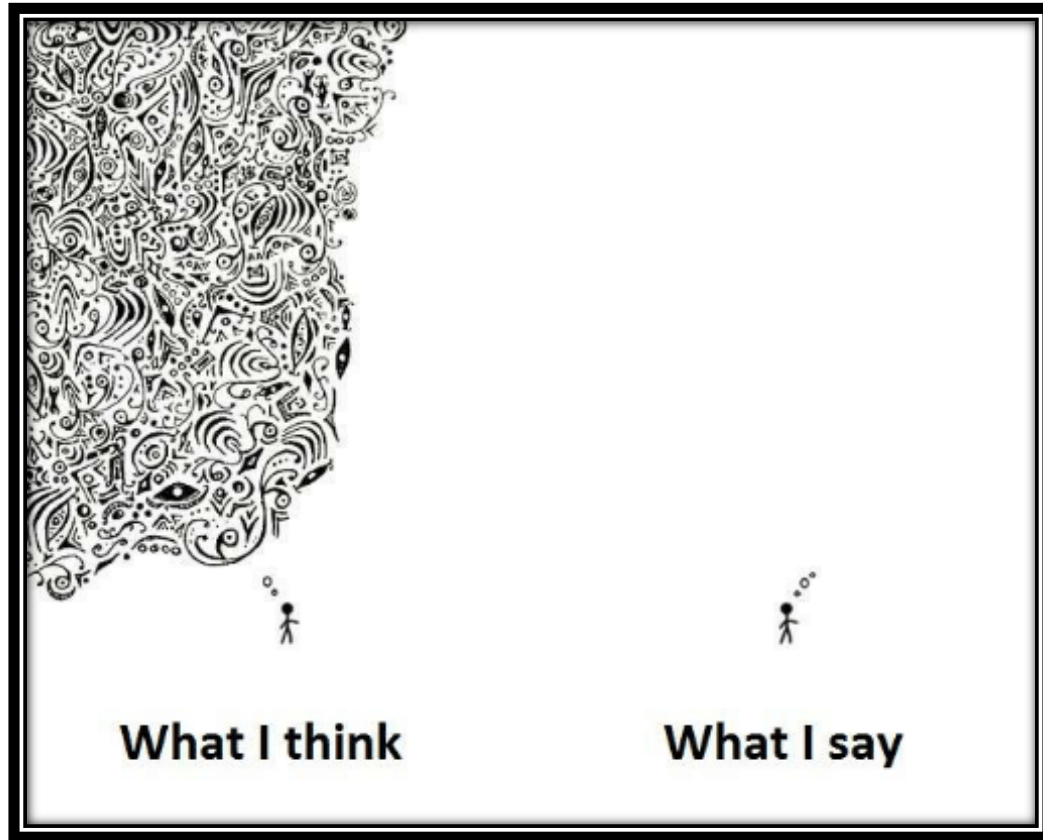
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Reality of Anxiety

- “Privileged youth are among the most emotionally distressed young people in America. These kids are incredibly anxious and perfectionistic.”
 - SuniyaLuthar, professor of psychology at Arizona State University
- “Anxiety is easy to dismiss or overlook, partially because everyone has it to some degree.”
 - Phillip Kendall, director of Child and Adolescent Anxiety Disorders Clinic at Temple University

Reality of Anxiety



What I think

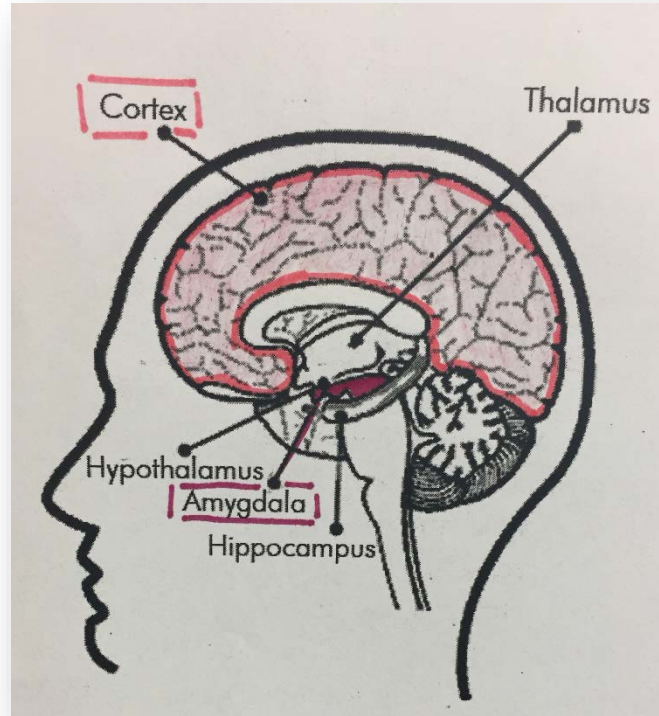
What I say



Fear vs. Anxiety

- Fear – typically associated with a clear, present, and identifiable threat
- Anxiety – occurs in the absence of immediate peril

Anatomy of the Brain





types of Anxiety

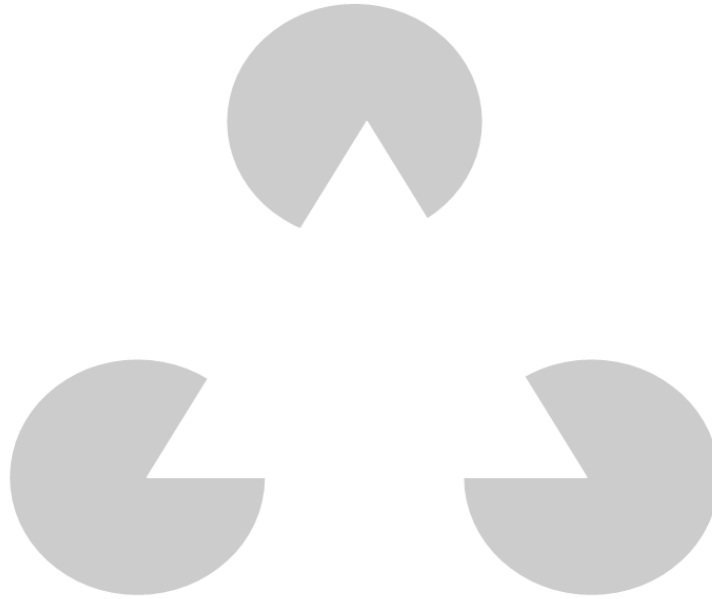
- Amygdala based -
 - physical experience of anxiety
- Cortex based –
 - negative anticipation (worry) and interpretations of situations
- Both



Understanding the Cortex

- The cortex constantly tries to make sense of the world
 - Our perceptions are not faithful renderings of what is going on around us

Understanding the Cortex





Cortex Produces Anxiety Through

- Pessimistic Tendencies
- Worry
- Holding on to thoughts or behaviors
- Perfectionism
- Seeing minor problems as huge disasters
- Guilt and shame
- Assuming that what we think is actually reality



Summary of Cortex Based Anxiety

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| P | C | I have difficulty getting myself to stop thinking about things that make me anxious. |
| | | I often think about situations from the past and consider ways they could have gone better. |
| | | I feel much better when I have a solution for a possible difficulty, just in case the situation arises. |
| | | I think I take people's comments too personally. |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| P | C | I know I tend to dwell on difficulties, but it's just because I'm trying to find explanation for them. |
| | | I have trouble accepting the fact that I make mistakes, and I beat myself up when I do. |
| | | When I have a setback, I find it overwhelming and feel like giving up. |
| | | I get stuck on a certain idea, doubt, or thought and can't get past it. |



Understanding the Amygdala

- Responsible for emotions, survival instincts and memory
- Your amygdala receives information **BEFORE** your cortex
- The part that causes you to react before you can even think about what is happening
- Fight, Flight or Freeze



Summary of Amygdala Based Anxiety

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| P | C | When I visit others, I frequently want to go home, even though things are going fine. |
| | | I have sudden rushes of anxiety that seem to come from out of nowhere. |
| | | I usually can't identify the triggers of my anxiety. |
| | | I strike out and later realize that my response was too strong. |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| P | C | When I get nervous, sometimes I can't concentrate very well. |
| | | During a test, I often can't remember what I've learned, even when I'm prepared. |
| | | Little things, like an insect or dirty dishes can send me into a complete panic. |
| | | When I'm being yelled at, I'm unable to come up with a response. |

Sleep and Anxiety

- Hours of Sleep
 - Elementary kids need 10 to 11 hours
 - Teenagers need 9 ¼ hours
 - Adults need 7 to 9 hours

Anxiety

Lack of Sleep





Warnings!!

- Do not remove your child from the situation when their fear is still high
 - Fleeing teaches your brain that is the coping mechanism it should use
 - This will increase your child's anxiety in the future



Reminders

- Not all fear is bad
 - Fear of snakes can save your life
- Not all anxiety has to be cured
 - If it doesn't affect your life – don't focus on it
- Stay in control of your behavior - don't let anxiety take control of you
 - We have to model this for our children



TYPES OF CORTEX INTERVENTION



Changing Negative Thoughts to Positive Thoughts

- Gratitude list
- Gratitude journal
- Only use positive words
- Push out all feelings that aren't positive
- Apps – Happify, Calm, Pozify, Positive Thinking– The Key to Happiness



types of Cortex Interventions

- Cognitive defusion: being aware of your thoughts without getting caught up in them
 - Saying “I need to be careful of this thought. I have no reason to believe it and it might make me feel anxious.”



types of Cortex Interventions

- Worry Box or Journal
 - Each time they feel worry have them write it down and put it in the box
 - Tell them that once they put it in the jar and close it the thought is locked away and won't bother them any more
 - Periodically go through the box/journal with them
 - This will help you identify their worry thoughts



types of Cortex Interventions

- Coping thoughts – build this with your child

| Anxiety – Igniting Thought | Coping Thoughts |
|---|---|
| <i>It's no use trying. Things will never work out for me.</i> | <i>I'm going to try, because then there's at least a chance that I'll accomplish something.</i> |
| <i>Something's going to go wrong. I can feel it.</i> | <i>I don't know what's going to happen. These kinds of feelings have been wrong before.</i> |
| <i>I need to focus on this thought, doubt or concern.</i> | <i>You have spent too much time on this and you need to move on.</i> |
| <i>I must be the best at all I do.</i> | <i>No one is perfect. I'm human and expect I'll make mistakes.</i> |



types of Cortex Interventions

- Coping thoughts

| Anxiety – Igniting Thought | Coping Thoughts |
|---|--|
| <i>Everyone should like me.</i> | <i>No one is liked by everyone. There will be people who don't like me.</i> |
| <i>I can't stand this!</i> | <i>This isn't the end of the world. I will survive.</i> |
| <i>I can't stop worrying about this.</i> | <i>Worrying never fixes anything. It will only upset me.</i> |
| <i>I don't want to disappoint other people.</i> | <i>Trying to please everyone is impossible and stresses me out.</i> |
| <i>I can't handle this situation</i> | <i>I'm a strong person. Even though I don't like this situation, I can get through it.</i> |



types of Cortex Interventions

- Replacing thoughts (Because you can't erase them)
 - Tell yourself to ***STOP***
 - Then **REPLACE** your thought
 - Write the replacement thought on an index card



types of Cortex Interventions

- Changing the Anxiety Channel
 - Distraction
 - Play is one of the best distractions
 - What you give your attention to creates your brain circuitry.
 - The circuitry you use the most is what is the strongest
 - You don't just reduce your anxiety for a moment, but you rewire your brain



types of Cortex Interventions

- Replace worry with planning
 - The longer you think about an event the longer your emotional reaction will be
 - List worries and make a plan for each
 - After you make a plan – MOVE ON

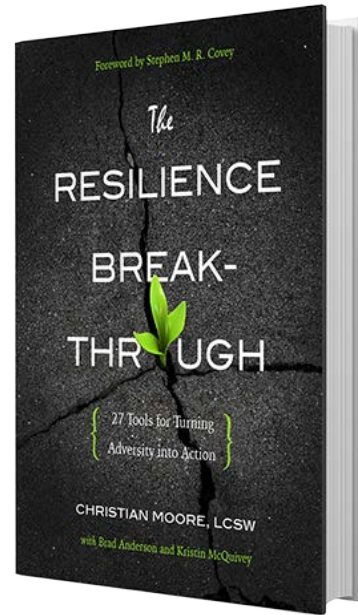


types of Cortex Interventions

- Mindfulness—
 - “Putting a gap between perceiving a thought and acting on a thought. In that gap is where change happens. That’s when you are in the driver’s seat”- Jewel
 - Mindfulness for Teen Anxiety: A Workbook for Overcoming Anxiety at Home, at School, and Everywhere Else (An Instant Help Book for Teens)
 - <http://mindfulnessforteens.com/resources/>
 - <http://youth.anxietybc.com/mindfulness-exercises>
- Yoga
 - <http://www.myhealthylivingcoach.com/yoga-for-teens-to-reduce-anxiety/>

types of Cortex Interventions

- The Resilience Breakthrough





TYPES OF AMYGDALA INTERVENTION



types of Amygdala Interventions

- Exposure
 - Gradual exposure to situations or objects that cause anxiety
 - Anxiety will rise to an uncomfortable level, but then subside
 - Let anxiety run its course without escaping – the amygdala will begin to pair triggers with safety

types of Amygdala Interventions

- [Calm Down and Release the Amygdala](#)
 - YouTube Video



types of Amygdala Interventions

Grounding Exercise

Name 3 things you...



see



smell



hear



feel

Breathe in & out slowly 3x

www.SocialWork.Career



types of Amygdala Interventions

- Exercise
 - Can be more powerful than medication
 - Use the anxiety to fuel your workout, walk or run
 - Aerobic exercise is the most helpful
 - Anxiety reduction is experienced after only 20 minutes of exercise
 - Results = decreased muscle tension for 1 ½ hours and reduced anxiety for 4 to 6 hours



types of Amygdala Interventions

- Ways to increase a good night's sleep
 - Before you go to bed, practice a routine set of relaxing rituals
 - Eliminate light stimulation for at least an hour before bed
 - Exercise during the day
 - Establish a consistent bedtime and waking time
 - Avoid napping (for older children)

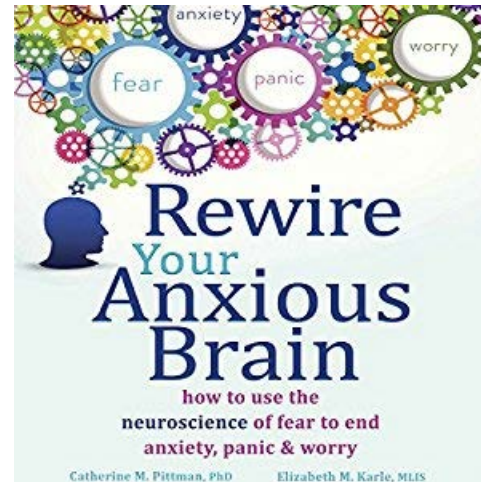


types of Amygdala Interventions

- More ways to increase a good night's sleep
 - If worries haunt you at bedtime, schedule a worry time during the day (worry jar can also help)
 - Avoid caffeine in the late afternoon and evening
 - Use relaxing breathing techniques to prepare for sleep
 - If you can't fall asleep after thirty minutes in bed, get up and do something relaxing

References

- Pittman, C. M., & Karle, E. M. (2015). *Rewire your anxious brain: how to use the neuroscience of fear to end anxiety, panic & worry*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.





Appendix



Cortex based anxiety



Left Hemisphere of the Cortex

| P | C | |
|---|---|--|
| | | I rehearse potential problem situations in my mind, considering various ways things could go wrong and how I'll react. |
| | | I often think about situations from the past and consider ways they could have gone better. |
| | | I tend to get stuck in the process of considering different ways I could talk to someone about concerns or other topics. |
| | | Sometimes I just can't turn off a stream of negative thinking, and it often prevents me from sleeping. |

| P | C | |
|---|---|---|
| | | I find it comforting to consider a problem from a number of different perspectives. |
| | | I feel much better when I have a solution for a possible difficulty, just in case the situation arises. |
| | | I know I tend to dwell on difficulties, but it's just because I'm trying to find explanation for them. |
| | | I have difficulty getting myself to stop thinking about things that make me anxious. |

If you checked several on this list your cortex is producing anxiety that shows up as a tendency to worry about what will happen and search repetitively for solutions. People tend to ruminate or focus intensely on a situation or feel the need to discuss a situation repeatedly.



Right Hemisphere of the Cortex

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| P | C | I picture potential problem situations in my mind, imagining various ways things could go wrong and how others will react. |
| | | I'm very attuned to the tone of people's voices. |
| | | I can almost always imagine several scenarios that illustrate how a situation could turn out badly for me. |
| | | I think I take people's comments too personally. |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| P | C | I often imagine ways that I might embarrass myself. |
| | | I sometimes see images of terrible events occurring. |
| | | I rely on my intuition to know what others are feeling and thinking. |
| | | I'm watchful of people's body language and pick up on subtle cues. |

If you checked several on this list your cortex has a tendency imagine events that aren't actually occurring. This may cause to you jump to conclusions.



Cortex based Anxiety from Interpretations

| P | C | |
|---|---|---|
| | | I have a tendency to expect the worst. |
| | | I think I take people's comments too personally. |
| | | I have trouble accepting the fact that I make mistakes, and I beat myself up when I do. |
| | | I have a hard time saying no because I don't like to disappoint people. |

| P | C | |
|---|---|--|
| | | When I have a setback, I find it overwhelming and feel like giving up. |
| | | When I have trouble finding something, I worry that I'll never find it. |
| | | I tend to focus on any flaws in my appearance. |
| | | When someone makes a suggestion, I can't help but consider it a criticism. |

If you checked several on this list your cortex has a tendency to turn neutral situations into sources of anxiety. The anxiety is being produced not by the situation but by the way the cortex is interpreting the situation.



Cortex Based Anxiety from Anticipation

| P | C | |
|---|---|---|
| | | If I know a potential conflict is looming, I spend a lot of time considering it. |
| | | I think about things that people might say that would upset me. |
| | | I can almost always think of several ways that a situation could turn out badly for me. |
| | | When I know that something might go wrong, it's constantly on my mind. |

| P | C | |
|---|---|---|
| | | I can be worried sick about something months before it occurs. |
| | | If I'm going to have to perform or speak in front of a group, I can't stop thinking about it. |
| | | If there's a potential for danger or illness, I feel like I need to consider it. |
| | | I often waste time thinking of solutions for problems that never occur. |

If you checked several on this list your cortex has a tendency to create anxiety based on the anticipation of events that may never occur. So instead of experiencing the event just once you experience it repeatedly before it occurs.




Cortex Based Anxiety from Obsessions

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| P | C | I devote a great deal of thought to keeping things in order or doing tasks correctly. |
| | | I'm preoccupied with checking or arranging things until I believe they're right. |
| | | I'm haunted by certain doubts that I can't escape. |
| | | I have concerns about contamination and germs. |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| P | C | I have some thoughts that I find unacceptable. |
| | | I worry about acting on urges that come into my mind. |
| | | I get stuck on a certain idea, doubt, or thought and can't get past it. |
| | | I have routines that I need to complete in order for things to feel right. |

If you checked several on this list your cortex has a tendency to create anxiety based on thoughts or activities that keep you stuck in patterns that maintain your anxiety in the long run and rob you of precious time.

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**Cortex based
tendencies that
can cause anxiety**



Pessimistic Tendencies

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| P | C | When I have an upcoming presentation or examination, I worry about it quite a bit and fear I won't do well. |
| | | I generally expect that if something can go wrong, it will. |
| | | I'm often convinced that my anxiety will never end. |
| | | When I hear that something unexpected has happened to someone, I typically imagine it's something negative. |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| P | C | I frequently prepare myself for negative events that I fear will occur but seldom or never do. |
| | | If it weren't for bad luck, I wouldn't have any luck at all. |
| | | Some people want to improve their lives, but that seems pretty hopeless to me. |
| | | Most people will let you down, so it's best to not expect too much. |

Your general perspective can have a strong impact on how your cortex interprets situations. Pessimistic thinking can increase anxiety and can make you less willing to try to change your anxiety because you don't expect success.



Worry Tendencies

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| P | C | I'm good at imagining all kinds of things that could go wrong in specific situations. |
| | | I sometimes worry that my symptoms are the result of some medical illness that hasn't been diagnosed yet. |
| | | I know I tend to worry about trivial things. |
| | | When I'm busy at work or with other activities, I don't have as much anxiety. |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| P | C | Even when things are going well, I seem to think about what could go wrong. |
| | | I sometimes feel that if I don't worry about specific situations, something will surely go wrong. |
| | | If there's even a small possibility that something negative could happen, I tend to dwell on that possibility. |
| | | I have trouble falling asleep because of the things I worry about. |

Worry is a source of anxiety for many people.



Obsession or Compulsion Tendencies

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| P | C | I need to repeatedly check on things in order to reduce my anxiety, either by checking with people or inspecting something, like my stove. |
| | | I can spend a long time rehashing certain events in my mind. |
| | | When I make some kind of mistake or forget to do something, it takes me a long time to come to terms with it. |
| | | I tend to get very upset if I can't keep certain objects in order or in good condition. |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| P | C | If a friend or relative disappoints me, it can take months for me to get over being upset and get back on good terms with that person. |
| | | I can become preoccupied with arranging, counting, or evening up things. |
| | | In many situations I just can't stop thinking about the risk of contamination, germs, chemicals, or illness. |
| | | Unpleasant thoughts or images frequently come to my mind, and I can't get them out. |

Compulsions may offer temporary relief for anxiety, but the need to perform them will arise again and again, often escalating the cycle of anxiety.



Perfectionistic Tendencies

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| P | C | I have high standards for myself and usually hold myself to them. |
| | | I usually have a right way to do something and find it difficult to vary from that approach. |
| | | People consider me extremely conscientious and careful as a worker. |
| | | When I'm wrong, I'm very embarrassed and ashamed. |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| P | C | When others are watching me, I'm concerned that I'll humiliate myself. |
| | | I almost never perform at a level that I'm satisfied with. |
| | | I have a hard time letting go of mistakes I make. |
| | | I feel I have to be hard on myself or I won't be good enough. |

If you checked many of these statements, you may have difficulties with perfectionism.



Tendency to Catastrophize

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| P | C | I often imagine the worst when I'm thinking about how a situation might turn out. |
| | | I can make a mountain out of a mole hill |
| | | People would think I'm going crazy if they knew the awful thoughts that go through my mind. |
| | | I often feel as if I can't handle one more thing going wrong. |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| P | C | When something doesn't turn out the way that I want it to, I find it difficult to cope. |
| | | I overreact to problems that others wouldn't consider much of a concern. |
| | | Even a small setback, like being stopped by a traffic light, can infuriate me. |
| | | Sometimes when begins as a small doubt in my mind becomes an overwhelming negative thought as I dwell on it. |

If you checked many of these statements, you may have a tendency to catastrophize.



Guilt and shame

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| P | C | I frequently feel that I'm not measuring up to what I expect of myself. |
| | | I become very concerned when I contemplate not doing something that I feel I should do. |
| | | I frequently worry about disappointing people and have trouble saying no. |
| | | If a friend is upset when I don't come to an event, I may feel guilt for days. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| P | C | It feels awful to know I've let someone down. |
| | | It's easy for others to guilttrip me into doing what they want. |
| | | It's very hard for me to admit my mistakes and discuss them with others. |
| | | Once a person criticizes me, I tend to avoid spending much time around that person. |

If you checked many of these statements, guilt, shame or both are probably contributing to your anxiety.

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Amygdala based anxiety



Amygdala Based Unexplained Anxiety

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| P | C | Sometimes my heart pounds for no reason. |
| | | When I visit others, I frequently want to go home, even though things are going fine. |
| | | I often don't feel in control of my emotional reactions. |
| | | I can't explain why I react the way I do in many situations. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| P | C | I have sudden rushes of anxiety that seem to come from out of nowhere. |
| | | I just don't feel comfortable going to certain places, but I don't have a good reason for feeling that way. |
| | | I frequently feel panicky with no warning. |
| | | I usually can't identify the triggers of my anxiety. |

If you checked several on this list your amygdala is reacting to a memory, however, most often we have no clue what it's reacting to or why.



Amygdala Based Rapid Physiological Responses

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| P | C | I find that my heart is racing even when there's no obvious reason. |
| | | I can go from feeling calm to being in a complete panic in a matter of seconds. |
| | | I suddenly can't get my breathing rhythm to feel right. |
| | | Sometimes I feel dizzy or as though I might faint, and these feelings arise quickly. |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| P | C | My stomach lurches and I feel nauseous right away. |
| | | I become aware of my heart because I have pain or discomfort in my chest. |
| | | I start sweating without exerting myself. |
| | | I have no idea what comes over me. I just start trembling without warning. |

If you checked several on this list your amygdala is reacting to what you may assume is an actual threat, but it is reacting to a trigger that isn't an accurate indicator of danger.



Amygdala Based Unplanned Aggressive Feelings or Behavior

| | | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|---|---|
| P | C | I explode unexpectedly in certain situations. | P | C | I feel that I'm capable of hurting someone when I'm under stress. |
| | | I often need to do something physical to express my frustrations | | | I don't want to lash out at people, but I can't help it. |
| | | I strikeout and later realize that my response was too strong. | | | Family members and friends know to be cautious around me. |
| | | I snap at others with little warning. | | | When I've been upset, I've broken or thrown objects. |

If you checked several on this list your amygdala is causing anxious aggression.



Amygdala Based Inability to Think Clearly

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| P | C | When I'm under pressure, my mind goes blank and I can't think. |
| | | I know that when I'm anxious, I'm unable to focus on what I need to do. |
| | | When I get nervous, sometimes I can't concentrate very well. |
| | | When I'm being yelled at, I'm unable to come up with a response. |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| P | C | When I feel panicky, it's often difficult for me to focus on what I need to do. |
| | | Even when I try to calm down, it's hard for me to distract myself from how my body is feeling. |
| | | When I'm scared, sometimes I draw a total blank about what I should do next. |
| | | During a test, I often can't remember what I've learned, even when I'm prepared. |

If you checked several on this list your amygdala is overriding your attentional control of the cortex and it is taking charge. You'll feel unable to control your thoughts.



Amygdala Based Extreme Responses

| | | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|---|--|
| P | C | A times, my anxiety is so strong that I'm afraid I'm going crazy. | P | C | At times, I've wondered whether I'm having a heart attack or stroke. |
| | | I get paralyzed by the level of anxiety I experience. | | | Sometimes I just lose my temper and go into a rage. |
| | | Other people have told me they think I overreact. | | | Little things, like an insect or dirty dishes can send me into a complete panic. |
| | | When something is out of place or disorganized, I can't tolerate it. | | | Sometimes things around me don't seem real, and I fear I'm losing my mind. |

If you checked several on this list your amygdala is probably behind this pattern of extreme responding. It may be taking over and acting to protect you from a danger that it perceives, but which you'd recognize, in a calmer moment, as not requiring such a strong response.