

DEBBIE

I am priceless, I am energising, I am loving, I am a woman, I am kind, I am compassionate, I am beautiful inside and out, I am helpful, I am wonderful, I am a free spirit, I am funny, I am giggly, I am a breath of fresh air!

This is the list of positive affirmations that I stuck to my wardrobe so that I could see it when I woke up.

Anxiety, what a debilitating condition to have. I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy. I have had numerous counselling sessions to get to the root of this problem. It is so hard to describe what an anxious feeling is. What is it? A bad bad feeling. My counsellor asked me to describe these bad bad feelings. I don't feel loved, I am not good enough, I need approval, I feel rejected, I feel afraid my mother might go away and leave me. Please don't leave me alone. I am terrified. If I am left alone I will die.

At 24 I went through a spell of writing down whole conversations that I had with people, just in case I had upset them. Then I could keep on checking that I hadn't caused anyone any pain.

I have an obsessional need to write in my diary. Now I write all the nice things that have happened to me, or that have been said to me so that I can feel reassured and safe.

I know we should not put blame on our parents but I believe that my condition has evolved by my being made to feel responsible for my mother's emotional well being. If she was happy and content, then I was too. If she was upset in any way, I felt that I was to blame.

It has taken me years of hard work and counselling, and lots of self help books (for example *Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway*, by Susan Jeffers) to realise that I am actually not responsible for the feelings of the entire universe. For years I have tried to make everyone like me! What an impossible task!

Approval has figured strongly in my make up. Requiring approval from people in order to feel safe. I now know that I have to approve of and love myself unconditionally. I am still working on it. There is a brilliant quote by actor Ted Danson, who on reaching his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday said

"I am now the person I always pretended to be!"

Through all my years of counselling, I have learnt that you can actually reprogramme your subconscious to undo the negative patterns. For example, the thought 'I am a bad, awful person', which gives you a horrible anxious feeling can be changed to 'I am a worthwhile, loving human being', which makes you feel warm and safe. There is a lot of hard work involved, but no pain no gain! Eventually, your subconscious will re wire and the knowledge that you are good enough, will seep through.

I have also been taught something called 'anchoring' which I find useful. It takes practice, but it works. In a relaxed state (which I know is hard to begin with), recall an experience which promotes a feeling of well being. This feeling is then anchored by a physical action, for example, a hand around the wrist, or pressing your thumb and forefinger together. When the nasty anxious feelings come, perform the physical anchoring gesture and the calm sensation will trigger as a result. Talk to a counsellor about learning how to do this. It really is worthwhile!

Often, when trying to resist a compulsive action, I experience panic attacks. Realising what it actually happening to me during a panic attack has helped a great deal. When stress occurs (such as the fear of contamination or being responsible for causing harm) the body over compensates by responding in a physical way, and produces too much adrenalin. The adrenalin is the response your body believes it needs, to help you to physically run away from the threat. The mind cannot tell the difference between an actual danger, or an imagined danger. The adrenaline has to go somewhere so it manifests in the 'fight or flight' scenario. This results in the physical sensations we know so well. Pounding heart, sweating, tension etc.

Understanding that you are actually in no physical danger is important. You are not having a heart attack and you are not about to die! This is a normal bodily reaction to stress. By going ahead and resisting the compulsion over and over again, the body learns that there is no real threat, and that nothing bad happens as a result.

I hope my experiences can help someone. 'No Panic' has helped me a great deal with it's newsletter and the thought that there is a helpline if needed.

It is reassuring to know that we are not alone in these states of anxiety. Perhaps they make us better, compassionate and more caring people. Sometimes trying to look upon this condition as a gift rather than a curse, can help us to see things in a new light.