

# Anxiety Triggers

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Having explored the quick fixes for managing anxiety, we now understand that true transformation and reclaiming our sense of peace require more than just simple techniques. Anxiety is a pervasive and debilitating experience that can leave us feeling helpless, overwhelmed, and alone. Many of us struggle with anxiety, asking ourselves “What is wrong with me?” or “How can I control these overpowering emotions?” If this resonates with you, know that you are not alone. As George Addair once said, “Everything you’ve ever wanted is sitting on the other side of fear.” But how do we conquer this fear and regain our sense of peace and well-being?

This chapter explores the countless causes that lead to anxiety, which may surprise you as they can stem from almost anything. Anxiety can manifest in multiple ways, whether a single event, cumulative stress, or even something we are unaware of. As a therapist, I understand the profound impact that anxiety can have on our lives, and I empathise with those who are going through this emotional turmoil. Fear not; through my experiences, I will guide you through various exercises and techniques that have proven effective in managing anxiety.

It is essential to acknowledge that reading this book may sometimes trigger feelings of vulnerability and discomfort. If this happens, see Table 1.1: *List of Possible Anxiety Triggers* and test your anxiety levels. Of course, if you feel terrible, I urge you not to leave the book entirely and instead attend only to the sections that make you

feel comfortable. You must be in the right mindset to engage with the techniques and exercises and apply them correctly. By doing so, you can transform the anxiety ailment you are battling. To do this, you must understand more about what sets you off.

As a social science psychology major turned educationalist, then psychotherapist, I have spent my career observing human behaviour methodically. Through personal experience, I have learned a lot about myself and others' responses to people, places, and events around us. However, according to a study conducted by developmental scientists at Harvard University, our powers of observation start from the day we are born and are geared outward, towards understanding and interpreting the responses of others rather than inward, towards reflecting on ourselves (Astington, 1993). This deprioritisation of self-reflection can significantly impact our mental health, limiting our ability to understand and navigate our emotional range and how it affects our relationships with others.

## **Understanding Your Motivations**

What if we could learn to reflect on ourselves and cultivate substantial self-knowledge and emotional awareness? Doing so will allow us to better understand our needs, feelings, and desires without relying solely on external validation and reassurance, especially if we have anxiety. According to psychotherapist and researcher Dr Kristin Neff, cultivating self-compassion can lead to greater well-being and resilience (Neff, 2003).

Cultivating self-awareness and self-compassion is crucial for navigating life's challenges with any mental or emotional ailment. By understanding the complexities of life from the inside out, we can build a better relationship with ourselves and overcome the limitations of external validation. By reflecting on ourselves and developing solid self-knowledge, we can identify what triggers us, upsets us, or makes us anxious, and then learn to give ourselves the compassion we need to heal—emphasising the importance of treating ourselves with kindness, care, and understanding. In doing so, we can become more resilient, more emotionally aware, and more fulfilled in our relationships and life in general.

However, not everyone has access to therapy to facilitate this personal growth. I can relate to this first-hand. Growing up in the UK during the 1990s, therapy was not a common practice, and I was unaware of the benefits it could bring to my life. It wasn't until university that I heard the term "therapy" during a psychology lecture, and even then, I had no intention of becoming a therapist. Instead, my dream was to become a pilot, but my anxiety would not let me achieve that dream.

Whenever I was about to fly a plane, anxiety would show up, leaving me feeling debilitated and nauseous. It was not until my wise flying instructor pointed me towards self-exploration that I began to understand the root cause of my anxiety. He encouraged me to examine my mind and listen to my thoughts, hoping my rational mind would guide me. Reflecting on my inner triggers, I realised that my thoughts were far from reasonable. Nevertheless, I persevered, and through self-reflection and diligent research, mainly from books—as the internet was not readily accessible then—I could self-diagnose and take control of my emotions. By facing my fears head-on, I was empowered to rise above the overwhelming weight of anxiety which had held me back for far too long.

While I may not have been able to complete my private pilot licence (PPL) due to motion sickness, this transformative moment was a turning point in my life. It taught me to listen to my thoughts, acknowledge my fears, and understand that my responses to my anxious thoughts were always based on what others might think of me. I realised that I was overly judgemental of myself and feared that others in my environment might judge me too. Consequently, every time I attempted to do something, such as fly a plane, I felt the need to perform to an unattainably high standard, which was the main trigger for my anxiety and the onset of my physical symptoms of motion sickness.

## **Cultivating Self-Awareness**

Understanding and cultivating self-awareness is a process that can lead to incredible personal growth and emotional resilience. By examining our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, we can gain a

greater understanding of ourselves and develop the necessary tools to navigate life's challenges with any mental or emotional ailment. This process of self-discovery requires effort and dedication, but the rewards of personal growth and relationship satisfaction are immeasurable. By becoming masters of our own emotional well-being, we can transform our relationship with ourselves and others.

As you read on, I know you understand that anxiety can be a debilitating experience, which can profoundly impact your daily life. The cycle of worry and amplification can exacerbate these feelings, leading to a vicious cycle that can be challenging to break free from. However, by developing emotional awareness and a better understanding of yourself, you can identify the sources of your anxiety and learn to manage your responses effectively. Effort and dedication can reduce anxiety and improve your overall mind. You can achieve a more fulfilling and meaningful life by taking charge of your emotional well-being.

Self-awareness and emotional regulation are vital to managing our mental and emotional well-being, and a crucial step in achieving this is identifying anxiety triggers. That's why I've compiled a comprehensive list of common anxiety triggers based on my professional experience and feedback from clients and referred patients. Each corresponding chapter in the book explores each trigger in-depth, providing practical exercises and techniques to manage them effectively, helping you transform your relationship with anxiety and live a fulfilling life.

To better understand anxiety, the next step is to take the trigger test. This assessment tool is designed to help you evaluate the anxiety you may feel by identifying the contributing factors. The test coincides with the book's chapters, providing an efficient way to understand anxiety and apply the techniques and tools provided. As you take the test, your thoughts and ideas about the book's context will help you understand your relationship with yourself first, allowing you to accept and apply what resonates with your self-care routine.

Remember, the title of this book is *Fix Me* for a reason—to help you take control of anxiety and start living the life you deserve. By embarking on this journey together, we can overcome anxiety one

step at a time. If you experience any obstacles along the way, know that the practical exercises and techniques provided in the book will help you transform your relationship with anxiety and empower you to regain control (see Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1** List of Possible Anxiety Triggers

Possible triggers	Measuring scale: 5 (feeling extremely anxious) to 1 (feeling extremely calm), write your number for each possible trigger below
Fear of public speaking	
Panic attacks and physical symptoms of anxiety	
Fear of failure and losing a job	
Feeling overwhelmed in crowded spaces	
Fear of flying and travel anxiety	
Grief and anxiety after the loss of a loved one or pet	
Fear of rejection and social anxiety	
Negative self-talk and self-sabotage	
Jealousy and comparison with others	
Difficulty communicating and maintaining healthy relationships	
Anxiety and panic in social situations	
Fear of bullying and traumatic experiences	
Fear of happiness	
Overthinking and difficulty with mindfulness	
Seeking natural remedies and alternative therapies for anxiety relief	
<b>Total score</b>	

The simple assessment tool of Table 1.1 is based on your score range, divided into three categories. If your score falls between 1 and 25, it suggests that you may not have any significant contributors to anxiety. However, if your score falls between 26 and 50, it indicates that you may have a few minor factors contributing to anxiety that you should be aware of and learn to manage effectively. Finally, if your score is between 51 and 75,

significant factors may contribute to your anxiety, which requires further attention. In such cases, as well as using this book as a tool, you need to seek help from a mental health professional to help you identify and manage these factors before they negatively impact your quality of life. While seeking professional help becomes essential when our ability to manage anxiety is exhausted, books like this can serve as a valuable companion to therapy.

It's important to note that the reasons contributing to anxiety can change over time, and sometimes anxiety can be caused by a combination of internal and external factors. By understanding the issues contributing to anxiety, you can take steps to manage them and reduce their impact on your daily life. I recommend taking a pen and paper and noting other reasons contributing to anxiety to understand your condition better.

Managing anxiety can be challenging, but it's a road worth taking. With the right tools, techniques, and support, you can break free from anxiety spirals and live a life that embraces your strengths rather than constantly fighting against internal obstacles. It's essential to recognise that this book is designed to work alongside a therapist if anxiety is significant, and seeking professional help is crucial in such cases. In addition, it is essential to note that the factors contributing to anxiety may vary over time, highlighting the need to continuously work on our mental and emotional well-being to maintain a healthy and fulfilling life.

## References

- Astington, J. W. (1993). *The Child's Discovery of the Mind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Neff, K. (2003). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualisation of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity*, 2(2), 85–101.