

Ep #14: Overcoming Anxiety



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With Your Host

Brooke Castillo

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Welcome to The Life Coach School podcast, where it's all about real clients, real problems and real coaching. And now your host, Master Coach Instructor, Brooke Castillo.

Hey everybody what's up? I'm so excited today; we're getting ready to drive down to Santa Barbara where we are going to check out the Four Sessions Hotel and the surrounding activities there. Because in March of this year, we're going to do our master mind for the life coach school and all of the certified coaches that have gone through the school in Santa Barbara and so we wanted to check out the hotel. I have reserved a room there that is ocean front, they tell me. If you're anything like me, being in a conference room all day is not my idea of a perfect day, so I want to make it more of a perfect day and I thought well an ocean front room with a balcony, a conference room that has a veranda so that's what we were heading out to do today.

Before I left I wanted to record this podcast for you because after that we're heading to Montana for a huge family vacation with my extended family for a week. I cannot wait. Anyway I hope your summer is going amazingly well. Today I'm going to talk to you about anxiety. Yeah we can't wait, I am ... I would say that the majority of the emails I get from people and a lot of the coaching I do is based around anxiety. It is something that most of us deal with on a pretty regular basis. I know for me personally I deal with anxiety and I have deal with it all of my life pretty consistently.

I can remember when I was I would say 14 I would wake up in the morning and immediately have a pit of anxiety in my stomach and it would go untreated let's say throughout the day and I still now wake up many days with anxiety that I have to process and work through. I'm really glad that I have the tools that I have and I know that some of you listening may not have some of these tools and may have some questions about how you can deal with anxiety better. We're going to talk about how to overcome it, and when I say overcome it I don't want you to misunderstand that you overcome it one time and then you never deal with anxiety again. It's not the case.

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Anxiety is a normal part in my opinion of being alive, we have evolved to this place because of anxiety it has served us well. We just need I believe to adapt it. First let's talk about what it is. The way that I describe anxiety is it's a vibration which means it's a feeling right, so one word feeling if you're thinking about the coaching model that we use at the life coach school. That F line, the feeling line, would be anxiety. It's a feeling of generalized worry fear apprehension or nervousness. I often times call it a cover emotion because it's very vague and unspecific and it thrives on that vagueness.

The reason why is ... Anxiety has served us well when we really needed to be on alert when we were evolving as humans. We needed anxiety so we could, react quickly and we could pay attention to that and to our senses and what was going on. Now it's not something that we necessarily need but we're still having that same response to it. I think knowing that anxiety has been something that has served us and got us this far, and that it queues us up for survival has been really helpful for me. A lot of times what happens is, we feel anxiety and we think oh my gosh something is wrong with me I shouldn't feel this all the time, I don't want even to know how anxious I am all the time.

How I'm just a little scared cat or whatever. No, the reason why you have evolved, the reason why your ancestors have evolved is because of anxiety, that feeling chewed you up and got you here literally. When you feel anxiety it's like huh there it is, that emotion that has served me so well in my life. Now living in our suburb neighborhoods as we do now, it doesn't serve us so well, but that does not mean that it's not natural or normal to be experiencing it. That in and of itself I think can be a huge relief for us is just to know oh this part of my humanness.

Now anxiety in and of itself is harmless, it's our reaction and our resistance to it that causes problems. That is not just semantics; I want you guys to really think about this because it's a game changer. Anxiety does not mean to be eliminated because anxiety in and of itself is not the issue; it's our resistance and our reaction to anxiety that causes us problems. Anxiety in and of itself is just a vibration, like if you were to sit here ... I often talk about how it'd be cool if I could just inject certain emotions into people and like you knew they were coming. If we were sitting here and I could say to you okay dude I'm going to inject some anxiety into you and I want you to tell me what it's like, just chill there and just feel it.

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Well that in and of itself wouldn't be true anxiety because you wouldn't be resisting it and you wouldn't and you wouldn't be reacting you would just be allowing it right. You know it's coming you would be like oh what is this like I'm going to experience it. I think what you would notice is that it's uncomfortable. Anxiety is not a joy ride, it's not intended to be, it's ... I think this emotion has evolved to wake us up, get us going, fight or flight let's rock on. That's what it's there for; it's not supposed to be something that lulls us into a sense of security that's not the purpose of that emotion.

It's uncomfortable but what we can remember that now when we feel anxiety it does not mean we are in danger okay. Anxiety has typically meant many times throughout evolution that we are in danger, but now it doesn't. It's normal, it's something that we have and we are adapting it and evolving into another way of using anxiety, but we're not there yet, we're still in that fight or flight response. When we have anxiety we recognize that that's what that emotion has been used for and that we don't need to react to it that way, that's a huge difference okay. When you experience it in modern day, we're having high levels of survival anxiety over pleasing our boss, high levels of survival anxiety over our kids' grades and gaining a few pounds.

I mean we are having this response to things that hardly mean danger and hardly mean life or death right. Think about this ... I mean this is a really important distinction, so typically in the past when we have felt anxiety it has meant danger. Now think about how you need to react to anger, you need to fight, so you need to get all tensed up, get ready, get those fists going. You need to flight which means you need to get tensed up, get ready to run, or you need to freeze which is get tensed up and don't move a muscle. That's how we typically react to danger, that's how we typically react to anxiety.

In modern day anxiety it doesn't mean danger typically, there so few times when we're being attacked literally, by someone that's trying to kill us and most of us will go our whole lives and never have that experience. Yet when we feel anxiety we're still having that same danger reaction, we're still tensing ourselves up, we're still getting ready to fight, we're getting ready to resist we're getting ready to go to battle. In truth the exact opposite reaction is require now, the exact opposite. Now anxiety is just an uncomfortable emotion and how do you deal when you're uncomfortable, what the best way to deal when you're uncomfortable?

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Get comfortable, relax, chill, breath the exact opposite. What most of us are doing when we feel anxiety is increasing our tension, increasing our anxiety, going into that fight or flight mode, resisting, reacting to it, really kind of hefting it up. We get tricked into doing that in a way that perpetuates it. If we can have anxiety, have that experience of anxiety and remember that this is an uncomfortable emotion, how can I treat discomfort, I need to treat it by calming myself down, getting myself comfortable, breathing and connecting, not fighting or flighting okay.

That is huge because when we start worrying about the fact that we're feeling anxiety it's like putting gas on a fire, it really is. We're adding worry to our already interest emotion okay. We need to go in the complete other direction. Okay I might hear you saying right now, okay great that makes sense, I don't want to tense up and increase more anxiety and increase more adrenaline and go into fight mode. I want to start being able to accept my anxiety relax into it and allow it, how do I do it. I'm going to tell you, the first thing you need to do and this is not, you can't skip the step.

The first thing you need to do is recognize and name it, that ion and of itself is huge, it's very powerful because anxiety thrives on the vagueness and it thrives on that increasing tension. If when you feel anxiety you say oh I am feeling vague anxiety or I am feeling survival anxiety, and you recognize it. That process of even naming it and being able to separate yourself enough to label it and recognize it is the first step. Once you recognize that you're feeling anxious there are four options you have at that point. The first option is to resist it or fight it and this is what I would say most of us do.

We resist the feeling, we push it away, we fight against it, we get mad at ourselves for having it. We get really tense about it and what of course that does is it increases it. It's like I want you to imagine that someone is coming at you to fight you, they're starting a verbal disagreement with you and they're yelling at you. I want you to imagine yelling back and screaming back and throwing some punches, you have just thrown gasoline onto a fire. You have now taken one person that's fighting and made it two people that's fighting that they're feeding the energy.

Now if that same person came up to you and was yelling and screaming and you sat in Lotus and just smiled at them you have completely dissipated your side, you have allowed them to keep yelling, you're not trying to yell at them to stop yelling right. You have accepted it and just

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stayed at that moment. Now I'm not suggesting that that's how you handle people yelling at you, I'm just using it as an example of how you can either increase the tension in a situation and how you can deal with your own anxiety. If you see your anxiety as something coming at you and you want to react to it, you're going to be in a battle with yourself.

Okay so that's your first choice. The second choice you have is to react to it, the first one was to resist or fight it, the second one is to react to it. Now many of us do this right, so we start feeling anxious, we start rushing around, we start yelling at people, we start trying to get things done, we start trying to get things done, we start trying to stay up too late. It's like we are running with it, we're trying to act it out. You've seen people that are really anxious, that are acting it out and that's like that flight thing, it's like we're increasing it and kind of fueling it by reacting to it.

The third option is avoiding it, and with all my work that I've done with my wait lose clients that is their reaction of choice usually is to avoid it. If the first one is resisting it, the second one is reacting to it and acting it out, the third one is avoiding it, it's almost like pretending it's not there, let's ignore the fact that I'm feeling anxious right now and I'll eat instead. It's not the same for everyone, other people drink alcohol to avoid it other people work to work to avoid other people do other internet things to avoid it. It's one of those things that by pretending it's not there, it becomes like this big sense of danger all the time.

I used to do this, so I used to be emotional over eater all the time. What would notice is that whenever I let that avoiding guard down it was almost like it attacked me. I'd be like oh my God, what's happening. I would have this vague sense that something was really wrong, like always under the surface but I couldn't remember what it was, what is really wrong, because I wasn't paying any attention to it. Then what happened was I started just over eating all the time and then I could say oh the reason why I'm feeling this is because I'm overweight.

Then I created this whole sub life where I could make sense of my anxiety and say the reason I'm anxious is because I'm overweight, the reason I'm anxious is because I can't stop eating, I feel so out of control It's like took all of that danger and gave it an explanation, by creating this whole sub life of my weight. Avoiding it feels like it's working in the moment, it really does. It feels like eating a cake is solving anxiety for that moment because it does

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distract us, it does take us onto a whole different place for a moment. As soon as we stop actively avoiding it comes back up. Okay so the first option is we can resist or fight it, the second option is we can react to it and act it out.

The third option is we can avoid it. Then there's another option and this is the option I really want to encourage you to try. We can actively accept it. Now I use the word actively because it's really important that you don't see acceptance as giving up. Again when I'm dealing with my weight loss clients, I teach them you have to, it's not negotiable, you have to accept your body the way it is in this moment before you can ever change it. When I say that to clients they often say to me, well that's giving up, if I accept this body I won't change it. I remind them no, of course the exact opposite is true, when you accept something and own something that's when you have all the power to change it.

By using the word actively accepting, it's something that requires you to go to work. It's not something that you can just do passively. It requires that you're willing to quietly witness it and observe it. They've done all these studies where they talk about how when the act of observing something changes it. I find that so fascinating that when we observe something, the thing that we're observing because it's being observed changes. I have seen this over and over in my own life. When I can go to that watcher place, when I can go to that observer place and watch myself think or watch myself feel, I notice that I am not only the person feeling it, I'm not only the person thinking it, I'm able to align with that part of me that has nothing to do with my brain.

By observing our own anxiety it gives us a moment of relief and a moment of perspective. Now I want you to think about it this way, if I allow you to do something, just think about the word allow. I am going to allow you to do something, it immediately give me authority over it. I feel empowered because I'm allowing it that is the same with our emotion. You think about when we're little kids like our parents allow us to do things. As someone who's feeling anxiety if I allow the anxiety, I all of a sudden a sense of authority and a sense of control and even sometimes a sense of mastery.

It doesn't make the anxiety go away and in fact it's kind of the opposite, I'm allowing it. As soon as I allow it my sense of control comes back. Think about that when you're feeling anxious can you allow it instead of resisting

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it, instead of reacting to it, instead of avoiding it. The word that I like to use with myself is stay and let it be, stay let it be. When you allow anxiety you said that it's quite harmless, it buzzes around. It's one of those vibrations that buzzes around and the thoughts are going wild in your brain. When you stay with it and you let it be that's all it is, it's just a vibration.

It pretends to be necessary, it pretends that there's danger, it pretends that we need to fight it or flight or freeze. In reality we can just stay and let it be okay. Let's talk about some technics that I have for actively accepting and the first thing you're really going to do is recognize when you're feeling anxious. Then you're going to remind yourself that you have four choices and you can notice which choice you're making, oh I'm resisting it, oh I'm reacting to it,, oh I'm avoiding it that's what I'm eating all this food or drinking all this wine or beer or whatever and oh I'm really into that actively accepting it, I can feel the consciousness, I can feel that I'm uncomfortable.

There seems to be this idea that we should be comfortable all the time. I don't think that's true. I think that probably half of our life is going to be a total disaster and I don't know why I feel so much relief when I think that. Like half the things I do in my life are going to be mistakes, and that's okay and half of the emotions I'm going to feel in my life are going to be uncomfortable and negative and that's okay that's what it means to be a human being. I've really been telling myself this a lot lately and I can't even tell you how much peace it gives me. Knowing that I'm uncomfortable with anxiety and knowing that it's part of my human experience and it's actually been one of those emotions that has got me and my ancestors to stay alive this long.

I can start changing my relationship with anxiety and I can see that yes it's no longer as useful as it used to be, but it's still here and it's still part of me and if I know it and understand it, it doesn't have to overtake my life and I don't have to react to it, resist it or avoid it. First and foremost how to actively accept something, remind yourself nothing has gone wrong it's just anxiety. You're going to accept it, but that doesn't mean you're giving up, it means you're taking your power back. Then you're going to remember that thoughts cause it. You go back to some of the earlier episodes which I hope you'll listen to if you're new to this podcast. I talk about how our thoughts create our feelings.

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Whenever we're feeling anxious it's because we're having a thought. Remember the example of if you're sitting at home alone and you here a noise outside. The noise in and of itself doesn't cause you anxiety it's your thought about it; there is somebody in a black mask outside my door. That thought in and of itself is causing the anxiety. Let's say there is somebody in a black mask outside your door and you see them, they still aren't causing you to feel anxious it's your thought that you're going to die that's causing you to feel anxious. It's really important to remember.

When you're feeling anxious and you remind yourself the reason I'm feeling anxious is because of what I'm thinking, then you can be curious about what you're thinking and the way that I like to deal with this especially when I'm really anxious and I feel myself really tempted to fight or flight I sit down and I just write all my thoughts down. So many times what's going on in there is crazy town. Seriously this is what we're thinking today. I have thoughts that are so illogical they making no sense, but I just let them go, and I just write. What most often I notice is of course you're feeling anxious Brooke of course this is what you're feeling because look at these thoughts.

These thoughts, if anyone thought them would feel anxious. These thoughts are not reality, these thoughts are not facts these thoughts are choices that you're choosing. I don't necessarily try immediately change those thoughts and go to happy land. I just notice this is the cause of my anxiety. When you understand the cause of something you are 20 million times closer to relieving any emotion that you're having than if you are trying to change it and fight it and ignore it. Okay so first thing write down all your thoughts and get them out of your head and on to a piece of paper and then remind yourself the reason why I'm feeling anxious is because I'm thinking all these thoughts and that's okay.

Don't try and change it, don't get mad at yourself up for your thoughts, it's not useful. Just look at the thoughts and be like I get it and let it just be, let yourself just understand. If you're in a hurry to get out of anxiety is because you aren't allowing it, you're afraid of feeling it and that is not useful. The better you are at allowing it and feeling it, the easier it will be to move through it okay. The next thing that I want to recommend, the first thing is do that thought download. The next thing I want to recommend is that you actively and specifically describe anxiety in its most factual form.

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The way that I want to give you the visual on this on this, I used to do this a lot in my classes. I used to say I want you to imagine that there's an alien a cute little friendly alien that's coming down from the land of planets that we don't understand. Imagine that you have this cute little alien and they don't feel emotion, they don't experience emotion, they don't even know what an emotion is. You're trying to describe to them exactly what anxiety feels like. You're not just going to describe as oh my gosh it's horrible. You're going to describe it as what it feels like in your body, where exactly do you feel it, what exactly does it feel like.

The more specific you can be the better, and you can start with the bottom of your body, start with your toes, go to your feet, go to your chins, go to your quads. Do you feel it in those places? If you do where exactly, do you feel it in your hips, do you feel it in your chest, do you feel it in your shoulders? Yes if you do feel it in your shoulders what exactly does it feel like in your shoulders, where do you feel it? The more specific that you can describe it the better, it gets you out of it, it gets you observing and it gets you describing it. I will tell you when you describe it on paper and then read the description ...

Well, at least for me I was like why in the world I'm I doing so many things to avoid this, this is not that big of a deal, it's just a vibration. When I allow it, when I pay attention to it it's not big of a deal really it's not. It's when I react to it, when I avoid it, when I resist it that it becomes much bigger of a deal. Okay so first thing you can do is that thought download, next thing you do is describe it in detail as if you're describing an emotion for someone that had no idea what it was. The next I'd like to do and I've done this with a lot of my clients with really good success, is what I call playing with anxiety.

A lot of times when we're feeling anxious, especially I have a lot of clients that have panic attacks and I personally have had a panic attack. I breathed in a thing like a like a little float-y thing that happens in the spring from the trees that have like a little thorn in it, and it got caught in my windpipe and I felt like I couldn't breathe. I had a panic attack I called 911, I was totally freaking out I thought I was choking. What I realize when I look back on it is that my thoughts really perpetuated this idea that I was dying, I really thought that I was dying, which of course made it harder to breathe and the more I panicked the less I could breathe.

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I know how scary that is, I know how completely uncontrollable that feels. I also know how I created so much of that situation with my thinking. At that time I didn't realize I've done some research since, I didn't realize that as long as you can get a little bit of air in you're not going to die okay. When you die is when you get a chunk of something that's completely blocking your windpipe or your airway and you can't get any air and that's when you pass out and could possibly die. I was still getting a little bit of air, had I known that, as long as I'm getting a little bit of air I'm going to be okay.

I also learned that when you cough it's like 800 miles an hour and it can pretty much blow anything out of there if you allow yourself to cough. What I didn't realize is this little thing that had gone into my windpipe had a thorn on it, so it was caught in my windpipe, that's why I wasn't able to cough it out, because it was just a little wispy thing. We'd laugh about it, I was with one my girlfriends, she's like you're the strongest person I know, it would be horrible if that little thing kills you. I can see how my thoughts of thinking I'm going to die and thinking no one can save and the hamlet is not going to work on something like this really perpetuated that.

One of the things that I like to do with clients before they're on a full on panic attack right, but when they're starting to feel anxious and this is for my clients that have a lot of anxiety all the time is we give them worry time, anxiety time and you can delegate it to ten minutes where you just allow yourself to feel anxious. You allow yourself to go to the worst case scenario. One of the things that I encourage my clients to do is to increase their anxiety during this time. Can you make the anxiety bigger? Now, this is so counterintuitive because if you are someone that resists your anxiety and that's what I was doing during my panic attack which of course made it worse, resisting, resisting makes you have a panic attack literally. If you practice increasing your anxiety, what it does is it lets you get a hold of it.

It lets you see that you are in the control of it because if you can increase it, you can also decrease it. By purposely sitting down and playing with it, by increasing it and then decreasing it, and then increasing it and decreasing it, it is such an empowering process. It also helps because if you're feeling anxious throughout the day, you could say, okay, I have my anxiety time or I'm going to allow myself to feel anxious. That's coming up in a couple hours. I'm going to delegate this to that time, right? I'm going allow it to come up.

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I know it's going to come up. In the meantime, I'm going to finish cooking dinner, right? I don't have to resist it because I know that I can feel it. By having that time to experience the anxiety fully, you're in the process of authority because you're allowing it. You're in control of it because you're increasing it and practice decreasing it, and playing with it, and experiencing it, okay? That's something that ... I've had clients do for just ten minutes a day. That has been unbelievably helpful for them to do.

Increasing it, decreasing it, okay? Then the last thing and I know that this is probably the most common and most obvious is breathing. When I was having my panic attack, if I would have relaxed, and allowed myself to breathe in the air that I could breathe in, it would have been a completely different experience for me because I would have been able to relax my windpipe and get in a lot of more air in than I was getting because I was panicking, because I was freaking out and resisting it and reacting to my anxiety.

I had much less air. I was going into fight and flight, which of course is short breathes, run, you're going to die, right? Versus, if you're uncomfortable right now, just relax. It's going to be fine. You're going to live. Breathe. You have something in your windpipe but it's not preventing you from breathing. It just feels like it is. Just relax and just breathe. That could have brought me to this place where I still would have been anxious, but I would have been able to breathe.

Now I was researching for this podcast about anxiety and about breathing techniques. I'm a yogi. I love yoga and we spend a lot of time learning how to breathe in yoga which is amazing and very calming. Of course I forget all of it when I was choking on my dandelion. I wanted to see like how do other people deal with breathing and use breathing when it comes to anxiety. When someone tells you just to breathe, it's very non-descript. Some of the techniques that I learned about, that I think are really helpful are these: the first one is, when you're feeling super anxious, when you have a lot of anxiety because you've been resisting and reacting to it, it's important to remember to breathe into your belly.

One of the things you can do, just put your hand on your belly and as you breathe in, you push your belly out, so you can feel your belly full of air. Then you exhale. One of the pieces of research that I read is that when people are having panic attacks, they are focusing on exhaling, which I

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thought was really fascinating because, when I was having my panic attack, I was just trying to suck in the air. I need air. The issue isn't in the inhale. The issue is in the exhale and if when you're having a panic attack or when you're feeling really anxious, if you focus on slowly exhaling all of your air, getting all of the stale air out of your body, then the inhale becomes much easier.

I thought that was amazing and I've actually been really working on that exhale every bit of air out. Then inhale into your belly. Put your hand on your belly. I think this is a great way of allowing, when you are for example, feeling anxious and you feel like you want to avoid it by eating, if instead you sit down and you exhale. Don't even tell yourself to breathe. Just sit down and exhale ten times. Put your hand on your belly; fill it up with air and then exhale. Just focus on that piece of it ten times. That can blow your minds.

I would tell you that because you're in the space of allowing, you're connected, you're increasing your consciousness with yourself and it's going to be uncomfortable. It's not like you're going to be in this glorious, meditative state. Please don't plan on that. I tell this to my clients all the time. Don't say, "I want to stop overeating." I say, "What do you think it would like when you stop overeating?" They all say, "Oh it'd be fantastic and wonderful and rainbows and daisies and beautiful and I'll be thin."

No. What happens when you stop overeating is you start feeling the negative emotion that you're trying to avoid. Knowing that is really helpful. If I don't overeat, I will instead be introduced to myself and to my negative emotion, and that is part of the process, because when I allow an emotion, I can metabolize that emotion. I can process it through. It doesn't have to stay around, festering because I'm avoiding it. One of the best ways to do that is to sit down and exhale, allow the emotion and exhale it out.

Allow the emotion, and exhale it out. Give yourself ten breathes. Please remember, it would not be pleasant. It would not be enjoyable but you can do this. This is part of the process of tuning into yourself, of being connected with yourself, of being truly in control of your life and your emotions. Exhale it out and don't expect yourself to feel amazing afterwards and don't expect that that emotion would completely go away. Just know that you've owned it. You've accepted it and therefore you are in control.

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Anxiety does not mean something has gone terribly wrong. Anxiety means that you are an evolved human being, that you are alive, okay? Anxiety is an emotion that most of us will experience on a regular basis. It is not a problem until we make it a problem by resisting it, by reacting to it or avoiding it. I really want to encourage you to actively accept it by writing down the thoughts causing it, describing it in detail, playing with it and breathing it. Can you breathe anxiety? Because if you allow yourself to feel the emotion, you will own it.

I would love to hear any of your experiences with anxiety and any of your experiences with using any of these techniques because, I would say this is the cornerstone of my coaching practice and what I teach is really learning how to process emotion and deal with emotion. You can go to the lifecoachschool.com/14. This is episode 14. You can go to that episode and in the comments, I reply to every single comment for all of my podcast. You can go there and tell me about what your experience is and let's have a talk about it because I would love to know if you're struggling with anxiety and how we can move you into allowing anxiety, so until next week, please allow it, talk to you then, bye.

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