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For Immediate Release:

On Sale March 3, 2015

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"Boyes' tone is friendly but never saccharine, and endlessly practical. Her tips and exercises...should make a valuable reference for anxiety sufferers, and an ideal companion to readers."

– Publishers Weekly

THE ANXIETY TOOLKIT

Strategies for Fine-Tuning Your Mind
and Moving Past Your Stuck Points

By Alice Boyes, Ph.D.

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million adults in the United States age 18 and older, or 18% of the U.S. population. "Everyday anxiety" affects a far greater number.

In the new release THE ANXIETY TOOLKIT: Strategies for Fine-Tuning Your Mind and Moving Past Your Stuck Points (Perigee Paperback; ISBN-13: 978-0-399-16925-0; \$16.00; On Sale March 3, 2015), Alice Boyes, Ph.D., presents the tools people need to help manage and overcome their anxiety in their personal and professional lives, whether they have a clinical anxiety disorder or are simply "anxiety prone" by nature. Drawing from her extensive clinical experience in Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Boyes addresses common anxiety traps such as:

- Hesitancy: how to stop holding back from things you want to do;
- Rumination: how to get your thinking unstuck;
- Paralyzing Perfectionism: how to stop getting derailed by the wrong kinds of high standards;
- Fear of Feedback and Criticism: how to work with your sensitivity to feedback; and
- Avoidance: how to stop procrastinating or putting your head in the sand about important things.

THE ANXIETY TOOLKIT is designed to help sufferers respond to these traps, understand themselves better, and accept and navigate their anxiety in order to live a meaningful and happy life.

About the Author:

Alice Boyes, Ph.D. blogs for Psychology Today and is the Emotions Expert for Women's Health Australia. Her writing has been featured on Lifehacker and her research about relationships was published in the world's premier social psychology journal, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. Dr. Boyes' expertise in social, clinical, positive, and relationships psychology topics has been featured in numerous magazines and radio segments. She currently resides in Las Vegas, NV. Learn more at www.aliceboyes.com.

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Q&A with Alice Boyes, Ph.D Author of THE ANXIETY TOOLKIT

You state that while anxiety may seem like a flaw, “it’s actually an evolutionary advantage.” How so?

Increasingly, psychological science is recognizing that all emotions have a purpose. Different types of emotions help us perform better in different situations. Our anxiety and fear responses have evolved the way they have because they’re fundamentally useful. Fear causes us to flee, fight, or freeze in the presence of danger. Anxiety is a hypervigilance system that causes us to pause and scan the environment when we sense that there may be a potential danger. For some people, their anxiety system misfires too often. The tools and strategies in The Anxiety Toolkit are designed help people recalibrate their anxiety system.

Why doesn’t the traditional “don’t worry, be happy” message of so many personal development/self-help books work for anxious people?

There is a difference between having an anxiety disorder and having an anxiety-prone nature. Being anxiety-prone isn’t a flaw. Like introversion/extroversion or any other trait, it’s just a difference and not a defect. Many people find it helpful to think about things that could go wrong and worst case scenarios. It can help people feel prepared. If someone isn’t happy-go-lucky by nature, the “don’t worry, be happy” message can be annoying and unhelpful. People can experience it as if they’re being told there is something wrong with their natural self. If people get this message a lot when they’re growing up, it can lead to a lack of self-acceptance.

What are the three main things you suggest to help them navigate their anxiety bottlenecks or traps?

3 quick tips for navigating anxiety bottlenecks:

1. When you’re worried about something, try considering (1) the best case scenario, (2) the worst case scenario, and (3) the most likely scenario. Answering these three questions will help keep your thoughts balanced.
2. Learn to recognize when you’re ruminating. Rumination is overthinking about something that has happened without that thinking turning into effective problem solving. My favorite antidote to rumination is self-compassion e.g., forgiving yourself for a mistake you’ve made or something you didn’t handle in an ideal way. Self-compassion tends to help people take effective action where action is required, or helps rumination pass more quickly when time is all that is required.
3. Typically, less is more when it comes to coping with anxiety. Many of the things people do to try to cope with anxiety actually lead to more anxiety over time. For example, over-

preparing for a situation or wearing “lucky” clothing. Instead, try acting as if you feel relaxed. When you act relaxed, your thoughts and feelings will likely start to catch up with your actions.

Do you think that widespread media and digital technologies like social media (likes, shares, favorites, followers) have contributed to an increase in anxiety?

People tend to present their most desirable selves on social media. Consuming social media can trigger a lot of social comparison anxiety. When we peruse Facebook etc, we tend to see people’s accomplishments and not all the failures and roadblocks that came along with those accomplishments. Likewise, we see happy family photos and not the photo from 5 minutes later when the kids start having meltdowns in the car.

Social media can also trigger rumination. For example, we might wonder why someone who usually “likes” our photos has all of a sudden stopped liking them. We’ve evolved to be sensitive to any hint of social rejection, and people with anxiety are often hyper-tuned to this. The problem is that social media can create a lot of false alarms because a lot of the normal contextual cues that are present in in-person communication are missing from likes, comments, and shares.

Can you talk a little bit about how anxious people may be sabotaging their career and the psychology of overthinking?

It’s important to maintain a balance between preventing mistakes and negative outcomes vs. reaching for new opportunities and rewards. Anxious people can get so over-focused on wanting to avoid mistakes or things going wrong that they get stuck in inaction or get caught up focusing on small things and miss the big picture.

Another way anxiety can get in the way of career success is that anxious people can be especially prone to “imposter syndrome.” The person may not feel ready to take on a new challenge because they don’t feel completely sure of themselves, and this holds them back from opportunities. However, that confidence is likely to come from experience, rather than from waiting on the sidelines.

How can anxious people use self-experiments to boost their happiness?

There are lots of tools and strategies for coping with anxiety that come from different types of effective therapies. However, we never know for sure what’s going to work for a particular person. People can try self-experiments to see what works for them. Self-experiments also allow people to personalize and simplify strategies to find something that works with their preferences and lifestyle. For example, someone might try a self-experiment to see whether doing 15 minutes of meditation a day results in them doing less overthinking and self-criticism throughout the rest of the day. Another example of a self-experiment would be experimenting with what types of thinking tends to lead to useful action-taking vs. what types of thinking just leads to going around in circles.



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"I have read many books on how to manage and work with anxiety. This might be the most powerful and accessible. Why? Because every strategy in here is based on the best scientific evidence available. Many readers will improve the quality of their lives with this toolkit."

– Dr. Todd B. Kashdan, author of *OK: The Upside of Your Dark Side*

"The Anxiety Toolkit provides quick, simple and practical tips that the anxious person can use now."

– Robert L. Leahy, Ph.D., Director, American Institute for Cognitive Therapy

"In this innovative handbook, Dr. Boyes identifies common habits that underlie different types of anxiety. She then offers clear strategies to drop the fight and become more gentle with ourselves. If anxiety has limited your life in any way, this book is an excellent place to start the healing process."

– Christopher Germer, Ph.D., Clinical Instructor at the Harvard Medical School
Co-editor, *Mindfulness and Psychotherapy*; author, *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*

"The Anxiety Toolkit is an investment in wellness. Based on years of clinical practice and research, Dr. Alice Boyes has written a real-world roadmap for all of us who struggle with making decisions and feeling stuck."

– Chris Guillebeau, New York Times-bestselling author of *The Happiness of Pursuit* and *The \$100 Startup*

"Boyes' mastery at breaking down psychological concepts and strategies into easy-to-understand clear steps anyone can apply, the many self-assessment quizzes she provides, and the overall thoroughness of her approach makes *The Anxiety Toolkit* an incredibly useful and practical book."

– Guy Winch, Ph.D., author of *Emotional First Aid* and *The Squeaky Wheel*

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