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A FREE GUIDE FROM THE SECURE BOND

When Everything Feels Like Too Much

A gentle, CBT-based toolkit for stress and anxiety — how to steady your body, catch the anxious thought, and find your way back to calm.



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Dear friend,

You know this feeling. Your chest tightens, your thoughts race ahead to everything that could go wrong, and your body braces for a danger you can't quite name. Maybe it wakes you at 3am. Maybe it hums quietly under an ordinary Tuesday.

Here is the first thing I want you to know: anxiety is not a weakness, and it is not "all in your head." It is your nervous system's **alarm** — an ancient, loyal system doing its best to keep you safe. The trouble isn't that you have an alarm. It's that, right now, it keeps going off when there is no fire.

In my work as a certified CBT relationship and life coach — and as a doula walking beside families since 2013 — I sit with capable, loving people who feel quietly overwhelmed. And I have seen, again and again, one hopeful truth: **calm is not a personality you were born without. It is a skill — and skills can be learned.**

In this short guide: you'll understand how anxiety actually works, receive gentle CBT tools to calm it in your **body** and your **thoughts** — and then use a **writing exercise** to trace it to its root: the real *why* underneath. Because anxiety is a **symptom**, not the source.

Warmly,

Esti

How anxiety actually works

When you understand the machine, you stop being afraid of it.

Anxiety runs on a loop. A trigger — a thought, a text, a memory — sets off an alarm, and the body floods with stress chemicals. Those sensations *feel* like proof that something is truly wrong — which fuels more anxious thoughts, which fuel more sensations. Round and round it goes.

1 · **A thought** — "Something bad is about to happen."



2 · **The body reacts** — racing heart, tight chest, shallow breath.



3 · **The proof** — "See? I feel terrible — it must be true."

↻ **and back to the top — the loop spins again, louder each time**

Here is the key CBT insight: your **thoughts**, your **body**, and your **behaviour** are three points of one triangle — each one pulls the others. Change any single point and the whole loop loosens; you don't have to fight the entire storm, only reach for one corner. And later we go deeper — because anxiety is a **symptom**, not the source.

The most important sentence in this guide: a feeling is not a fact.

Anxiety feels certain — that is its oldest trick. But a racing heart is not evidence of danger. It is only evidence of a racing heart.

You can't reason with a flooded nervous system

When the alarm is blaring, logic can't get through — the thinking brain goes quiet while the survival brain takes the wheel. So we begin with the body. These two tools speak its language, and tell your nervous system, physically, "**we are safe.**"

The extended exhale — 60 seconds

Breathe in through your nose for a count of **4**. Hold gently for **4**. Then breathe out slowly — **longer** than you breathed in — for a count of **6 to 8**. That long exhale is the one part of the alarm you can turn down on purpose; it flips your body from "danger" into "rest." Repeat five slow rounds.

5 · 4 · 3 · 2 · 1 — come back to now

When your mind is racing into the future, your senses bring you home to the present. Slowly name: **5** things you can see · **4** you can hear · **3** you can touch · **2** you can smell · **1** you can taste. You cannot be inside the catastrophe and inside your five senses at the same moment.

Do this first — before you try to think your way out. Calm the body, and only then will the mind be able to hear you. Trying to reason first is like arguing with someone who can't yet hear you over the noise.

Put the anxious thought on trial

Anxiety speaks in **distortions** — old thinking habits that sound exactly like the truth. Learn to spot them:

- **Catastrophizing** — leaping straight to the worst possible ending.
- **Fortune-telling** — "I already know it will go badly."
- **Mind-reading** — "They think I'm a mess."
- **All-or-nothing** — "If it isn't perfect, it's a disaster."

When you catch one, don't argue with it — **investigate** it. Take the thought to trial:

"I sent that email wrong — I'll lose the client and it will all fall apart."

↓ **what is the evidence *against* this?**

"I've sent hundreds of emails. One typo has never lost a client. They replied warmly last week."

↓ **what would I tell a friend who thought this?**

"I made a small mistake. It's uncomfortable — not catastrophic — and I can simply follow up."

The goal is never fake positivity. It's a thought that is both **kinder and truer** than the anxious one — one you can actually believe.

Anxiety is a symptom — trace it to its "why"

Breathing and reframing calm the wave. But if the same anxiety keeps returning, the tools are soothing the **symptom**, not the **source**. Beneath every recurring anxiety sits a trigger — and beneath it, an older fear or unmet need. This short writing exercise helps you find it. Write it **by hand** if you can — honest and unedited.

The method — the downward arrow

Start at the moment the anxiety spiked, and write the thought. Then ask, again and again: "**And if that were true — what am I really afraid would happen?**" Follow it down until a sentence lands with a pinch in your chest. That is the root.

Trigger: "My partner didn't reply to my message all afternoon."

↓ ...and that made me think

"He's pulling away from me."

↓ and if that were true — what am I afraid it would mean?

"That I'll be left all alone."

↓ and underneath even that...

"That I'm only safe if I'm never abandoned — I have to earn my place."

See how far we travelled — from one unanswered text to a lifelong belief about worth. **That** belief is the real trigger; the text was only the match.

Trace your anxiety to its root

Take a recent moment the anxiety rose. Travel down with it — and stop when something inside you pinches.

The moment / trigger — what was actually happening?

The thought that crossed my mind:

And if that were true — what am I really afraid would happen?

And underneath that — what would it say about me?

The root — the real fear or belief, in one honest sentence:

What would I gently say to a dear friend who believed this about themselves?

Example: *"I have to earn my place — or I'll be left alone."* → **"The people who love me aren't waiting for me to be perfect. I'm allowed to simply be."**

A GENTLE STEP FORWARD

Calm is a skill — and skills are built with practice, not willpower.

You now hold three tools: one for your body, one for your thoughts, one for your day. Use them gently, again and again — that repetition is what quietly rewires the alarm. And if your anxiety runs deeper, or has been with you a long time, you don't have to untangle it alone. That is exactly the work I do, side by side with you, in coaching.

If you'd like to talk about what's weighing on you — book a free discovery call. No pressure, no script.
thesesecurebond.com · WhatsApp works too — I read every single message.