



Understanding Anxiety: A Personalised Approach

Unravelling the root causes of anxiety can often feel like solving a complex puzzle. Everyone is unique, and while their experiences may share similarities, the underlying triggers of their anxiety are distinct. There is no universal solution, but a structured, evidence-based approach can be highly effective in identifying and addressing the root causes.

In the 1980s, Joe Griffin and Ivan Tyrell developed the **Human Givens Theory**, based on extensive work with individuals struggling with mental health issues, including anxiety. Their research revealed that human beings have **nine fundamental emotional needs** that must be met in balance to maintain psychological well-being. When these needs are not fulfilled, individuals may experience emotional distress, and in severe cases, develop chronic anxiety. David, like many others, was not having his emotional needs met, which was exacerbating his anxiety. The key to helping him was to identify which of these unmet needs were causing his distress.

The Nine Emotional Needs

1. **Security** – Living in a safe environment that supports personal growth.
 2. **Attention** – The ability to give and receive attention in meaningful ways.
 3. **Control** – Having autonomy and the ability to make responsible choices.
 4. **Community** – Feeling a sense of belonging in wider social groups, such as clubs, societies, or religious organizations.
 5. **Intimacy** – Knowing that at least one person truly accepts and values us.
 6. **Privacy** – Having the opportunity to reflect and regulate emotions, particularly during stressful times.
 7. **Status** – Feeling respected and valued by our social and professional circles.
 8. **Achievement** – Experiencing personal agency and the ability to make things happen.
 9. **Meaning and Purpose** – Engaging in activities that provide fulfilment and a sense of direction.
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A Four-Step Approach to Resolving Anxiety

To effectively address anxiety, I use a **structured four-step method** that helps individuals gain clarity on the root causes of their distress and implement actionable solutions.

Step One: Conduct an Emotional Needs Audit

In business, routine audits help identify inefficiencies and maintain overall health. Similarly, individuals can perform an **Emotional Needs Audit (ENA)** to assess how well their psychological needs are being met. This involves rating each need on a scale from 1 to 7. For example, to evaluate security, one might ask, *Do I feel safe in all aspects of my life, including work and home?* If the score is below 4, further exploration is necessary to determine the underlying issues.

Step Two: Identify the Root Cause

Just as assembling a jigsaw puzzle starts with finding the corner pieces, identifying the core causes of anxiety requires pinpointing key problem areas. For example, in David's case, his ENA revealed that he scored only **2** on security. Through further discussion, it became clear that his workplace environment was a major stressor. His boss frequently berated him in front of colleagues, which eroded his confidence and sense of safety. Once we recognized this as a primary trigger, we had our "corner pieces" in place.

Step Three: Develop a Strategy

Understanding the root cause allows us to devise a targeted strategy to address it. In David's case, his primary issue stemmed from his relationship with his boss. However, anxiety can make problem-solving difficult, as the brain often struggles to think clearly under stress. To counter this, seeking external input—whether from a trusted friend, colleague, coach, or therapist—can be invaluable in brainstorming potential solutions.

For David, possible strategies included finding a new job, requesting an internal transfer, or even taking a sabbatical. Ultimately, he decided to address the issue directly with his boss.

Step Four: Take Action

David chose to use the **XYZ approach**, a communication technique from relationship therapy, to confront his boss about the issue:



X: "When you shout at me in front of my colleagues..."

Y: "...it makes me feel embarrassed and humiliated..."

Z: "...In the future, please call me into your office if you need to discuss something."

Initially hesitant, David committed to trying this approach before considering more drastic measures. To his surprise, his boss responded with genuine concern and remorse, admitting he had been unaware of the impact his actions were having. The conversation led to a positive shift in their working relationship, and over the following weeks, David's anxiety decreased significantly. His overall well-being and confidence improved, demonstrating the power of addressing unmet emotional needs.

Conclusion

Anxiety can stem from multiple causes, making a structured approach essential for effective resolution. If you or someone you know is struggling with anxiety, consider using this **four-step method** to assess emotional needs and develop actionable solutions. By identifying unmet needs, addressing root causes, and implementing strategic changes, it is possible to regain a sense of balance and well-being.

Remember, anxiety is not a life sentence. With the right approach, it can be managed and overcome.