

# The Anxious Moment

## The Anxious Moment & How to Manage It

Brief Therapy Conference  
December 7, 2018

Reid Wilson, PhD  
Chapel Hill, NC

*Reid Wilson, Ph.D.*

Anxiety Disorders Treatment Center  
421 Bennett Orchard Trail  
Chapel Hill, NC 27516  
[919] 942-0700

drwilson@anxieties.com  
www.anxieties.com  
www.NoiseInYourHead.com

### The Moment

3

*Whenever I notice...*

Intrusive...  
Distressing...  
Unhelpful...  
Noisy worry...

*That shows up as...*

Memory...  
Fearful anticipation...

### My bias

4

All therapeutic work should manifest  
moment-by-moment

### *The beginning of* Objective 1

5

to defend logically the therapeutic benefits  
of embracing doubt & discomfort

### How do we get to “embrace”?

6

while feeling doubt & discomfort...  
elevate above their immediate fear &...  
apply new response...  
based on provocative frame of reference  
...and therein lay the benefits

# The Anxious Moment

7

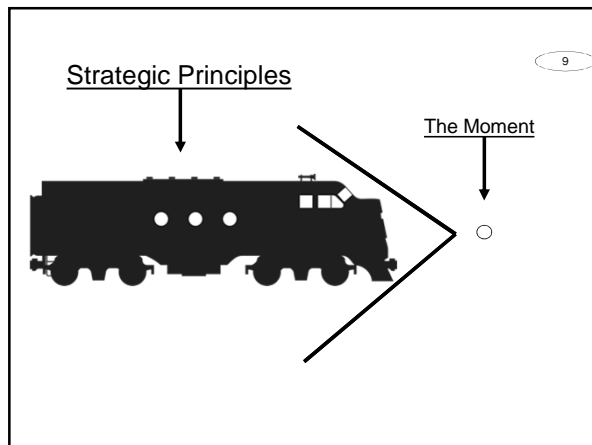
If they need to understand the way things are,  
don't give them a map

They don't need directions,  
they need to see the big picture

8

“Asbestos is none of your business!”

9

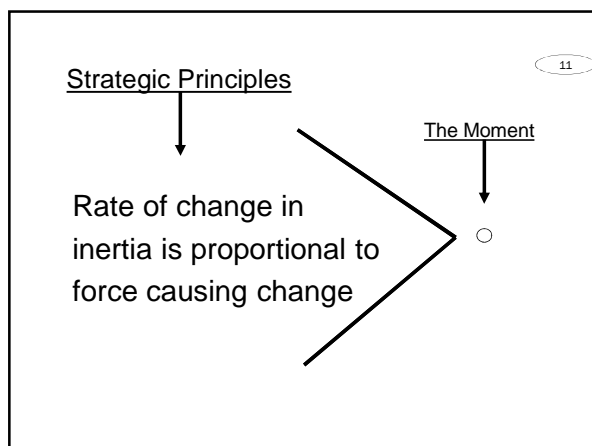


10

## *The beginning of* Objective 3

to persuade an anxious client of the  
benefits of seeking out distressing moments  
while simultaneously holding an  
incompatible point of view

11



- hands to become hard surface
- that quickly punches ball up over net
- Disrupting speed & direction

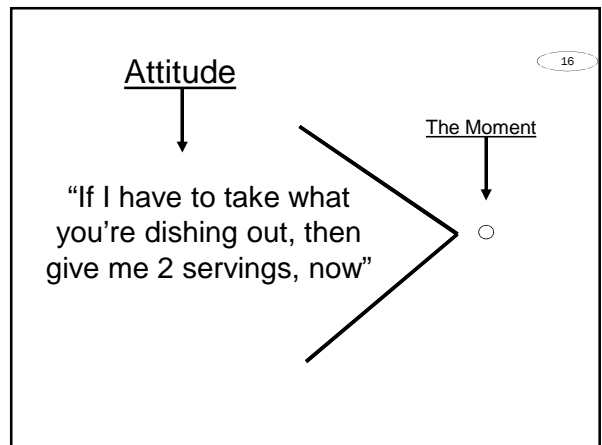
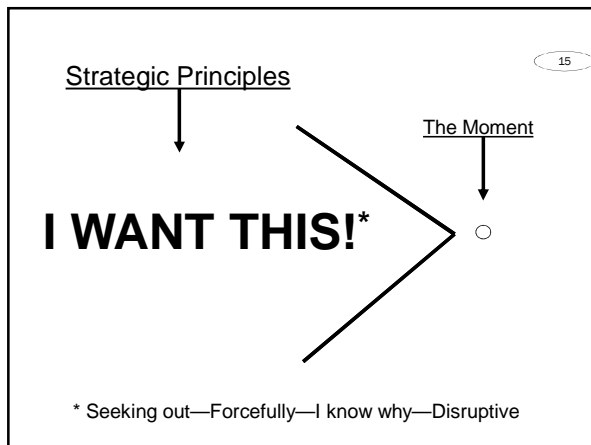
# The Anxious Moment



- A sudden, hard push in a new direction



- one pin?
- ten pins at once?



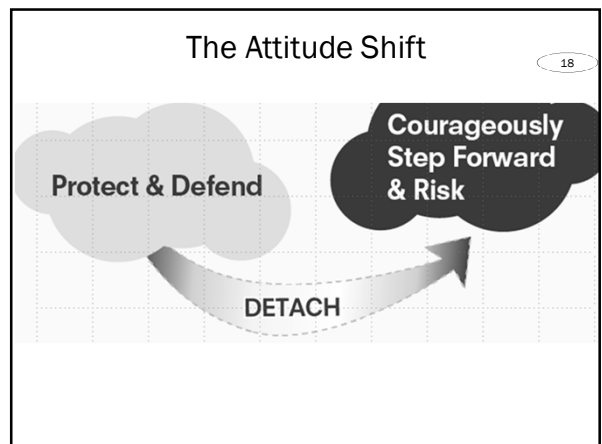
17

This is “Explosure-Plus”

Don’t step forward

Step forward with attitude

Be aggressive — Push into the Disorder’s territory



# The Anxious Moment



Negative emotions narrow our thinking 20

- "I can't do this"
- "Tomorrow's going to be just like yesterday"
- "what's the point...")

Positive emotions broaden our thinking

So...

21

## Arousal congruence

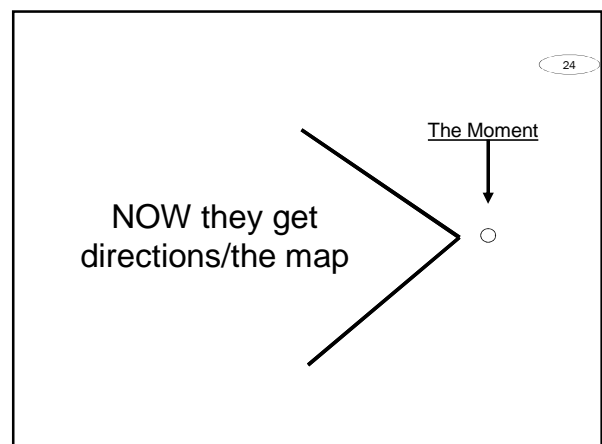
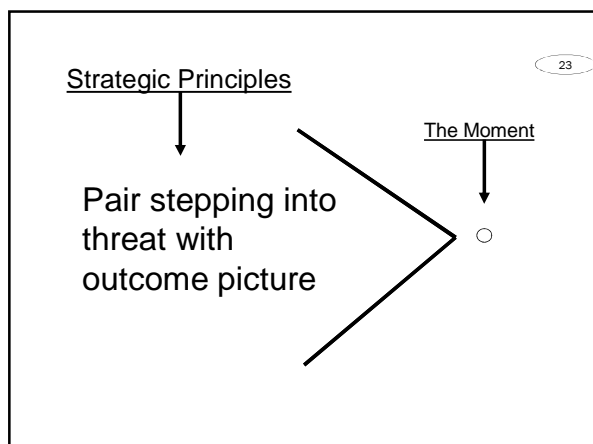
Move valence of distressing uncertainty from negative to positive

Make anxiety & doubt ego-syntonic

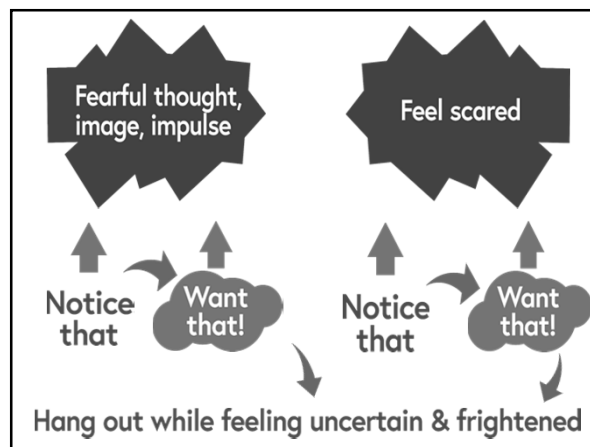
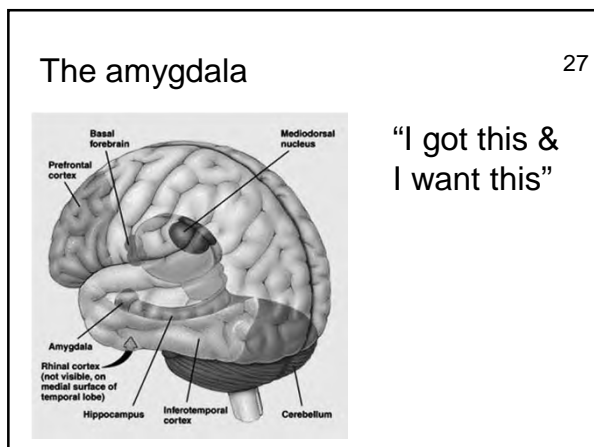
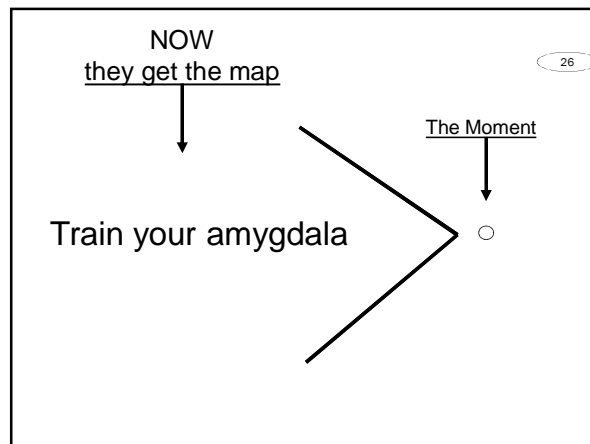
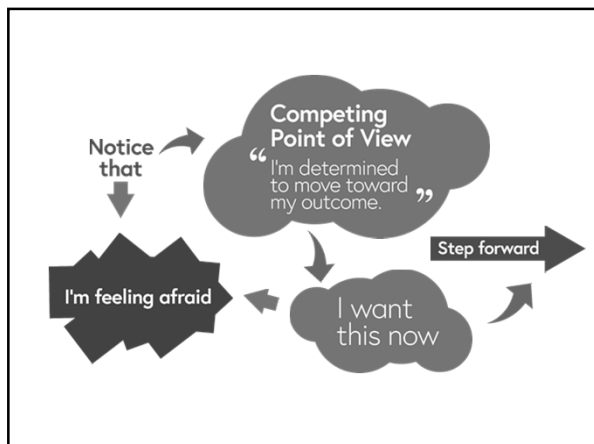
22

"Only do what you want to do"

"And if you want to get stronger, you have to want to do the hard stuff"

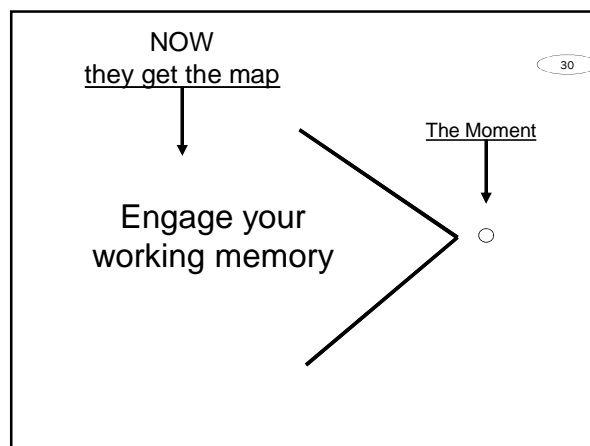


# The Anxious Moment



Objective 2

to explain how to engage the working memory in service of therapeutically managing the anxious moment



# The Anxious Moment

31

## Working Memory

- Roughly 4 thoughts, images or feelings at one time
- Central Executive pushes away distractions

The diagram illustrates the Working Memory Model. It features a central oval labeled 'Central executive' with double-headed arrows connecting it to two rectangular boxes on either side: 'Visuospatial sketchpad' on the left and 'Phonological loop' on the right.

A person icon with an exclamation mark is labeled 'Long-term memory Working memory pulls forward'. An arrow points to a cloud containing the text 'Here's how to escape'. Below this, another cloud says 'Get me away from this!', and a smaller cloud says 'I'm feeling afraid'. To the right, a circle labeled 'threat' is connected to the 'Here's how to escape' cloud by a vertical line.

33

## Self-talk DIRECTS Working Memory

Therefore, apply strategy...

When you're anxious → ask for exactly what you're experiencing now

But you have to ask for it

- signals working memory to retrieve resource of “acceptance” from past

A person icon with an exclamation mark is labeled 'Long-term memory Working memory pulls forward'. An arrow points to a cloud containing the text 'Here's how to accept'. Below this, another cloud says 'I want this now', and a smaller cloud says 'I'm feeling afraid'. To the right, a circle labeled 'threat' is connected to the 'Here's how to accept' cloud by a vertical line.

The APP -- [Anxietychallenger.com](http://Anxietychallenger.com)

35

The screenshot shows the 'Anxiety Challenger' app interface. On the left, a smartphone displays the app's main screen with various challenge options. On the right, a person is silhouetted against a sunset background with their arms raised in celebration. The app title 'Anxiety Challenger' is prominently displayed, along with the tagline 'Identify Your Anxieties Challenge Them On Your Mobile Device Score!'. At the bottom, there are buttons for 'ANDROID' and 'IPHONE'.

36

NOW  
they get the map

Develop your  
Self-talk

The Moment

The diagram shows a large right-pointing chevron shape. The text 'Develop your Self-talk' is positioned to the left of the chevron. An arrow points from the word 'NOW' above to the top of the chevron. Another arrow points from the word 'The Moment' above to a small circle at the tip of the chevron.

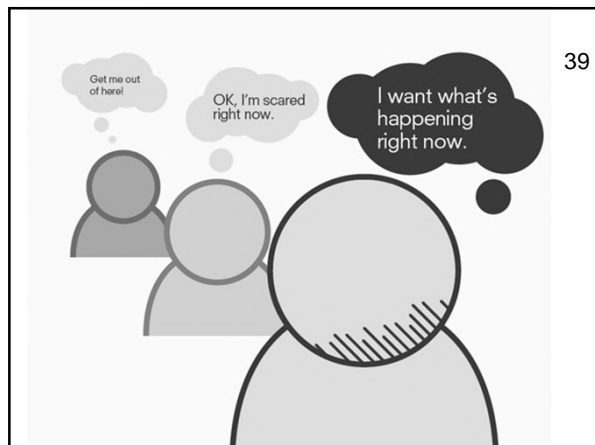
# The Anxious Moment

Messages of motivation 37

- "... Good opportunity to practice"
- "I can take this hit"
- "I can handle this"
- "I want to be uncertain"
- "I want to be clumsy"
- "I gotta risk something here"

Self-instructions/commands 38

- "Leave the room now!"
- "Stop washing"
- "Call someone"
- "Take a risk"
- "Keep moving; don't pull over"
- "Don't figure it out"



Honest Stance toward symptoms/worry/uncertainty... 40

Purposely, voluntarily, choose...

- ✓ "I want it"
- ✓ "If it lasts, I want it to last"
- ✓ "If it gets strong, I want it to be strong"

Self-Talk 41

Infuse it into treatment

It should represent Attitude

Apply strategy... 42

Attach self-messages to exposure

↓

Keep repeating process

↓

Your long-term working memory will link it all together

# The Anxious Moment

43

Then...

call up message → cue working memory


↓

retrieves internal resources associated with message

Your work becomes easier over time!

## Teaching children to dive

- Brain → “water is solid object”
  - Urge to protect!
  - Picks up head as diving
- Coach creates strategy!
  - “chin tucked; hands flat, one on top of other...”
  - Repeat → sitting, kneeling, standing dive....
- Builds working memory to master diving for life



44

## “Run hills hard”

45




## Step 1: Create Strategy

46

- 1) get body forward by dropping head & raising arms
- 2) apply energy to task
- 3) push forward & up
- 4) get faster turnover of legs

## Step 2: Generate Commands

- “Look 5-6 feet ahead”
- “Raise arms”
- “Shorten stride”
- “Swing arms”
- “Pick up tempo”



## Step 1: Create Strategy

47

1. Act as though the content is irrelevant
2. Accept the worry/obsession when it pops up
3. Seek out uncertainty
4. Seek out anxiety
5. Create rules if you need them

## Step 2: Generate Motivations or Commands

## Dr. Barb Frederickson

48

[- narrows (“I can’t”); + broadens (“maybe”)]

If you will pull up a positive emotion on the heels of these negative feelings, you can literally dismantle all that mental and physical preparation to run

- Actively generate a positive meaning for why you are letting yourself generate feelings of threat
- Then step forward, voluntarily, because you know why you are stepping forward – because you can see it in the broader context of your life’s goals
- Then your intentions can transform your experience



# The Anxious Moment

49

- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist*, 56, 218– 226.
- Fredrickson, B. L., Mancuso, R. A., Branigan, C., & Tugade, M. M. (2000). The undoing effect of positive emotions. *Motivation & Emotion*, 24, 237– 258.

## Dr. Les Greenberg

50

Transform your fear reaction: Let yourself become afraid, then call up a competing emotion

- NOT by thinking or reasoning, or allowing the feeling, or letting go of the feeling, or facing the feeling. NOT by exposure or extinction or habituation

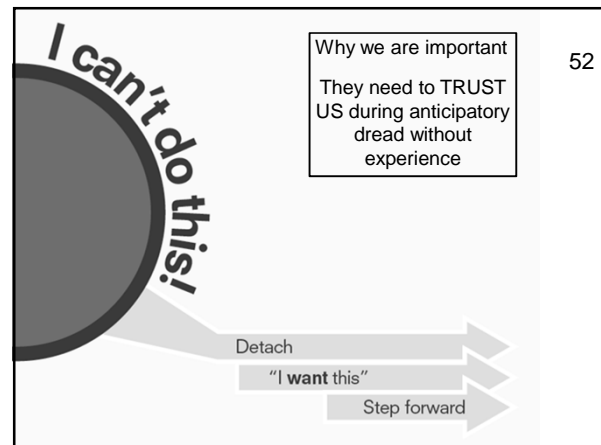
But by activating a competing emotion that expresses a competing point of view

- *How? Elevate your willingness to embrace doubt and discomfort while you're feeling afraid*

51

- Greenberg, L. S., Rice, L. N., & Elliott, R. (1993). *Facilitating emotional change: The moment by moment process*. New York, NY: Guilford.
- Greenberg, L. S. (2010). *Emotion-focused therapy*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Greenberg, L. S. (2012). Emotions, the great captains of our lives: Their role in the process of change in psychotherapy. *American Psychologist*, 67(8), 697-707.

52



53

## Sandra

- OCD 21 years
- Rabies, other contaminations, ordering
- 1 bottle Champagne per night
- Session 4 (5 weeks)
- CLIP 1 (30 sec.) her response to improving

54

## CLIP 2 (2:45)

- **Essential placebo & rapport:** "I finally met someone who knows what I'm talking"
- **Generating 2<sup>nd</sup> voice (NOT dominant yet):** "I wanted to be optimistic, but I was very pessimist"
  - "21 years is too deep. I've tried over and over, and I have failed every time."
- **Watch her light up.** "What you put on the board! That's what you did! That's what you do!"
- **Self-talk that manifests principles:** "...how I need to feel anxious and distressed for prolonged time. I had that memorize, and I still say that."

# The Anxious Moment

- **2<sup>nd</sup> voice becomes dominant:** “I just made myself do it. 55  
I said, ‘I’m going to do it.’”
- “The biggest thing was...”
- **Self-talk:** “It’s going to work. It can work me, too.”
- **Self-talk:** “I’d touch them, and I kept saying to myself,  
‘You’re going to have to feel anxious.’”
- **TRUST!** “I said that over and over, *‘I hope that good  
doctor knows what he’s talking about.’*”
- **Learning thru behavioral experiment:** “Some of the  
things, within 15 minutes, I just moved on...”

## Act as though...

56

I want to take actions right now as though...

- ✓ everything is OK just the way it is unfolding
- ✓ this is exactly what needs to be happening  
right now
- ✓ I have enough skills
- ✓ The content of my obsession is irrelevant

Get big! – Change who is in charge

“Bad dog!”

57

## NoiseInYourHead.com

*Free, short videos*

- How Anxiety Uses Basic Human Nature against You (5 min.)
- Why You Should Step AWAY from Your Worries” (5 min.)
- Why You DON’T Need to Relax to Get Control” (6 min.)
- How to Transform Fear” (6 min.)

NoiseInYourHead.com/free-video-series

Thank you