

## Episode 86: My 3 Best Tips for Navigating Anxiety

Welcome to the Healing Sanctuary. This is a podcast dedicated to self-healing, personal growth, spirituality, and everything in between. Each week I share a new meditation, visualization, or soulful discussion. I'm your host, Melissa Field, and I'm so grateful you're here.

This week I'm talking about my top three tips for navigating anxiety. These are the three things that have actually worked for me. I have been dealing with anxiety and panic attacks my whole life. The first time I remember having a panic attack I was 12 and in the sixth grade. The teacher started to banter and joke with one of the students in class. I had no idea why, but I felt a sudden wave of terror come over me. My entire body went cold, and I was almost shaking with the fear that something terrible was about to happen to me. In terms of flight, fight or freeze, I was totally frozen, almost paralyzed with fear. Nothing scary was happening. I wasn't in any danger. The teacher wasn't even mad. He was joking with a student, but it triggered something unhealed within me that sent me spiraling into a state of irrational terror.

When I look back on it, sixth grade was when I became acutely aware of chronic feelings of being unsafe, uncomfortable, and distressed. I noticed that every morning there was this feeling that would come over me. I'd look across the soccer field at the school and other students, and dread and panic would sweep over me.

I had no language then for what I was experiencing. I also had no idea that because this was happening at such a young age, I would spend the next 20 years thinking it was normal. It was so entwined with my sense of self and my experiences of life I thought everyone was walking around the same way. As I became an adult, the fear and anxiety became unbearable. It was truly derailing my life and making me want to shut down and just spend the rest of my life in a dark room with the blinds drawn.

One year during the holidays, I was about to visit my friend in another city and go to his annual Christmas party. This is such a fun event where he coordinates a sock exchange, and everyone brings socks and we play games and just enjoy a light hearted evening. But as I was getting ready to go, my panic became so severe I felt like I was leaving my body. I'd never felt anything like this before and it really scared me, which is saying a lot considering panic attacks have been a familiar thing to me since I was 12.

The drive out to my friend's place was almost 2 hours, and so on the way out I had a lot of time to think. I just kept having this repeating thought, and it was almost like I was yelling my own head, that I CAN'T LIVE LIKE THIS ANY LONGER. Something inside of me had awakened and a fire was lit within me. I didn't care what it took. I was going to stop living my life in a constant state of fear and start reclaiming my own life.

That night was over 5 years ago, and it really was a turning point for me. My first step was to start telling people what I was experiencing. I didn't realize until then how much I just powered through and pretended like everything was fine when I was dying inside. By telling people, I felt myself reclaim a huge amount of power. It no longer felt like I was putting effort into hiding who I really was, but instead, putting effort into support, connection, and self-acceptance.

Over time, I began realizing that some things were more effective for helping me navigate this anxiety than others. A lot of stuff I read or heard to try did nothing for me. Slowing down my breathing didn't

help, it didn't help to count, or to touch something solid and feel grounded. Honestly, if there's an anxiety "trick" out there, I've probably tried it.

So let's talk about what did work for me. These are things I've found to be beneficial, and I hope they help you, but if not, know that your answer is out there. You may even develop some new tool that helps other people, so don't give up, because you were not created to be anxious. You are a whole person who has a whole Self that exists beyond your anxiety, and you're going to find it.

### **Tip #1: Give yourself permission to feel what you're feeling**

When anxiety comes over us, we can have a knee jerk reaction to wanting to make it stop immediately and at all cost. Nothing feels more important than getting this feeling to GO AWAY. We don't want people to see us feeling scared or uncertain. We don't want to be interacting with people from this place of survival and fear. We want the anxiety to stop, and if you're like me, you'll almost go into an attack mode to the part of you that is feeling nervous, unsafe, or unworthy.

When the anxiety comes over me, I try to tell myself to relax, to calm down, but this does nothing. If anything, it makes me feel worse because all of my energy starts to focus in on how nervous I am, and it feels like I'm feeding the anxiety. It also starts to feel like I'm fighting with myself, and I start to feel agitated and like a battle is raging within me. The anxiety is at war with the part of me that wants to be calm, and neither side is going to give in.

When I feel myself going into this inner battle mode, I first become aware of what I'm doing. I stop telling myself to relax and calm down and I give myself permission to be nervous. This is huge, because more than anything, it gives me what I am often craving more than anything, which is feelings of acceptance and security. So I tell myself "It's okay to be nervous. Everybody gets nervous. It doesn't mean anything is wrong with you. It just means you feel uncomfortable and you're trying to protect yourself." And then I repeat that several times. "It's okay to be nervous. Everybody gets nervous. It doesn't mean anything is wrong with you. It's okay to be nervous."

This usually tones down the intensity, and I'm no longer at war with myself, but now, I'm giving myself love and working with myself. I've introduced internal cooperation into the process.

**I would also add into this an informal tip, we'll call this 1A, which is to do what I said earlier.** Tell a trusted and safe person that you're feeling anxious. Whenever I tell someone how I'm feeling, I feel an immediate reversal in my sense of personal power. I no longer feel like I'm being drained, but instead like my energy is in a normal flow again. Also, I often find when I say how I'm feeling the other person relates, and it gives them permission to be more of their own self. But again, make sure you tell someone you trust and not someone who's going to negate or diminish your feelings.

### **Tip #2: Remind Yourself That This Feeling is Only Temporary**

This is the tip I find the most relief from. It doesn't make the anxiety go away, but it provides so much relief that it no longer feels like I'm slamming on a gas pedal and driving towards a brick wall at 90 miles per hour. It slows my inner vehicle down, and I regain some control.

When you feel anxiety rushing over you, start to remind yourself that this feeling is temporary. You know it's temporary because you've felt it before and it never lasted forever. It's literally impossible for your body to be in this heightened state 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It cannot be done. So even if you

do nothing, the anxiety will go away. It has no choice. And again, you know this, because there is always a break in the anxiety. There is always a moment of relief, even if it's you going to bed and falling asleep.

When I remind myself the feeling is temporary, I stop trying to control the anxiety. I stop feeding it. Being worried about our worry can actually be the thing that locks into place, so when you stop worrying that you'll be anxious forever and ever, you may also find the intensity to drop on its own.

This may take a little practice to start reacting in this way, because our reactions to anxiety get memorized and become automatic. So if you need to, write down these tips on a notecard. Put them in your purse or your wallet, and when you feel anxiety come on, excuse yourself to the bathroom, read your notes, and just give yourself permission to be human and to be nervous and to know there's nothing wrong with you for having intense feelings. It's very common.

### **Tip #3: Understand That Anxiety is Simply Neurons in Your Brain Firing in a Specific Way**

During my quest to be less anxious, I began learning about how my brain works. I started learning about neurons and neural clusters and chemicals and hormones, and all this fascinating stuff that explained so much about my reactions and perceptions of the world. I was amazed to learn that I didn't experience anxiety because I was a weak and hopeless person, but because I had a program running in my neurons that told me to react this way. I got programmed with this fear response largely through childhood experiences, and I don't want to go too deep into this, but the gist is, your brain runs like a computer, and whatever your program into it is what's going to run.

So when you have a repeated thought or experience, it will bond neurons together into a cluster, which looks something like the roots of trees.

When I'm getting anxious, I just start telling myself, "This is a neuron cluster in my brain running a program." And then I'll instantly see it, I'll visualize this cluster, and somehow thinking this and visualizing it turns the intensity way down.

I then tell myself, "It's running because I don't have a different program in place. All I need is to get different neurons to fire together, to form a new program, and I'll have new experiences." And then I keep repeating myself so that I know, I am not stuck like this. This isn't a fixed part of me that I just have to deal with. It's the neurons doing what I programmed them to do, and I programmed them as a scared child who didn't understand her value or worth or her own power. Now that I have new information and a new awareness of myself and the world, I've got to start running programs based on what I want.

The reason I love this last tip is because it's pure mechanics. It's very dry and factual, and my brain has no choice but to get out of it's overly reactive emotional state and look at the facts. And the facts are, this isn't who I am. This is just a story running because neurons are firing together based on old and fault information. And that's all anxiety is.

### **So how do you get your neurons to fire together in ways that are beneficial and empowering? This is my other bonus tip, which we'll call 3A.**

The best way I know to reprogram your mind is through visualization. Visualization is different than meditation, and I did my previous discussion on what the difference is. This episode is full of great information that will help to illuminate why meditation isn't enough to change anxiety, and why you need both meditation and visualization.

What I love about visualization is it changes the story before I even step into a room. So for me, social anxiety was a huge issue. When I began visualizing, I began telling myself a different story not from a place of trying to course correct, but from a place of being proactive rather than reactive. Changing my thoughts patterns when I'm at home, in a safe place, doesn't just benefit me. It also feels good. It feels good when I'm visualizing, whereas trying to change anxiety when it's happening really doesn't feel good. I'm just trying to tone down the intensity so I can get back to being myself.

If you want to learn more about this, I highly encourage you to checkout my latest package, Heal Your Life with Meditation and Visualization. It's going to go deep into visualization, how it works, and everything you need to know about it. It also includes a powerful 5 minute visualization that will uplift and empower you. I'm currently offering it for only \$5, but this is a limited time offer.

You also might be interested in my package Empwering Visualizations, which includes 15 visualization to rewire your brain for confidence, self-love, healthy relationships, and more. It's a life changing package and you won't find anything like it anywhere else.

I've got links to both of these things in my episode notes, or you can go to [melissa-field.com](http://melissa-field.com).

This brings me to the end of my discussion on anxiety and how I navigate and manage it myself. I want to conclude by saying anxiety is not something I think of as something to overpower or erase from my life. It's something I look at as I can turn down the intensity or the volume on it so I can continue to socialize and live my life. And then when I am in a place I feel safe, when I'm in my own home, that's the time to work on reprogramming my brain, on shifting my thoughts patterns, so that the anxiety doesn't turn back up the next time I'm out or feeling stress. You absolutely can have anxiety and live a healthy and happy life. I have anxiety and I just take it day by day and continue to remind myself there's nothing wrong with me. My brain was just programmed a certain way, and now I'm in the process of inserting a new program.

I sincerely hope these tips help you, and if you need to, play this again and write those tips down on a 3 x 5 card or on your phone and carry them around with you. In time, you'll start recalling them on your own and it'll become habitual, and you'll no longer feel powerless to your own mind.

Thank you so much for joining for this discussion. It's something that's very personal to me, and something I'm working on myself. If you know someone who would benefit from this discussion, please share it. And if you don't mind, if you could leave a rating that would help others to find this podcast. Your support is deeply appreciated.

This is the Healing Sanctuary and I'm your host Melissa Field. I'll be back soon with another meditation or visualization and I hope you'll join me for that. If you have any questions or comments feel free to connect with me on Instagram at [meditate\\_with\\_melissa](https://www.instagram.com/meditate_with_melissa) and once again my website is [melissa-field.com](http://melissa-field.com)