

Self-Reflection: The Art of Stress and Anxiety

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Anxiety is something that has plagued me for years. I can now recognize its beginnings when I think back to my university days, but it took hold in my thirties when I had my kids, and then really took hold years later after a bad marriage and a subsequent emotionally and psychologically abusive relationship.

I have been going to therapy for years, trying to overcome the constant overwhelm, the social withdrawal, and the physical symptoms but have never been able to really make any headway. The work I've done with the Art of Stress and Anxiety workbook has been a completely different experience. I found that even just sitting down and really thinking about what makes my anxiety worse was a challenge initially, but once I started to identify that, I could see more clearly what was going on with me. I was able to identify the avoidance strategies I was using which helped me understand how, over time, these avoidance strategies had contributed to so many of the decisions I had made and experiences I had gone through. Moreover, I could see how my experiences had led me to these avoidance behaviours and appreciate the difficult cycle I was in. Understanding why I behave the way I do and seeing myself as separate from my masks, was liberating. I have become more forgiving and compassionate towards myself and my inner critic has become quieter. Recognizing the onset of anxiety before it gets overwhelming has been life changing.

Experiencing the outcome of the workbook firsthand has been very helpful for me in sessions with clients in that I can empathize with them about how hard the work can be, but can also truly provide statements of hope for them that they can do it, and that it will be worth it. I often will conceptualize anxiety with my clients and discuss the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, which I have found to help clients calm their fears around the

physical arousal of anxiety. I have found that the workbook has helped to better navigate conversations with clients about anxiety and work with them by implementing various parts of the workbook as they organically come up in sessions.