

# Jon Dillow Counseling

Counseling, Coaching, and Seminars

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## Befriend Anxiety:

I've not met anyone who likes the feeling of anxiety. Heart racing, chest tight, thoughts swirling... anxiety is unpleasant. It's natural to want to make it go away. I find people try to do so in one of two ways. They either fight it or surrender to it.

Those who fight their anxiety demand that it leave. They try to will themselves not to be anxious. The problem is this simply reinforces anxiety and amplifies the physical symptoms. As you "fight" anxiety you become more tense, more stressed, more *anxious*.

But the other option, surrendering to anxiety isn't much better. People who surrender, let anxiety tell them what to do. If anxiety says a social situation is dangerous you'll avoid the situation. This may temporarily relieve the anxiety but it creates a feedback loop that tells your brain that social situations are scary and to be avoided. And then lo and behold, the next time you get invited to a party, anxiety pops up screaming "Danger! Danger!"

There is a third more productive option. We can befriend our anxiety. When it shows up we gently accept it. We don't tense up, fighting to make it leave, or give in, surrendering to its demands. Rather, we calmly say, "Hi anxiety. I see you've decided to join me today. That's ok. You're welcome to hang around but I'm going to keep doing what I had planned to do."

This calm acceptance of anxiety does several things.

- It avoids reinforcing and strengthening the anxiety.
- Experiments have shown that labeling or naming an emotion can decrease our physical reactions to the emotion.
- Externalizing anxiety, by giving it a name, helps us see that we are bigger than our anxiety and don't need to be controlled by it.

So how can you try to befriend your anxiety:

1. When anxiety appears calmly notice and name it as anxiety

"I have some anxiety that just appeared."

2. Be curious.

“I wonder what I might learn about myself through this anxiety?”

3. Talk to it

“Anxiety, it’s ok that you’re here but I have things I want to do and I’m going to keep doing them.”