

Anxious Attachment

RECOVERY WORKBOOK



Heal Relationship Anxiety,
Stop Overthinking & Build Secure Love

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If you are experiencing severe emotional distress, a mental health crisis, or thoughts of harming yourself or someone else, seek immediate help from a qualified professional, a local crisis service, or emergency services in your area.

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INTRODUCTION

I often think of anxious attachment as an alarm clock inside you that rings without a schedule. Night. Silence. Everything seems fine, but inside, something is already screaming: What if he leaves? What if he is tired of me? What if love ended while I was washing the dishes? And suddenly, a person with anxious attachment is no longer sleeping, but mentally testing the relationship's strength, like checking a door before leaving the house. Is it locked? Truly locked? And what if I pull on it one more time?

Fear of loss rarely looks like a calm reflection. Usually, it is a TV series with endless episodes. He didn't reply right away — he must have fallen out of love. He replied briefly — he must have grown distant. He replied warmly — he is still with me, but not for long. Anxious attachment can turn any silence into a tragedy and any distance into an abyss. And then the person starts saving the relationship in advance, even when no one planned to destroy it.

Anxious attachment is like a heavy suitcase with no handle. It's hard to carry, but frightening to let go of. A person doesn't cling to a relationship because it feels good, but because it feels far scarier to live without it. And then the partner stops being a living person but turns into a life preserver instead. And as we all know, a life preserver is only needed when you feel like you're drowning.

Anxious attachment is often reduced to the fear of being abandoned. But things aren't so simple in real life. There is also a need for closeness, sensitivity to changes in the relationship, and past experiences. And, of course, there is that one person by your side. After all, anxiety doesn't always arise out of nowhere. An accidental pause in communication is one thing. But a relationship in which you are constantly left guessing, waiting, and doubting is a completely different story.

I didn't want to write a book about how to become a less sensitive person. Or how to learn not to expect anything from others. The need for warmth, attention, and a secure connection is completely natural. But sometimes the fear of losing closeness becomes so strong that it's hard to hear yourself through it anymore. What do I want now? What is happening to me? Does the way this relationship works actually suit me?

We will explore what triggers anxiety, how it gains strength, and why, in those moments, it can be difficult to rely on what you understand perfectly with your rational mind. This book contains explanations, questions for self-reflection, and exercises for specific situations. You don't have to go through everything in order or try to change your habitual reactions all at once. Move at your own pace.

Working with anxious attachment does not mean that you will never again feel afraid when someone pulls away, or that you will stop needing support. Rather, over time, it becomes easier to distinguish: this is

my fear; this is what is actually happening between us; and this is the action that I can choose right now.

This book is about the kind of closeness in which the other person remains important — and so do you.

YOUR FREE GIFT

When the Alarm Goes Off

An Anxious Attachment First-Aid Kit



You may understand your anxious attachment well, and still struggle to remember what helps when anxiety takes over.

Created as a practical companion to this book, this phone-friendly guide brings five helpful practices together in one place.

Inside, you will find five practical exercises to help you:

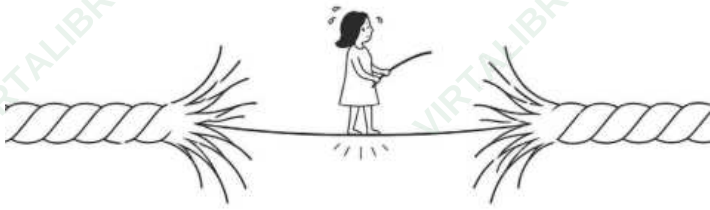
- slow down the anxious spiral and stop overthinking;
- reconnect with your body and the present moment;
- separate facts from fears and assumptions;
- choose your next step with greater clarity.



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CHAPTER 1

Anxious Attachment: How to Recognize This Pattern in Yourself

1.1. What Is Anxious Attachment, and Why It Is Not Just “Strong Love”

I suggest we begin with an important clarification: anxious attachment is not strong love or high emotionality. It is a deeply rooted survival strategy shaped by earlier experiences. At the core of anxious attachment lies an unconscious belief: to preserve safety and a sense of self-worth, you must constantly secure the attention and approval of a significant other.

This system works like an internal alarm that goes into anxiety mode at the slightest signs of emotional or physical distancing from a partner. Such signs are perceived as a threat to existence. And the key components of this state are:

- hypervigilance toward the partner’s behavior;
- negative interpretation of ambiguous signals;
- chronic uncertainty about the strength of the bond.

Let’s take an example. Anna notices that her boyfriend Philip did not reply to her message right away, as he usually does, but after forty minutes. Instead of thinking, “He is probably busy,” Anna’s brain instantly generates scenarios such as “He has grown cold toward me,” “He is no longer interested in me,” “He has someone else,” and so on. And she spends the rest of

the day in painful waiting, analyzing every word in his messages.

It is important to emphasize that anxious attachment is not a character flaw but an outdated safety program that once helped you survive but now sabotages close relationships.

Let's imagine a kettle. It has simply boiled, and steam is coming out of the spout. But the internal alarm reacts as if a fire has started and launches the full fire-extinguishing system. In the same way, the nervous system of a person with anxious attachment works like a faulty fire alarm, raising panic over false alarms.



Exercise

When you feel a wave of anxiety coming on, try answering a few questions in writing:

1. What frightening scenario is my brain drawing right now? Simply formulating it already helps you begin working with it.

2. What are 3–5 objective facts that contradict this scenario? For example: “It is his workday right now,” “He has an important project at work,” “In general, everything is fine in our relationship.”

3. Is there a more neutral explanation for the other person’s behavior? For example: “He is probably busy in a meeting with a client, so he is answering messages not after 5 minutes, but after 40.”

Most likely, the first time you do this exercise, it will not be enough to completely dispel the anxiety. Besides, you may think that when emotions overwhelm you, you simply will not be able to remember it. Here,

it is important to understand one thing: there is no need to learn to swim during a storm. First, a person learns to swim in a safe pool, feeling the bottom with their feet. And only later do they face strong waves. It is the same here.

The task is not to “switch off” anxiety at the most difficult moment. First, it is important to gradually train yourself to notice your reactions in a calmer state by asking yourself these questions.

It is important not to demand from yourself that this exercise immediately free you from anxiety. The state itself may not disappear right away. But the ability to pause and reflect on it already helps gradually weaken the automatic attachment-related reaction.

Imagine that your fear has a voice. What exactly does it whisper to you in moments when your partner distances themselves, or when it seems to you that they are distancing themselves? And does this sense of threat resemble anything from your past experience? Most likely, these feelings did not appear yesterday. Perhaps there is something very familiar in them. There is no need to answer these questions in detail right now. But the material that begins to rise to the surface will be useful to us later.

Imagine for a second: if your internal fire alarm, which floods everything with foam when a kettle boils, became less sensitive, what would your life be like?

Here, an objection may arise: “But my fears do come true. Partners really do leave.” You have been through painful experiences. It is absolutely real: some

situations confirmed your fears. If your fears had never come true, it would be easier for you to let them go.

But let's look deeper. Could the fear itself that your partner would leave you, and your reactions to that fear, have unintentionally influenced how events developed? Could they have unintentionally played a part in creating this self-reinforcing cycle?

There is no right answer here, and you may answer in whatever way feels true to you. We will see these connections again.

1.2. Where the Anxious Relationship Pattern Comes From

Why does a person find themselves in similar relationships again and again, experiencing similar fears, as if walking around the same emotional circle? The roots of anxious attachment almost always trace back to early experiences of relationships with significant adults.

Love and attention were inconsistent: sometimes the adult was warm and available, and at other times cold, distant, or rejecting. In this atmosphere, a child could not truly relax. The psyche developed a survival strategy: to preserve love, you had to be hypervigilant, read the other person's mood, earn attention, adapt, and avoid losing the connection.

Over time, this strategy becomes imprinted into the nervous system. Later in adulthood, a person tends to reproduce the same relationship model, even if they want something completely different.

It is important to understand: at one time, this strategy really did help you survive. Today, however, it can create serious problems.

The long-term consequences of anxious attachment often look like this: chronic stress, emotional ups and downs, exhaustion, painful breakups, constant anxiety in relationships, and a tendency to choose emotionally unavailable partners.

Why is a person so strongly drawn specifically to emotionally cold people? Because they fit an already familiar inner scenario. The psyche unconsciously chooses what feels familiar, even if it causes pain.

It is important to emphasize: you do not choose to be anxious on purpose. Your nervous system was taught that closeness is unstable and unpredictable, something you constantly have to fight for. Anxious attachment is not a choice. It is a forced adaptation formed in childhood.

For example, when Christina was a child, her father could be affectionate, attentive, and caring in a good mood. But when he was upset because of work, he could go for weeks without really noticing her at all. Because of his emotional immaturity. From childhood, Christina learned to pick up on the slightest changes in his tone of voice to gauge whether she could count on his warmth and attention that day. Now, in rela-

tionships with men, she unconsciously reproduces this model. She constantly tries to guess her partner's mood, panics at the slightest coldness, and unconsciously chooses emotionally immature men.

It is like dancing with a ghost. When you enter a new relationship, you begin to dance the dance you learned in childhood. Your partner may not even know the steps, but you persistently lead him through the familiar scenario, reacting not to him, but to a ghost from the past. You find yourself not in the “here and now,” but in the “there and then.”



Practice for Self-Observation

Try reflecting on a few questions.

1. Which significant adults in your childhood were emotionally unpredictable?

2. What feelings did this bring up in you?

3. What survival strategies did you invent back then in order to receive love and attention?

4. How do these strategies show up in your relationships today?

This exploration is not about looking for someone to blame, but about noticing how the past influences the present. The past influences the present, but it does not determine the future.

Another important question: what was the main rule of love in your family? For example: “love has to be earned,” “don’t cause problems,” “be convenient,” “don’t feel too much,” “don’t ask for too much.” What did you feel when you needed comfort but did not receive it? And is this feeling familiar to you today?

The psyche often tries to “replay” an old wound. It unconsciously looks for similar situations, hoping that “this time it will end differently.” This is why a person may be so strongly drawn to emotionally cold or unavailable partners. As if somewhere inside, there is a hope: “I will finally make you love me.” But here, it is important to ask yourself honestly: has this worked for you?

Sometimes a person says, “I had a good childhood. My parents loved me.” And that may very well be true. This is not about whether there was love. It is about the stability of emotional contact and whether an adult was near the child who was emotionally available, predictable, and able to tolerate the child’s feelings.

Even loving parents can be emotionally overwhelmed, anxious, tired, psychologically immature, or traumatized by their own experience. Then the child is faced not with an absence of love, but with its inconsistency: today there is contact, tomorrow there

is none; today the parent is present, tomorrow they are emotionally unavailable.

We are not looking for someone to blame, nor are we trying to accuse the parents. We are exploring how the way a person builds closeness today was formed.

1.3. How to Recognize Anxious Attachment in Yourself

Anxious attachment shows itself not so much in separate actions as in the overall emotional background and motivation.

The main markers can be conditionally divided into four groups:

Signs at the level of thinking

This is constant mental involvement in the relationship. A person keeps analyzing the partner's behavior, trying to read their thoughts, looking for hidden signals, and interpreting neutral events as a threat.

For example, the partner replied not after five minutes, but after forty. Wrote more dryly than usual. Did not use the usual emoji or did not like a photo. For a person with anxious attachment, such little things rarely remain just little things.

The anxious brain instantly begins to complete the picture of what is happening and look for signs of a

threat to the relationship. Automatic thoughts appear: “He has grown cold toward me,” “He is no longer interested in me,” “Maybe he has someone else.”

At the same time, there may be no objective confirmation of these conclusions at all. But the psyche already perceives the situation as dangerous and triggers an anxious reaction, as if closeness is about to be lost.

Another important marker of anxious attachment is a tendency toward catastrophizing. Any mismatch or temporary distance begins to be perceived as a sign of an approaching breakup.

A small argument, different views and tastes, the partner’s desire to be alone, or even emotional distance for a few hours, can cause strong anxiety and a sense of threat. The psyche instantly moves to the worst-case scenario: “something has gone wrong,” “the relationship is falling apart,” “I will soon be left.”

Conflicts, differences, and periods of distance are normal parts of any living relationship. Closeness does not require constant merging and does not disappear with every tense moment.

Signs at the emotional level

These are sharp emotional swings: from euphoria upon receiving reassurance of love to despair at the slightest sign of distance.

A background feeling of tension and anxiety appears, which temporarily quiets down only during contact with the partner.

Signs at the behavioral level

Here, there is often a constant need to maintain contact: a person keeps waiting for messages, often writes or calls first, and looks for reassurance of love and emotional involvement from the partner. Even a small distance can be experienced very painfully.

There are often difficulties with being alone. One's own interests, needs, and plans gradually begin to move into the background. A person increasingly adjusts their life to the relationship and the partner's emotional state, trying to preserve closeness at any cost.

Over time, this can lead to a blurring of personal boundaries and the feeling that one's inner state depends entirely on how the other person feels today and how emotionally available they are.

Signs at the level of self-perception

Self-esteem gradually begins to depend on external signals from the partner: how they looked, what they wrote, how warmly they replied, and how much attention they showed today. Because of this, a feeling may arise: "Without a relationship, I am incomplete"

or “If I am not loved, then something is wrong with me.”

And often all of this is perceived as proof of deep love and strong feelings. But the main diagnostic criterion here is not the intensity of emotions. A more important question is: how much does your inner calm depend on external reassurance from your partner? How much does your ability to feel valuable, loved, and safe rest on another person’s reaction?

For example, Sophia may spend hours analyzing why her boyfriend did not like her new photo. Dozens of scenarios of cheating or emotional cooling begin to play through her mind, even though there are no real reasons for this. This inner dialogue exhausts her so much that by evening, she meets her partner with a list of accumulated accusations, which eventually provokes a real argument out of nowhere.

It is like an emotional minefield. The partner moves through the relationship in constant tension, expecting that any wrong step could lead to disaster. Every message, intonation, or pause requires enormous mental effort and analysis. Both partners end up in a state of constant inner exhaustion.



Questions for Self-Observation

Try to honestly assess how familiar you are with the following states. You can use a scale from 1 to 10.

1. "I often worry that my partner loves me less than I love them."

2. "My mood for the whole day depends on how our conversation went."

3. "I am afraid to express dissatisfaction so as not to provoke an argument or a breakup."

4. "If my partner takes a long time to reply, I immediately think that something has happened or that they are angry."

5. "I am ready to cancel my plans if my partner suddenly suggests a meeting."

A few more important questions:

6. How much time a day do you spend analyzing the relationship?

7. What happens to your sense of self when you are left alone with yourself?

8. What price do you pay for this constant inner vigilance?

It is important to emphasize that the goal is not to abruptly eliminate anxious attachment. First, it is important to explore it: how it is structured, how it manifests, what it gives you, what it protects you from, and what price you pay for it.

Sometimes a person says, “I am not anxious. I am just very sensitive and emotional.” And indeed, sensi-

tivity in itself is not a problem. On the contrary, the ability to feel and love deeply is a great strength.

The question is not how to remove emotions or become less sensitive. The question is how to separate the ability to love from the anxiety and suffering that begin to accompany this love. Because very often a person calls anxiety love. But love and constant inner torment are not the same thing.

1.4. Where the Line Lies Between Love and Anxious Dependence

It is important to distinguish between love based on deficit and love based on abundance.

Anxious attachment most often stems from fear of loss and an inner emptiness that, to the person, only a partner can fill. This kind of love becomes an attempt to receive what is painfully missing inside: safety, confirmation of one's own worth, and a sense of being needed and significant.

Deep love comes from a different state, from a sense of one's own wholeness and inner fullness. In this case, relationships are not built around an attempt to close an inner deficit, but around the desire to share with another person the good that already exists inside.

Love based on deficit seeks what is missing, while love based on abundance shares what is already there.

Here, it is important to distinguish between deep, stable love and anxious attachment. This is more of a metaphor and a useful distinction for understanding than a set of strict categories. In deep love, there is trust and inner calm, even in moments of separation. With anxious attachment, the fear of loss may remain even when two people are together. Time together is colored by anxiety: that it will soon end, that the partner is not involved enough, or that the relationship is “not the way it should be.”

Healthy love expands a person's inner world. It gives more freedom, stability, calm, and the ability to remain oneself and live one's own life without losing closeness with others. Anxious attachment, on the contrary, narrows the world down to one person. The emotional state begins to revolve around the partner, and the relationship becomes the center of inner life. It is as if a cage has been built, in which everything depends on the other person's presence, reactions, and mood. So, we can put it this way: deep love expands your world, while anxious attachment narrows it to the fear of losing the source of emotional safety.

It is important to understand that how a person feels in a relationship depends not only on their own attachment style but also on the kind of partner beside them and the dynamic that forms between them. With one person, anxiety may be constantly activated, while with another, it may noticeably decrease or almost not appear at all. A relationship is always a system to which both people contribute.

If a partner creates emotional ups and downs, uses distance, the “closer-farther” game, unpredictability, silence, or intermittent reinforcement, anxiety naturally intensifies. The psyche begins to live in constant tension and expectation of losing contact.

Conversely, next to an emotionally stable, predictable, and reliable person, greater calm, trust, and inner stability may gradually emerge. So, the question is not only “what kind of attachment do I have?” It also matters what kind of relationship a person is in and how the partner dynamic affects them.

Ask yourself a simple question: since these relationships appeared, has your world become bigger or smaller? Has there been more of you, more freedom, interests, contact with the world, or has everything gradually narrowed down to one person? If the relationship becomes the center around which your entire inner state revolves, this is an important signal to pay attention to.

And one more important question: what does trust in a relationship mean to you? Is it about calm and a sense of safety, or constant alertness, control, and fear of losing? Many people think that true love means complete merging, the desire to always be together, and not existing without each other. But healthy closeness is still built not only on “we.” There remains space for “I” and for “you.” Not out of fear of losing each other, but out of a free desire to be close.

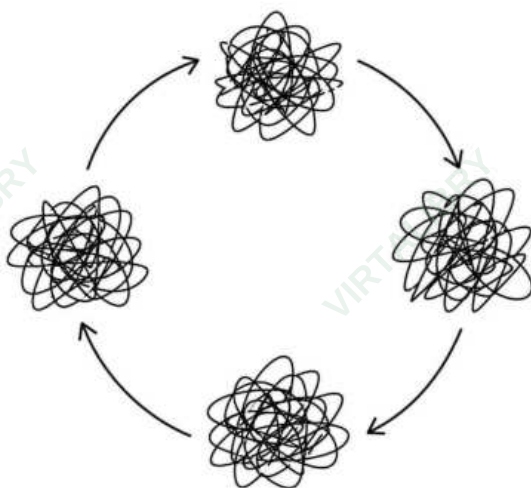
The desire to be together is a natural and important part of love. The problem does not begin with

closeness but with closeness turning into a rigid demand. When not being together 24/7 begins to feel like a tragedy, the other person's freedom becomes a threat to the relationship.

In anxious attachment, it often seems that true love means complete merging: doing everything together, feeling everything in the same way, and having no boundaries or separateness. But the paradox is that a deep connection is usually possible only between two whole, separate people, not inside an emotional cage.

Anxious attachment is built from fear, deficit, and inner dependence: "I am with you because I cannot be without you." This kind of dynamic gradually wears down the nervous system.

Healthy love is built differently. It contains choice, freedom, and inner calm: "I am with you not because I have to be, or because I am afraid to lose you, but because I want to be close." This kind of love does not narrow life down to one person, but helps two people create something alive and stable together.



CHAPTER 2

How the Anxious Cycle Works in Relationships

2.1. How the Anxiety Cycle Works in Relationships

The anxious attachment cycle is a closed loop made up of four stages, and over time, it only becomes stronger.

1. The first stage — the trigger

A real or imagined sign of the partner's distancing appears: they did not answer a call, became more thoughtful, wanted to be alone, or even simply replied more dryly than usual. Sometimes, for a person with anxious attachment, even a very small signal is enough to feel a threat to the relationship.

2. The second stage — activation of fear

The internal safety system instantly launches anxiety and catastrophic thoughts: "He is leaving me," "He no longer needs me," "He has someone else," "She thinks I am worthless."

That is, after the trigger, panic appears, along with a sense that the bond is under threat.

3. The third stage — protest behavior

The person tries to eliminate the threat immediately and restore a sense of closeness using so-called activating strategies. These may include:

- frequent calls and messages;
- demands for reassurance of love;
- reproaches;

- attempts to provoke jealousy;
- emotional pressure;
- desperate attempts to restore contact.

4. The fourth stage — temporary relief or worsening of the situation

Sometimes the partner really does give more attention and reassurance. This brings short-term relief, and the psyche remembers: “This strategy works.” This is precisely the trap of the cycle.

But it can also happen differently: the partner begins to distance themselves even further due to pressure, control, or emotional overload. Then the original fear only becomes stronger, and a new round of anxiety begins.

The problem here is not the desire for closeness itself. The desire for closeness is natural for any person. The problem is that the way this closeness is pursued paradoxically begins to destroy exactly what you are trying to preserve.

Let’s imagine an example. Alex arranged to meet his friends and go watch football at a bar. At first, his girlfriend reacts calmly to this. But closer to the evening, anxiety begins to overwhelm her.

She writes: “Do you really love me?” “It seems to me that you don’t want to spend time with me.” “If you really loved me, you would rather be with me than with your friends.”

Alex replies irritably: “Everything is fine. I love you. Everything is okay.” But this is not enough for the girl. She calls, starts crying. Alex loses his temper, an argument breaks out, and in the end, the evening is ruined for both of them.

This is an illustration of the anxious cycle: trigger → fear → protest behavior → worsening of the relationship.

Here, the metaphor of a leaky bucket is appropriate. A person tries to fill themselves with a sense of emotional safety through the partner’s attention. But inside, it is as if there is a hole — a deep deficit of self-worth and stability. And no matter how much reassurance of love comes in, the relief is temporary. Very soon, the anxiety returns again.

It is important to understand: I am not saying this to make you feel guilty. On the contrary, I am saying it to help you see the mechanism itself. Anxious attachment is a process with its own internal logic that can grow stronger over time.

A useful exercise here can be “The Cycle Map.”



Exercise “The Cycle Map”

Draw a circle, divide it into four parts, and fill them in:

1. Trigger

What exactly happened? It is important to separate facts from interpretations.

“He doesn’t love me” is an interpretation. The fact is: “He went with his friends to watch football.”

2. My thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations

What am I thinking? What am I feeling?

Try writing your thoughts in direct speech: “I think that if he is spending time without me, then I don’t matter to him.” Then listen to your feelings and bodily reactions: anxiety, anger, shame, heaviness in the chest, tension in the stomach, and so on.

3. My impulsive action

What do I want to do immediately? Call? Start a relationship confrontation? Begin demanding reassurance of love?

Sometimes it is useful to look at it this way: “What action now seems to want to happen through me?”

4. Alternative action

What small thing can you do for yourself right now, without involving your partner?

For example:

- take a few slow breaths in and out;
- write down your feelings;
- go for a walk;
- turn on a film;
- shift your attention to taking care of yourself.

At this point, many people have the question: “Then why do I need a partner at all if I have to cope by myself?” This is an important question. And later, we will discuss the difference between healthy closeness and emotional dependence.

For now, I suggest that you reflect on this:

1. Have you noticed the brief relief that appears when your partner finally gives you reassurance of love?

2. What do you think is the worst thing that will happen if one day you do not react to the anxious impulse, but simply observe it?

3. What happens to your sense of self when you are left alone with yourself?

4. How do you think your partner feels in moments of your protest behavior?

Often, a person says, “If I do nothing, if I stop controlling the situation, my partner will think I don’t care and will leave.” Behind this statement is usually a deeper belief: that love must be constantly earned, held on to, and controlled.

Later, we will explore where this belief comes from and how to gradually learn to trust relationships without turning them into a constant struggle for attention.

In essence, the anxiety cycle in relationships is a self-fulfilling prophecy. A trigger appears; it triggers panic, and then the person performs a protest action — for example, starts calling constantly or demanding reassurance of love. This may bring short-term relief, but in the end, it often leads the partner to distance themselves. And in this way, the original fear is only confirmed.

2.2. Why Attempts to Achieve Closeness Can Push a Partner Away

This happens because of a fundamental mismatch between intention and perception. Your intention is to receive reassurance of love, feel safe, and restore the connection. And this is an absolutely natural human need. But the problem arises in how exactly this need begins to be expressed.

A person with anxious attachment often tries to achieve closeness through control, complaints, constant checking, emotional pressure, demands for reassurance, and repeated questions. But from the partner's side, this is not perceived as a request for support. It is perceived as distrust, pressure, control, accusation, and intrusion into personal space.

And then the opposite reaction is triggered, the partner begins to protect their autonomy instinctively: they distance themselves emotionally, shut down, avoid contact, become irritated, and try to "get some air."

And the stronger the pressure, the stronger the desire to distance. This, in turn, confirms the anxious person's main fear: "I am about to be abandoned." That is how the cycle closes.

It is very important to see one thing here. Your cry of "Please calm me down, tell me that you love me" often comes across to your partner as "You do not love

me enough.” Instead of wanting to comfort you, they begin to protect themselves.

For example, Steve constantly asks his girlfriend: “Are we okay? Are you angry? Do you love me? Did I do anything wrong?” He does this out of fear that she is unhappy and may leave him. For Helen, this begins to feel like a constant interrogation. She feels distrusted and treated like an object. This scanning of her mood tires and irritates her, and she distances herself so her psyche can rest from the constant emotional tension.

But there is no need to abruptly try to “stop being anxious.” That usually does not work. You will feel anxious, break down, reproach yourself, and fall back into old reactions. Changing the pattern begins with noticing how the cycle unfolds, what fear lies behind your reaction, and what you are really trying to receive.

You can bring into your communication the skill of a “translator from the language of anxiety.” Translate reproaches into I-statements about your needs. For example, instead of: “You never text first. You don’t care about me,” try saying: “When I don’t receive messages from you for a long time, I start to feel anxious and forgotten. It would mean a lot to me if you sometimes wrote me a couple of words during the day. It helps me feel connected.”

There is a common fear that vulnerability is weakness. But what if the opposite is true? What if real strength lies precisely in the ability to honestly show your feelings, instead of hiding them behind complaints and defenses?

Try to observe how reproaches work in your life. How often do you turn to them in relationships? And most importantly, what do they lead to in the end? Do they create closeness, understanding, and calm? Or do they create tension, distance, and mutual defensiveness? Sometimes it may seem that reproaches keep the relationship from falling apart. But look honestly: what do they actually create between you?

And what if sincerity can create closeness much better than reproaches? What if you can speak about your fears directly, instead of hiding them behind complaints and accusations?

Try to remember your last reproach toward your partner. What feeling or fear was really behind it? Often, behind irritation there is the fear of being rejected, unwanted, abandoned, or unheard. The trap of reproaches is that they make the other person responsible for your emotional state, without noticing the anxiety and pain behind them. But closeness is usually born not where accusations are voiced, but where honesty appears. Not in the format: “You ruined everything again,” but in the format: “This is what I feel when this happens. It is important for me to understand whether we can discuss it.” This is not about instantly stopping all reproaches. At first, it is enough to begin noticing how you do this, what fear stands behind the reproach, and where this way of communicating eventually leads your relationship.

2.3. What a Partner Feels When You Act from Anxiety

There is a high chance that they, too, are in a state of chronic stress and confusion. They may feel as if they are walking through an emotional minefield, or across a floor covered with shards of glass, afraid of taking a wrong step. They may constantly feel guilty because all their attempts to calm you down have only a temporary effect.

Anxious attachment does not destroy only the person who feels anxious. It can also destroy the partner, especially if they tend to take responsibility for another person's emotional state. Gradually, this leads to emotional burnout and a desire to distance themselves. This is not necessarily because the partner does not love you. Sometimes they distance themselves to escape the feeling of suffocation and helplessness.

How to Support Your Partner

Supporting your partner means, first of all, acknowledging their feelings. For example: "I understand that it can be difficult for you with me." Secondly, it is important to gradually take responsibility for your own state. This helps remove the perception that your partner is the only rescuer and the only person responsible for your emotional state. Your partner is neither your enemy nor the source of your pain. They

are a separate person who can also suffer after finding themselves in the gravitational field of your anxiety.



A Question That Helps Shift the Focus

The next time you feel an anxiety attack coming on and want to make a complaint to your partner, try to pause and ask yourself:

- “What is happening in their world right now?”
- “Are they tired?”
- “Do they have their own stresses?”
- “Do they have problems too?”
- “What might they be feeling next to me right now?”

One simple question like this can help shift the focus from your pain to the couple’s shared reality. That is, what becomes important is not only “What is happening to me?” but also “What is happening between us?”

“Why Should I Think About Their Feelings If I Am in Pain?”

It is important to acknowledge this: your pain is real. It is not made up, not stupid, and not secondary. But the paradox is that the path to your own relief of-

ten goes through understanding how your pain affects another person. When you show compassion toward your partner, you begin to break the “attack — defense” cycle. And then there is a greater chance of creating a space where your partner can give you the warmth, support, and closeness you so much need.

2.4. What Happens If You Ignore Anxious Attachment

Let's now look at this from another side. What long-term consequences can come from ignoring anxious attachment even if the relationship outwardly remains stable? Let's say the relationship exists and continues; the partners do not break up, but the anxious pattern remains unaddressed.

It is like driving a car with a flat tire or misaligned wheels. The car keeps moving, but every mile requires tension. Gradually, the tire wears down, the load on the other parts increases, the car wears out, and the driver becomes tired.

Something similar happens in relationships. The anxious partner lives in constant stress, and the other partner lives under constant pressure. Gradually, closeness erodes. Sincerity is replaced by endless rituals of reassurance. Sex becomes not an expression of desire and closeness, but a way to receive confirmation of love and safety. Over time, the relationship can

turn into a codependent system, deprived of growth, where both people are unhappy but afraid to change anything. Unresolved anxiety slowly poisons the relationship, turning it from joy into fatigue and mutual obligations.

Let's take an example. Polina and Ron have been together for ten years.

Polina has never really worked through her fear of being abandoned. Every time Ron stays late at work, she begins calling him again and again, even if he warned her in advance. To avoid conflict, Ron begins to lie: "I'm already on my way, I'll be home soon." He does this not because he wants to deceive her, but because it is the only way to temporarily reduce the tension. But Polina senses the lie, and her anxiety grows even stronger. Gradually, their communication turns into a battlefield. There is almost no trust left in the relationship, only fatigue, irritation, and mutual tension.

Anxious Attachment Is a Process

It is important to understand that relationships and attachment are not fixed. They are constantly developing processes. The only question is in which direction.

If a person continues to remain completely under the power of anxious attachment, does not create space between the trigger and the reaction, does not learn to take care of themselves, and continues to beg

the partner for reassurance of love, it is important to honestly ask yourself:

Where will this lead in five years? And in ten? What will our relationship be like? What kind of person will I become? What will I feel every day?

Sometimes it is useful to remember yourself five years ago and look at what has changed since then. Has there been more calm, freedom, and trust? Or has the anxiety only grown stronger?



Questions for Reflection

Try asking yourself a few questions:

1. What price are you already paying for this anxiety?

2. What good thing is anxiety trying to do for you?

4. What advice for

Self today if you c
ars from now?

VIRTUALIBRY

“Everyone Has Problems in Relationships”

Often, a person says, “You are exaggerating. Everyone has problems in relationships. That’s normal.” And indeed, perfect relationships do not exist. Films, books, and TV series constantly show conflicts, jealousy, drama, emotional ups and downs, and the struggle for love.

But there is a huge difference between solving difficulties together and living through the same painful dynamic every day. The task is not to “rock the boat” and destroy the relationship. The task is to notice the leak in time and repair it so the relationship can become safer and more alive for both of you.



CHAPTER 3

The Deeper Pain: Fear of Abandonment, Self-Worth, and Choice of Partners

3.1. Why the Fear of Being Abandoned Is Connected to a Sense of Self-Worth

This connection is direct. If a person's self-worth is conditional and depends on external factors, for example, on the presence and attention of a partner, then a breakup is perceived not simply as the loss of love, but as a complete devaluation of oneself as a person. A person with anxious attachment experiences a breakup not just as a painful life event, but also as proof of their own worthlessness.

The fear of being abandoned is often not only the fear of losing a person. It is the fear of facing an inner emptiness and the belief: "Without him/her, I am nothing." When inner support is weak, a person begins to look for it outside and appoints the partner as the keeper of their own worth. That is why the potential loss of a partner feels like a threat to existence itself.

Unconditional Self-Worth

Working on unconditional self-worth is the gradual realization that your value is built into you, not granted to you by someone from the outside. Very often, a person is afraid of losing not so much the partner as the version of themselves that existed in the loving eyes of another.

For example, after a breakup, a young man feels not simply lonely; he begins to feel completely worth-

less. He stops going to the gym, which he used to love. Because: “What is the point now if she won’t appreciate it?” His self-esteem has become so intertwined with his partner’s opinion that, as a result of the relationship, he has lost a sense of his own significance.

Here is what is important: you can lose the feeling of your own worth, but not the worth itself. Your own significance cannot be lost, even if it seems otherwise to you.



Exercise: “My Qualities Outside of Relationships”

A useful practice is to make a list of your qualities, achievements, and abilities that remain with you regardless of whether you are in a relationship. Try to formulate:

- your strengths

- achievements

- abilities

- personal qualities

- interests

- skills

For example, you are a good friend; you know how to support people; you have a sense of humor; you are curious; you know how to organize space; you know how to care; and you have learned something over the past year.

The point of the exercise is to see that relationships are only one area of life, not the whole of life. Besides relationships, a person has work, development, interests, friends, creativity, hobbies, and a personal path. When relationships become all of life, their loss is indeed experienced as a catastrophe.

Existential Loneliness and the Value of Closeness

A person comes into this life alone and leaves it alone. This does not mean being doomed to loneliness or that relationships are meaningless. The point is different: no one will ever be able to fully live your inner life for you, to completely feel your thoughts and experiences. But this is exactly what makes closeness valuable. Relationships become not a way to escape inner emptiness, but an opportunity to share life with another person.



Questions for Reflection

Try continuing the phrase: “If my partner leaves me, it will mean that I am...”

And then ask yourself:

- What valuable things in yourself do you stop seeing?
- What existed in your life even before this relationship?
- Where did it disappear to?

And one more important question: what would happen if you treated yourself with the same care with which you treated your partner at the beginning of the relationship? What changed? Why did this care disappear in relation to yourself?

Self-Care Is Not Selfishness

Many people perceive self-care as selfishness. The thought appears: “If I think about myself, then I am a bad partner.” But here it is important to make a distinction. Selfishness is demanding from others at their expense. Healthy self-care is creating inner resources so that you can enter relationships not from the need to close an inner emptiness, but from fullness and the ability to share.

When a person is internally full, they can give more to another without exhausting themselves. That is why self-care is not the opposite of love. It is one of its foundations.

3.2. Why You Choose Similar Partners Again and Again

The connection between partner choice and attachment style is not accidental; it is systemic. The psyche unconsciously strives to reproduce familiar emotional circumstances, even when they are painful, because the familiar is perceived as more predictable and safer.

The Anxious-Avoidant Trap

A person with anxious attachment often chooses partners with an avoidant attachment style, and this is how the anxious-avoidant dynamic forms. One person desperately seeks closeness, while the other just as desperately fears it and distances themselves. The avoidant partner's need for space triggers panic in the anxious partner, and the anxious partner's protest behavior makes the avoidant partner distance themselves even more.

A closed circle is formed, and the anxious person once again confirms their belief: "I will be abandoned anyway." The avoidant person confirms theirs: "Closeness is suffocation."

We are not looking for a person, but for a familiar emotional role. Often, a person chooses not so much the partner themselves as a familiar emotional scenario, which is why similar relationships repeat.

For example, Valerie had several relationships with emotionally cold men whose attention she constantly had to earn. She complained that she kept “meeting the wrong ones,” but did not notice that her inner radar was unconsciously tuned precisely to such people, whose emotional unavailability recreated a familiar childhood dynamic from her relationship with her father.

Calm People Are Boring

Often, a person says: “But it is unavailable partners who create passion and a spark. Calm people are boring.” Here, it is important to understand that the nervous system can confuse anxiety with love, and emotional ups and downs with passion. Sometimes what feels like a “spark” is actually the familiar arousal of the anxious system. What is perceived as boredom may turn out to be an unfamiliar feeling of safety and stability. Perhaps your nervous system is simply not yet used to calm closeness without constant highs and lows.



Exercise: “Analysis of Past Relationships”

It is useful to explore recurring patterns. Think of three or four past significant relationships and fill in the table below.

It is important to look not at external characteristics, but at the emotional dynamic of the relationship.

Relationships	What attracted me to this person in the beginning?	How did he or she show feelings?	How did they react to my requests for closeness?	What common traits repeat?
Relationship 1				
Relationship 2				
Relationship 3				

3.3. How to Distinguish Past Pain from the Behavior of a Real Partner

Learning to distinguish what belongs to your past and what is really happening in the relationship right now is a necessary and important skill. One of the key steps here is to develop the ability to see yourself from the outside. That is:

- to notice your reactions,
- to explore your feelings,
- to try to look at the situation through the other person's eyes,
- and at the same time, to observe yourself as if slightly from the outside.

When a strong emotional reaction arises in response to a partner's actions, it is useful to mentally press pause and ask yourself: "Am I reacting right now to the real person in front of me, or to a ghost from my past?" Sometimes, even a short micro-pause already helps bring back more clarity.

The main marker that you are reacting to past trauma is disproportionality, the excessive intensity of the reaction. For example, your partner is ten minutes late, and inside you feel total betrayal and panic, as if you have been abandoned forever. Most likely, it is not only the current situation that is being activated, but also past experience.

It is important to learn to notice this. For example: “Hello. It’s you again, my old fear of being abandoned.”

At the same time, it is important not to devalue the reality of what is happening. This is not about ignoring real problems or closing your eyes to your partner’s behavior. The task is to restore clear perception and respond to what is really happening now, not to the shadow of the past.

Your partner is not responsible for the wounds that appeared before them. But they can help you heal them if you stop unconsciously appointing them as the cause of their appearance.

Let’s take an example of this kind of “echo of the past.” Suzanne’s boyfriend says that he wants to spend the evening with friends. Suzanne’s first reaction is panic, with thoughts like: “He is tired of me,” “He doesn’t love me anymore,” “He will be laughing about me with them.” She pauses and remembers a similar feeling of abandonment in childhood, when her father would leave the house after arguments with her mother. Then she understands that this panic is an echo of the past. The reality of the present moment is only that her partner wants to meet his friends. After that, she can say: “I feel a little sad because I’ll miss you. But I understand that this is important to you. Have a good time.” Here, balance is important: do not deny your feelings, while also taking into account the reality of another person and their right to their own life.



Practice: “Echo of the Past”

When you experience a strong emotional reaction, divide a sheet of paper into two parts.

First column: “What actually happened?” Here, you need to write down only the facts. For example: “He did not reply to my message for two hours.”

Second column: “What does this resemble from my past?” Here, you write down what memories come up, what feelings rise to the surface, and what this is associated with. For example: “This is like how my mother ignored me when she was offended.”

This exercise helps you see where the current situation ends and old pain begins to surface.

What actually happened?	What does this resemble from my past?

If Your Partner's Behavior Really Hurts You

There are situations when a partner really does behave in an unacceptable way. Our task here is not to justify someone else's behavior, but to separate the partner's real actions, which are indeed worth discussing, from the avalanche of feelings from the past that covers you on top of these actions.

When you begin to distinguish between these two layers, it will become easier to discuss what is happening calmly, understand yourself better, and avoid collapsing under the weight of old emotional reactions. Then you can work with both the real situation in the relationship and your inner wounds separately, rather than mixing everything into one experience.

3.4. What Secure Attachment Feels Like

We have talked a lot about anxious attachment. But what, then, does secure attachment feel like? It is not some utopian state without conflicts or difficulties. It is a deep inner knowing that you are worthy of love by the very fact of your existence, and that you can cope with life's difficulties, both together with a partner and alone.

Secure attachment is characterized by calm inner confidence. A person can openly talk about their needs and does not panic if they are not met immediately.

They value closeness but are not afraid of autonomy, either their own or their partner's.

The relationship stops feeling like a constant emotional storm and becomes a safe harbor, a place you can return to after difficulties. Self-esteem gradually stabilizes and no longer depends on another person's mood.

The main feeling in such relationships is freedom. Freedom to be yourself. Freedom to trust. Freedom to know that you will cope, even if the relationship ends one day.

What Is the Goal of Change?

The goal of inner transformation is not to tie your partner to you forever. The goal is to stop linking your sense of happiness and wholeness to the constant presence of another person. This does not mean that anxiety disappears completely. Anxiety may remain, but its intensity becomes much lower. Where panic and despair once appeared, there may now simply be light sadness, a sense of missing the person, or worry.

For example, Julia used to panic every time her husband was late. Now, if she misses him, she may feel a little sad, but she no longer experiences it as a catastrophe. She knows that her husband loves her and that his lateness is simply lateness, not a sign of rejection or neglect.

She uses this time for herself. Gradually, the relationship changes. Arguments become less frequent

and more productive. They do not become a platform for exchanging accusations, but rather a space for discussion and problem-solving.

And Julia begins to feel not like a “half” but like a whole person building a relationship with another whole person.

Forming Inner Support

It can be useful sometimes to reflect on how a person with a more secure attachment thinks, feels, and acts. You can even try writing down such thoughts in the first person:

- “I value myself regardless of relationships.”
- “I calmly accept my partner’s need for personal space.”
- “I trust unless there is a reason not to trust.”
- “I know how to talk about my feelings without accusations.”
- “My inner calm is my responsibility.”

The point here is not to mechanically repeat affirmations, but to gradually form a new way of experiencing closeness within yourself: not through constant fear of loss, but through greater stability, trust, and contact with yourself.



CHAPTER 4

Inner Support: How to Withstand Anxiety Without Destroying Yourself or the Relationship

4.1. How to Learn to Endure Being Alone Without Panic

For a person with anxious attachment, being alone often means: “I have been rejected.” If no one is nearby, a sense of danger, emptiness, and being unwanted can arise. That is why the key task here is to gradually change the meaning of being alone:

Not “I have been abandoned,” but “This is time for myself.”

When being alone is perceived as a threat, it begins to torment you. But when it is perceived as an opportunity to recover, be with yourself, and fill yourself with something important, your attitude gradually changes. This requires conscious practice.

Time for Yourself Instead of Waiting

It is important not just to passively wait for your partner to return, but to create your own meaningful experience. For an anxious person, there is an illusion: “If I am anxious, then I am doing something useful.” But anxiety does not solve anything. That is why it is better to begin with small, manageable doses of solitude and gradually increase them. The goal is not to love being alone at any cost. The goal is to stop being afraid of it and to feel more stable in it.

Every time you spend time alone and cope, you send your brain a signal: “I managed,” “I remain a whole person even without my partner nearby.”

A relationship with yourself is the foundation for relationships with others. If it is unbearable for a person to be alone with themselves, they begin to use their partner as a kind of painkiller for inner pain.

For example, earlier, when Kate's boyfriend went on a business trip, she would spend the days in tears and waiting. Now she plans this time in advance: she visits places she has long wanted to visit, does things she has been putting off, adds new experiences, and takes care of herself. Gradually, the time of separation ceased to be solely a period of suffering and became a space for her personal life and development.



Exercise: "A Date with Yourself"

It is useful to explore what spending time with yourself means for you. Make a list of ten things that bring you at least a little joy and that you can do alone.

For example:

- have coffee in a new café,
- walk through an unfamiliar neighborhood,
- put together a puzzle,
- watch a film,
- read,
- go to an exhibition,
- take a walk without a goal.

When you begin to feel anxious because of being alone, you do not need to painfully come up with something to do in that moment. Just open the list and choose one item.

“I Have Nothing Except Him”

Many people say, “Nothing interests me without my partner.” This is an understandable state if the relationship has taken up almost all the space in life. But interests are rarely found ready-made. They have to be rediscovered. You do not need to begin with grand hobbies. Ask yourself: “Is there something small that would bring me at least 1% pleasure if I did it only for myself?” Even such a small step already begins to gradually restore contact with your own life.

4.2. How to Stop Looking for Constant Reassurance of Love

The key to reducing this need is shifting the focus from searching for an external source of calm — that is, a partner — to creating an internal one. This is a skill that requires practice.

Here, conscious effort is very important: pausing before taking the usual protest action — calling, writing, demanding an answer. And in this pause, your task is not to suppress the anxiety, because anxiety cannot be suppressed by force, but to acknowledge it and give yourself first aid.

The task is to become, in relation to yourself, a good, caring, accepting, and supportive parent — the kind you may not have had. Because anxious attachment is often formed precisely there. You cannot change your childhood, but you can change the way you relate to yourself today.

You need to develop an inner supportive parent who helps calm your frightened inner child, rather than demanding that your partner do so. After all, anxious attachment is an attempt to make the partner soothe your inner child: “Come on, read my mind.” And every successful act of self-soothing, even the smallest one, strengthens the “neural network” responsible for self-sufficiency. The main thing is to create a pause between the trigger and the protest behavior, and during that pause, take care of yourself.

You are trying to receive from your partner what it is important to learn to give yourself: a sense of safety and confirmation that you are okay, that you are a good enough person. No one except you yourself can do this for you. The hope that your partner will take on this responsibility turns the relationship into anxious attachment.

For example, Max saw that his girlfriend was online but was not reading his messages. His first impulse was to write: “Are you ignoring me?” This is protesting behavior in response to a trigger. But instead, he stops himself and says out loud: “I feel anxious right now. This is just anxiety, not a fact.” He goes to the kitchen, makes tea, and decides to wait 10 minutes before doing anything. And often, during these 10 minutes, the anxiety weakens, and a reply comes to his phone: “Oh, I didn’t notice the message. What’s up? Tell me.”

The task is not to solve the whole problem instantly, but to create a pause between the trigger and protest behavior, and in that pause, take care of yourself.



Practice: “Anchor”

1. Find five objects of different colors in the room and name them out loud.

2. Touch five different surfaces and describe them: “rough table,” “smooth glass,” “cold surface,” “warm surface.”
3. Take five slow, deep breaths, focusing on how the air fills your lungs.

The point of these exercises is to move the brain from a catastrophic future into a safe present. You show your body that right now you are not in danger, that your survival no longer depends on whether this person replies to you or not.

What is the worst thing that will happen if you give yourself these 10 minutes of silence before seeking reassurance of love from your partner?

What is it like to realize that the key to your calm is in your own pocket, not in your partner's? And this key cannot be taken away from you. Even if someone wanted to.

What Is Self-Soothing?

Self-soothing, or self-regulation, is an active and conscious process of managing your emotional state without outside help.

Self-soothing includes the ability to:

- recognize rising anxiety;
- notice attacks of panic and despair;
- use specific exercises to bring the nervous system back into a more balanced state.

Through small actions, we can gradually create greater calm within the body and, along with it, within the psyche. These 10 minutes you spend on a self-regulation technique turn out to be very important.

Why This Is Especially Important with Anxious Attachment

For a person with anxious attachment, the partner often becomes an external regulator of their emotional state. Their mood begins to depend on the partner's reply, their intonation, their attention, closeness, or distance. Self-soothing helps gradually break this dependence. A person begins to become the regulator of their own state.

It is important to understand: this is not about suppressing feelings. It is about containing emotions — the ability to hold them inside yourself without destroying yourself or the relationship. Self-soothing is not a sign that you do not need anyone. It is a sign of emotional maturity, which makes a person capable of healthy, not dependent, closeness.

“Rescue” and Sharing Experiences

You may object: “But isn't it my partner's responsibility to calm me down? Then why do we need relationships at all if I am not being soothed in them?”

Mutual support is indeed one of the most important parts of relationships, and no one disputes that.

But there is a difference between support and turning your partner into your only emotional life support. By developing the ability to calm yourself independently, you do not devalue your partner's role. On the contrary, you make the relationship more mature and freer, where support becomes a gift rather than an obligation.

Let's take an example. Earlier, when Vanessa became angry or upset after a conversation with her manager at work, she would immediately call her boyfriend and demand that he calm her down. Often, she would also lash out at him. Now she pauses:

- goes outside,
- breathes deeply,
- listens to her favorite song.

After that, she can calmly call her partner and tell him what happened, but not demanding rescue — rather, sharing her experience.

This is not about never turning to close people at all. It is about no longer fully shifting responsibility for your emotional state onto them.

A List of Actions for Self-Support

It is useful to make a list in advance of simple actions that help you come back to yourself, and keep this list nearby — for example, in the notes on your phone. In a moment of anxiety, you do not need to invent anything. You simply choose one item and do it.

For example:

- wash your face with cool water;
- do a few squats;
- turn on calm music;
- watch a funny video;
- hug yourself;
- take deep breaths in and out.

Do Not Demand an Instant Result

Do not worry if, at first, these actions do not have a big effect. Self-soothing is not an anxiety switch, but a skill that develops gradually. You do not need to set the goal of completely removing anxiety. At first, it is enough to reduce its intensity, to withstand a few additional minutes, to create space between the trigger and the habitual reaction. This is exactly how inner stability gradually forms. The task is not to destroy anxiety, but to learn to stay with yourself even in a moment of anxiety.

4.3. How the Body Experiences Anxiety and Helps Cope with It

Now let's look at the bodily component: the role the body plays in anxiety and how bodily sensations can support recovery.

Anxiety is not only about thoughts. First and foremost, it is a physiological reaction. The nervous system reacts to a trigger before you have time to realize it: the heart begins to beat faster, breathing becomes shallow, muscles tighten, and tension appears in the body. That is why trying to work with anxiety only at the level of thoughts is often not enough. It is important to take the bodily level into account as well.

Working with the body begins with developing bodily awareness — the ability to notice the first signals of anxiety and respond to them.

Instead of trying to “talk anxiety out of it” only with thoughts, you can:

- breathe through it by taking a few deep breaths,
- stretch,
- ground yourself through bodily sensations by touching different surfaces,
- feel the support under your feet,
- focus on the weight of your body.

Such actions send the nervous system a signal of safety. Sometimes this signal proves more effective than verbal persuasion. Your body remembers the threat and launches anxiety. It can also become the main tool for returning to safety.

For example, Edward notices that after a tense message from his partner, his chest tightens and his hands become cold. Earlier, he would ignore these sensations and immediately sink into panicked thoughts.

Now he stops: he places his hand on his chest, takes several slow breaths, directs his attention to the tightness, and stays with the sensation. In this way, he does not immediately fall into the anxious scenario, but begins to notice what is happening in his body.



Practice: “Body Scan”

In a moment of anxiety, you can use a simple exercise — a body scan.

Sit or lie down. Close your eyes. Mentally move your attention through your body — from the top of your head to the tips of your toes. Do not try to change anything. Simply notice:

- where there is tension,
- where there is cold,
- where there is warmth,
- where there is tightness,
- where there is heaviness,
- where there is emptiness.

There is no need to try to get rid of the sensations. You need to notice them without judgment. This helps develop contact with the body and reduce panic about your own bodily reactions. Often, the problem is not that the body reacts, but that

the person begins to panic because of the body's reaction itself. A reaction to the reaction appears.

The body says: "I am anxious." And the psyche answers: "Something is wrong with me." But you can relate to it differently: "Hello, tightness in my chest. I notice you."



Questions for Self-Observation

Try to explore:

1. Where does your anxiety live in your body?

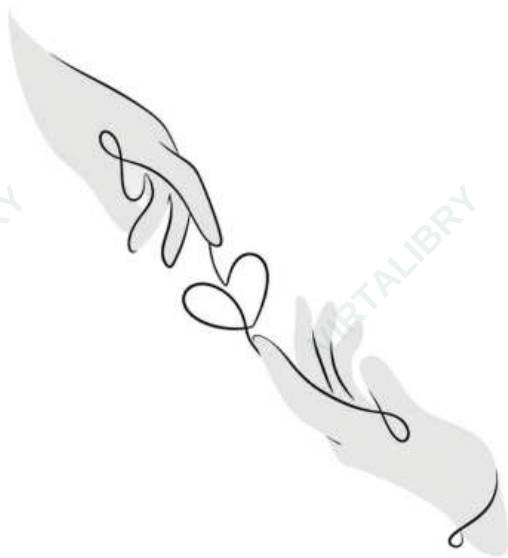
2. How would you describe it?

3. What does it resemble?

4. What simple movement or posture helps you feel more stable?

5. What is your body trying to say through these symptoms?

You may ask: “How can feeling my feet on the floor or breathing help me with problems with my partner?” The point of these practices is that they help create a gap between the trigger and protest behavior. The body gives you an opportunity to stop before anxiety turns into a message, an accusation, a call, or an argument. That is why body-oriented techniques are not a replacement for conversation, nor can a single exercise resolve every problem. They are an additional way to restore your stability.



CHAPTER 5

New Communication: How to Talk About Fears, Needs, and Conflicts

5.1. How to Talk About Your Needs and Fears Without Reproach

The transition from destructive communication to constructive communication begins with a shift in focus: from blaming your partner to describing your own inner state. Instead of “You are to blame,” it is more helpful to begin saying: “This is what I feel.”

Here, the format of the so-called “I-statement” is useful. Its essence is to move away from phrases that begin with “you,” which often sound like an attack, and toward phrases that begin with “I,” which create space for dialogue. But it is important to understand: it is not only the words that matter, but also the intonation. Even an “I-statement” can be spoken in a way that sounds passive-aggressive in every word.

The Structure of an “I-Statement”

The conversation is built roughly according to this pattern:

1. “I feel...” — you name your state: anxiety, fear, sadness, hurt.
2. “When this happens...” — you describe a specific fact, not an interpretation.
3. “Because it is important to me...” — you reveal your need or fear.
4. “Could you please...” — you formulate a specific and doable request.

This form of communication helps you avoid attacking and instead share your experience. Then a healthy partner is more likely to respond and help, rather than defend themselves.

For example, in the old communication scenario, a person builds a phrase like this: “You are late again. You don’t care about me at all. You don’t value me.”

In a new formulation, it may sound like this: “I feel anxious when you are late and don’t let me know. I start worrying and become afraid that something has happened to you, or that I am not important to you. Please send me a short message if you realize you will be late.” Feel the difference. In the first case, the person attacks. In the second, they reveal their inner state and make a request.

Of course, even an “I-statement” can become a hidden accusation. For example: “I feel anxious when you don’t care enough to let me know you’ll be late.” Formally, this begins with “I,” but in essence, it remains an attack.



Practice Before a Conversation

Before a difficult conversation, it is useful to write down your thoughts in advance according to four points:

1. What do I feel?

2. When exactly does this happen?

3. Why is this important to me?

4. What exactly do I want to ask for?

Sometimes it is even useful to say this out loud in front of a mirror and hear how it sounds from the outside. It is important to stop hoping for mind-reading. What used to remain implied needs to be made explicit: your feelings, your fears, your requests, your needs.

“Why Should I Be the Only One Trying?”

Resistance often appears: “Why should I be the one choosing my words and learning to speak differently? Let my partner change, too.” And this is a fair question. Of course, ideally, both people learn healthier communication. But sometimes someone takes the first step, and this does not mean weakness, humiliation, or “giving in.” It is an attempt to step out of the familiar circle of arguments and begin creating a different dynamic in the relationship.

5.2. How to Go Through Conflict Without Destroying the Relationship

The key to constructive conflict is a change of goal. It should shift from “winning the argument, proving you are right, and defeating the other person” to “preserving contact and understanding the other.”

For a person with anxious attachment, any conflict often feels like a threat that the relationship may end. That is why the first task during an argument is to learn to regulate your state right in the process of the conflict.

A Pause Instead of an Emotional Explosion

One useful tool is an agreement to pause. When emotions begin to go off the scale, and panic appears, partners use an agreed-upon stop word — for example, “Pause.”

After that, they separate for 15–20 minutes. Not in order to demonstrate offense or punish each other with silence, but to calm the nervous system. During this time, you can use self-regulation techniques: breathe, wash your face with cool water, ground yourself by feeling the support under your feet, shift your attention, and try to view the situation in a more balanced way. And best of all: give up trying to read your partner’s mind.

After the Pause — Returning to Dialogue

It is better to begin not with the subject of the argument, but with a discussion of your inner state: what you felt, what hurt you, what you became afraid of, what was important to you?

Here, this sequence of “I-statements” can help:

1. “I felt...”
2. “I became anxious because...”
3. “It is important to me...”
4. “I would like...”

This approach sets the tone that we are not against each other, but are trying together to cope with the problem.

Healthy relationships do not mean the absence of conflict; disagreements are inevitable. The difference is whether people can stay in contact even when it is difficult. The goal of healthy conflict is to attack the problem together, not each other.

Rules for a Safe Argument

It is useful to discuss a few rules with your partner in advance, at a calm time, that must not be broken during arguments. For example:

No insults or personal attacks.

No threats to break up or leave.

Each person has the right to take a pause without accusations or judgment.

After the pause, we first talk about our feelings, and only then return to the substance of the conflict.

Sometimes it even helps to write down these rules and keep them somewhere visible.

“In the Moment of an Argument, I Can’t Control Anything”

Many people say, “When I am emotional, I am completely unable to remember any rules.” And this

is normal. No one expects perfect behavior from the first try.

The task is not to break down. The task is to gradually learn to:

- notice the moment when you are being carried away,
- stop a little earlier,
- return to dialogue more quickly.

You may lose control, but if, after some time, you are able to say, “I’m sorry. I was wrong. Let’s try to return to the conversation calmly,” that is already a big step forward.

You Cannot Change Another Person by Force

You cannot force another person to change. You can suggest, ask, explain, or show a new way of interacting. But whether to change or not is the other person’s responsibility. Then your responsibility is deciding whether this relationship format is suitable for you going forward.

5.3. How to Explain Your Anxious Attachment to Your Partner

How can you explain your anxious attachment pattern to your partner so that they become an ally, rather than feeling accused? This means telling them about your attachment style, not in the spirit of complaint, but as an instruction manual for your nervous system. That is, instead of “You make me anxious!”, it is better to say something like, “I have this vulnerability, and I am learning how to work with it.”

It is better to choose a calm moment when you are both in a good mood, and to speak through “I-statements.” You can describe anxious attachment as an old program or a feature that you are currently working on. It is important to try to communicate that your partner’s behavior is not the cause of your anxious attachment. It can be a trigger for an already existing vulnerability.

And the most important part of such a conversation is to end it with a specific, simple, and doable request. This way, your partner can understand exactly how they can support you.

When you take responsibility for your pattern, you give your partner the opportunity to stop being the “cause” of your pain and become a participant in your healing.

This Is What Such a Conversation Might Look Like

“I want to share something important about myself with you. I have realized that I have this feature — anxious attachment. It is connected to my past. My brain reacts very sharply to distance.

For example, if you take a long time to reply, an old program starts up inside me, screaming: ‘Danger.’ I understand that this is my responsibility, and I am working on it. But if you have the opportunity, it would be very valuable to me if you sometimes wrote something like: ‘Everything is okay, I’m busy, I’ll reply later.’ That would be a big support for me.”

Where Is the Line with Manipulation?

It is important to distinguish an honest explanation of your vulnerability from an attempt to shift responsibility onto your partner. Manipulation would sound something like this: “I have a problem that I cannot do anything about. This is just how I am. So you have to accept me in any form and support everything I do.”

In this version, the person is essentially using their problem as an excuse and as a way to get permission not to change. The healthy version sounds different: “I have a vulnerability. I understand that this is my area of responsibility. I am working on it. And I want to ask you for specific support.” The difference is fundamental.

An Instruction Letter to Your Partner

You can write a short letter to your partner. You do not necessarily have to send it — sometimes it is enough to use it to structure your own thoughts.

The structure may look like this:

1. Gratitude and the value of the relationship: “I value you very much and want our relationship to become better.”

2. Description of the pattern without blame: “I have discovered this feature in myself — anxious attachment.”

3. Give an example: the trigger and the reaction. “When you take a long time to reply, I begin to feel anxious and wind myself up.”

4. Acknowledgment of your own responsibility: “I understand that this is my area of growth, and I am working on it.”

5. A specific request for support: “Can I ask you for this kind of support...?” The request should be simple, clear, and doable. For example: “If you are busy and cannot reply right away, write me briefly: ‘I’m busy, I’ll reply later.’”

What If My Partner Uses This Against Me?

This risk does exist. For example, in the next argument, your partner may say: “There’s your anxiety talking again.” But that is already a separate and seri-

ous topic. This is exactly why it is important to present the information not as an excuse for your behavior, but as an explanation. But if your partner uses your vulnerability against you, this says something about the quality of trust in the couple and requires a separate conversation. At the same time, there is another side: if you never give your partner a chance to become your ally, you will not know whether they are capable of being one.



CHAPTER 6

The Path of Change: Breakdowns, Setbacks, and Turning Anxiety into Strength

6.1. Why Breakdowns and Setbacks Happen, and How Not to Devalue Your Path

You are working with your anxious attachment and trying to cope with it better, but then you find yourself in another breakdown. Again, you made a scene. Again, you began to control. Again, you could not stop yourself. The question arises in your mind: “Were all my efforts in vain?”

No. Breakdowns and setbacks are not a sign of failure. They are an inseparable part of the learning process. You are trying to change a pattern that was formed and repeated for decades. That is why the task is not to behave perfectly right away.

The task is to gradually shorten the recovery time after a breakdown.



What to Do After a Breakdown

Instead of falling into self-blame in the spirit of “I am hopeless,” “Nothing will work for me,” “Something is wrong with me,” it is more useful to take a different approach.

1. Acknowledge

Honestly, say to yourself and to your partner: “Yes, I broke down. My old program took over again.”

2. Apologize

Sincerely take responsibility for your behavior, without making excuses: "I am sorry that I hurt you."

3. Analyze

When the emotions settle, calmly think or better write down:

1. What became the trigger?

2. Where did I not pause?

3. What could I have noticed earlier?

4. What support did I need in that moment?

5. What can I take into account next time?

A breakdown is not a return to the starting point, but material for exploration. It shows the next area of growth.



Self-Compassion After a Breakdown

It is necessary to bring self-compassion into this process. Ask yourself:

1. What kind and supportive words would I say to a close person in a similar situation?

2. Can I say them to myself?

3. What need of mine is this breakdown speaking about?

4. Maybe I did not have enough rest, safety, support, or pause?

5. What small step can I take right now to care for myself?

You are growing an inner supportive parent — a stable, reliable inner figure who stays with you not only when you do everything right. It is often the lack of this kind of inner support that lies at the root of anxious attachment.

How You Talk to Yourself After a Mistake

Sometimes it is useful simply to notice how you usually talk to yourself after a breakdown. What sounds inside? “You ruined everything again,” “You are a terrible person,” “It is impossible with you,” “You will never change.”

Even the very fact that you begin to notice your inner critic is already important. You can say to yourself, “I hear that my inner critic has switched on right now. But what would support me in this moment? How can I treat myself with more care?”

A Breakdown Is Not a Crime

A breakdown does not need to be perceived as a catastrophe or as proof that nothing will work. It is a lesson from which meaning and conclusions can be drawn.

If after every breakdown you say to yourself, “That’s it, I am hopeless,” then movement really does stop. But you can say it differently: “Yes, this happened. It is unpleasant. But I can look at what it teaches me and keep moving.”

Responsibility Is Not the Same as Cruelty Toward Yourself

Many people think: “If I am kind to myself after a breakdown, I will never change. Only harshness motivates me.” But this is not true. Often, a person confuses cruelty with responsibility.

Responsibility sounds like this: “I made a mistake. I acknowledge it. I will try to correct it.” Cruelty toward yourself sounds different: “I am the mistake.” Responsibility leads to growth. Self-blame leads to shame and paralysis. That is why our task is to learn to be responsible, not cruel to ourselves: “Yes, I made a mistake. Yes, it is unpleasant. Yes, I accept the consequences. And this is what I am doing to repair it.”

6.2. How to Turn a Tendency Toward Anxious Attachment into Strength

Is there anything good at all in anxious attachment? What hidden strengths might people with this pattern have? Of course, it would be better if this pattern did not cause so much pain. But if it is already there, it is important to look at whether something supportive can be drawn from it.

Your anxious system is not only a source of suffering. When a person begins to understand their anxious system and learn to manage it, some of its underlying

qualities can gradually develop into strengths. What looks like a flaw in an unhealthy expression can, in a more mature version, become a strength.

For example, hypervigilance can gradually transform into empathy and intuition, the ability to notice subtle emotional nuances that may be unavailable to other people.

The need for closeness can turn into the ability to create truly warm, deep relationships.

Emotional intensity can become a source of life energy, brightness, and aliveness.

The question is not how to completely eliminate your sensitivity. The question is how to learn to use it without destroying yourself and others.

How to Rethink Your Qualities

Some of your traits can be looked at from another angle. For example:

“I constantly analyze relationships” can gradually turn into: “I am capable of deep analysis and reflection.”

“I am afraid of conflicts” can become: “I strive for harmony and know how to smooth out rough edges when it is appropriate.”

“I react sharply to coldness” may mean: “I am a sensitive person who deeply values warmth in relationships.”

This is not an attempt to pass wishful thinking off as reality. And it is not a justification for destructive

behavior. This is about something else: it is possible to separate the valuable raw material — your sensitivity — from the toxic product that may sometimes emerge from it, for now. Sensitivity itself is not the problem. The problem is how it is lived through and what it turns into in relationships.

“I Just Want to Stop Being Anxious”

Many people say, “My anxiety only ruins everything. I don’t want to look for anything good in it. I just want to stop being an anxious person.” This is an understandable wish.

Most likely, for a long time, you have seen only the destructive side of this pattern. So it is natural to want to get rid of it. But the task is not to justify anxious behavior. The task is to learn to work with what lies underneath it.

Your sensitivity can be not only a source of pain, but also material for mature closeness, empathy, and deep connection. It is just that, for now, this strength may be unmanaged.

Why Anxiety Intensifies with One Partner and Disappears with Another

Sometimes a person notices: “With one partner, I had strong anxious attachment, and then I entered another relationship, and there are almost none of these

problems there. So it was not about me, it was about the partner.” This is a very important observation.

Attachment style is not a solo performance or a monologue. It is a dance for two. The partner really does play a huge role in how your attachment style shows up.

The Partner as an Environment

A partner is not just a person beside you. They are an environment in which your pattern either becomes activated or remains calm. Imagine that a predisposition to anxiety is dry gunpowder. By itself, it can lie there calmly. But if there is a partner nearby with avoidant, inconsistent, or emotionally unstable behavior, they become the spark that is constantly being brought to this gunpowder.

Such a partner creates uncertainty: today they are warm, tomorrow cold; sometimes they move closer, sometimes they disappear; sometimes they give closeness, then sharply withdraw. This is called intermittent reinforcement: sometimes the person receives the desired closeness, and at other times faces distance.

This kind of dynamic greatly intensifies anxiety and dependence. The person cannot relax because the nervous system is constantly scanning the space for threats. In such conditions, even a person with a more secure attachment can begin to show anxious traits. And if a predisposition to anxiety was already there, such a partner becomes a catalyst and amplifier

of anxiety. You may quite rightly feel that it was about the partner: they created the “perfect” storm for your nervous system.

When a Stable Partner Appears

If an emotionally stable, predictable partner appears in life, a regulatory effect can occur. Such a person does not disappear without explanation or punish you with silence. They remain consistent, respond calmly to anxiety, and create a sense of safety.

Their stability sends your nervous system a signal: “There is no danger. You can relax.” Again and again, they confirm: you are loved, valued, and you will not be abandoned over a small thing. Then the anxious “gunpowder” does not ignite. The nervous system leaves survival mode and gradually moves into life mode. The symptoms of anxious attachment can indeed weaken noticeably or almost disappear.

The Absence of Symptoms and Healing Are Not the Same Thing

Here, it is important to distinguish between the two states:

The symptoms have gone away because the environment has become safe;

The inner structure has truly changed.

A relationship with a stable partner is a huge gift and an important stage of healing. But the absence of symptoms does not always mean that the vulnerability has completely disappeared.

We can use the metaphor of an allergy. If a person is allergic to peanuts and lives in a house where people constantly eat peanuts and scatter them everywhere, the symptoms will appear constantly. Then the person moves into a house where there are no peanuts. The symptoms disappear. They feel healthy — and this is indeed true. But does this mean that the predisposition itself has disappeared? Not necessarily. It may mean that the trigger has disappeared.

It is the same with anxious attachment: if an unstable partner disappears, and a stable and predictable person appears nearby, the anxiety may go away. This is wonderful. But it is important to look deeper.



Questions for Self-Reflection

Not to frighten you, but to help you be more honest with yourself, consider the following questions:

What will happen to my state if even a stable partner becomes less available for a while? For example, if they face a difficult life crisis: losing a job, illness of a loved one, severe fatigue,

or emotional exhaustion. Will I be able, in that moment, to rely not only on their stability, but also on my own? Will the old program switch on: “He has stopped loving me,” “I have ruined everything,” “I am about to be abandoned”?

These questions help you see whether there is already real inner support, or whether your calm still mainly rests on the stability of your partner.

If you answer negatively, this is not a reason to devalue good relationships. On the contrary, a stable partner can be a wonderful environment for healing. But the real work lies in gradually transferring part of this stability inside yourself.

The thought “with one partner I had anxious attachment, and with another I don’t” is, in general, true — but incomplete. A more precise view is this: your anxiety did not arise simply by itself, and not only because of the partner. It was the result of a resonance between your inner predisposition and the external behavior of another person.

When there was a trigger-partner beside you — unstable, unpredictable, sometimes coming closer and sometimes moving away — they set off all this inner commotion. The system began to buzz. The nervous system kept interpreting what was happening as danger, and the anxious pattern resurfaced. When one component of this system was removed — the partner who was constantly bringing the spark to the dry gunpowder — the anxiety could weaken sharply or almost disappear. And this does not mean that you made it all up. No, you really did find yourself in a different environment. In new relationships, where there are no old emotional ups and downs, you receive a very valuable experience of corrective connection. A stable partner, through their predictability, supports your inner recovery and shows your nervous system that it can be different; closeness does not necessarily have to be dangerous.

Here, the main task is not only to enjoy this state, although that is absolutely necessary too. It is also important to use this period of calm to strengthen your own inner anchor: to learn self-soothing, develop a sense of self-worth, and gradually turn to yourself for

support rather than looking for it only in your partner. Because then your stability will not rest 100% on another person, but at least partly on yourself. And when a storm happens in the future — and life, let's be honest, does bring storms sometimes — you will not just be a ship that was lucky enough to find itself in a safe harbor, but the captain of a ship who has gradually learned how to stay afloat.

A Note from the Author

I'd Love to Hear from You

If something in this book stayed with you, I would be glad to hear about it.

Perhaps you recognised yourself in one of these pages, found an exercise that was especially helpful, noticed a small change in the way you respond in relationships, or discovered that something did not quite work for you.

Your message does not need to be long or carefully written. A few honest lines are enough.

You can write to me at: ingaduval@proton.me

Thank You for Reading

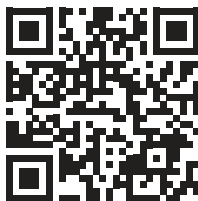
Thank you for choosing this book.
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feel more supported, and take a few meaningful steps
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Thank you for sharing your experience.

Acknowledgements

This book grew out of many conversations, questions, and honest reflections on what anxious attachment feels like from the inside. I am grateful to everyone who shared their experiences, challenged my assumptions, and helped me better understand what people need when insight alone is not enough.

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And finally, thank you to you, the reader, for choosing this book and bringing your own honesty to its pages. I hope it helps you understand your patterns with greater clarity and gives you practical ways to respond when anxiety begins to take over.

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