

# THE ANXIOUS GIFTED STUDENT

## FROM PROCRASTINATION TO PERFECTIONISM

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When you think of your student and getting schoolwork done, does *this* come to mind?





Or this...?



# Lab Technicians

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- Lab Technicians come to work on time, don the white coat, and set about doing their work with care
- When they're done they record their data, tidy up the lab, hang up their coat, and go home

# Pirates

- Pirates roam the seven seas, restless and wary
- When they sense attack and capture they hoist all sails, run out the cannons, and take evasive action
- When caught, they attempt to repel all boarders. Surrender is shameful.
- They walk the plank with fire in their eye. Arrrgh.



Although they would rather  
walk the plank than admit it...

Most pirates are experiencing  
significant anxiety





“You’re five now, Lance. You’ve got to let go of four.”

# Anxiety Prevalence

- Percentages of normal school children 4 to 12 years of age reporting:
  - fears 75.8
  - worries 67.4
  - scary dreams 80.5
- One year prevalence of anxiety *disorders*: 6 and 20%. Equates to between 3 and 8 million children in the U.S.

# Anxiety Facts

- About half of all children with an anxiety disorder meet criteria for a second anxiety disorder
- Girls are somewhat more likely to have anxiety disorders than are boys
- Anxiety is more common than ADHD

# More Anxiety Facts

- The child does not have to recognize that his fear or worry is unreasonable
- Somatic complaints (stomach ache, headache) are common
- Crying, irritability, anger and defiance are common
- A return of bedwetting, thumb sucking, or clinginess can be a sign of anxiety and stress

# Classic v. Modern Anxiety

- Classic: True worries and anticipation of negative events (trait anxiety)
- Modern: Anxious arousal in the moment (state anxiety)

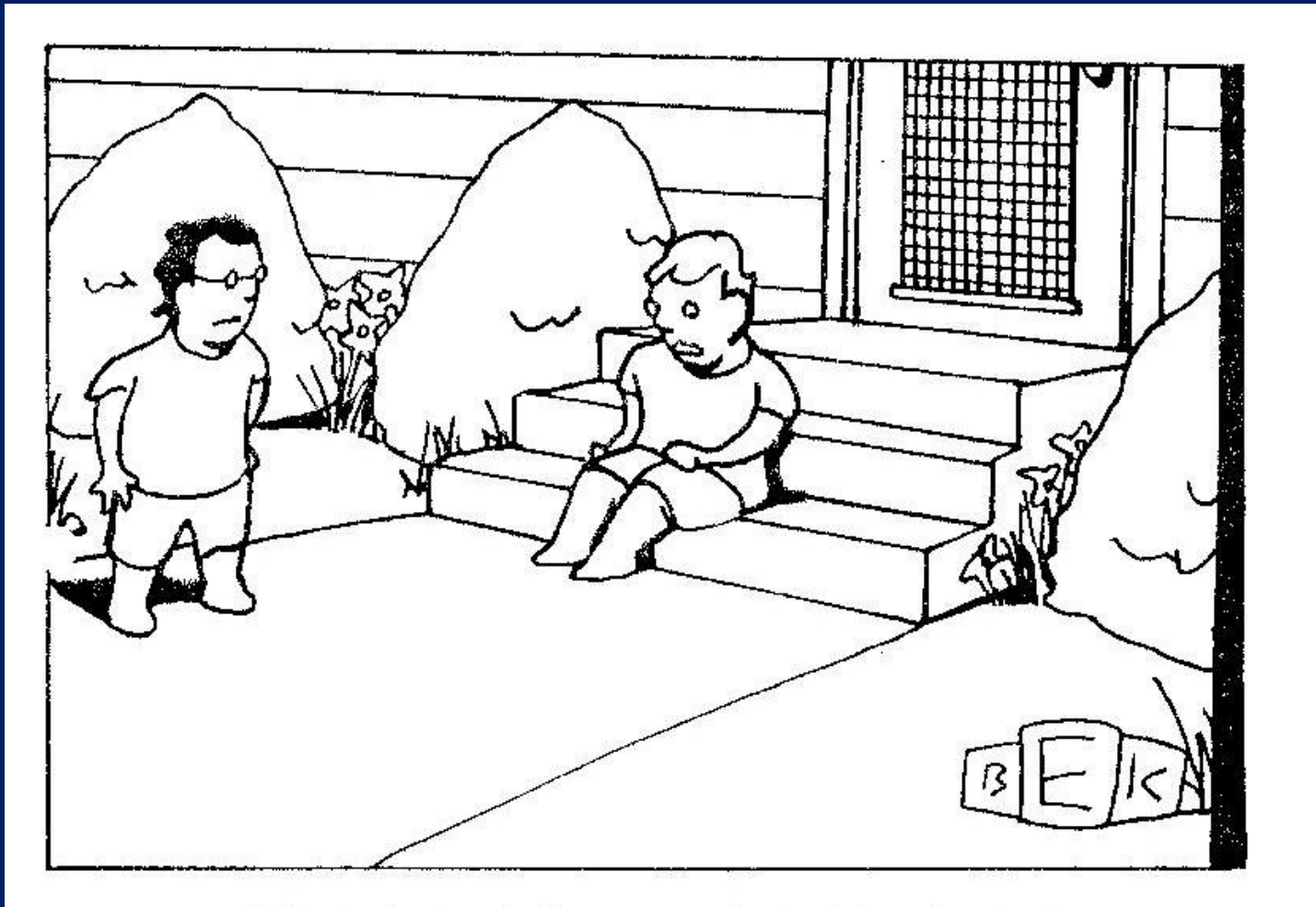
# The “Gap”

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Social-  
Emotional  
Intelligence

The I.Q. Thing

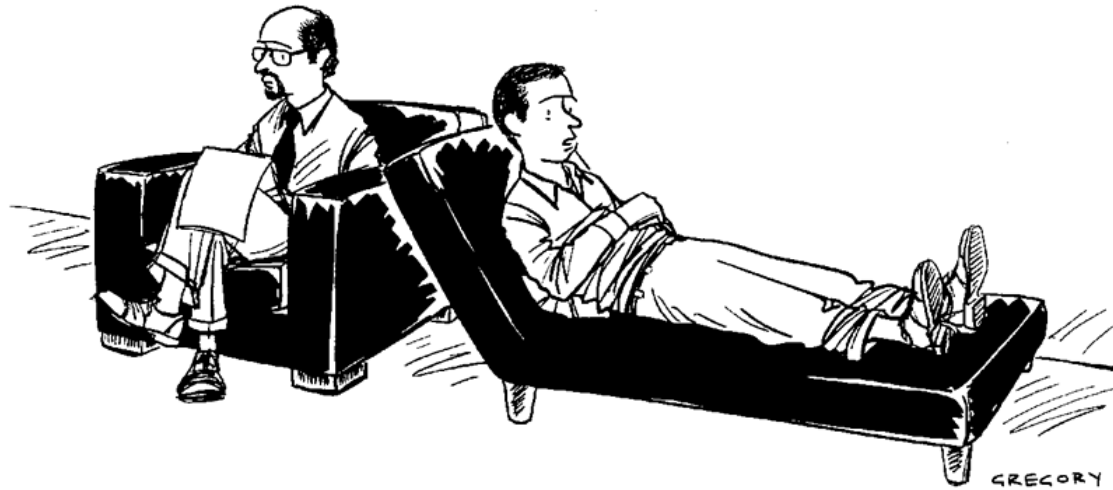


“They’re trying to figure out whether it’s a chemical thing or I’m just a crybaby”


# The Hairball Model of Psychopathology



t  
s  
c



"Could we up the dosage? I still have feelings."



“I can act my way into feeling  
better sooner than I can feel  
my way into acting better”

O.W. Mower

“We acquire [virtues] by first having put them into action... we become just by the practicing of just actions, self-controlled by exercising self-control, and courageous by performing acts of courage”

**Aristotle**

# Types of Roadblocks

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- Procedures
- Learning Styles
- Thoughts and Feelings

# Why Start With Procedures?

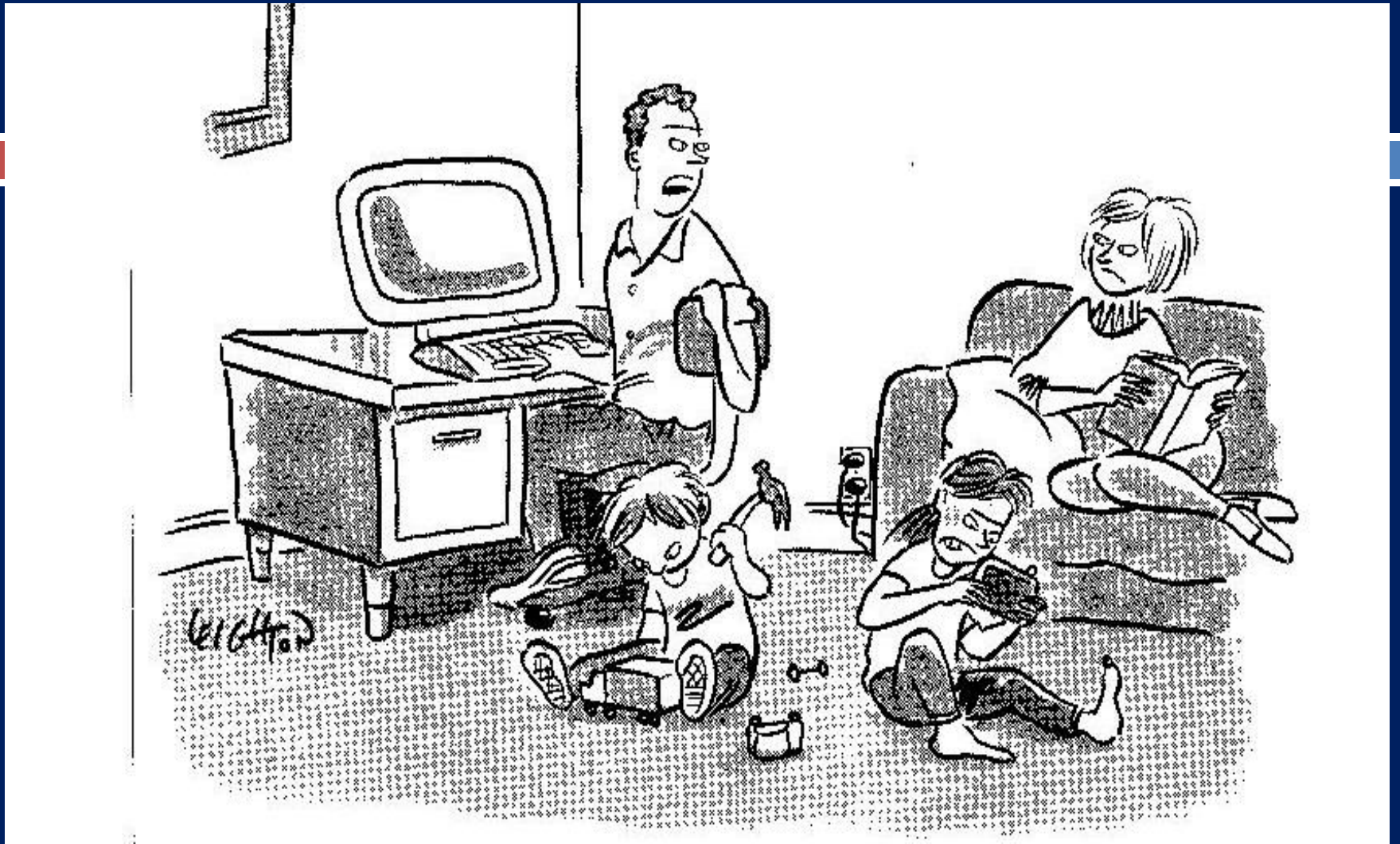
- An easier “entry point” than “Let’s talk about that anxiety of yours”
- In the context of sorting out procedures, other roadblocks will be revealed
- If there are ANY procedural roadblocks they can become an impediment; either through increasing anxiety or serving as a reason to avoid the work
- Having a reliable, consistent, and predictable routine, that experience tells us works, helps us perform uncomfortable actions

# Organization *Skills*

- What we call *organization* is a set of behaviors or skills
- As such, they must be taught, coached, practiced, and encouraged until these behaviors become habit

# Organization *Maintenance*

- Not just a matter of *getting* them organized, but *teaching* organization skills and *keeping* the student organized
- That's where you come in: teaching, modeling, supervising, and encouraging



“Me? I thought *you* were raising them.”



# General Strategies

- **Start small:** Getting the backpack organized may be more immediately useful to the student than a large, comprehensive plan
- **Define the problem in specific terms:** “Assignments are not getting written down” is more useful than “He’s forgetful”

# General Strategies

- **Process over Product:** “I’m going to get all A’s” allows complacency now and doesn’t address the mechanisms necessary to get *acceptable* grades
- “Take the first step; not the second or the third”
- **Work Backwards:** Start with the due date and a description of the final product and set interim goals

# From the External to the Internal

- **Short-term strategies** create a prosthetic environment (scaffolding) that supports the student from the outside
- **Long-term strategies** teach the skills and support the student's independence in these areas through repetition and habit

# Procedural Roadblocks

Any physical or behavioral impediment to:

- Obtaining necessary information
- Accessing necessary materials
- Initiating, persisting in, or completing tasks
- Getting work turned in

Finish it



Get it Home

Get Assignment

# Initial Roadblocks

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- Not getting the assignment
- Incomplete information
- Not bringing home necessary materials

# Mid-Game Roadblocks

- Not getting to the assignment; avoidance, procrastination
- Not completing the assignment
- Not getting the completed assignment squared away and ready to go back to school

# End-Game Roadblocks

- The Finish Line Problem
  - Type I. Premature “completion”
  - Type II. Perfectionism
- Not turning in completed work
  - Losing work in the backpack
  - Lack of strong, clear prompts to turn it in



# The 7 Deadly “I Don’t Know”s plus 1

1. I don’t know what the assignment is or that I even have one
2. I don’t know how to do
3. I don’t know that I can do it
4. I don’t know that I need help or what help I need

# The 7 Deadly “I Don’t Know”s plus 1

5. I don’t know when it’s due
6. I don’t know where it is
7. I don’t know whether it’s done or not
8. I don’t know how it gets turned in

# Emotional Roadblocks

- Anxiety
- Shame / Humiliation
- Doubt
- Boredom
- Resentment and other thoughts

# Thinking Roadblocks

- “I’m stupid”
- “I’m no good at writing/math/particle physics”
- “I can’t turn this in, it’s not good enough”
- “I’m not your slave”
- “I’m not weak”
- “I’m not a nerd”
- “I hate my teacher”
- “My teacher hates me”
- “It’s more mature than I want to be”



# Waiting for the Motivation Fairy





“Do or do not,  
there is no *try*”

- Yoda





Failure after *low effort*  
results in guilt

Failure after *high effort*  
results in humiliation

Which would you rather feel?

# Graybar's 2<sup>nd</sup> Law of Human Behavior

He who cares least has the  
most power

*or*

The more you care, the  
more you must be willing  
to bear

# Motivation Programs

- Bribe or reward?
- Promises- the external will
- Simple, Specific & Proximal
- Freshen frequently
- R+ for parents



# Mile 20

# Confronting Emotional Roadblocks

- Validation: articulating and accepting what is in the moment
- Acceptance and Commitment
- Reorientation to proximal, actionable goals: “Take the first step; not the second or the third”

# Graybar's First Law of Human Behavior

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“All behavior is a message, and a behavior won't begin to change until the person knows the message has been received”

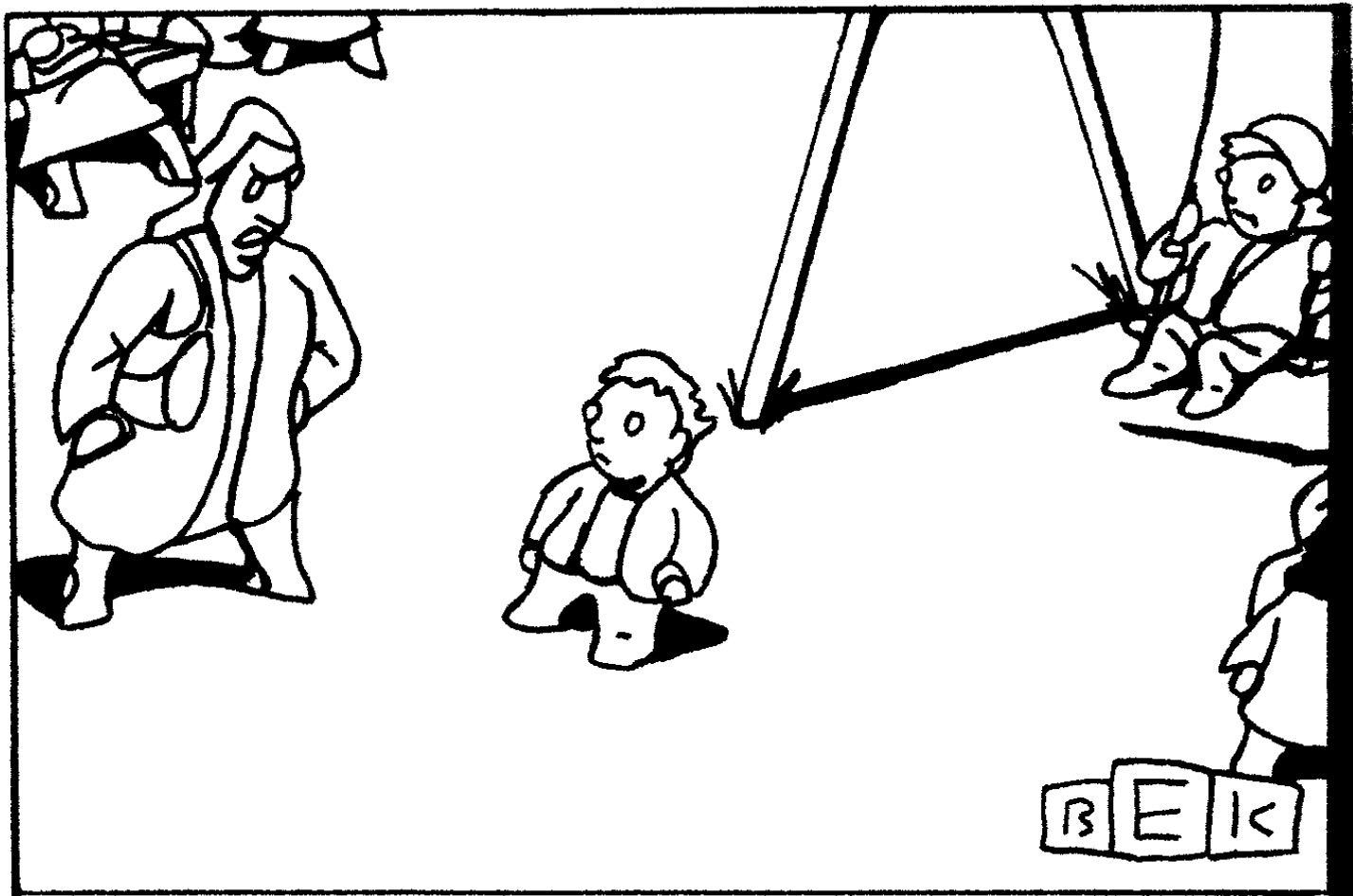
# Validation

- Promotes “mentalizing”
- Closes the communication loop: “message received”
- Replaces ineffective *reassurance* in many situations
- Says nothing about your agreeing with or the “appropriateness” of that thought or feeling at the time

# Validation Techniques

- Simple and specific “Ah” statements:
  - “Ah, you’re feeling *nervous* right now”
  - “Ah, you’re having one of those ‘I can’t do it’ thoughts and you want my help”
- “I wonder” statements
- “Refusal rights” with older kids





“Mommy needs to get mad at you in a weird calm voice now”

# Whole Body Validation

# Strategies for the Student

- Commitment
- Acceptance
- Attention
- Self-care

# Definitions of Commitment

- A pledge or promise: obligation
- The act of committing, pledging, or engaging oneself
- The story we tell ourselves
- The choice to limit our choices

# Definitions of Acceptance

- To agree or consent to
- To regard as true or valid
- To take or receive what is offered
- To accommodate or reconcile oneself to

# Commitment and Acceptance: Two Sides of the Same Coin

To Be A  
Good  
Team-  
mate

Effort,  
Frustration,  
and  
Sacrifice

# Commitment and Acceptance: Two Sides of the Same Coin

To Be A  
Good  
Student

Effort,  
Frustration,  
and  
Sacrifice

# The Role of Attention

The word “attention” comes  
from the Latin *attendere*,  
meaning  
“to stretch forward”

As opposed to “vigilance”



We are all the  
descendants of the  
paranoid people

# The Attention Spotlight

- Orienting to an “affect neutral” stimulus: breathing, muscle tone
- Shifting attention from negative private events to actionable goals
- The distraction paradox

# Carl Gustav Jung

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“Life’s truly important problems cannot be solved, they can only be outgrown”

# Parenting Your Anxious Child with Mindfulness and Acceptance

a powerful new approach to  
overcoming fear, panic, and worry using  
acceptance and commitment therapy



Christopher  
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Foreword by Steven C.  
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