
What is Therapy?

You may have tried other therapists or programs, or you may be completely new to therapy for panic and anxiety. We often get asked, “What does ‘doing therapy’ mean?”

Let’s explain what therapy is.

Cognitive therapy for anxiety disorders is learning new ways of thinking and, therefore, feeling. As we learn new ways of thinking and feeling, we can begin to react to life with less and less anxiety, and have it happen automatically.

So, therapy is *learning* – like learning any new subject. You will be learning the therapy by reading the material provided and “practicing” it as outlined.



If you put in the consistent effort of *reviewing* and *repetition*, you will gradually see your anxiety diminish. It’s that straightforward. We’re not saying it’s a breeze to change thoughts and behaviors. Therapy requires your effort, consistency, repetition, and engagement with the therapy materials presented to you. The same effort would be required to study any subject, like geometry, in school.

You know that if you want to learn geometry, you would need to study it. And you know that studying requires time and effort on your part. You can’t learn all there is to know about geometry in one day, nor would you be able to recall much if you tried to cram it into your head that way. Thankfully you can learn a new subject with the right kind of study and practice. Thus, *you can do therapy with the right kind of consistent effort.*

Let’s be clear: You cannot be expected to know how to overcome panic and anxiety on your own. Everyone needs help. This therapy is here to help you learn how to do it in the right way.

Here's another example:

Let's say your goal is to learn how to play one song on the guitar. You've never played the guitar before, but you have a favorite song and you want to be able to strum it on the guitar.

First, you need a guitar, of course. Then, you'll need some advice on the fundamentals of how to tune the guitar, how to hold it, and how to place your fingers. Next, you need to find the right resources which teach you the chords of your favorite song and how to use your fingers to form those chords.



From this point on, you keep practicing over and over again. You probably will have to keep referring back to your resources to remember the proper chords until you've practiced so much that you begin to remember the chords automatically – because you've "memorized" them in.

At first, your playing will most likely be very unsteady. Your arms feel sore from holding the guitar, and your fingers hurt from pressing down on the strings. You never knew that playing a few simple chords could be so difficult. Other people make playing the guitar look so easy and fun!

Your fingers feel clumsy and awkward. Sometimes you manage to play a chord just right, but other times you miss the chord because you're not holding down the strings correctly. You could give up on your goal of playing this one song on the guitar, but you decide to practice it a little every day.

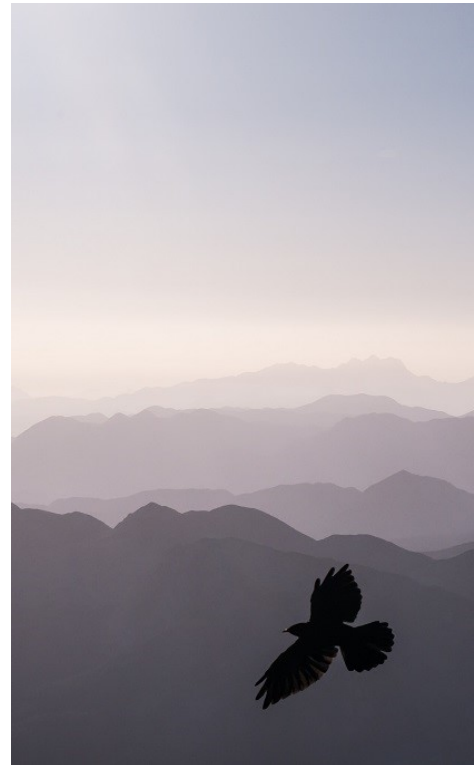
Over the weeks and months of practicing your favorite song, you notice that you are getting better. At first, it was uncomfortable to hold the guitar, and it took a lot of effort just to hold down the strings. Now, it feels more natural. It doesn't take you as much effort to perform the same actions. Your hands and fingers have become used to it.

You no longer have to concentrate as much on the mechanics of playing because there's a kind of muscle memory that has worked itself into your mind. Your hands automatically know what to do. And, thankfully, your fingertips aren't so sore anymore. They've become stronger. And even with this increased strength, it seems they require less effort to accurately perform the same actions.

You have learned to play your favorite song on the guitar. You can't remember an exact moment or specific day when you went from not being able to play your song to being able to play your song pretty well. It *gradually happened* over the many days of your practicing. And now you know how to play your song.

Now the song is a part of your brain. If you didn't play your song for a few weeks, you could pick up the guitar again and your ability to play that song will *still be there* in your brain and in your hands. Your persistent practice made this possible. You couldn't forget how to play this song even if you tried.

You've noticed something else that is a pleasant surprise – you've learned to play a few new songs. The chords of your favorite song share chords that help you play other songs. *Practice pays off!* And since you don't have to pay as much attention anymore to what your hands are doing, you can sing and play at the same time.



Therapy is learning, practice, repetition, and persistence. Yes, it takes time. Yes, you can do it. The more you practice it, the more there is a “snowball effect” with therapy – the positive effects spread out into other areas of your life.

Learning how to overcome panic and anxiety requires your consistent daily effort. There will come a time when you don't need to “do” therapy every day. By that time, you will have practiced the therapy more than enough so that you automatically respond to life more calmly and rationally, and without panic. To get to that place, we must be sure to *over-learn* all our therapy now. There are no short-cuts.

Your goal here is not to play the guitar, but the *same principles of practice and learning apply to therapy.* To play that song, we needed a guitar and the right guidance. You have the right resource and guidance in this therapy series.

Should I see a therapist?

Meeting with the right therapist can be a big help. But, in keeping with our guitar example, let's say you decided to take a 30-minute lesson once a week from a recommended guitar teacher. This teacher can help guide you, correct your mistakes, and give you advice on the best ways to practice. Still, you will not learn your favorite song if you confine your practice to that one, single 30-minute per week session.

Learning how to overcome panic and anxiety is the same. To be effective, therapy needs DAILY review and practice. The majority of your progress is dependent not upon that single weekly visit with a therapist, but upon the *daily effort* you put in to reinforce and learn the cognitive therapy as outlined in this series.

A therapist's job is to provide you with the right guidance and a comprehensive, structured plan for what to do DAILY during your therapy practice. That guidance and structured plan is provided for you in this audio therapy program "Overcoming Panic and Anxiety".

Therapy = your daily effort of *reading* and *reviewing* the therapy materials in the right way.