CALM LIVING MADE SIMPLE

7-Day Anxiety Course: Lesson One
Hi, my name is Candice. I love connecting with people, but was fed up with being afraid of what other people think of me and isolating myself as a result. So I created a six step process that helps people with anxiety (like myself) engage with others, create deeper connections and just do what they want to do, even in the face of uncomfortable thoughts or feelings.

I am the co-owner of Wellness Blueprint Health Centre and founder of the Calm Living Blueprint, which I developed based on my own 20+ year experience with anxiety.

I help people all over the world overcome anxiety using the same system I developed to achieve a life of freedom for myself.

[Click here](#) to read the study that was published about the results of the Calm Living Mentorship program.

And [my podcast](#) that’s listened to people from all over the globe.
I want to share the story of one of my patients. We’ll call her CJ.

When I “met” CJ she was 31 years old. I put quotations around the word met because I didn’t actually meet her in person for her first consult. She would only agree to talk to me via Skype.

You see, CJ had developed a fear of being in social situations. She did not leave her home. She had groceries and other necessities delivered to her. She had quit her job so that she could work from home.

However, her home-based business was not going well and CJ was running out of money.
I FEEL WORSE WHEN I’M AROUND PEOPLE.

They look at me funny. Why would I want to experience that when I can feel okay at home?
CJ contacted me to help her overcome her anxiety so she could go back to her old job – outside of her home.

I made a mistake when I told you that CJ didn’t leave her home.

She actually left her home every couple of months to meet her drug dealer that sold her Xanax.

I know this because when I asked her about her medications I realized the dose she was taking was probably going to kill her one day. At the very least she was becoming addicted.

CJ was using experiential avoidance – avoiding external experiences as a way of avoiding distressing emotions.

It wasn’t working, though.
EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE

Avoiding external experiences as a way of avoiding distressing emotions.
AVOIDANCE SEEMS LIKE SUCH A GOOD IDEA
In the short-term anyway...
Experiential avoidance can work for the outer world: Raining? Avoid it by taking shelter.

Dodging painful situations is an excellent strategy when it comes to physical objects. It keeps us from burning ourselves on a hot stove and stops us from eating sharp objects.

It seems logical that the same strategy would work to avoid psychological suffering, but it doesn’t.

Instead it usually increases the hurt it is meant to eliminate.
Think of CJ...

Every time she turned down an invitation to a staff party or to go out on a date there was relief. But, the fear began to invade even the places where CJ retreated.

At first she chose to sit at her cubicle rather than socialize in the staff room. Then she started going home for breaks, lunches and staff parties.

Eventually she stayed home altogether.

Drugs calmed her, at first, but then she became dependent on them, requiring higher and higher doses.

By the time I spoke to her, her entire life was entrapped by fear.
EVERY TIME YOU AVOID AN EVENT
because it’s painful, you automatically connect the discomfort with whatever you do instead.
Our brains work by forming connections and associations.

For example, pick two unrelated objects that are around you right now and answer the question, “How are they alike?”

Say you picked your shoes and a book.

You might say they are alike because they helped you get a job – the shoes helped you dress well for the job interview and the book helped you study and prepare for questions you might be asked during the job interview.

So your book, your shoes and your job all become linked by a new neural connection in your brain.
Now when you think of one of those objects you will be more likely to think of the other objects in that connection.

And say I watch a movie to distract myself; those same feelings may become triggered just from the mere mention of the movie's title.

Suppose I’m having a bad hair day and to avoid feeling shame or embarrassment I cancel a meeting with a client. Just thinking about that client triggers those feelings of shame and embarrassment.

This same process happens with every form of psychological suffering we try to outrun or avoid. Our brains trick us in to thinking avoidance seems like a good idea, but avoidance actually makes things worse.
CALM LIVING MADE SIMPLE

Picture your mind as an electronic gadget with two dials, kind of like those old-fashioned radios...

One dial is labeled Emotional Suffering. Of course, we do everything in our power to keep that dial at zero. The truth is this does not work and we ultimately have no control over our pain.

The other dial is labeled Willingness. We start life with that dial set to zero and we rarely see a need to change it. Why would we want to increase our willingness to suffer, to increase our availability to pain?
CALM LIVING MADE SIMPLE

Picture your mind as an electronic gadget with two dials, kind of like those old-fashioned radios...

But, since turning down the Emotional Suffering dial only makes things worse, what if we try something radical:

What if we leave the Emotional Suffering dial alone and focus completely on turning up the Willingness dial?
This means that we stop avoiding experiences because we’re afraid of the unpleasant feelings that come with them.

It’s not that we seek suffering or take pride in it; we just stop letting it dictate our choices.
WHEN I DARE TO BE POWERFUL

- to use my strength in the service of my vision – then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid. Audre Lorde
DO YOU HAVE THE COURAGE TO BE WILLING?
ASK YOURSELF:

What would I do if I stopped trying to avoid emotional pain? Write your answer below.
I hope this helps give you a glimmer of what your life without avoidance would be like.

Being unwilling to feel anxiety robs us of incalculable joy – and the horrible irony of it is that we still get all the anguish we tried to escape (and then some).
THERE'S A TYPICAL PATTERN TO EMOTIONAL DISCOMFORT

It rises, crests and falls in a series of waves.

Each wave washes parts of us away and deposits treasures we never imagined. Out goes despair, in comes kindness; out goes anger, in comes love. No one would ever claim it is easy, but the rhythm of emotional pain that we learn to tolerate is natural, constructive and expansive.

The pain leaves you healthier than it found you.
It took CJ a leap of faith and time to accept this, but ultimately she chose to turn up her Willingness dial.

She began therapy and traded her street drug habit for a complementary combination of prescription and natural medication. She had episodes where her anxiety spiked, fluctuated then gradually declined.

CJ’s anxiety is not completely gone and that is okay. Anxiety is part of the human condition. What's most important is that she is willing to accept discomfort, which means that she will never be a slave to fear or anxiety again.

And, I’m happy to report that she has a new job – outside her home.
CALM LIVING MADE SIMPLE
What happens if you are willing?

To some degree we are all like CJ.

CJ may seem like an extreme example, but CJ was just rejecting something based on fear, much like most of us do.

Where, in your life, do you practice experiential avoidance?

Where is there an absence where you wish there was something wonderful in its place?

Are you ready to commit to the process of getting that wonderful something?
When you allow fear to make choices for you, nothing in this world will keep dread and anxiety from finding you.

However, if you can avoid avoidance then nothing can keep you from achieving calm and confidence or from achieving your dreams.
THIS SEEMS CONTRARY TO EVERYTHING I KNOW.
This type of approach may seem like a surprise to you because the traditional model of dealing with painful feelings and emotions permeates our culture and the media.

Just look at the Dr. Phil show, for example.

The traditional model engages people in the process of analyzing their way out of their problems whereas the approach of this new model asks you to accept that you have negative beliefs and to focus on what you want.

This new model is consistent with the spiritual approach to behavioural changes reflected in ancient Buddhist teachings, Zen and Daoism. Rather than fighting your negative thoughts, the focus shifts to mindfulness and a commitment to aligning with one’s values.
BRAIN SCIENCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

support this new model towards anxiety, depression and stress related disorders.
CALM LIVING MADE SIMPLE
What happens if you are willing?

A study published in July 2008 in the journal Personality and Social Psychology followed 141 participants assigned to groups that required them to focus or not focus on their feelings using different strategies in a guided imagery exercise that led them to recall an experience that made them feel overwhelmed by sadness or depression.

The first group (the “immersed” group) was told to go back to the time and place of the experience and relive it as if it were happening to them over again and try to understand the emotions they felt, along with the underlying causes.

The second group (the “detached” group) were told to go back to the time and place of the experience, take a few steps back and move away from the experience, to watch it unfold as though it was happening to them from a distance.
They were then asked to try to understand what they felt and the reasons for the feelings.

Immediately after the exercise the second group reported lower levels of anxiety, depression and sadness compared to the first group.

Even after time had passed, weeks later, the second group still continued to show lower levels of depression and anxiety.

This research supports the idea that we need to focus less on how to manipulate the content of our thoughts (the traditional approach) and more on how to change the context of our thoughts – to modify the way we perceive thoughts and feelings so that they can’t control our behaviour.
WHAT IS THE CALM LIVING BLUEPRINT?

How can the Calm Living Blueprint help me to avoid avoidance... overcome anxiety... and to live the life I want to live?
The Calm Living Blueprint is a program based on scientifically supported therapies. At its core it is about learning to accept what is out of your personal control and committing to take action that improves your life.

My goal for each individual that works through this program is quite simple: to help you create a rich, full, and meaningful life while effectively handling the pain and stress that goes with it.

The Calm Living Blueprint achieves all of this in two ways:
First, it helps you develop psychological skills to deal with your painful thoughts and feelings more effectively, in such a way that they have much less impact and influence over you.

We call these “mindfulness skills.” You can think of mindfulness skills as new ways to handle the thoughts and feelings that trigger anxiety in the first place.

Second, this program helps you to clarify what is truly important and meaningful to you – what we call your “values” – and then use that knowledge to guide, inspire, and motivate you when making changes in your life.
WILL THIS APPROACH WORK FOR ME?
Will the Calm Living Blueprint work for me?

Many people feel doubtful at first and that is okay.

The fact is there is no known treatment that is guaranteed to work for everyone. So I can’t promise that this will work for you.

I could tell you it’s worked for lots of other people and I could pull out all the published studies and the research papers, and so on, but that still wouldn’t guarantee it will work for you.

However, here’s something I can guarantee: if we stop the work whenever you have the thought, “This won’t work”, then I can absolutely guarantee that we won’t get anywhere.

So, even though you may be having the thought that this won’t work, are you willing to give it a go anyway?

I’ll see you at the next lesson 😊
If not now, WHEN?
Are you ready to take action right now?
Awesome! I love action takers.

Give me a call at (306) 781-2222 or email me at candice@calmlivingblueprint.com and let’s create an action plan together to overcome your anxiety once and for all.