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8/Managing Emotions

Am I realistic to think I can eliminate negative emotions such as fear and anger?

I have always wanted to go on a study abroad program for a semester, but I'm afraid I might not be able to handle being so far from home. I feel like I'm missing out. What can I do to overcome my fear?

My grandma is a worrier, my mother is a worrier, and I'm a worrier. Is worrying a result of heredity or environment?

Sometimes I get so angry I think I'll explode. What can I do to control my anger?

REAL PEOPLE, REAL STORIES

Dr. Lyn Freeman relates this story about fear:

* * *

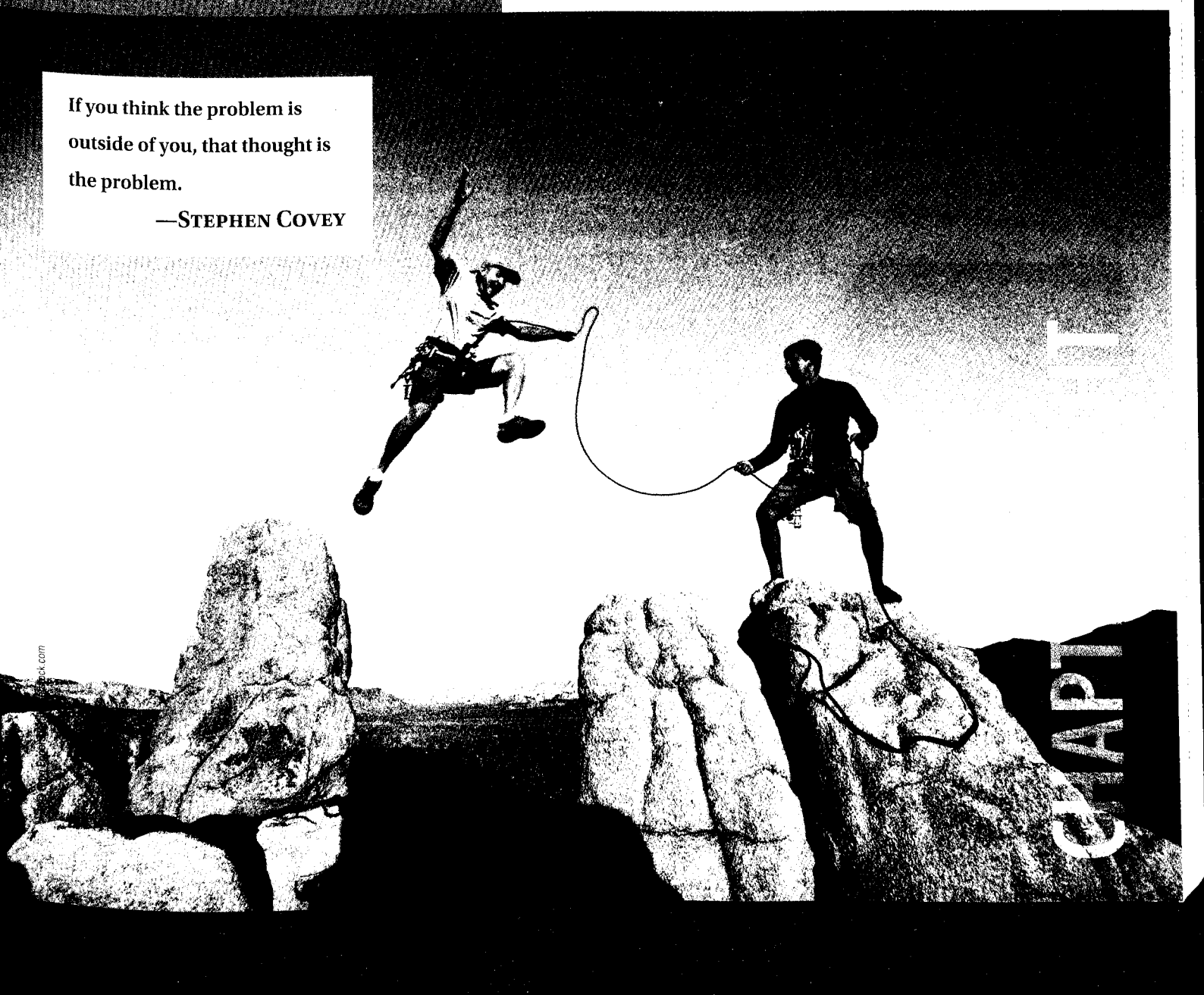
Theresa was rock climbing in an area indigenous to rattlesnakes. Upon reaching an especially precarious part of the climb with only one good handhold left, she was tired. With as much force as possible, Theresa jammed her fingers into the rock crevice and prepared to swing herself up to the top. At that moment she heard a rattling sound. In an instant, she was gripped with fear.

In a split second, the thought of being snake-bitten several times, the fear of pain, a picture of her hand swelling, and the fear of an agonizing death all raced through Theresa's mind and body. Her heart began to pound, and she began to pant and sweat profusely. Her body stiffened as her gaze froze on a shadow in the crevice. Her thoughts focused like a laser on her predicament.

"Don't let go!" a voice screamed in her head. She thought she might survive a snake bite, but never a 2,000-foot fall. With all her will, Theresa

If you think the problem is outside of you, that thought is the problem.

—STEPHEN COVEY



strengthened her finger grip on the crevice and with tremendous effort swung herself to the top of the bluff. She ripped off her climbing gloves and checked for signs of a bite. Her hand was unblemished. Safe, her bodily responses slowly began to return to a more normal state.

A few minutes later, the climber just behind Theresa pulled himself onto the bluff. "Did you encounter the rattler?" Theresa asked.

"Oh, do you mean this?" the climber responded. He reached into his shirt and pulled out a chain with snake rattles attached to the end. Shaking the rattles, he said, "This is my good-luck charm."

Source: *Mosby's Complementary and Alternative Medicine: A Research-Based Approach* (3rd ed.), by Lyn Freeman (St. Louis: Mosby, 2009).

Student Objectives

Study of this chapter will enable you to:

1. Explain how negative emotions such as guilt, worry, fear, anger, and hostility relate to stress.
2. Describe the physiological manifestations of certain emotions.
3. Distinguish between guilt and worry.
4. Explain the differences between anger and hostility.
5. Take action to prevent and control stress-causing emotions.

Managing Emotions

Do you control your emotions, or do your emotions control you? The ability to experience a wide range of emotions is part of what makes us uniquely human and keeps life interesting. We get angry. We get scared. We feel guilt and worry. How boring life would be if we never were to experience the ups and downs of emotions! Like most things in life, we need a healthy balance for optimal well-being. Chronic guilt and worry, fear that prevents us from living life fully, an attitude of hostility and anger—all are negative and stress-producing. You will learn in this chapter that you can control your emotions so they don't control you. The focus is on the emotional dimension of health.

As Theresa's story demonstrates, strong emotions may or may not be based on reality, but the powerful physiologic response to fear is the same whether the rattlesnake is real or imagined. Negative emotions such as anger and fear have a very real and profound impact on quality of life. To think that we can eliminate all negative emotions is unrealistic. In this chapter we will learn how to control and eliminate many of the negative consequences of these emotions. The key to better health and a more contented life lies not in which emotions seize us but, instead, in our ability to express and control our emotions.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Experiencing a range of emotions is part of the human experience

The Physiology of Emotions

Researchers have discovered that certain emotions can make us more susceptible to stress and disease. These negative emotions, including worry, guilt, fear, anger, and other strong emotions, can activate the sympathetic nervous system division of the autonomic nervous system, evoking the stress response—as is so clearly demonstrated in Theresa's story at the beginning of this chapter. Fear put Theresa's body on alert. Powerful hormones, including cortisol and epinephrine, flooded her body. Her blood pressure soared and her heart raced.

Theresa's experience had a profound physiologic and biochemical effect on her. Will this intense one-time scare have long-term effects on Theresa's health? Probably not. These emotions can be used for protection. The emotions of fear and anger have been linked to the

fight-or-flight response, where they can serve a protective function. Fear relates to "flight," in which we realize that sometimes running from or escaping from a potentially dangerous situation can protect us. Anger relates to "fight," in which the stress response is useful to confront and resist that which we perceive as dangerous.

The problem comes when long-term emotions such as fear and anger affect health in much the same way that long-term stress affects health and longevity. Emotional stress is clearly a significant factor in creating vulnerability to disease by disrupting normal homeostasis. **Somaticizing** is the body's way of turning mental stress, usually anxiety, into physical manifestations. Chronic worry and anxiety can overwork the nervous, immune, and hormone systems. When people somatize an emotion like worry into a physical complaint, they literally feel something physically.[1]

A growing body of research indicates that as many as half of all patients who visit physicians have physical symptoms directly caused by emotions. Some research findings even put that figure as high as 90–95%. These are not imaginary, but real, physical symptoms. What this tells us is that the root of many of today's illnesses and diseases is mental and emotional rather than organically physical.[2]

When worry or fear or anger become a typical emotional response to life, health deteriorates and life loses some of its joy. Learning how you can manage the primary stress emotions can prevent that from happening.

It isn't the experience of today that drives men mad. It is the remorse for something that happened yesterday, and the dread of what tomorrow may disclose.

—Robert Jones Burdette

The Benefits of Positive Emotions

The focus of this chapter is on managing emotions that contribute to unhealthy stress. But what about emotions that have a positive impact on health? Throughout this book you are introduced to the benefits of emotions like happiness, compassion, and optimism. So while this chapter covers the stress-producing emotions, be alert to the positive emotions that can make your life better. See the Positive Nuns Research Highlight that follows to learn how positive emotions can even contribute to longevity.

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Positive Emotions, like optimism, can reduce stress levels.

Guilt and Worry

Wayne Dyer states that one of two emotions, guilt or worry, is associated with virtually every stressor we perceive. Dyer believes that guilt and worry are the most ineffective coping techniques for stress management because they perpetuate the avoidance of stress-related issues that require resolution.[3]

Guilt is the conscious preoccupation with undesirable past thoughts and behaviors. Guilt is an expression of self-anger detected by internal dialogue that includes self-talk such as, "I should have. . ." While guilt keeps the mind occupied with thoughts and behaviors from the past, **worry,** a manifestation of fear, keeps the mind focused on events yet to come.

Clinical psychologist Thomas Pruzinsky says, "Worry is a state in which we dwell on something so much it causes us to become apprehensive. It differs from the far stronger emotion we call fear, which causes physical changes such as a racing pulse and fast breathing. Worry is the thinking part of anxiety."[4] So, as opposed to worry, **anxiety** is the psychological and physiological response to worry. When worry and anxiety escalate, the outcome is fear.

You wouldn't worry so much about what other people think if you realized how seldom they do.

—Eleanor Roosevelt

Research HIGHLIGHT

Positive Nuns

The Nun study gives us evidence of the importance of maintaining positive emotions. A group of 180 nuns wrote autobiographies while they were in their early twenties. The diaries were analyzed many years later and assessed for common psychological features. The researchers also looked at the number of these nuns who lived into the ages of 75 to 95.

The results showed that "Positive emotional content in early-life autobiographies was strongly associated with longevity 6 decades later." Nuns who expressed the most positive emotion in their diaries lived on average 10 years longer than the others.

Source: "Positive Emotions in Early Life and Longevity: Findings from the Nun Study," by D. D. Danner, D. A. Snowdon, & W. V. Friesen, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 80*(5) (2001): 804–813.

Sources of Worry

Surveys show that the most common sources of worry for Americans are family and relationships, job or school, health, and finances. Studies indicate that most people worry about 5% of the time. Chronic worriers, however, spend an average of about 50% of their time worrying. And some worry nearly 100% of the time.

Source: *Mind/Body Health* (4th ed.), by K. Karren, B. Hafen, N. Lee Smith, and K. Jenkins (San Francisco: Benjamin Cummings, 2010).

Letting Go of Worry When you watch young children play, you become aware that they rarely demonstrate guilt or worry. These are habits we develop. Imagine how silly it would sound if one youngster were to say to another, "I'm so worried about coming to your house later today. We might get hurt, or your mom will yell at us, or we may disagree about how a front flip is done on your trampoline."

Kids don't let thoughts of what may or may not happen dominate their thinking. They are too busy attending to what is happening right now and enjoying their present-moment activities to use up their consciousness on some unlikely future event. Children can teach a lesson about worry that many adults need to learn.

Guidelines to Help You Manage Worry The following seven ideas can help you when you feel the urge to worry.

1. *Most things we worry about are out of our control.* Many of the things we worry about have to do with events or situations over which we have no control. Even if we can change some aspect of the things we worry about, worrying is not the way to do it. We worry about war, the economy, the possibility of coming down with some illness, about losing our job; we worry about whether someone likes us; we worry about the people we love; we worry about our weight, or whether we will get a good grade in a class. We worry about getting old and even dying. The list of the things we worry about is endless.
2. *Worry is not the same as caring.* We have no control over most of the things we worry about, but we have been taught, and accept as true, the notion that worrying is the same as caring. This is a learned response. We are not born worriers, but we may be taught at an early age that if we care about someone that means we worry about them. We believe that if we don't worry, we must not care very much.

   Tip: Take time to reflect on the idea that worrying is not productive. Think of someone you worry about. Make a list of alternative ways you can demonstrate caring toward that person in productive ways. For example, if you are worried about your mother's health, take a few minutes, rather than wasting time worrying, to write her a note expressing your love and appreciation for her.
3. *Worry is not the same thing as planning.* The problem with worrying is that it does not change anything. When we plan, we bring future moments into the present so we can control those future events appropriately. When we plan, we are using our present moments in a useful way to prepare us for a future event or experience. It is essential to distinguish the difference between worrying about the future (unproductive and stress-producing) and planning for the future (productive and stress-relieving).

We worry and we worry . . . and we worry about worrying.

—Leo Buscaglia

TIME TIP

"I used to waste a lot of time worrying. When I worried, I felt like I was doing something. I felt like I was preventing some anticipated catastrophe, like failing a test or my dad getting cancer. After I read the chapter on managing emotions, I had an 'A-ha' moment. I was wasting a lot of time and energy worrying. It was like I was living the failure or catastrophe, even though it may never happen. Now, at the first moment I become aware that I am worrying, I stop and ask myself this question, 'Will my worrying about this change the outcome?' This simple strategy has saved me hours of needless worry (and stress) so I can focus my time and energy more productively."

—Cindy E.

Research HIGHLIGHT

Worry and the Mind

Stress emotions can affect our cognitive abilities. When we are overcome with emotions, we have trouble thinking clearly, and long-term worry can produce lasting decline. In a study reported in *Neurology,* chronic worry was linked to an increased risk of cognitive decline. Comparing worriers with non-worriers, based on an initial assessment, 1,064 members of a community were observed 3–6 years later for Alzheimers disease. The results showed that obsessive worriers had more than double the risk of decline compared to their more carefree peers.

Source: "Proneness to Psychological Distress and Risk of Alzheimer Disease in a Biracial Community," by R. S. Wilson, L. L. Barnes, D. A. Bennett, et al. *Neurology, 64* (2005), 380–382.

4. *Most things we worry about never happen.* When we worry, we focus on the possible painful outcomes that we associate with some future event. We let our present moment be filled with what *might* happen but usually doesn't. Worry prevents thinking in the present moment because of our preoccupation with things that may, or may not, occur in our future. Mark Twain understood this when he said, "I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened."
5. *Move your worries from your mind to paper.* Idle worrying is not constructive. Next time you catch yourself worrying, write down what is troubling you. Once you have moved the worry from your mind to the paper, you can identify the concern more clearly and go to work on finding a solution. You might even try making a list of everything you worry about for one day. Go back and review the list in a week, and you might be surprised to see how few of your worries ever came to pass.
6. *Practice mindfulness.* An effective way to remain free from both guilt and worry is to practice being mindful, as was explained in Chapter 7. Mindfulness keeps our attention on what is happening here and now. When our thoughts are focused on here and now, we aren't as likely to dwell on thoughts of the past and the associated guilt, or thoughts of the future and the associated worry and fear.

In graduate school I had a good friend whose wife allowed worry to take pointless control of her life. For example, while she was driving home from the store, here are some of the thoughts that would run through her head:

"I wonder how things are going at home. . . . The babysitter is a good one . . . she seems to take such good care of our kids. . . . But I wonder if she's okay right now. . . . I wonder if the kids are okay right now. . . . Sometimes the babysitter isn't completely responsible. . . . I'll bet she's taken the kids to play in the park. . . . She's probably taken the kids for a walk and left them alone. That irresponsible babysitter has left the kids on their own, and they don't know how to get back home. . . . My kids are in danger! . . . Somebody is going to kidnap them! . . . The kidnapper is going to hurt my kids! . . . Things can't possibly get any worse than this!"

By this time, the woman was having a panic attack. Her hands were clutching the steering wheel, her heartbeat was soaring, her blood pressure was through the roof, and her thoughts were racing madly about all the horrible things that surely were happening to her kids. She drove home barely able to control herself for fear of what had become of her kids. She had literally driven herself to a frenzy because of her worry-filled thoughts about her kids.

Of course, when she arrived home, the kids were just fine. They were happily playing with the babysitter and enjoying a pleasant afternoon in the backyard.

This loving mother allowed her thoughts to control her consciousness to the point where she was damaging her physical and emotional well-being. Her body was flooded with stress hormones, resulting in a full-fledged stress response much like what she would need if she were truly threatened and had to protect her children.

Notice how unnecessary her worrying was. As she was driving home, she could do absolutely nothing about what was happening with her kids and the babysitter. Her worrisome thoughts were immobilizing her and preventing her from enjoying her ride home.

—MO

7. *Remember—worry is a habit.* Negative habits such as worrying are learned, and they can be unlearned or replaced with healthy, positive habits. When you become aware that you are worrying, say to yourself, "Worry is a habit, and I choose to break this habit." Focus your mind on a relaxing image or a stress-relieving affirmation.

Tip: If worry is a habit you can't seem to break, give yourself designated "worry time." It sounds crazy, but by limiting your worry time, you can prevent worry from consuming your thoughts.

Relieving Test Anxiety

What do you worry about? Students often explain that they worry about such things as money, family concerns, grades, relationships, and their future. But by far, at the top of the list of things they worry about, students report that they worry about tests—Have they studied enough? Did they study the right information? How can they relax so they can think clearly and remember what they studied? How did they do? Because tests carry a lot of weight toward the outcome of a successful graduation, they may be perceived as major threats to well-being.

The least useful thing we can do, in order to do well on a test, is to worry about it. Recall from Chapter 3 that any time we are in the stress mode, our higher order thinking tends to shut down. In other words, our ability to remember, process, and analyze important cognitive information is dramatically reduced when the stress response is activated. As stress goes up cognitive ability goes down.

Stress Busting Behavior

NO MORE WORRY WART

Review the 7 helpful ideas for when you feel the urge to worry. Prioritize these ideas from the most helpful for you (1) to the least helpful (7). Circle your number 1 idea. This week each time you feel the urge to worry, focus on the idea you rated as most helpful to reduce and/or eliminate the negative emotion of worry.

- ☐ Most things we worry about are out of our control.
- ☐ Worry is not the same as caring.
- ☐ Worry is not the same as planning.
- ☐ Most worries never happen.
- ☐ Move your worries from your mind to paper.
- ☐ Practice mindfulness.
- ☐ Remember, worry is a habit.

Here are ten tips to help reduce your test-taking worries:

- *Prepare*—This may seem obvious, but preparing means more than cramming information into your brain the night before the test. Rather than wasting time worrying about when you will study for a test, make a schedule that spreads your studying out over several days prior to the test. Research on test preparation suggests that we are able to remember more if we study the information on several occasions (paced learning). Planning is constructive, worrying is not.
- *Ask*—If you are unsure of what to study for an exam, rather that wasting time worrying about if you are studying the right information, make an appointment with your professor and ask for guidance.
- *Sleep on it*—Review the material the day before the test, then get a good night's sleep. When you are drowsy, your ability to recall important information decreases. Getting sufficient sleep is vital to optimum mental functioning.
- *Eat right*—Evidence suggests that where carbohydrates are body food, protein is brain food. In others words, if you want to think more clearly, prior to the exam, eat primarily protein-rich foods. Avoid eating a large meal right before a test. You want your blood flowing to your brain, not your stomach.
- *Exercise*—Try a brisk walk around the block or sprint up and down the stairs prior to test-taking. Exercise is a great way to get your blood pumping to your brain and to get rid of the accumulated stress.
- *Try a relaxation technique*—Do something that profoundly takes you out of the stress response. Fortunately, the relaxation techniques described in Chapters 16-22 of this book are some of the best known ways to make that happen. When the mind and body are deeply relaxed, that is, not in the fight or flight mode, the mind is in an optimum state to remember the things that it has thought about previously. Relaxation breathing is an especially easy and effective technique to reduce test stress, but pick your favorite—autogenics, meditation, guided imagery, yoga—you decide. Just sit back and enjoy the relaxation. A deeply relaxed mind is a clear thinking mind.
- *Practice mindfulness*—Remember what you learned in Chapter 7. Keep your mind focused entirely on the question at hand. If the answer to a question doesn't immediately come to you, stay focused on the here and now. Don't let your mind bring up thoughts of what might happen since you don't know the answer—don't dwell on the bad outcomes. This will activate the stress response.
- *Move on*—If you don't know an answer, calmly move on to the next question. Let the previous question go back into your subconscious mind, which will be searching for the answer. Later, come back to the question and watch for the answer to pop into your mind. If you simply don't know the answer to a question, give it your best guess. Don't let your mind bring up thoughts of bad outcomes. Don't make up worst case scenarios of how bad things will be if you don't get it right.

- *Know when enough is enough*—Yes, you could always study more, but at some point just give yourself permission to feel good. Follow these tips, pat yourself on the back, and tell yourself, "I am prepared, so I can relax and do my best."
- *Let it go*—A lot of worrying happens after the test is done. What is the point in agonizing about a missed question? Do your best, learn from your results, and move ahead.

During it all, keep perspective. As a student for many years, consider how many tests you have successfully passed. Getting an answer wrong is unlikely to result in devastating consequences. So don't worry, just relax and enjoy your opportunity to work your mental muscles.

Letting Go of Guilt Guilt can be a destroyer or a teacher. When we reflect on our actions, we can learn important lessons from them. Hindsight is a great teacher if we are willing to listen.

Several of the seven ideas discussed earlier for how to manage worry also relate to how to manage guilt. For example, you can remember that guilt is a habit. When you are feeling guilty, you can change the focus of your thinking to mindfulness. To manage stress and enjoy life, remember that we can learn from our past experiences, and we can plan for our future. Worry and guilt will not help unless we use those emotions to motivate us toward positive change.

Kim was a popular, happy sophomore in college when she learned a lesson the hard way, a lesson that would change both her life and the lives of many others. Kim and her friend Sara went out for a night on the town to celebrate Kim's 21st birthday. Kim had been drinking and was driving too fast. On the way home to their dorm, she missed a corner and rolled her car. Sara was trapped under the car, and later that night died in the hospital emergency room. Kim was charged with vehicular homicide and spent time in prison. Part of the punishment the judge imposed was the requirement that Kim speak to high school and college students about her experience. She also was required to spend every birthday for the next 10 years in jail so she could reflect on the consequences of her actions.

She shared with my class, "If I had it to do over again, I never would have gotten behind the wheel of a car. I have to live for the rest of my life with the knowledge that I killed my best friend. I think of Sara and her family every single day. Sometimes I'm overcome with the guilt of what I did, but I've come to realize that the only way any good can come from this is if I use that guilt to motivate me to spread the message to others to never drink and drive. I would give anything to bring Sara back, but I can't. Maybe, though, I can help someone else not make the same terrible mistake I did."

Although Kim's experience with guilt relates to a profoundly sad situation, you will be able to think of a time when you felt guilt for something you did. We have all done things or said things that we wish we could take back. Getting buried in the guilt of our past mistakes is not productive and only adds to our stress. To let go of guilt, we need to ask ourselves a couple questions: "What can I do to make it right?" and then, "What lessons can I learn that will enable this experience to add value to my life and the lives of others?"

—MH

Fear

What is fear and what is happening in our minds when we fear something? **Fear** is a state of escalated worry and apprehension that causes distinct physical and emotional reactions. When worry becomes intense, we feel fear. Fear usually involves a focus on the future. We create in our mind thoughts that something in our future, some event or experience, is going to involve pain, danger, or discomfort and therefore is to be avoided. Psychologists report that fear is one of the chief reasons people seek their help. Fear may be the single most potent stressful emotion.

> You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the things you think you cannot do.
>
> —Eleanor Roosevelt

Types of Fear Common types of fear and examples of each are given in Table 8.1.

Types of Fear with Examples

Change	Afraid to move to a new city, change majors, or break up with a boyfriend or girlfriend
Pain or physical suffering	Fearful of going to the dentist or getting a shot
Failure	Afraid of not being selected for the track team or not being accepted into graduate school
Some *thing*	Afraid of snakes or spiders or being mugged
The unknown	Fearful of going away to school or of people who are different from you
Death	The biggest unknown of all

Fear can paralyze and incapacitate us and can stop us from going after our desires. In succumbing to fear, we settle for less and get less than what we really want. As an example, you probably know of someone who wants to interview for a job, try out for the golf team, ask someone out on a date, or audition for a play, but because of that person's feelings of fear, he or she does not realize those desires. The belief that these activities will be painful in some way stops the person from moving forward toward a desired outcome.

It's about Growing To understand fear, we must ask an ominous-sounding question: *Why are you here?* This question is not the same as asking Why are you where you are right now? The deeper questions are: Why do you think you are alive on this planet at this time? What is your purpose for being? For what are you living? These might seem like strange questions to include in a chapter about fear and emotions, but stay with us—this is important. Some typical replies to these questions are:

- To learn everything I can
- To enjoy life to the fullest
- To make a difference in other people's lives
- To serve others
- To have and support a family and provide a quality life for my kids
- To develop my skills, talents, and natural abilities
- To have a good time
- To be happy
- To work toward and reach the goals that I set for myself

All these purposes are worthwhile and have great value. When we look at them, we notice a common theme: the general desire among humans to grow, to develop, to serve, and to enjoy. We have a natural tendency to want to expand, to become more of who we are. Even people like the great physicist Albert Einstein, at the point of death, decried the fact that so little of him had been realized. We have great untapped potential.

He has not learned the lesson of life who does not every day surmount a fear.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Comfort and Discomfort Zones In contrast to our innate need to grow and expand is another natural law of behavior: We tend to gravitate toward our comfort zones. A comfort zone is any place, situation, relationship, or experience where we do not feel threatened. It usually is a known place or situation where we feel safe and in control. Examples of comfort zones are our homes, especially certain rooms or places in our homes, our jobs, the family and friends we spend time with, the types of food we eat, the places we go to exercise, the make of car we drive, and the routes we commonly travel. We prefer being in places, being around people, and doing things that are more comfortable to us.

When we are in our comfort zone, we experience little growth or progress. To grow, we must leave our comfort zone and move out into our **discomfort zone.** The word *discomfort* implies that we do not feel especially comfortable "out there." Discomfort zones are those places where we *do not* naturally gravitate. We usually try our best to avoid our discomfort zones.

Although moving out of a comfort zone can help us progress in the direction of our potential, it has a catch: This growth takes effort. This effort usually involves overcoming or dealing with some type of fear.

Lean into your fears, dare them to do their worst and cut them down when they try. If you don't, they'll mushroom 'til they surround you, choke the road to the life you want. Every turn you fear is empty air dressed to look like jagged hell.

—Richard Bach

When we venture out of our comfort zones, we sense the emotion of fear because we believe that some kind of pain or discomfort might be lurking out there. But the reality is that *there is no pain in our discomfort zones.* When we move out into our discomfort zones, we rarely are hurt in the true sense where physical pain is involved. On rare occasions this can happen. Some people live in environments where physical danger can be a real threat. In these situations, fear can protect us. In the vast majority of situations that we feel fear, however, we are not really in danger of having pain inflicted on us. We mentally manufacture the pain we experience. So while the fear we experience is sometimes justified and prompts us to take action, most of the time, we create the false need to prepare for some pain that simply isn't going to happen. Consider the following example that looks at one of our top social fears—public speaking.

Imagine that you have been asked to speak in front of a large group of people. Because this is something you are not comfortable doing, you prepare for several days. As the time approaches for you to speak, you notice that you are feeling more and more

nervous. Finally you find yourself at the meeting where you are to be the next speaker. You feel prepared, yet prior to being introduced, you notice that your knees are shaking, your mouth is dry, and you are having trouble thinking clearly (all indications that you have activated the stress response). Your mind races with thoughts of what the people in the audience might think of you once you start speaking. You notice yourself sweating, feeling extremely uncomfortable. You almost feel like crying or running away as your name is announced.

With some difficulty, you make your way to the podium. At first, it seems like you barely can get any words out, but soon you settle into a nice flow and you end up giving your speech without any problems. The attendees are attentive, nodding, smiling, and even laughing at your jokes. At the end of the speech, you notice that the crowd is applauding. You return to your seat with a smile on your face, relieved that you are finished.

Fear is a feeling based on the thought that you want to avoid potential pain in the future. So let's analyze where the pain can be found in the process of giving your speech and why doing so seemed so unpleasant. If you felt fear at any point as you approached this speech, we must ask the crucial question: *Where* was the *real* pain during the speech? Going through each phase of giving the speech, where would we find pain? No real pain was happening while you were sitting in your seat waiting to get up or while you walked over to the podium. No real pain occurred as you were speaking. Nor did any pain accompany you as you went back to your seat after you finished speaking. At no point during the entire event was there *real* pain. If giving this speech in reality is a pain-free experience, why would you feel any fear?

Your fear was based on your thoughts about the people who were there. You interpreted the potential reactions of the audience in a certain way. They could have disagreed with you or thought mean things about you. That thought, to you, was psychologically painful.

Remember that thoughts always happen before emotions. Your thought was that those people's opinions mattered to you, and rejection hurts. The fear you felt is the emotion that follows the thought of wanting to avoid *that* pain. But remember that there was nothing painful about the speech itself.

You can do a test to show that this is a working principle, that your fear is based entirely on your thoughts and not on the process of giving the speech: Do the same speech again in the

I was out of shape and overweight. The fatter I got, the worse I felt about myself and the less motivation I felt to change. I knew exactly what I needed to do to rid my body of the excess fat, yet I was stuck in the rut of apathy and inactivity. It was easier to keep doing what I was doing. I couldn't seem to gather the energy to change my routine, to move out of my comfort zone.

One day I decided to change the way I was living and feeling. The choice was mine. I was sick and tired of feeling sick and tired. I needed to stop thinking about changing and actually *do* something. I loaded the kids in the car and headed for the track. My goal was to run 1 mile. Well, I couldn't. But I did run half a mile—and walked the other half. That marked the first baby step out of my comfort zone.

© Duncan McNicol/Getty Images

Don't let fear stop you from experiencing the abundance that makes life worth living. What have you done to step out of your comfort zone?

Two years from that day at the track, I ran a marathon. I crossed the finish line with tears of joy (and maybe a little pain) as my family cheered me on. When I started, I wasn't sure I could finish the marathon. Running 26 miles had seemed like an impossibility only 2 years earlier. Although I was afraid I might fail to finish the marathon (fear!), I decided to find success and growth in the process. This was important to me: Even if I didn't finish the marathon, I had grown in many ways from taking on the challenge.

People have asked what got me moving in the right direction. The turning point related to this question: Why am I here? My motivation related to my spiritual belief that we are here for a reason and to my belief that I was doing this not only for myself but also so I could be a healthy role model for my children. I believed that one of the reasons I was here was to set an example that might help others move from comfort to growth. If I could do it, so could they. Here is what worked for me:

1. I decided to focus on what I could do rather than what I could not do.
2. I decided to enjoy exercise and think of exercise as something I was privileged to do, not something I had to do. I thought about the time I spent exercising as a gift I gave myself.
3. I was motivated by something more than the desire to shed the fat. I wanted to be a healthy role model for my children. This was a deeply ingrained value.
4. I set goals to move gradually out of my comfort zone and toward my potential.
5. Even though I was afraid I might fail, I told friends and family what I was doing. This was motivating to me and I received support and encouragement.

Finishing the marathon gave me courage to step out of my comfort zone in other areas of my life and was literally a life-changing event. It took courage to get courage. Don't let fear stop you from experiencing the abundance that makes life worth living. Dare to try.

—MH

same room, but this time do it without anyone present in the audience. Similar to the first situation, you are doing exactly the same thing—sitting, walking to the podium, speaking, and then sitting down again when you are finished. Your experience this time will be far different than the first.

What can we do with this understanding? Anytime we find ourselves afraid of something, we can mentally examine each step prior to the event and the event itself, and remove any unreal pain. By realizing that no real pain is involved except that which we create in our own minds, we can choose to think differently about it, as we have discussed. Once we have recognized that no real pain is involved, we are much more likely to move forward in the direction of our desire without fear or apprehension. We become free to move confidently toward any outcome that we choose.

I was eating dinner at a restaurant with two of my kids. My daughter told me she was thirsty and wanted another drink of water. I told her to go ahead and ask the waitress, the next time she walked by, to bring some water for her. My daughter's face went sour and her eyes lowered. I could tell she had some reservation about asking for another glass of water. She was afraid of asking but had no idea why she was afraid. I tried to help her understand that she was fully capable of following through on a task that she feared. I suggested to her that she not let her fears stop her from getting what she wanted.

Similarly, we see something that we want, but our thoughts of painful or uncomfortable outcomes keep us from going after it. As in the case with my daughter, most of the things we fear are based on empty ideas about what might happen to us, but usually don't. In her case, there was no threat. There would be no future pain. With most of the things that we fear, the same is true. For most of the fears that we deal with daily, the only real pain we will experience is the pain and discomfort that we create in our own heads.

—MO

In class, I ask the students to think of something that they fear—not something that will barely edge them just outside their comfort zones but something that will move them way "out there." The item they decide on must be something that they ought to do, something that would add real value to their lives, but they have not done it for fear of the perceived painful outcomes. Next I ask them to take the next two weeks and outside of class actually follow the steps that will move them through that experience or event they feared. They are to do that thing they fear.

At the conclusion of this assignment, I continue to be amazed at the breakthroughs as well as the insights of the students who choose to really "go for it." I frequently hear comments like these: "I can't believe I was afraid of something so silly." "I feel so alive and free ever since I did that." "What a relief to know that I can do that which I never thought I could or never tried because of my fear." The final part of this assignment involves the student, immediately upon completion of breaking through one fear, moving to the next one and going for that one as well.

—MO

Putting It Together

1. Most of us believe we are here not to be stuck in a rut of comfort but, rather, to grow and move in the direction of our potential.
2. Our natural inclination is to be comfortable—to remain in our comfort zone.
3. We need to balance our need to grow with our desire to feel comfortable.
4. Overcoming fear is necessary for growth, and growth takes effort.
5. Moving toward your potential results in feelings of accomplishment and gives meaning to life.

We need courage to shift from comfort to discomfort. Moving out of our comfort zone implies facing our fears. But if we are to expand and grow, we must face our fears.

Fear Factors Four principles for managing fear can shape our understanding of fear and guide us in taking control of our choices.

1. *Fear can motivate positive action.* If you are afraid of flunking a test, you can use that fear to initiate a plan of action. One student, Dave, related in class that he remembered the day he received hi s credit card bill in the mail and realized that he was scared. He felt absolute terror about the debt he had accumulated and feared that he would not be able to get out of debt because of the choices he had made. Dave was able to use his fear to initiate change. He sought financial advice and received help in setting up a budget. Dave used his fear for positive change.

   Fear also can serve a protective function in times of real physical danger, such as the fear of burning our hands when we touch a hot oven or the fear of being attacked if we walk alone at night.

As a result, we don't touch the hot oven, and we don't walk alone at night.

2. *Nothing in the world is inherently fearful.* Like stress, there is nothing "out there" that universally causes fear. Fear is an internal experience. Many people are scared of snakes, while others are content to have the critters as pets and feel no fear as the snake slithers around their neck. The snake is not causing the fear. The fear is the result of what the person believes about the snake. When we associate a snake with pain and danger, fear is the result. The emotion of fear is the result of the thoughts we create inside our minds.
3. *Fear is learned.* Psychologists tell us that newborn babies have a natural fear of falling and loud noises. Others disagree, saying that babies are simply reacting to these stimuli without a capacity to associate pain with an experience. Regardless, most of what we learn to fear is a result of either personal experience or our belief in someone else's experience. For example, if your neighbor tells you about the time she went to the dentist and experienced excruciating pain, you may decide to do everything in your power to avoid going to the dentist. When we experience something painful, such as getting stung by a bee, in the future we will associate the past experience of pain with the presence of the buzzing bee.

   If fear is learned, it follows that fear also can be unlearned. Within our capacity is the potential to release our attachment to our fears, to let them go. If one person can overcome a fear, such as a fear of high places, or speaking in front of a group, or meeting a new person, so can others.
4. With practice and experience *we can learn to overcome our fears.* We get better at handling fear through practice and experience. Little by little, we develop the confidence and self-trust to risk more frequently and to do more things that seem frightening. We could talk about all the reasons we feel fear, but until we actually step out of our comfort zone, look that which we fear straight in the face, and move toward it, we will not rid ourselves of our fears.

My friend Cheri and I spent hours planning and saving for a backpacking trip through Europe upon college graduation. As the day of departure neared, I was nearly overcome with fear about all the things that could happen when I was so far from home.

What if I run out of money?
What if we get lost?
What if I lose my passport?
What if my backpack doesn't arrive?
What if something happens to a loved one while I'm away?
What if we get mugged?

Fear has been defined as:

F = false
E = evidence
A = appearing
R = real

and this fear nearly prevented me from experiencing the trip of a lifetime. This trip shaped my love of travel and adventure. Best of all, I met an adventurous backpacker in Copenhagen who was to become my husband. Just think what I would have missed if I had let fear hold me back!

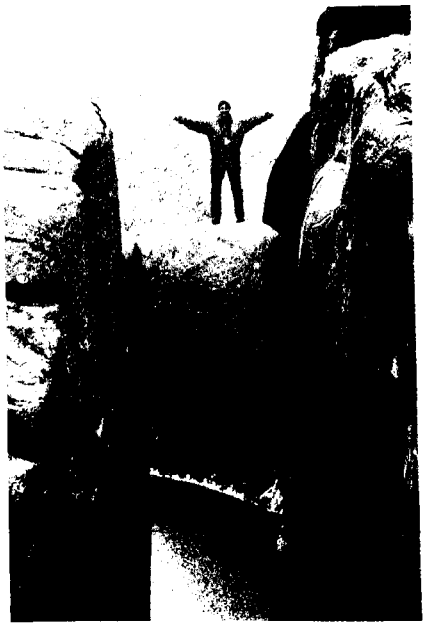
—MH

The meaning I picked, the one that changed my life: Overcome fear, behold wonder.

—Aeschylus (525–456 BC), Greek tragic dramatist

Remember when you were learning to drive a car? Most of us were intimidated the first time we got behind the wheel. And why wouldn't we be? Driving a car is a big responsibility and one of the most potentially dangerous things we can do. Yet, we overcame our fear. Through practice and experience, we gained confidence for one of the most dangerous things we ever do. Our familiarity with this activity determined our level of fear.

We can reinforce the feeling of assurance that we can handle whatever we need to reach our goal by looking at our past experiences. The fact that you are alive is proof that you are a capable person. This is not a frivolous statement. It is an accurate one. You know you can handle life's challenges because you keep handling things every day. Why should some future event be any different from the millions of previous ones? Unquestionably, things are uncertain at times, but you still come out alive, unhurt, and capable of handling more. Curiously, most of us find that we can handle the things that we go after and, moreover, that we enjoy them, that they bring us pleasure. The pain that we perceived rarely happens, but the joy of going for what we want frequently does.



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If fear is learned, it can be unlearned. Overcoming a fear, such as a fear of heights, can be exhilarating.

Ask Questions

Don't let the fear of asking a question keep you from acquiring needed and helpful information. Be sure you completely understand what is communicated to you. Asking questions can help you get additional directions or clarify what is being asked of you. If you feel afraid to ask for help, summon your nerve and go for it anyway!

Strategy for Overcoming Fear The following is a proven strategy for overcoming fear:[5]

1. *First, admit you are afraid.* List the things that cause you to feel fear. As you think about these things, try to imagine them without the emotion of fear. Learn to disassociate the pain from the event. This takes some practice, but you can do it.
2. *Next, confront your fear.* Do whatever it is that you are so afraid of. Realize that your fear will intensify as you face it, but do it anyway. Go back to your mental pictures and try to imagine that the situation is not fearful.
3. *Do whatever you are so afraid of at least three times.* Chances are that you will be less afraid each time. Chances are even better that you were afraid because you were unsure.
4. *As you confront your fear, call it something else*—excitement or a challenge, for example.

Fear knocked at the door. Faith answered. Nobody was there.

—English Proverb

Momentum carries tremendous power. If we settle for one little victory, the growth stops there. To continue the progress, plan another visit into your discomfort zone and venture out again. Little by little, you will realize that fear is an illusion. With practice, you can adopt the feeling of assurance that you can handle it. One common thought that precedes the emotion of fear is a lack of trust in ourselves. We can allay a fear of failure with a sense of self-assurance and self-efficacy.

Scared to Death

Throughout medical history, examples abound of people who have been literally frightened to death. If fear is intense enough, all systems can be overloaded fatally, as the following examples demonstrate:

- Barbara Reyes was spending her Memorial Day weekend floating on a raft on Georgia's peaceful Lake Lanier. The calm of the peaceful, warm afternoon was shattered when a man riding a motorized jet ski roared within a foot of the 40-year-old Reyes. In a panic, she paddled to shore, collapsed, and died. Randolph Simpson, the Gwinnett County coroner who examined Reyes, said, "There's no question she was literally scared to death." The man who roared by on the jet ski was arrested and charged with involuntary manslaughter.
- A 45-year-old man died of fright as he stepped to a podium to give a speech.
- An elderly man sitting on his lawn collapsed and died when a car jumped the curb and appeared to be heading straight for him.
- Panamanian dictator Omar Torrijos reportedly amused himself by killing a prisoner with an unloaded gun; the sound of the blanks firing was enough to scare the man to death.

Source: *Mind/Body Health* (4th ed.), by K. Karren, B. Hafen, N. Lee Smith, and K. Jenkins (San Francisco: Benjamin Cummings, 2010).

The Fear–Faith Connection The more we believe that our lives are about something, that things happen for a reason, and that we are meant to benefit from the experience of our journey, the more courageous and less fearful we are when we are confronted with difficult situations. The more we are guided by fear, the weaker our faith. The stronger our faith, the less we fear. We are not talking about only a faith related to the belief in a higher power but also about the faith you have in yourself and your abilities. Pushing through fear is less frightening than living with the underlying fear that comes with a feeling of helplessness. Underlying all of our fears is a lack of trust in our ability to handle something. We need to remember we can handle it.

You will never overcome all your fears, but you can conquer the fears that prevent you from living your life to the fullest. Set out to tackle the fears that are holding you back. Viewing life as an adventure and an opportunity to grow can help reduce the fear of venturing into new, unknown territory. Helen Keller said, "Life is either a daring adventure or it is nothing." Have you ever given up on a hope, a dream, a goal, or an adventure because you were afraid of failing? Pushing ourselves out of our comfort zone can energize us and help make life an exhilarating adventure. Some of life's greatest stress is a result of regret, of being afraid to stretch for fear of failure. Shakespeare once said, "A coward dies a thousand deaths, a hero only one." Cowards live the potential outcomes repeatedly in their mind, continually bringing up the associated pain. The hero simply moves in the direction of the feared thing. As you move through your fears, celebrate your victories. The more you associate pleasure and positive feelings with risking, the more you will be inclined to risk again. We are not talking about unnecessary, dangerous risk but, rather, the risk to move out of your comfort zone and grow. Experiencing success in overcoming fear in one area of life can encourage you to challenge your fear regarding other personal limitations, and thereby to risk again and grow in unpredictable and exciting ways.

Risking

To laugh is to risk appearing a fool.
To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.
To reach out for another is to risk involvement.
To expose feelings is to risk exposing your trueself.
To place your ideas, your dreams, before the crowd is to risk their loss.
To love is to risk not being loved in return.
To live is to risk dying.
To hope is to risk despair.
To try is to risk failure.
But risks must be taken because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.
The person who risks nothing . . . does nothing . . . has nothing . . . is nothing.
You may avoid suffering and sorrow, but you simply cannot learn, feel, change, grow, love . . . live.
Chained by your certitudes, you are a slave; you have forfeited freedom.
Only a person who risks is free.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Anger

Work rage, road rage, sideline rage—you can hardly watch the news or read the paper without learning about yet another example of out-of-control anger. Whether it is the basketball player who leaps into the bleachers and starts punching an unruly fan, or the soccer mom who ends up in jail for assaulting the referee, or the disgruntled college student who opens fire on his teachers and classmates, or the guy who rams full-speed into the car that passed him—all seem to be reacting with anger to these stressful times. None of us is immune to the ravages of anger. Have you ever felt like throwing your cell phone out the window because you were disconnected after being on hold for half an hour? And more than one of us has shouted profanities at our computer when it locked up and we lost three hours of work.

Anger is a transient emotional response based on the way one chooses to think about events. It is usually triggered by perceived provocation or mistreatment. Anger is tricky to define, but here are some common elements of anger:

- Everyone experiences anger, although to widely differing degrees.
- Anger is considered a temporary emotion.

Can't you see my temperature's rising? I radiate more heat than light.

—Neil Peart

CULTURE Connection Road Rage

Americans aren't the only ones feeling stress on the road. According to a study published in the *Journal of Sociology,* road rage is a problem on the roads of Sydney, Australia, as well. ***Road rage*** is a term used to describe a range of aggressive and dangerous driving behaviors directed at other motorists. Uncontrolled temper and an open display of anger and frustration are typical of road rage.

The research conducted on drivers in Sydney showed that motorists viewed driving as a source of autonomy, pleasure, and self-expression—meanings that often were frustrated by the travails of negotiating the road system. Road rage was seen as as a response to the stresses of urban living, not only driving in a crowded road system but also the pressures exerted by factors such as a competitive work environment and lack of time. The findings revealed that the expression of anger in road rage is conceptualized negatively because of the challenges it poses to the idea of the "civilized self," but also that such expression is seen as understandable in the context of an urban environment replete with stress.

Road rage—an unhealthy outcome of anger and hostility.

Source: "Road Rage: Drivers' Understandings and Experience," by D. Lupton, *Journal of Sociology,* 38(3) (2002), 275.

- Anger combines physiological and emotional arousal.
- People express anger along a continuum from simple resentment or jealousy to full-blown, out-of-control rage.
- Anger is not the same as hostility (discussed later).

Anger comes in many forms including abuse, ridicule, physical violence, temper tantrums, sarcasm, and even the silent treatment. We might say things such as, "He infuriates me!" or "You really tick me off!" Jealousy is a form of anger, as are rage, annoyance, irritation, blaming, and frustration. Even guilt, as you learned earlier in this chapter, is a form of anger—in this case, self-anger.

Sources of Anger Sybil Evans, a conflict-resolution expert in New York City, has identified three primary factors contributing to our ever-increasing anger: time, technology, and tension. She says:

> Americans are working longer hours than anyone else in the world. The cell phones and pagers that were supposed to make our lives easier have put us on call 24/7/365. Since we're always running, we're tense and low on patience. And the less patience we have, the less we monitor what we say to people and how we treat them."[6]

Stress doesn't necessarily cause us to be angry, but it certainly makes us more vulnerable to overreacting.

Dr. Wayne Dyer describes some common circumstances in which people select anger as the main emotion of the moment.[7]

- *Anger in the automobile.* While driving, we get upset at how we believe other people ought to be driving.
- *Anger in competitive games.* In every sport, we find people getting upset at opponents, teammates, referees, and even themselves.
- *Anger at those things that seem to be out of place.* We have thoughts that things ought to be in certain places, and when they aren't, we lose control. An example is the driver who believes the bicyclist should not be on the road and crowds him off the road.
- *Anger about taxes.* The anger we create about something over which we have no control is senseless, but we allow ourselves to get angry over it nonetheless.
- *Anger over the tardiness of others.* The anger over people being late occurs when we believe that others ought to function according to our timetables. We immobilize ourselves with this thought: "I have a right to be angry. She kept me waiting for an hour."
- *Anger at the disorganization or sloppiness of others.* Again, this is an attempt to modify someone else's behavior according to our rules for how they ought to behave.
- *Anger at inanimate objects.* You feel your anger rise as a car alarm honks endlessly or your computer freezes up.
- *Anger over the loss of objects.* No amount of anger will turn up a lost key or a wallet.
- *Anger over world events and conditions beyond your control.* Regardless of how much you approve or disapprove of what is happening in the world, your anger will not change the situation. Similarly, your anger at the conditions of Mother Nature

Mad Driver Disease

The American Automobile Association's Foundation for Traffic Safety says that incidents of violently aggressive driving—sometimes called "mad driver disease"—rose 7% a year in the 1990s.

Source: "Why Are We So Angry?" by D. Hales, *Parade Magazine*, September 2001, pp. 10–11.

I almost never get angry. It is an emotion I rarely experience—except when I am driving. For years I would cuss and fuss at what I considered inconsiderate drivers. You know the ones—the drivers who desperately pass, cut in quickly, then put on the brakes to slow down and turn.

Then, one day I came across a quote from Buddha: "Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else—you are the one who gets burned."

What an insight! When I get angry, I'm the one who suffers. Why should I let someone I'm never going to see again control my mood and ruin my day? Inconsiderate drivers may not have any idea that they have done anything wrong, or maybe they simply don't care.

Although my initial reaction is hard to shake, when I encounter a "bad" driver now, I think of this quote. Sometimes I wave and smile. Sometimes I think about reasons why that driver did what he did. Maybe she just had a call that her child was injured at school, or maybe he is an EMT rushing to an accident. The point is that when you hold on to anger, you are the one who gets burned.

—MH

is unproductive. Becoming irate because the day is too hot or too cold, too windy, too rainy, or too sunny is a waste of present-moment energy.

Some people carry the anger they had in childhood over to adulthood. Behavioral therapy can help these people have a better sense of what happened to them in their lives and stop associating everything with upsetting events from the past. The key is to stop looking at the present constantly through the lens of the past.

Effects of Anger Anger causes physiological and psychological arousal effects including:

- Increase in cortisol and adrenalin
- Increase in blood pressure
- Increase in blood sugar
- Faster pulse
- Constriction of blood vessels
- Increased serum cholesterol levels
- Decreased immune function
- Insomnia and fatigue

If this sounds a lot like the stress response, it is. Dr. Redford Williams and other researchers at Duke University found that anger puts one at higher risk for heart disease, sudden heart attacks, and chronic high blood pressure. They found that the harmful effects of anger may be more dangerous to health than the stress response.[8]

The Only Reason We Get Angry As with all emotions, the feeling of anger comes from how we are thinking. Depending upon how we interpret what is happening, we create the emotion of anger. The feeling of anger is based on the perception that what is happening, or what might happen, or what already happened, occurred differently than how we think it should have. Anger is a reaction we have when expectancy is not met. Anger occurs when we wish some aspect of the world, or somebody in it, were different than it is.

In life we have many rules or agreements of how things ought to be. The laws by which we abide are a vast collection of rules. These tend to serve the population toward our common good. Without these rules, we would experience chaos daily. Rules of this kind bring order to our lives.

A basketball player who dribbles the ball, stops dribbling, then starts dribbling again is guilty of double-dribbling and will lose possession of the ball. Basketball has many rules. Rules for sports and games help make the games fun and competitive.

We also have individual rules that we decide are the way things ought to be. A rule is our belief or sense of surety that something should be a certain way. Anger happens when someone breaks one of our rules. Whether we get angry at other people, at things, or at situations, we are responding to a perceived need to have things our way. Give it some thought and you'll discover that *every time you have been angry, it was because you were not getting your way.* Our thought about the event usually includes the words *should, ought to,* or *must.*

Here are some examples of rules we make about everyday events:

- Dogs shouldn't bark too loudly.
- Cats shouldn't throw up on my living room couch.
- The room should be quiet when we are practicing meditation.
- The music you are playing shouldn't be too loud.
- I was here first, so the waitress ought to take my order first.
- It should not rain on my wedding day.
- I should be able to talk to a real, live person when I call the airlines.
- This professor should be on time and should be interesting.
- My computer should work as it was designed to.
- People should have the good sense not to ram their grocery cart into my heels.
- People should not drive slowly in the fast lane.
- I made an appointment, so I shouldn't have to wait.

These are everyday rules that *we make up for ourselves.* No natural or cosmic law says the house must be quiet so you can meditate. No universal rule says that the person we have asked out on a date must say "yes." We have simply decided that this is how things ought to be. Anger is the emotion we create when something happens that conflicts with how we

believe things ought to be, when something happens contrary to our rules. The event itself does not make us angry any more than events can cause us to be stressed, fearful, or have any other emotion. The way we construct the event in our minds, what it means to us, determines if we will become angry.

Therefore, anger is often the result of our decision about how people should act. Think back to our discussion of levels of responding from Chapter 6. Remember the scenario of Jenny standing in line waiting for a concert ticket. Had she held firm to her rule that the line should be moving more quickly than it was, the result may have been feelings of anger. Reacting in anger would cause unnecessary stress and may even result in Jenny doing something inappropriate.

This doesn't mean we should never get angry. If we notice ourselves feeling that something ought to be different than it is and we are in a position to make positive changes, we can channel our anger into productive action. Sometimes anger can be channeled into productive action on an even larger scale. When enough people have the same rules and agree that the rules are necessary for the safety and well-being of the entire population, those rules may become laws. This is the case with traffic laws and laws restricting smoking in public places, for example.

Given this understanding, we can immediately defuse any bout of anger simply by reexamining our rule and being aware that our rule, not the event itself, is what is causing us to choose anger. For example, if you notice the cat has thrown up on the couch, rather than letting anger cause you to do something you will regret later, you can immediately look at the situation and recall the rule you have set up in your mind as the real cause of anger—the rule that cats should not throw up on the couch. With this awareness, you can operate from a more positive emotional state. As long as we stay focused on who or what we think made us angry, we will remain upset. Once we understand that we create our anger with our thoughts, we can take steps to reduce our anger.

Expressing Anger Is it best to hold your anger in or let it out? The answer depends on who you ask and how your anger is expressed.

The following Research Highlight suggests that expressing anger is healthy, but how you express that anger may be even more important to your well-being. Research by Brad Bushman, a psychology professor at Iowa State University, suggests that letting anger out may make people more aggressive, not less. He says, "Many people think of anger as the psychological equivalent of the stream in a pressure cooker: It has to be released or it will explode. That's not true. The people who react by hitting, kicking, screaming, and swearing just feel more angry."[9]

You need only to watch a chair-throwing *Jerry Springer Show* to see how inappropriate expressions of anger can lead to escalation. So "venting" may make you feel better, but only for the moment. You might want to think twice before you kick the dog or scream at your roommate. Venting your anger could:

1. Make you feel worse
2. Cause your situation to escalate
3. Lead to new problems you might have to fix later

Anger Blocker In Chapter 10 you will learn forgiveness techniques that can help you express and release anger in a healthy manner. When you find yourself in a tense

Research HIGHLIGHT

Anger Expression

Expressing anger may help protect men from heart disease and stroke, a new study shows. The risk of a nonfatal heart attack was cut by more than 50% in men with moderate levels of anger expression, and they also were less likely to have a stroke, compared to men who rarely expressed anger, according to the study published in *Psychosomatic Medicine.* It's possible that the men who rarely expressed anger were suppressing the emotion, and that may have led to a higher risk for heart disease and stroke. The study also indicates that the relationship between anger and cardiovascular disease may be more complex than previously thought.

Source: "Anger Expression and Risk of Stroke and Coronary Heart Disease among Male Health Professionals," by P. Mona Eng, G. Fitzmaurice, L. Kubzansky, E. Rimm, and I. Kawachi, *Psychosomatic Medicine, 65* (2003): 100–110.

situation, give yourself some time to breathe. Walk away from the situation and remind yourself that it might be best to consciously decide not to get angry in the first place. "Anger blockers" can help you do that.

Here are some tips for keeping anger in check:[10]

- First and foremost, get in touch with your thoughts at the time of your anger, and remind yourself that you don't have to think that way simply because you've always done so in the past.
- Try postponing your anger. If you typically react with anger in a specific circumstance, postpone the anger for 15 seconds, then explode in your typical fashion. Next, try 30 seconds, and keep lengthening the intervals. Once you see that you can postpone anger, you will have learned control.
- Don't try to delude yourself into believing that you enjoy something you find distasteful. You can dislike something and still not have to be angry about it.
- Remind yourself at the moment of anger that everyone has a right to be what he or she chooses and that demanding that anyone be different will simply prolong your anger. Work at allowing others to choose, just as you insist on your own right to do the same.
- Ask someone whom you trust to help. Have this person let you know when he or she sees your anger, either verbally or with an agreed signal. When you get the signal, think about what you are doing and then try the postponing strategy.
- Keep an anger journal, and record the exact time, place, and incident in which you chose to be angry. Be diligent with the entries; force yourself to record all angry behavior. You will soon find that the very act of having to write down the incident will persuade you to choose anger less often.
- After you have had an angry outburst, announce that you have just slipped and that one of your goals is to think differently so you don't experience this anger. The verbal announcement will put you in touch with what you have done and will demonstrate that you are truly working on yourself.
- Try being physically close to someone that you love at the moment of your anger. One way to neutralize your hostility is to hold hands—despite your inclination not to—and keep holding hands until you've expressed how you feel and dissipated your anger.
- Defuse your anger for the first few seconds by labeling how you feel; and if your anger is directed at another person, how you believe they feel as well. The first 10 seconds are the most critical. Once you pass this window of time, your anger will often subside.
- Get rid of unrealistic expectations. For example, remind yourself that the basic nature of children is to be active and loud occasionally.
- Love yourself. If you do, you won't want to burden yourself with self-destructive anger.
- In a traffic jam, time yourself. See how long you can go without exploding. Work at the control aspect. Use the time creatively to write a letter or a song, or devise ways to get out of the traffic jam, or relive the most exciting experience of your life, or, better yet, plan to improve it.
- Instead of being an emotional slave to every frustrating circumstance, use the situation as a challenge to change it, and you will have no present moment time for the anger.
- Keep in mind that although the expression of anger may be a healthy alternative to storing it up, the healthiest choice is not to have it at all. Once you stop viewing anger as natural or "only human," you'll have an internal rationale for working to eliminate it.

Hostility

Hostility and *anger* are not interchangeable terms even though they frequently are used that way. Anger is considered a temporary emotion, usually in response to a specific event, and hostility is an attitude motivated by hatefulness and animosity. Hostility often is considered as anger that is projected outward at something or someone in an aggressive or antagonistic way. Although hostility usually is not considered an emotion, it is worthy of mention here because of the important relationship between hostility and health.

Researcher Dr. Meyer Friedman thinks hostility can best be defined by its manifestations, including:[11]

- Irritation or anger at the minor mistakes of others
- Looking for whatever might go wrong

Happy Aging

Getting older makes you happier. A study found that after age 50, people report being consistently happier, less stressed, and less worried than their younger counterparts. Because of life experience, older people may be "more effective at regulating their emotions than younger adults," says psychiatrist Arthur Stone.

Source: "Health . . . Laughter," *The Week: The Best of the U.S. and International Media*, 10 (495–496), December 24, 2010–January 7, 2011: 22.

- Inability to laugh at what other people laugh at
- Inability to trust others
- Suspicion that other people have selfish motives
- Frequent use of obscenities
- Difficulty in complimenting or congratulating others
- Preoccupation with the "errors" of the government, large corporations, or the younger generation.

Hostility is especially dangerous to the heart and may be a good predictor of heart attacks. Anger and hostility seem to have a dampening effect on the body's immune system. Hostility can be dangerous on the psychological level as well. People who are hostile tend to be involved in abuse and problems with marriage, higher levels of stress, less job satisfaction, and more problems in working relationships.[12]

Conclusion

The ability to experience a wide range of emotions is part of what makes us human and keeps life interesting. The challenge is in taking responsibility to control the negative emotions that can weaken our quality of life. Long-term emotions such as fear, worry, guilt, and anger can affect health in much the same way that long-term stress affects health and longevity. Don't let out-of-control emotions hold you back from experiencing the adventure of living.

Our doubts are traitors and cause us to lose the good we oft might win for fearing to attempt.

—SHAKESPEARE

Do you see life as an adventure? Do you seek opportunities to stretch and grow? Are you willing to put aside your fear of failure or change and test your limits? Are you able to face with power and confidence the unexpected challenges that come your way?

Feeling like you are stuck in a rut and living a life of drudgery can be highly stressful. You have a choice. You can choose adventurous living, or you can choose mediocrity. What will it be? What could be more stressful than letting fear prevent you from getting what you want from life? Take control of your emotions so they don't take control of you.

LAB

8.1 Feel the Fear—Go for It Anyway

PURPOSE The purpose of this activity is to allow you to overcome a fear by participating in an activity that is outside your comfort zones.

DIRECTIONS

1. Think of something that you are nervous or fearful of doing. Select something outside your comfort zone that you know should be done, but you have been avoiding because of your fears of what might or might not happen. Your assignment is to break through your fear and take a risk.To get you thinking, here are some examples of students' fear:
   - Ask somebody out on a date
   - Quit a job
   - Confront someone

- Forgive someone
- Interview for a job
- Speak in a public meeting
- Go rock climbing (fear of heights)
- Change majors
- Mend a broken relationship
- Tell someone who you have avoided that you love him or her
- Visit someone you don't know very well but would like to and get to know him or her better

2. Describe the thing you fear doing. Relate your thoughts and feelings about why it seems to be fearful for you.
3. After you have completed the assignment:
   A. Describe your experience from beginning to end of going for it and doing the thing you feared.
   B. Describe the insights you gained about that particular fear. Describe the insights you have gained about your own fears in general.
   C. Explain how this activity relates to stress management.

Online Activities Course

Additional activities to enhance what you have learned in this chapter can be found at the CourseMate website by logging in to www.cengagebrain.com.

Resources and Activities that relate to this chapter include:

- Critical thinking/discussion questions
- Chapter 8 activities

Key Points

- Emotional well-being requires appropriate expression of a wide range of emotions.
- Chronic guilt and worry, fear that prevents us from living life fully, and an attitude of hostility and anger are negative and stress-producing.
- Guilt is the conscious preoccupation with undesirable past thoughts and behaviors.
- Guilt keeps the mind occupied with thoughts and behaviors from the past, and worry, a manifestation of fear, keeps the mind focused on events yet to come.
- Worry is different from planning, the latter of which brings future moments into the present so we can apply appropriate control to those future events.
- The most effective way to remain free of guilt and worry is to practice being mindful.
- Fear is a state of escalated worry and apprehension that causes distinct physical and emotional reactions.
- Anger is a transient emotional response based on the way one chooses to think about events, usually triggered by perceived provocation or mistreatment.
- Anger is considered a temporary emotion, usually in response to a specific event, as different from hostility, which is an attitude motivated by hatefulness and animosity.
- Researchers have discovered that certain emotions can actually make a person more susceptible to stress and disease. These negative emotions include anger, worry, guilt, fear, and hostility.
- Positive emotions, like gratitude and happiness, are explained in other chapters. Just as negative emotions contribute to unhealthy outcomes, positive emotions contribute to good health. Remember, your thoughts control your emotions.