

## Understanding Momentum

Momentum is energy that builds up the longer you do, think or feel something. This energy is a force that pulls you to continue going in the direction you're already going. The best way to understand momentum is to imagine taking a car to the top of a big hill, such as the streets in San Francisco, which are famous for being steep. If you put the car in neutral and gave it a nudge down the hill, it will begin to roll. As it continues to roll, it picks up speed and the physical mass being in motion will continue to gain energy, go faster, gain momentum as it rolls down the hill. At the top of the hill it is going slow. If you jumped out in front of it immediately after you gave it a nudge, you could stop it. But, if you tried to stop it at the bottom of the hill, you'd be dead. The increase in the energy of the car's movement in that direction is momentum.

The same principle that applies to the physical world also applies to thoughts and emotions. The more that you think about or focus on or talk about or feel something, the more momentum that thought or emotion gains.

So, when it comes to dealing with emotion, emotional intensity and regularity equate to momentum. The emotion of uncertainty has much less momentum than anxiety, and fear has the most momentum. That is why it is so much harder to get yourself out of a state of fear than a state of uncertainty.

**LOW MOMENTUM EMOTIONS:** Get out in front of it early. Low intensity emotions are like the car that just got pushed toward the hill. They're not moving very fast and they don't have the energy to drag you down or run you over. If you're feeling uncertain, or another more mild emotion, you can jump out and stop it. You can redirect your focus onto something more pleasing or you can change your perspective. But, if you don't stop it early, and it picks up speed, it takes a great deal more effort to stop it.

**MEDIUM MOMENTUM EMOTIONS:** If you're feeling anxiety (or anger), you've already gained some momentum. Your car is going faster. You may need to pull out in front of it with another car or drop a boulder on it. The more momentum/intensity your anxiety has, the more it's going to beat up on you when you try to change it. At an emotional/mental level, the 2<sup>nd</sup> car and the boulder could be going for a walk, listening to an inspirational so, talking to a trusted supportive friend, taking a bath or taking a nap. A simple thought change won't work at this point because the anxiety has momentum and will just continue to pull you along with it. That's why these actions I suggested take a higher level of action. It takes a higher level of distraction to stop the momentum, but once you do you can focus on and do things that shift the emotion in another direction. For this reason, everything we teach has the ultimate goal of helping you develop the ability to **CATCH IT EARLY**—to notice the emotion, identify the thought, and change your direction **BEFORE** it spirals out of control

**HIGH MOMENTUM EMOTIONS:** If you're nearing the bottom of the hill in San Francisco and you can see that you're headed for the Bay, what do you do? You have 2 choices:

1. **Slow the momentum.** At this point you cannot stop the momentum in its tracks. Instead of a car on a hill, imagine your fear is like a freight train barreling across the countryside. You want it to be going the opposite direction—toward relief and hope and joy—but you cannot change a train's direction all at once. If you tried, the train would buckle under the pressure and everything inside of it would be destroyed. It would go off track and ruin the rails. Expecting yourself to flip the switch from fear to happiness (which is impossible) has the same effect on you.

First, you must SLOW the momentum. You can put on the breaks. You can put objects on the tracks that slow down the train. Emotionally, you can practice self-control techniques that you've learned while NOT in a state of fear. You can try the techniques mentioned above. You also have time on your side because eventually the fear will dissipate. Once momentum slows, you have the opportunity to start over and begin going the other direction. The more you focus your thoughts and attention in the direction of things that feel better, you pick up momentum in the way you WANT to go. The more momentum and speed you have going toward certainty and hope and enthusiasm, the harder it is for your emotional train to start going back the other way toward fear.

2. **Hold on.** It will be over soon. In many cases, there is not much you can do other than damage control. The momentum is too great. Do your best to let go, accept where you are stay safe. You're in a state of fear (or despair). But all hope is not lost. Inevitably, the experience will end and the fear will dissipate. You can start fresh next time and practice the tools that help you stop the emotional escalation before momentum builds.