

# A Peaceful Mind

Psychotherapy and Personal Counseling

Anxiety • Depression • Stress [www.PaloAltoTherapy.com](http://www.PaloAltoTherapy.com)



## Taming Fear, the Little Word with a Big Voice

**F**ear talks to people. And when they listen, this is what can happen:

*Sheila K. loved to dance but she wouldn't go out on the dance floor for fear she'd look clumsy and ridiculous.*

*Arnie M.'s fear of going into business to sell the jewelry he loved to design kept him from quitting a job he detested; his continued unhappiness constantly spilled over onto his family.*

*Delia B. was so afraid of rejection by the son she gave up for adoption that she never called the number she had discovered for him.*

Fear is that nattering voice inside our heads that says, you can't, you shouldn't, what if.... Fear keeps us from taking risks that might enrich our life or holds us back from doing some things we need to do. Experience new and exciting vistas? Accomplish something really great? Fear says, "Not on your life."

This isn't to say fear is all bad. At its best it's an instinctive, natural ability to help us survive. Without fear we might attempt to stroll across freeways or scratch behind a lion's ears. But given the upper hand, fear can dominate our life and make even the innocuous—taking a walk or answering the phone—a daunting experience.

Ninety-nine percent of what we worry about never happens, according to Susan Jeffers, Ph.D., author of *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*. "There's a voice inside our head that's always heralding doom and disaster even before we get started on something," she says.

On its own, fear won't disappear. Following are some strategies to help you deal with fears that might be holding you back from something you want or need to do.

- **Get information.** In an information void, fear clicks in to do what it thinks is its job. But when you find out about what scares you, you replace fear with knowledge.
- **Learn how to do it.** If there's something you'd like to do, but you're afraid to try, take lessons. We're not born knowing how to ride horses or make pottery.
- **Find models.** Let someone who's not afraid model courage for you. Just as fearful behavior breeds the jitters, courageous behavior invites confidence.
- **Talk to yourself.** Self-talk filled with positive messages can change fear energy into positive energy. Eliminate the can'ts, shouldn'ts and ought-tos from your self-talk vocabulary.
- **Use your imagination.** Before you arrive at the party, imagine other guests are as frightened as you. See your audience as people who really want the information you have. Visualize yourself doing what you are afraid to do; see yourself as graceful, strong and capable.
- **Focus on the little things.** Keep your mind on the details, not the Big Picture. Complete the report word by word, pay the bills one by one, see the group individual by individual.
- **Expand your comfort zone.** Take a small risk each day. Make one phone call, ask for one thing you want, go to one new place. Little by little your confidence will expand, too.
- **Relax and breathe.** Sometimes the physical response to fear creates even more fear. Physically relax your body and breathe in and out to release tension. ✿

## 10 Warning Signs of Stress

*For all its bad reputation, stress isn't a product of only negative things. It's a response from your body to changes in your life. "Good" things can cause stress as frequently as "bad." The stress created by getting that new job or the arrival of a baby can take its toll just as much as that caused by losing someone you care about or getting laid off from work.*

*Following are ten warning signs of stress. Simple stress reduction techniques such as meditation, deep breathing, relaxation or exercise may be able to reduce these symptoms.*

1. **Fatigue or exhaustion** that is interfering with daily activities.
2. **Sleeplessness or bouts of insomnia** caused by a list of concerns and worries.
3. **Irritability or moodiness** that may trigger negative responses and reactions.
4. **Anxiety** about what the future holds.
5. **Depression** that affects your ability to cope and weakens your spirit.
6. **Lack of concentration** that makes it difficult to perform familiar tasks.
7. **Health problems** such as headaches, backaches, chest pains, constipation or diarrhea, or a change in appetite.
8. **Anger** and difficulty in controlling your temper.
9. **Social withdrawal** from friends and activities that once brought pleasure.
10. **Feeling overwhelmed** or out of control. what lies beyond it can keep you young at heart. ✿

## A Letter From

Ernest S. Schmidt, LCSW

Founder, Palo Alto Therapy



Palo Alto Therapy continues to grow, providing new services and opportunities to help our clients enjoy healthy, fulfilled lives. In 2009, we added two new therapists to our staff. With the skills and experience of Sharon Fischer, LCSW, and John Montopoli, LMFT, we'll be able to assist more children, adults and couples in our community with a variety of emotional concerns.

Our therapists are available to help with a wide range of issues, and we're turning some special attention to one very common issue: anxiety. Ernest Schmidt has long recognized the role anxiety plays in many people's lives, and he has wanted to put a usable, accessible tool into people's hands to help them understand and handle their anxiety. His new ebook, *Tackling Anxiety: How to Regain Your Peace of Mind* ([www.tacklinganxiety.com](http://www.tacklinganxiety.com)), explains exactly what anxiety is, what makes it worse, and how to make it better, all in an approachable style that's easy to understand.

That friendly, down-to-earth style will also benefit young adults who join our anxiety group. This eight-week class is designed to help participants discover new ways to manage anxiety. Together we'll explore how to recognize and deal with anxiety, and learn to offer and receive support from one another, all in a fun, relaxed atmosphere. It's all part of Palo Alto Therapy's work to provide our clients with real-world solutions.

Be assured of our heartfelt gratitude for referring your friends and family. They're the highest compliment you can send. Thanks!

To be added to or removed from our newsletter list, or if you would like extra copies of this newsletter, please email us at: [info@paloaltotherapy.com](mailto:info@paloaltotherapy.com).

## Are Your Assumptions Undermining You?

It's natural for us to instantly and automatically generate beliefs or assumptions about other people and our environment. Most likely it's a throw-back to our reptilian brain, which constantly scans to see if we are safe or in danger. Some assumptions are useful and necessary—such as assuming that night will follow day. However, other assumptions can undermine our well-being, our level of connection with others, and our overall success in the world. Take a look at the following questions to discover if your assumptions are undermining you:



### True False

#### Set 1

- 1. I base what I believe is possible on past experiences I've had.
- 2. I assume I already know what I do and do not like and therefore stick to what I know.
- 3. I tailor what I say and do based on expressions I see on other people's faces.
- 4. I don't tell certain people what I think or feel because I already know what they will say.
- 5. I can pretty well size people up within minutes of meeting them and then know what to expect.
- 6. How I relate to people is influenced by the way they look, dress and speak.
- 7. My opinions of others are influenced by what kind of work they do and where they are from.

#### Set 2

- 1. I regularly examine the assumptions I have about myself to determine whether my beliefs are holding me back.
- 2. I know that my truth is not necessarily other people's truth.
- 3. When I have an assumption about someone, I check it out with that person first before acting based on what I think is true.
- 4. I make time to clear the air with my loved ones and work-mates so that we don't just assume we're on the same page.
- 5. I consciously endeavor to open my heart to people I think are different from me—and am delighted when I discover we have more in common than I had imagined.
- 6. I make an effort to learn about differing beliefs and try to keep an open mind.
- 7. I cultivate curiosity as a way to counteract my natural human tendency to make assumptions.

If you answered true more often in Set 1 and false more often in Set 2, you may wish to examine how your assumptions are undermining your relationship with yourself, others, and life in general. Please don't hesitate to call if you'd like to explore this issue further. 🌸

## Bounce Back! Developing Emotional Resilience

**M**ajor disruptions are a “gotcha” we all experience at one time or another in our lives. For some, these hard times come frequently – the impact is overwhelming and recovery, if it comes at all, can be painfully slow. Others show resilience and are admirably able to glide through these times fairly easily, bouncing back to a normal life again quickly. Resilience—the strength required to adapt to change—acts as our internal compass so we can resourcefully navigate an upset.

When unexpected events turn life upside down, it’s the degree to which our resiliency comes into play that gives these “make-or-break” situations the opportunity for growth. The good news is that each of us has the capacity to reorganize our lives after a disruption and to achieve new levels of strength and meaningfulness. In fact, life disruptions are not necessarily a bad thing because they help us grow and meet future challenges in our lives.

It’s easy to feel vulnerable in the midst of chaos because of not knowing what lies ahead. But learning how to adapt during chaos strengthens your ability to meet stresses in the future. It’s a lot like a bone that was once fragile or broken, and is now strong from being used.

So how can you learn to become more resilient? Learning how to put closure to previous life experiences is often key for bouncing back. In addition, developing resilience depends on many factors. Let’s take a look at 7 key characteristics of people who demonstrate resilience during life’s curve balls.

### **A Sense of Hope and Trust in the World**

Resilient people rely on their belief in the basic goodness of the world and trust that things will turn out all right in the end. This positive attitude allows them to weather times when everything seems bleak and to look for and accept the support that is out there. This approach toward the world gives them the ability to hope for a better future.

### **Interpreting Experiences in a New Light**

The ability to look at a situation in a new way (a skill called “reframing”) can minimize the impact of a difficult situation. Resilient people take a creative approach toward solving a problem, and don’t always use an old definition for a new challenge.

### **A Meaningful System of Support**

One of the best ways to endure a crisis is to have the support of another person who can listen and validate your feelings. Knowing that others care and will come

to your support lessens feeling isolated, especially when tackling a problem alone. It’s important to choose people you trust. Don’t be surprised if it takes several friends, each of whom can provide different kinds of support. Resilient people aren’t stoic loners. They know the value of expressing their fears and frustrations, as well as receiving support, coaching, or guidance from friends, family or a professional.



### **Mastery and Control Over Your Destiny**

You may not be able to predict the future, but you can tackle a problem instead of feeling at the mercy of forces outside of your control. Resilient people know that ultimately their survival and the integrity

of their life values depend on their ability to take action rather than remain passive. Tough times call for you to tap into your own sense of personal responsibility.

### **Self-Reflection and Insight**

Life’s experiences provide fertile ground for learning. Asking yourself questions that invite introspection can open a door to new understanding and appreciation of who you are and what you stand for. Giving voice to your thoughts and feelings can invite insight and help transform the meaning of a problem into something useful. Resilient people learn from life situations, and they do not succumb to punishing themselves because of decisions made in the past.

### **A Wide Range of Interests**

People who show resilience in the face of adversity are those who have a diversity of interests in their lives. They’re open to new experiences and ideas. Because their lives are rich, they can use their variety of experiences to find relief from the single-mindedness and worry which often accompanies a crisis.



### **Sense of Humor**

Have you ever had a wry laugh during a difficult situation? The ability to see the absurdity, irony, or genuine humor in a situation stimulates your sense of hope and possibility. Humor has both psychological and physical benefits in relieving stress because it encourages a swift change in your perception of your circumstances—and when your thoughts change, your mood follows. ✿

# New Year's Resolutions: How to Make Them So You Can Keep Them

This will be the fourth year in a row Betty J. has made a New Year's Resolution to exercise more. She's also vowed to lose weight (an annual resolution since 2005), and to finally start that novel (this one goes all the way back to the 90s.)

Like two out of every five Americans, Betty begins every new year with stout resolve and good intentions. But like most who make New Year's Resolutions, by the time the spring fashions hit the shop windows, all that resolve has gone the way of last year's colors. No exercise program. No weight loss and, sadly, no novel. Not even a beginning chapter.

What goes wrong?

Betty's problem and the difficulty most people face in keeping their resolutions is that changing behavior involves more than simply vowing to do so. A lot more. So, whether you want to do more or less of something, quit something altogether or start something new, here are a few tips that can help.

## 1. Be sure the change you vow to make is something you really want,

not just something you think you should do or something you're doing for someone else. Altering habits is hard work; if you're not going after something you really want, you set yourself up for failure.

**2. Be specific.** Instead of vowing to "lose weight," be specific: five pounds by March 15. Vague words like "more," "better" or "less" don't give you a toehold to measure against. State your goal in incremental, measurable, specific terms. Be certain it's attainable, too. To go from a sitting position to running a marathon in six weeks may be too long a distance to travel in that short a time.

**3. Accentuate the positive.** When you just say no, you're reminding yourself of what you can't have or can't do. Instead of saying "no fatty foods," say "nonfat milk and fruits for dessert." Instead of saying "I can't smoke," try "I'm choosing a smoke-free lifestyle."

**4. Believe in yourself.** Positive self-talk, affirmations and encouragement really do help. Even if you fail the first time that doesn't mean you're doomed to failure. Like the song says, "Pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start all over again." Be easy on yourself if you lapse. Change is often a two steps forward, one step back process.



**5. Easy does it.** Set your goals in short, manageable steps rather than one giant leap. Start off slowly: go to the gym twice a week instead of four times; walk a block instead of a

mile; begin with a low-fat breakfast, in a few weeks you can tackle lunch, after that, dinner.

As for Betty and her novel, at last report, she committed to a page a day, four days a week. At that rate, by the end of 2010, she'll have more than 200 pages completed—two-thirds of her way to a good-sized novel. 🌸

Call us today to get started: 650-384-0342

"I have more hope and a more positive attitude about the future because I gained a lot of tools and information that I can put to use to help me achieve the level I want to achieve."  
—Past Client

Palo Alto Therapy delivers children & adults a better quality of life through professional, sensible & honest counseling. As a results-oriented practice, we stand apart by specializing in the proven cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) method to quickly effect change. Our counselors involve clients in setting goals & creating plans, while communicating how & why certain elements are beneficial. We are direct, warm & accessible, creating a relaxed atmosphere for clear conversation & tangible results, even through difficult situations.

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