

5. How to Deal with Anxiety



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Dara Tomasson

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Do you often feel stuck in your life and not sure how to get out? Join me for this episode where I teach you a tool that will help you doing and being more than you thought possible. I am Dara Tomasson and this is Weight Loss for Quilters episode five.

Did you know you could lose weight and keep it off for good? After 25 years of hiding behind my quilts, I have finally cracked the code for permanent weight loss and I've lost 50 pounds without exercise or counting calories. I'm Dara Tomasson, professional quilter turned weight and life coach, where I help quilters just like you create a life they love by losing weight and keeping it off for good. Let's jump into today's episode.

Now, today's episode is all about anxiety. So just a disclaimer. If you are on anxiety medication and you have a diagnosis with a doctor, please keep doing that. I have several clients who have come to me who have a diagnosis, who have medication for anxiety. And what I tell them is that, "When you learn this tool and you have this understanding, that will be an asset to you." So, I just wanted to clarify that.

Alright, I have five children. I have four sons and one daughter. And not to stereotype but my four sons all have red hair. And they have some stereotypical red hair qualities of – we don't say stubborn in our house, we say steadfastness. And so, it has been interesting for me to watch them as they have different approaches to trying to solve their problems.

So, I'm going to tell you about my first son. My first son that struggled with this, he did not want to go to school. He had other ideas of other things he'd rather be doing than going to school. And so, it was quite a struggle, and in fact kindergarten and grade one almost every single day he did not want to go to school. And pretty much every day at the end of the day I'd say, "How was school?" And he'd say, "Best day ever."

But it was interesting to watch him because there would be times in class that he would literally just freeze. He would do nothing. He would sit with his arms folded for a long time. This would happen in the car, I'd say, "Put your seatbelt on." And he would just freeze. Now, we talk about the lower

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brain and the higher brain. The lower brain wants us to seek pleasure, conserve energy and avoid pain. And it's wanting us to do that, and one of the strategies if it ever feels in danger is it will either freeze, just like a predator, if you've seen a little bunny.

We have bunnies now and they've been eating my strawberries, it's so sad. These strawberries have been growing for two years, we finally got berries and now the rabbits have eaten all the tops. I digress. And so, if you see an animal like a bunny hunted, they will either freeze, they will either fight, bunnies generally don't fight, or they will run, so flight, they'll go so fast. So, this son in particular he would freeze and he wouldn't say anything and that's what he did.

And then I had another son, I have another son, and he is flight. And so, I would get a call from the school and they would say, "Well, he left the school." And I'd have to hop in the car and rush to the school and find him. And he did that several times. And one time he even walked all the way home, and the principal couldn't find him. But that is what he did.

So, I'm telling you this story because we all are wired to stay safe. And part of that wiring is that we will either fight, so that can now look as adults we might go to blame, we might not take responsibility. It might look that way. We might freeze. So that might be a lot of Netflix watching, or social media, being on our phone a lot. Or we might flight. And part of flight is we do take off, we'll go shopping, or we'll just leave our surroundings and we just go away. And we go away from our brains in the process. And the same thing with freeze.

So, this one son in particular who kept leaving the school, which of course is a safety hazard. I remember just having a really big discussion with him about why he was doing that. And he would get so overwhelmed that he just couldn't cope. And he just had these bursts of anger and he couldn't deal with it. And so, I went to the library. I did some research and one of the things that I came up with, I found a child's book on dealing with anxiety. And I'm just going to describe anxiety in just a moment. But it talked about where our brain goes when we are having this, this problem with anxiety.

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And before I go onto that I just want to shout out to one of my clients who is a really good example of how this anxiety, how she's been able to reduce it. So, when I first started working with her she would wake up every morning, just felt almost like a straitjacket. She felt that she couldn't really cope with all the things that were going on that day. And she really struggled with knowing how to manage.

And one of the ways that she was able to get through the day was eating a lot of sugar. Because that sugar and the more sugar she ate the more she needed to get the same hit, it's basically like drugs. So, she would just kind of work her way through the day giving herself more and more sugar so that she could cope. And as she applied these tools, and this is one of her favorite tools that I'm teaching you today in the podcast. She was able to now kick her sugar addiction and she wakes up in the morning without all of those heavy feelings. And when they start coming back she's able to recognize it.

So, I just wanted to shout her out. And it's just so much fun to watch my clients as they progress. So, let's go back to how I've been able to help so many women and my children learn how to deal with anxiety. So, the first thing about anxiety is that anxiety is when you go to your worst case scenario and you stay there. Now just before I teach you this tool, one thing to be really cautious about is anxiety has kind of become a buzzword, kind of like bullying.

And so, if we just say a blanket statement like bullying or anxiety, we actually don't give ourselves the opportunity or the clarity of our brain of what is actually going on. So that's why I don't like to have those labels because it doesn't give our brain as much focus to see what's really going on. So how I look at anxiety is you have an undesired emotion. This could be positive or negative. If you feel really proud and you have a really hard time feeling proud of yourself, you're not going to process or let that emotion stay with you. You're going to react to it, you're going to avoid it.

So, when you have an emotion like you're proud of yourself and you don't want to feel it, or you feel fear. We start on a road which I call worry road.

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Now, worry road, I like to imagine it, and this is where I was getting at with this child's book about anxiety, *Helping Your Child with Anxiety*. And it was really interesting because right at the beginning of the pandemic, I got that book out. And so, I had it for many months because the libraries were closed.

And they had this picture of a child and there was a fork in the road. And one side of the road had skulls, and crossbones, and scary animals like snakes and bears. And they had a cave with a scary face in the cave. And this child was walking down and he had all of these symbols of fear. And then there was the other road that was, and I call this one, hope road. It had flowers and it was sunny, and it was joyful.

So, as I was thinking about these two roads, this is what came to my mind. Imagine you're on a highway and you see a bunch of road signs, you know the ones, the advertisers that say Disneyland, or drink milk, or whatever those are. And so, what I say to my clients is, "When you go down this road, and you see the skeleton or whatever, what do the signs say on that road? So, on worry road, which will lead to anxiety because anxiety is going to your worst case scenario and staying in there. What do those signs say?"

So, my clients and myself have come up with signs that say things like what other people think of you is more important than what you think of yourself. You can make mistakes. People can laugh at you. You aren't very smart. People don't choose you. You are usually the last one picked. Don't forget that people can be mean. Don't forget that words can hurt. All of those statements that I just said, those appear on this road.

And so, you imagine driving down this road and all you see are signs like you're not very smart. You haven't figured it out yet. What's wrong with you? When are you going to grow up?" Those signs. So, if you're completely surrounded by that and that's all you see and focus on, then of course you get to the point where you just think worst case scenario. My husband will want to divorce me. Or I will never be able to accomplish that

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goal. I will always be overweight. I will never be able to go kayaking with my grandkids. I will always be sitting on the sidelines.

I will never be able to go on an airplane easily and walk and do all the things that would take to go to that Houston quilt market. I'll never be able to do those things. And that's being in your worst case scenario, and then you feel stuck. And the interesting thing about when you're in your worst case scenario is it takes you right back at the beginning of the road of that negative emotion or positive emotion that you don't want to feel. And you have to just keep doing that over, and over, and over again.

So, I like to imagine it like it's one of those drills that goes down, and down, and down into the earth. And you just go further, and further, and further down. And you don't see a way out. You get more and more stuck. So that is all that's happening is that you see a bunch of signs that are not helpful, they are not hopeful, and they feel very scary and detrimental.

So, what I offer to my clients is that we can actually go on the other road. And that's called hope road. So, hope road it has road signs that say things like everything is figureoutable. You can solve any problem. You have had success in the past. You have a skillset that has success, for example. There are so many different signs that you see. And as you go down hope road and you see these signs like everything is figureoutable. Your worth is already set. Life is to have fun, to have more pleasure or more joy. You don't have to earn your worth. We just talked about that in the last podcast.

So, then you get to this place in the road where you start new things. And you can feel fear and you don't worry about it, you're like, "Yeah, there's some fear, no big deal, let's just keep going. Here's some disappointment. I can feel some disappointment." We're not afraid of these emotions any longer. We can just process them. We can just let them be with us. We can even carry them on our back for a little while. And then we are just able to keep moving on in life.

So, when you get to the end of hope road, what happens is you don't need to know the how of how you're going to accomplish something. If you're on

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worry road you're constantly saying, "Well, I have to do this, and then I have to do that. And then that person has to call me. And then this has to happen." You try to control everything. But when you're on hope road you're, "I don't know how it's going to happen. I don't even need to know. I just know that I can trust myself to figure things out."

So, then what happens with the hope road is that it just builds your confidence in yourself and your ability to trust yourself. And when you trust yourself you're able to feel any feeling. You're like, "Yeah, I can feel any feeling. It's just a feeling. Feelings are helpful." And then your opinion of yourself has evolved, and it's changed, and it's elevated. So now you have much more trust with yourself. And this is what self-confidence is all about.

So, as we talk about anxiety I want to just go back to this concept of being in your worst case scenario. So, let's say for example there is a lady whose husband is a police officer. And her husband gets called out and he doesn't come home. And she waits, and she hears some sirens, and she tries his phone, and he doesn't respond. And her mind just starts getting a little bit worried. Something could happen to him. Things aren't so great. And so, this is what I would tell her to do because right now she's in her worst case scenario: He will die.

And I say, "Okay, so if he died, then what would you do?" And this is what I do for all my clients. So, then she would be really sad. Okay, you'd cry and then what? Well, then she would have a funeral. Okay, and then what? Then she would put away all his clothes. And then what? She would decide if she's going to live in that house still or sell that house. Okay, and then what? She would sell the house and buy a new one and move into that house. Okay, and then what? She would get settled in her new neighborhood. Okay, and then what?

So, every time I do that it's allowing the brain to answer the question of everything is terrible. This is so fearful. This is so horrendous. This cannot be happening. But really truly I was just coaching a client recently and she has some different feelings about her husband. And doesn't always speak up and is afraid to speak up. And I said, "Okay, how come?" She worries

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that if she says something he doesn't like or approve of then they'll get a divorce. And I said, "Okay, then what?" Well, and then she would get half the money. Okay, and then what? And then she would get a new house.

And then what? She would keep quilting. And then what? She would go to retreats. And then what? And so, she realized that as she did that it wasn't as bad as she thought and she could handle it. If that did happen she could solve that problem.

So, I talked at the beginning about my two sons, and our lower brain is really great. It has kept us safe and it kept us alive all of this time, through the black plague, through corona, through all of these things. And it's great that we are able to evolve and change. So, anxiety has a role. Anxiety says there is a lot of danger here, you really need to pay attention. Great. But if we resist the negative emotion and we believe all those terrible signs. What that does is it leads us to the worst case scenario. And if we don't allow ourselves to work through that worst case scenario, we're now stuck.

And we don't – not only are we stuck, it just becomes debilitating, like that drill, it just goes lower, and lower, and lower. Another way I like to describe it is it's like you're in a tornado and it's just spinning and it collects speed. And as it collects speed it picks up cows, and houses, and telephone poles. And just it's a disaster spinning out of control. That's kind of how it feels. So, I don't want that for you. And I want you to know that you don't have to stay that way.

It's amazing. You can just decide this is who I am, this is me just having a thought that creates a negative emotion or a positive emotion that I don't want to process. And because I don't want to process that emotion then I go down this road that's scary. And it says things like, "You're not smart enough. You can't figure it out." And then when you get to the end of that road you feel stuck. And you feel like you don't have anywhere to go. And you stay in that worst case scenario and then that fear intensifies, or that negative emotion intensifies because you haven't processed it.

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So, one of the ways that we describe when you avoid, resist or react to a negative emotion. It's like a giant beachball and you don't want to see the beachball because it's that emotion that you don't want to see. And so, what happens is you spend a lot of time and energy shoving that beachball under the water. And when you shove that beachball under the water you're using all your energy to not look at the beachball instead of just allowing the beachball, seeing the negative thing and then saying, "Okay, yeah, there it is."

So, anxiety is just being in your worst case scenario and staying there. Now, you're going to have some physical responses when faced with a negative emotion. And so, when you resist you intensify that intensified emotion which creates an even more intensified emotion. And then you just spiral out of not being in your power. So, the solution is just to stop going down worry road in the first place. And remember, the beginning of worry road is just an unprocessed emotion.

You have a thought like, I'm never going to get this done in time. Let's say you submitted a quilt for a quilt show and you really want to get it in. But you have to hand stitch the quilt sleeve on there, and you think I'm never going to get this quilt done in time. And so, you resist that fear. And then you just start going down worry road. What's wrong with me? What was I thinking? Why do I even try? This is ridiculous. Who did I think I was? All of those thoughts.

And that just leads you to the worst case scenario of you're never going to be able to finish anything again. And you should just give away all your quilting stuff and just watch Netflix. Okay, you hear me? So, the process to avoid anxiety is to not reject that emotion, to allow it in your body. So, you don't need to be afraid. We can build our trust. And our opinion of ourselves elevates.

Now, the last thing I'm going to say as I close this episode is that anxiety truly is an option. And anxiety is literally just being in your worst case scenario and staying there. So, the second step of reducing anxiety, so the

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first one is to just feel that emotion and not react to it and go down that road.

And then the second step is when you are, so if you did let yourself go down that road. Then you just give yourself permission to get, like a curious three year old, and say, “And then what? And then what? And then what?” And when you can walk yourself through. It’s kind of like a nightmare.

When I was a kid I had the same nightmare over and over again. And finally, I decided I was just going to be like the director of the play of my nightmare, and take charge, and start saying, “Okay, then what are we going to do? And then what are we going to do?” And I started solving for the nightmare. And I started coming up with solutions. And that’s an option for you to reduce anxiety.

So, don’t forget the next time you start feeling your heart might be beating a little bit, or you might be feeling very fearful, or a lot of stress. You’re probably on worry road. You’re probably reading a lot of signs, you’re having a lot of thoughts that say things like you’re not good enough, what were you thinking? And what I want to recommend to you, so instead of getting to the end of worry road and going to your worst case scenario and staying there. Just allow yourself to recognize, I’m on worry road. I’m having a lot of thoughts in my brain that are not helping me.

And then allowing yourself to take a little detour and hop down to hope road that says things like everything is figureoutable. You can do hard things. You have had success in the past. It’s just a – you can just learn a new skill. Learning new skills doesn’t even take that long. Change is really easy and doable.

Alright, I can’t wait to meet you on hope road. Take care everybody.

To celebrate the launch of the show, I'm going to be giving away \$100 gift cards to Lisa Bongean's Primitive Gathering shop to four lucky listeners who follow, rate and review the podcast. It doesn't have to be a five-star review, although I sure hope you love the podcast.

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My goal for this show is to provide you with tons of value. So please let me know in your review if there's a topic you'd like me to cover. Visit daratomasson.com/podcastlaunch to learn more about the contest and how to enter. I'll be announcing the winners on the show in an upcoming episode.

Thanks for listening to *Weight Loss for Quilters*. If you want more info, please visit daratomasson.com. See you next week.