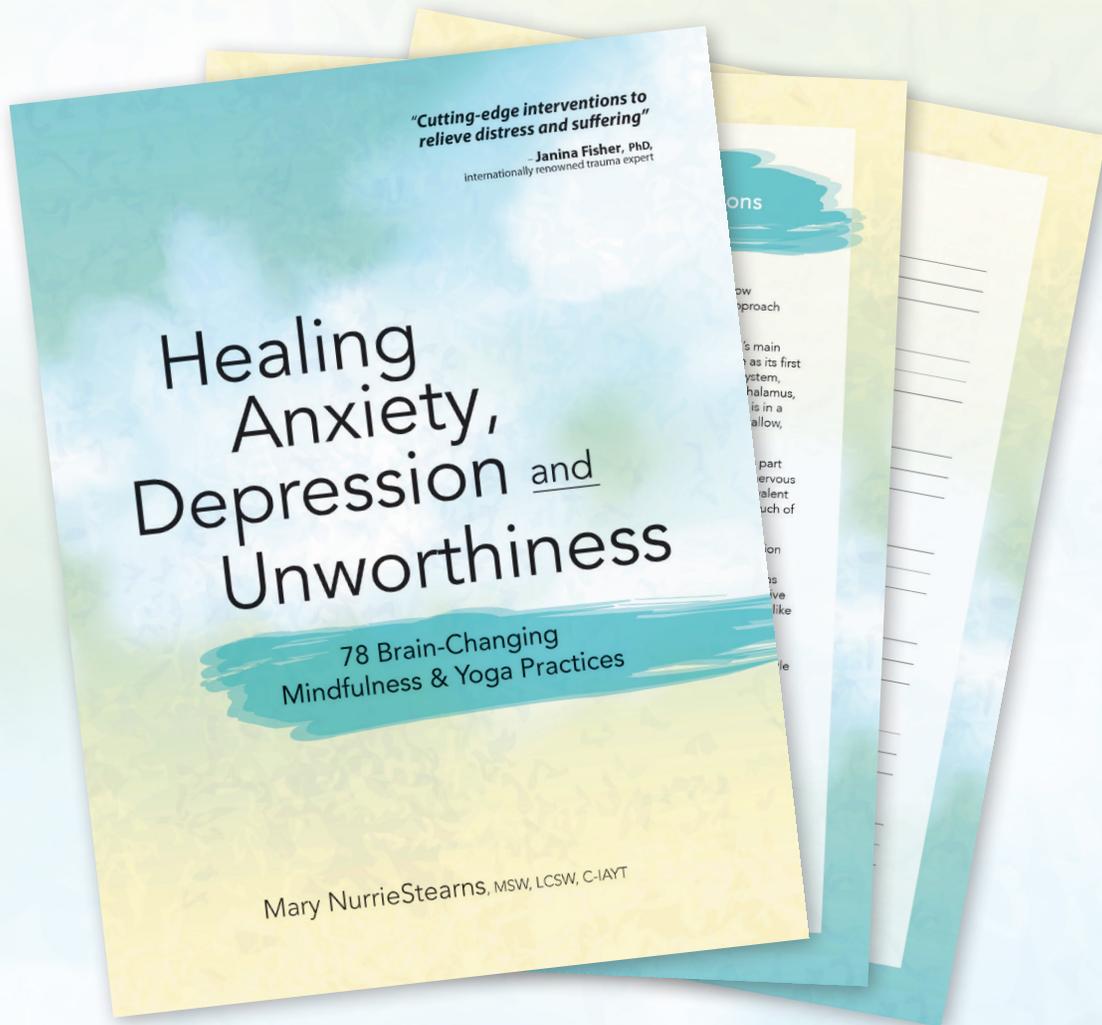


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# Worksheets on Healing Anxiety, Depression and Unworthiness



Practical and engaging printable tools!

# Introduction to Your Brain and Emotions

This following information describes the three emotional motivation systems, and explains how emotions guide actions and inform attitudes. This information prepares you to approach your emotional life with the practices described later in the following worksheets.

**The first emotional motivation system is your threat response system.** Your brain's main job is to preserve your life. It relies on your fight, flight, freeze/feign dead response as its first responder to risky or alarming situations. The perception of danger depends on communication among the amygdala, hypothalamus, and thought processes. Threat is detected, and the next thing you know, your body is in a state of alarm. In preparation for action, your heart pounds, your breath becomes shallow, and your muscles tense.

However, according to Lanius (2015), in the aftermath of childhood maltreatment, this part of your brain can perceive danger where there is none. As a result, your sympathetic nervous system remains activated, as if threat is ever present. Considering how shockingly prevalent trauma in childhood is, it's no wonder that many of us feel revved up and frightened much of the time.

**The second system is your affiliation system.** Your brain's survival depends on association with others. Throughout life, your brain is dramatically influenced by the people you surround yourself with. This is so true that Daniel Siegel (2010) defined the human brain as a social organism and coined the term *interpersonal neurobiology* to reflect how interactive with others your brain is. You are not nearly as autonomous or independent as you might like to think.

Your brain is designed to be comforted by others during times of duress. When you are upset and scared, you naturally gravitate toward people who are kind, when possible. Gentle touch and caring words lower your stress response by activating your parasympathetic relaxation response.

Research confirms that contact with friends and supportive family provides the sense of belonging that allows you to feel calmer. Tuija Turunen (2014) found that children with secure attachment, meaning they have a close emotional bond to parents, suffer fewer PTSD symptoms after traumatic incidents such as school shootings. And, undeniably, children and adults who have loving support systems enjoy better physical and mental health.

Your ability to emotionally attach to others is initially developed by having a safe, loving bond with parents during early childhood. Children who feel protected by parents learn that closeness with others soothes. They develop a secure attachment style and go on to trust and rely on others.

Relationships provide stability unless people who were supposed to be there were inconsistent, hurt you, or in other ways significantly betrayed you. Sadly, under those conditions, an insecure or avoidant attachment style can result—the person may require a lot of reassurance from others or find it difficult to sustain closeness with others. As a result, their adult relationships may suffer. Statistics vary but suggest that approximately 55 percent of adults have secure attachment styles. Moullin and associates (2014) found that 40 percent of U.S. children have insecure attachment style. Mindfulness and self-compassion practices help you repair that breach of bonding and enable you to seek and tolerate support from safe people.

**Third is your drive system.** Your brain requires stimulation and is on the lookout for something to explore. This is a biological need. Doing so gives you a sense of vitality and mastery. Children play and study in order to learn about the world around them. Teenagers practice driving, explore dating skills, and develop decision making to expand their capabilities. Adults learn how to earn money, take care of home and family, make sense of life, and find meaning.

Human brains, including yours, are novelty seekers. According to Folletto, Hopper, and colleagues (2015), our “seeking circuitry” is what provides the drive to intentionally pursue anything. The issue is *what* you pursue, not *if* you pursue. These authors theorize that in the aftermath of trauma, when the threat system remains overactive, this brain circuitry turns toward safety and control. The risk of making mistakes, being emotionally vulnerable, asking for help, or trying something new may be too daunting. Life may shrink and the world become smaller, even dull, although predictable.

## Primary Emotional Motivators

Gilbert and Chodon (2014) teach that the three emotional systems are primary motivators that guide your actions and inform your attitudes. They are not intentional choices—they are unconscious, powerful responses of a brain designed to keep you alive. You can become educated and more conscious about them. Doing so makes it possible for you to lovingly care for them so you can act on desired motives.

How these systems function today is informed by the past. Consider what prior trauma does. It can cause your fear system to go into overdrive and misinterpret life as dangerous, based on previous threats. Trauma can cause your affiliation system to not trust others, based on former betrayals. It can cause your drive system to seek safety and control, based on earlier deprivation. You can see how the past influences the present and at times is almost recreated in it.

You, like many people, may have a predictable response to real and perceived threat. Depending on how your nervous system responded in the past, you may automatically react to threat with anger, fear, or immobilization. Following is some detail to make this clear.

If you are prone to anger, you may come across as irritated, argumentative, challenging, aggressive, or blaming. If you are fearful, you may show up as anxious, conflict avoidant, averse to risks, people pleasing, or needing to appear in control. If you go into a freeze and feign dead response, you may experience confusion, numbing out, difficulty responding, feeling different from others, or wanting to hide. You may know all three. None is right or superior—these reactions are self-protective and unconscious.

The following worksheets are filled with questions to discover and understand your emotional motivation systems. Use these worksheets to begin transforming your feelings of anxiety, depression and unworthiness into loving self-acceptance.

# Inquiry into Your Emotional Motivation Systems Worksheet

Inquiry is an investigation, an effort to seek understanding, and a way to become conscious. Use the following questions to prompt your examination.

## Threat System:

When stressed, do you typically respond with anger, fear, or numbing out?

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What happens to your heart rate and breath?

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Are you easily startled? When?

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Do you generally perceive the world as dangerous? Why?

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Do you carry chronic muscular tension? If so, where?

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Why/how did your body learn to react to stress the way it does? Perhaps describe an early memory of being stressed/frightened.

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**Affiliation System:**

Are you secretive about your emotional distress? How did you learn this?

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Are you a lone soldier? When? Why?

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Do you seek support from others? How?

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Do you rely "too much" on others and have difficulty soothing yourself? Why?

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Is it hard for you to be alone? Why?

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Do you let yourself be vulnerable with others? When?

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Do you believe that people will be there for you? Based on what?

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Do you attempt to control others? Why?

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How/why did you learn to relate to others when you are stressed?

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**Drive System:**

Do you seek change frequently? Why?

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Do you prefer a lifestyle of conformity and "fitting in?" Based on what?

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Does desire for safety inhibit your willingness to learn new tasks, assert your preferences, show vulnerability to others?

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Do you seek adrenaline thrills and/or take physically risky challenges?

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Do you seek novelty?

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Do you avoid opportunities to advance your career?

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Do you push beyond your limits and/or take pride in being "the best?"

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Do you seek perfectionism and being in control? How does that affect you?

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How/why did the seekers of your brain learn to respond in the way they do?

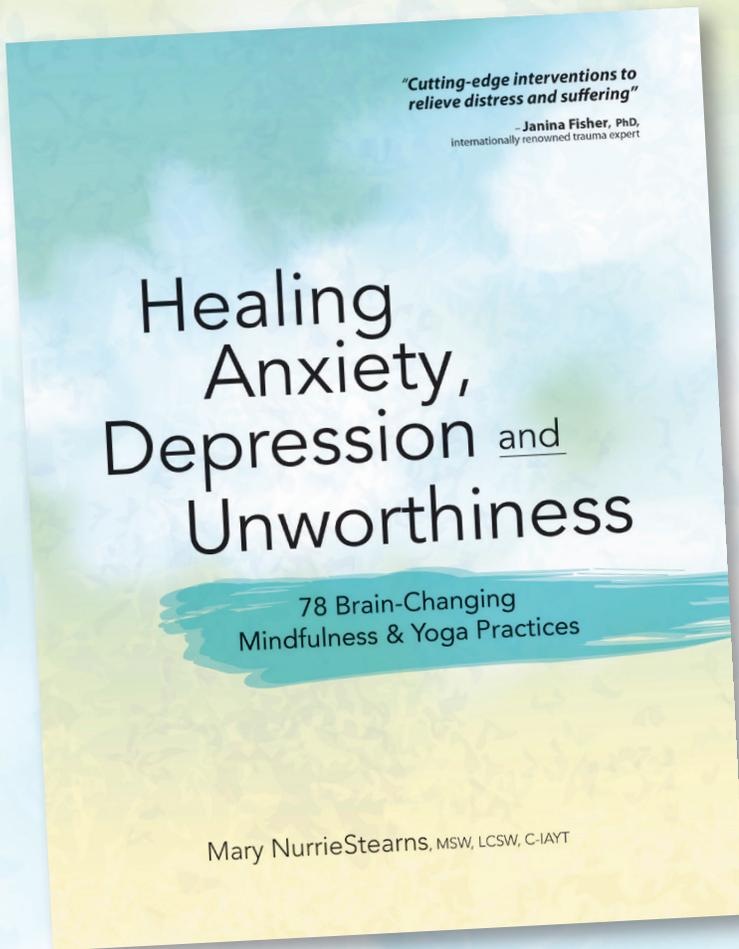
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MSW, LCSW, RYT

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