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# LOVING AND FEARING LIFE

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**Many forms of anxiety lead to situations in which patients feel they are withdrawing from life. However, behind these anxieties is often a need for more living, more uncertainty, more excitement and more color and adventure in life. Improvements in internal and external communication can lead to a greater fulfilment of this need.**

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## Introduction

Anxieties and fears are something very common. Frequently, it is a result when people withdraw from life, rather than embracing it. The anxiety does not signal to withdraw from life more but to embrace it more fully. In a burnout situation in work, for example, one may feel that the own feelings are the problem and that one should withdraw from oneself and the unpleasant feelings even more, but in truth it is that there is too little rather than too much of oneself. In stressful and overwhelming situations it is important to know more about one's needs, values, desires and aspirations to rediscover the internal compass, but this requires connecting more rather than less with oneself.

Anxiety often is generalized, when it no longer seems tied to specific situations and triggers, which is then in effect an anxiety of life itself. This does not mean, however, that one does not want to live anymore. Rather the opposite, it testifies to how strongly one is bound to life. If something were not meaningful or relevant to oneself, there would be no anxiety but indifference. Specific anxieties may mean one is affected more by certain aspects of life than others, which, however, can also mean that these areas of life are more important to oneself. The more one is in love with life, the scarier uncertainties about it can become. However, uncertainty is also what makes it interesting. Since change is a fact of life, there is no life without uncertainty.

## Life is Communication

Communication is the exchange of meaningful messages, messages that can bring about a change. Life exists where there is the communication of information. This begins with the information transfer when a molecule moves in a cell, and goes all the way up to the information exchanged on a date or between

groups of people. If the information exchange is meaningful it brings about change, which moves everything into a better place if the change is adaptive and helpful to the cell, the organism or the group of people. Death is when communication, internally and with the external world, ceases.

Being sensitive may lead to more anxiety, but it also means that more information is received and processed. Thus seeing, perceiving and feeling more in the world can also cause more anxiety. To treat anxiety is then to answer the questions, how meaningful messages are received, processed and sent and whether the individual uses communication patterns, internally and externally, which benefit the individual or not. The important step is thus not to suppress or unlearn the anxiety, but to find out what it really means, which can then provide the insight to adjust existing internal and external communication patterns or create new ones. Since internal and external communication are just two ways of looking at processes with the same basic rules, working on one side brings about a tangible benefit on the other side.

## Emotions below the anxiety

Emotions are messages aggregated from large volumes of information inside one's body. They are thus important pieces of information that helped humans and animals survive over time. As such they are always useful. In modern work and relationship environments many people, however, many people have to relearn how to interpret and use the relevant information they contain.

Anxiety is not an emotion, but a state of nervousness and tension caused by emotions which are insufficiently identified. These emotions then become UFOs in the cognitive system. They are unidentified, free floating, scary and create uncertainty about oneself and the world. When one becomes disconnected from oneself and others, the uncertainty and the anxiety thus increase. The anxiety is thus a signal to be more connected with oneself, internally and externally.

While there are biological predispositions for anxiety and how one experiences the intensity of emotions, the psychological aspect decides where they interfere with one's life or not. If my life is 'in sync' internally and externally and I am happy, the levels of anxiety will be lower than in a state where this is not the case, no matter what my predisposition is.

Anxiety can thus be reduced through greater awareness of the underlying emotions, identifying them and putting them into a meaningful context for the individual person. Using this information from the emotions and the information contained in memory allows the cognitive part of the brain to identify situations and activities in life which feel good and are beneficial and those which felt bad and are not helpful. This helps in the decision making processes and provides a compass which helps in life.

## Connecting the Head and the Heart

Identifying the emotions makes it possible to use them to lead a more rewarding and more active life. Often, this requires better communication with oneself and with the world around. Connecting with one's inner emotional world and the cognitive part of one's brain helps to make better emotional decision and provides a greater sense of safety about decisions that need to be made.

The author has developed communication-focused therapy (CFT) (Haverkamp, 2010, 2017a, 2017b) to provide techniques to help in this process within or outside the therapeutic setting.

## The Journey Ahead

Life is a journey, a life-long learning process. Important is to be open to the meaningful information that comes from many sources, internally and externally. This is what leads to greater contentment, satisfaction and happiness in the long run. Immediate changes are usually not necessary, but gradual movements into the right direction.

If something is important, one feels more strongly about it. The same applies to life. Making the most out of it requires both a love for it and a fear at the same time. If one sees primarily the fear, anxiety and avoidance can be the result. The bridge between the two is internal and external communication. The more one is connected with oneself and with others, the easier it is to feel the fear but live anyway. When someone cares about something and has a connection with it, there can be fears but underlying is also the love of it.

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