

PEACE *from* ANXIETY BOOK CLUB GUIDE

Welcome to the *Peace from Anxiety* book club guide. The material in this book can be much more impactful when approached in an interactive and exploratory way. It is especially powerful when you can engage with the material with others. This is your guide to working with the concepts in this book with a small, trusted group of people.

There are many ways to run your book club. This document is going to give you some ideas on how to create some structure for your meetings and your conversations; use what is useful to you and leave what isn't.

HOW TO STRUCTURE YOUR MEETINGS

It's helpful for everyone to agree on a few things before the first meeting.

You might want to decide on these things:

1. Decide on the number of meetings and which chapters you're going to discuss in each one (we suggest at least three meetings if possible).
 2. Decide on your meeting length.
 3. Find a location that is private and without distraction—you can meet on Zoom, in someone's living room, at a park outside. We don't suggest meeting in a place with other people around (such as a restaurant or coffee shop).
 4. The ideal group size is 12 or less. With more it can be hard to have a group conversation.
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BEST PRACTICES FOR BOOK CLUB PEER FACILITATION

Peer facilitation means that no one person is guiding the group, but rather everyone is there to collaborate and hold space for each other. (If you choose to have one person be the designated facilitator that is fine too. You can still use these best practices). It's good to assign certain roles and responsibilities before each meeting. Here are some suggested best practices.

Creating the Space: Do your best to create a welcoming space for your meeting. Have some tea or drinks prepared, light some candles, plan the best seating arrangement. A circle is an ideal arrangement, and if that makes sense, arrange seats or pillows in a circle and place a candle or object in the center of the circle. Once everyone arrives and you're ready to start, begin with a moment of silence. If someone wants to lead a meditation or some breathing or movement, this is a good time to do that so everyone feels grounded and present for the discussion. *You can even use some of the practices from the book here!*

Review Group Agreements: This is a very important part of creating a space where everyone who wants to speak is heard and people feel relatively safe to share. We have some suggested agreements that you can review as a group and change or add to in any way that you like. Start each meeting with a reminder to adhere to the agreements as best as possible.

Mirroring/Active Listening: When someone is sharing, others in the group should practice active listening or mirroring. It's not always helpful to give advice or try to analyze what others are saying. Simply let them know you hear them, ask clarifying questions if you like and offer empathy. The goal is to listen to each other and have a space where people are comfortable sharing and feel heard.

Switch Sharing Formats: Sharing can be done in many ways and switching it up can be helpful at times. Group sharing can be done discussion style, which is like a conversation, or counsel style, which means that when one person is sharing everyone else is listening without comment. Counsel-style sharing is a very effective group tool. In counsel-style sharing, we ask that people "speak, learn, and share from their hearts." Often, we pass a "talking stick" around the circle or we go "popcorn style," where the stick is in the center of the circle, and whoever wants to speak picks it up and returns it when they are done. Another style is to have the person with the stick pass it to anyone in the group when they are finished. This keeps people from worrying about what they're going to say and when. You can also have people share in subgroups of two, three, or four if you have a larger group.

Closing: Try to end each meeting intentionally with a moment of silence, or with each person sharing one word or phrase about what they are taking with them.

SUGGESTED GROUP AGREEMENTS

Take a Breath before Responding: Especially if the conversation gets heated or passionate, the more grounded you are the more productive and inspiring the conversation will be.

Use “I” Statements: We don’t know other peoples’ experiences, so speak to yours please.

Move In, Move Out: If you are comfortable speaking in groups, make sure you’re making space for those who are not. Try and create a space where everyone who wants to share feels that they can.

Give People the Benefit of the Doubt: We are here to be together in our messiness and imperfection. The goal is to create a safe space for folks to express themselves and be themselves. This will be clunky, and we will make some mistakes.

Intention Doesn’t Always Equal Impact: Sometimes we say something with the best intention, but for someone else, it feels hurtful or insulting. Even if our intention wasn’t to do harm, we want to attend to the impact rather than defend our intention.

Practice Confidentiality: Don’t share other peoples’ personal material outside the group without their consent.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION PROMPTS FOR EACH CHAPTER:

With discussion questions, less is more. Pick the questions that resonate most with the group for each meeting.

CHAPTER 1

Your Body Is Your GPS: Tools for Self-Regulation

- Start with one of the Grounding Practices from pages 7–8. What are two of your biggest takeaways from this chapter?
 - » Which practices worked best for you? (You can also take turns guiding the group in the various practices and then share your experience.)
- Reflection from the book: Are you an ON or OFF person, or both? What feelings, impulses or behaviors do you tend to have when you are dysregulated?

CHAPTER 2

Trusting Your Body Again: Overcoming Obstacles to Feeling Good

- Start with the Awareness Practice on page 40.
- What are two of your biggest takeaways from this chapter?
- Reflections from the book:
 - » How did you cope with challenging emotions or situations as a child? Do you still have any of those habits? Which ones serve you and which ones don’t?
 - » What were you taught to do with your big impulses and feelings in your family of origin?
 - » In what way might these norms and rules have been necessary for your ancestors? How might these have been survival strategies?
 - » What gifts and strengths have you inherited from your family and ancestors? What traditions or beliefs are positive coping strategies and supports for you?

CHAPTER 3

Reclaiming Our Capacity to Heal: *Tools for Releasing Stress and Anxiety*

- Start with the Interoception Practice on page 58.
- What are you two biggest takeaways from this chapter?
- Reflections from the book:
 - » What is your relationship with your body? Describe it as if your body were another person and you're describing the dynamic between the two of you.
 - » In the culture you grew up in, what qualities were valued and devalued? Are there aspects of your personality and identity that were valued or devalued? How did you respond to this?
 - » What is your relationship to stress? Who would you be if you weren't stressed? Is there anything scary about the concept of not being stressed out?
 - » Do you come from a group that is currently or has been historically marginalized, minimized, or oppressed? If so, have you internalized beliefs and judgments about yourself and your community based on this? What are these beliefs? Go back and do the previous reflection with these beliefs if you haven't already.
- For everyone, whether you come from a marginalized group or not: have you internalized assumptions or judgments about people who come from these groups? Be honest about what groups and what the specific assumptions are. In what way might you unwittingly be contributing to the anxiety of others from these groups?
- What does wellbeing mean to you?

CHAPTER 4

Transforming Trauma: *The Gift in the Wound*

- Start with one of the practices from Chapter 1.
- What are you two biggest takeaways from this chapter?
- Reflections from the book:
 - » If you were born into the world as a raw piece of coal, what are the life experiences that shaped you into who you are today and who you see yourself being tomorrow? Consider answering in a stream-of-consciousness style or in poetry.
 - » What were you attuned to as a child? What are some of your earliest memories of you and your caretaker(s)? Are your current relationships a reflection of this earlier imprinting?
 - » What has been the role of systemic trauma in your life? Where have you benefited from systems of inequality and where have you or your ancestors been disadvantaged by them? Consider your access to education, quality health care, job security, safety, clean air and water, healthy food, and housing as well as whether you have to deal with discrimination and/or oppression.
 - » What challenging experiences in your life have shaped you? What gifts did you get from these experiences? What gifts can you imagine getting from them?

CHAPTER 5

A Few Thoughts about Suffering: *How Being with Our Pain Can Open Our Hearts*

- Start with Tonglen Meditation on page 121.
- What are you two biggest takeaways from this chapter?
- Reflections from the book:
 - » What are your conscious or subconscious beliefs about suffering? What were you taught about suffering in your family of origin? It's OK if your answers seem irrational or unreasonable.
 - » What life experiences have you had that have taught you that suffering can be transformed into meaningful growth? What experiences have you had of resisting suffering and inadvertently creating more? What situations or experiences are currently present for you that may be opportunities to stay with discomfort rather than avoiding it?

CHAPTER 6

Connection Is the Key: *Being Well Requires Us to Depend on One Another*

- Start with one of the practices from Chapter 1.
- What are two takeaways from this chapter?

CHAPTER 7

Creating a Connection Ecosystem: *Building Resilience in Community*

- Start with one of the practices from Chapter 1.
- What are you two biggest takeaways from this chapter?
- Reflections from the book:
 - » Take a moment to reflect on your connection ecosystem. Are there places where you feel a sense of warmth and authentic relationship? If so, where? Where is this connection lacking? Write your answer or draw a picture to symbolize your connection ecosystem.
 - » What does connection mean to you? What does it feel like?
 - » In your close relationships, how do you know when you need more connection? What thoughts, feelings, or behaviors do you exhibit? What does it feel like in your body?
 - » Are there areas in your life where you don't feel empowered to ask for what you need because of power dynamics? How might this contribute to your level of stress?
 - » Are there areas of your life where others might feel that they cannot ask you for what they need because of power dynamics? What can you do to open up lines of communication with them?
 - » What are your barriers to connection to community? What small things can you do to shift this and open up?
 - » What are one or two easy things you can do to widen your circle of compassion right away? What are one or two more challenging things you can work toward doing eventually?
 - » Are you a giver in relationships? If so, how does it feel for you when you receive? What emotions or impulses come up for you? Is there anything scary about receiving in your relationships?
 - » Do you have solitude in your life? How does it look? What can you do to have more solitude?

CHAPTER 8

Connecting with Something Bigger: *Reclaiming Wonder*

- Start with one of the practices from Chapter 1.
- What are your two biggest takeaways from this chapter?
- Which rituals resonated the most with you?
- Reflections from the book:
 - » Do you have a relationship to something bigger than you? How do you access wonder? If you don't, how might you cultivate this connection? Write or draw your answer.

CHAPTER 9

The Global Heart: *Redefining Self*

- Start with one of the practices from Chapter 1.
- What are your two biggest takeaways from this chapter?
- Reflections from the book:
 - » What are your habits around technology and news? What can you do to curate your media consumption so that it is deliberate and useful, rather than distracting and overwhelming?
 - » What are your most important values? Where in your life are you living by these values and where could you make some changes?
 - » Where in your life are you dealing with conflict by separating and defending? Where are you holding a grudge and unable to see the humanity in the person you're struggling with? What could be possible if you kept that person's dignity intact in how you approached the conflict?
 - » What is your general attitude about conflict with others? Are you willing to consider that some of these conflicts can have the potential to transform all parties if they are addressed with that intention in mind? How might your views on personal conflict extend to the ways our broader systems, such as the criminal justice system, the educational system, or the political system, approach conflict?
 - » What does the "global heart" mean to you? How might this concept help you alleviate your anxiety or pain? Write your answer in poem form and/or draw it.

CHAPTER 10

Self-Reflection and Action: *Living a Life Oriented toward What Is Possible*

- Start with one of the practices from Chapter 1.
- What are your two biggest takeaways from this chapter?
- Reflections from the book:
 - » On a sheet of paper, create three columns. In the first write down parts of your identity that are privileged by society, in the second write down parts of your identity that are marginalized, unseen, or pathologized by society, and in the third write down parts that are complicated (e.g., privileged in one setting but not another). Think about things like your race, gender, class, education level, citizenship, ability, mental health, cognitive functioning, religion, body size, sexuality, age, and as many other characteristics as you can think of. Take some time to reflect on how the things in each column have impacted your life.
 - » What are some actions you can take in your life right now that would contribute to a paradigm of collective care and liberation? Use Macy's categories if you like.
 - » Referencing the list on pages 219–220: What items on this list are you already doing? What items are things that you might be able to start doing? What is your specific piece of this work toward collective liberation right now?