

Contents

Foreword	7
1 How anxiety can develop	11
1.1 How anxiety sneaked into my life	12
1.2 Anxiety – an approach from a neurobiological point of view	27
1.3 What can be done?	34
<i>Seven questions for you and your anxiety</i>	44
2 Therapies	45
2.1 Couch hopping	46
2.2 Facts – What kind of therapy is right for me?	70
2.3 Waiting for therapy to start – how to use the waiting time, or Alternatives to therapy	78
<i>Seven steps towards psychotherapy</i>	88
3 Anxiety in the workplace	93
3.1 How my fear held me back and pushed me at the same time	94
3.2 Facts – anxiety in the workplace	107
3.3 How to integrate your anxiety into your work	114
<i>Outing your anxiety - dos and don'ts</i>	123
4 Relationships	125
4.1 About fear of relationships and fear-based relationships	126
4.2 Facts – fear of relationships, co-dependency and relationship patterns	147
4.3 Anxiety in relationships: coaching	156

<i>Alternative beliefs</i>	160
5 Anxiety – the systemic view	169
5.1 From “Go away“ to “Hello Anxiety“	170
5.2 Facts – systemic perspectives	190
5.3 How to shape your relationship with your anxiety	198
<i>Seven suggestions for your first date with your anxiety</i>	206
6 Fear and creativity	209
6.1 How my fear became my courage	210
6.2 Facts – fear and creativity	218
6.3 Coaching: how you can open yourself up to change	225
<i>Exercise – cooking up a ”two week soup“</i>	236
7 Me, you, our anxiety and our society	239
Ideas, hopes and perspectives for dealing with anxiety	240
Glossary	253
Service: first aid and online services	275
Literature	281

Foreword

Let me be the first to admit it - the cover of my book could give you the impression that I'm one of these hyper-optimistic coaches who want to sell you anxiety as the newest must-have in the cycle of self-optimisation. But I can reassure you there. That's not the case. I'm neither convinced by the neo-liberal idea of 'everyone can do it all if they only want to' nor do I want to sell you anything, least of all the message that anxiety is actually a good thing. I know from my own experience how difficult and unbearable it can be when your thoughts run in circles in the merry-go-round of anxiety and you can't find the emergency brake. And when it comes to self-optimisation, it's a phenomenon that contributes, in my opinion, at least partially, to the increase of mental health issues in our society. If you're constantly tinkering around with your better self, modelling yourself on influencers and other narcissist opinion makers, you're bound to fail and therefore be dissatisfied. Why? Because you can never fulfil your own unrealistic aspirations.

So what do I want to achieve with this book?

I want to tell you something. About me, about the anxiety that has been part of me since my adolescence in so many different ways. It kept me down, held me back in my job, my relationships and in life in general, it ensured that I was unable/unwilling to take responsibility. And I tried to get rid of it in almost every conceivable way,. I tried countless therapies, yoga, the tapping technique, shamanism, herbs and even medication.

I'm going to tell you about that, and how I managed to say 'hello' to my anxiety. I'm writing about it as someone who is affected by it, providing an insight into her personal history with anxiety. I'm also writing as a journalist who informs, defines and raises awareness, something I already do in my podcast “Hallo Angst” (Hello Anxiety). And I'm going on this journey with you in my role as a systemic counsellor, sharing ideas and

thoughts, how to make contact with your anxiety, how to accept it as a part of you, live in peace with it and maybe even transform it into courage. I want to show you alternatives in your struggle with anxiety and encourage you to live with your fear. Why? Because, and I want to say this right now, in advance, it is a fight you can only lose. Although therapists, psychiatrists, books and the pharma industry claim otherwise, you can’t overcome your anxiety by trying to get rid of it. On the contrary, if you fight it, it will become even stronger. It took me a long time to understand that. That’s why I’m telling you my story, so that, maybe, it won’t take you quite as long.

But even if it takes you as long as it took me, that would be ok too. Because, and that’s important to me, it’s not about achieving something, putting in a perfect performance, successfully checking off the exercises in my book in order to become a ‘Hello Anxiety’ pro. I can now live quite well with my excessive fears and the thought of an occasional panic attack. I even managed to find my courage and try new things, thanks to my anxiety. A process that I also owe to many wonderful people around me.

Every story around anxiety is an individual story. That’s why I have no intention of recommending my ideas, thoughts and solutions as a kind of ‘recipe for a happy life without anxiety’ or even push them onto you. I would be very happy if my book made you think a little bit, if you reflect on a phrase in it for a little while, or maybe even many times, or if one of my exercises could help you in some way. It’s about impulse, about the small things in life, about a tiny dose of confidence meant to support you to find your own way of saying ‘Hello Anxiety’.