The Struggles of Gift Giving Anxiety

by ERIC PATTERSON

Experiencing Holiday Gift Giving Anxiety

The holidays are here, and while others around you are excitedly spreading the cheer of meeting with friends and family, you are experiencing something else; something decidedly less festive — fear.

With anxiety in your life, it can shift the most joyful of events into periods of panic and times of terror. Your worry will be excessive and out of control. You will think and believe that no matter how hard you try, you will fail. Even worse, you think that others will judge, criticize and look down on you.

In this situation, your anxiety forms from gift-giving. Certainly, many find high levels of happiness and pleasure from giving gifts. You, on the other hand, always feel very uncomfortable and uncertain when gift giving. You may worry that:

- The person will not like the item.
- It will be too big or too small.
- It will be too expensive or too cheap.
- Their reaction won't meet your expectations.
- They will already have the item.

Like in other situations, this level of anxiety only makes the experience worse. Rather than building motivation for picking a thoughtful present, your anxiety will be a crippling force. It will leave you unable to think of one appropriate gift for a special person in your life. The worry and anxiety become panic, and before you know it, the unwanted feelings are spreading throughout your life.

Gift-Giving Guide

This only happens if you let it, though. This holiday season does not have to be like the last. This year, things can be different. Your gift-giving can go from painful to pleasurable. Here's how:

Assess Your Status

How did your gift-giving go last year? What were the failures? Did you have any successes? What was the source of your anxiety?

Be sure to be fair and accurate in your reflection instead of only focusing on the times that things did not go as planned. With this information, you can begin to build an understanding of your thoughts, behaviors and feelings surrounding giving gifts. What symptoms are triggered? What makes them worse? Have these feelings always been present?

Set a Goal

Now that you know a bit about where you are at with gift-giving, where would you like to be? When you set a giving goal for this year, be sure to make it as realistic and attainable as possible.

It likely took you many years to develop this level of anxiety regarding presents, so completely reversing this trend in one year is improbable. Instead, consider this year an opportunity to make small improvements towards your ultimate goal. Additionally, it is impossible to pick the “perfect” gift for each person on your shopping list. What do you want to accomplish this year? Setting a reasonable goal will give you direction to work towards.

Talk Yourself Into It

Does a sense of dread and frustration begin to grow when the calendar turns to November, or does it wait until the wrapping paper is torn? Whenever it comes, that feeling of negativity will fuel negative thoughts.

Next page: how to be open, but not self-deprecating when it comes to giving gifts.

Gift-Giving Guide

If you tell yourself gift-giving will be an undesirable situation, your feelings will follow. If you can begin to see levels of hope and optimism in the situation, there is a chance for positivity.

Make sure your self-talk reflects the goals you have. It will be unreasonable to expect everyone to flip over the great gifts you gave. Instead, focus on how good it feels to let people in your life know that you care about them.

Relax

Relaxing is a complex set of actions that challenges your anxious symptoms, but it remains an important focus nevertheless. If the holiday season ramps up your anxiety, you will need to increase your positive coping skills to match. Otherwise, you will become overrun by holiday stress.

Giving your mind and body time and space removed from stress will make your judgment stronger when you return to the gift-giving topic. What relaxation strategies work best for you? If you can’t think of any, it might mean you should be seeking professional assistance.

Choose a Gift

Overthinking is the enemy of the anxious gift-giver because it breeds self-doubt and second guesses. Set aside a length of time to decide on gifts. It could be 30 minutes per person or 10 minutes for everyone, depending on the level of anxiety and your past tendencies.

Once the time has expired, make your decision and stick to it. With your goal setting and improved self-talk, you will realize the “perfect” gift is impossible — you can only do your best, and it is always good enough.

Be Open, Not Self-Deprecating

Your gift does not have to be amazing — it only has to come from you with the best intentions. As you give the gift, consider providing a brief explanation of why you chose that item.

Be honest without making any critical comments about yourself or the gift. If your finances are not in a great position, let others know as a reason instead of an excuse.

Forget the idea that bigger or more expensive is better. Remember, handmade gifts can mean more than the most expensive items.

Plan for the Worst

Not every gift will be a huge success, and your anxiety will likely make their reaction less positive than it actually is. If someone has a strongly negative reaction to your gift, that says more about them than the gift.

Including a gift receipt with the item acknowledges the notion that your gift is not “perfect,” and they can exchange it if they wish. Take this time to reflect back on your goal of improving your anxiety. As long as your anxiety improves, you have accomplished your goal and left yourself in a better position for next time.

If holiday gift-giving anxiety is beginning to build, take some time to consider the tips above. By understanding your past and taking steps towards completing your goal for the future, you will be in a better position to handle the present.