



Leave Your Anxiety Behind You

The impact of emotionally immature parents can have a lasting effect on your relationships, your happiness and feeling satisfied.

You know the feelings, you know the behaviours and yet where did that anxiety commence.

In this guide you can: read about the five signs that your anxiety may have started when you were young; recognise that you learnt some coping strategies to survive; use the six tools for changing your patterns; and consider what healing really looks like.

Use what fits. Skip what doesn't. Small, gentle steps add up.

Note: This guide is educational and not a substitute for personalised medical or mental health care.



"Zest For Life" means approaching life with enthusiasm, energy and a passion for your what you are doing and new experiences.

Nicholas Dob uses a blend of modalities, including TRTP, to help clients release long held emotional wounds and subconscious distress that may have been stored in the mind and body for years.

By clearing the charge around trapped emotions and triggering events, he supports clients to free up emotional, mental, and physical energy, often leading to more zest, better health, stronger relationships, and a renewed sense of self. He also provides practical education, expanded awareness, useful tools, and genuine support to help clients create lasting change.



When the Anxiety Was Never Yours to Carry



A gentle, practical guide for adults who grew up with emotionally immature parents and are still feeling it. Allowing you to reflect and understand how when your childhood needs weren't met, you took on certain beliefs, attitudes and behaviours to cope in your environment.

Sometimes there's a gap between a loving parent providing a safe home and that same loving parent struggling with their own challenges and not the nurturing and stability a child requires.

42%

of Australian adults
experienced a traumatic
event in childhood

1 in 5

adults globally may have
experienced childhood
emotional neglect

28.8%

of Australians will
experience an anxiety
disorder in their lifetime

These numbers exist because anxiety very often has a story, one that started long before you were old enough to understand it. This guide is here to help you begin to read that story, and to show you that the next chapter can be very different.

What's in this resource

- 1 Five Signs Your Anxiety May Be Rooted in Childhood
- 2 How Your Nervous System Learned to Brace
- 3 Six Practical Tools for Right Now
- 4 What Healing Actually Looks Like

1. Five Signs Your Anxiety May Be Rooted in Childhood



Not all anxiety looks the same. The kind that comes from growing up with an emotionally immature parent has its own particular texture, and it often masquerades as a personality trait rather than a pattern that was learned. See if any of these feel familiar.

1 You read the room before you enter it

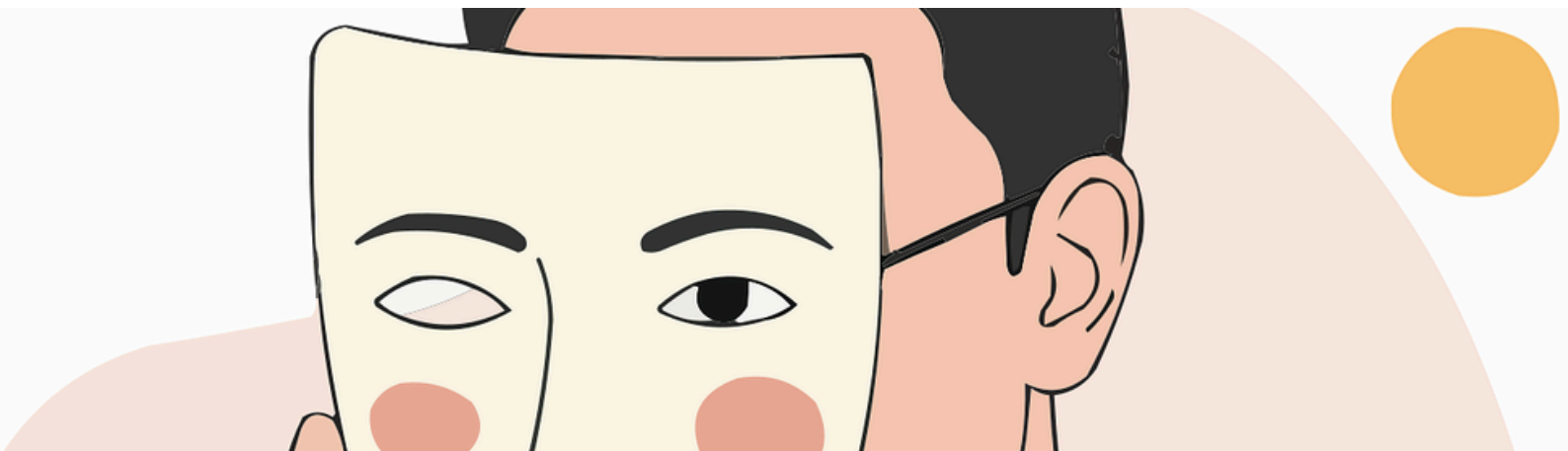
You're aware of other people's emotional states before they've said a word. You adjust yourself before they've asked you to. This isn't empathy, or at least, it isn't only empathy. It's a survival skill that was built when someone else's mood determined whether you were safe.

2 You brace for bad news even when life is going well

Things are fine. Work is okay, the relationship is stable, nothing obvious is wrong. And yet there's a hum of low-level dread that won't quite switch off. You find yourself waiting for the other shoe to drop. This is a nervous system that learnt that calm doesn't last.

3 Conflict feels physically threatening

A raised voice, a terse email, someone sounding mildly frustrated, and your heart is already racing. Your body responds as though the stakes are enormous, even when your conscious mind knows they're not. That's because, for a child who needed peace to feel safe, conflict really was dangerous.



2. How Your Nervous System Learned to Brace



Understanding the mechanism beneath your anxiety isn't just interesting. It's genuinely relieving. Because when you understand why your body does what it does, you stop blaming yourself for it.

The child who had to manage the weather

When a parent's emotional state is unpredictable, the household operates like a weather system with no forecast. A child in that environment learns, brilliantly, instinctively, to read every available signal. The quality of a footstep. A silence that feels different from the usual kind. A sigh that isn't quite neutral. This isn't a flaw. It's a child doing exactly what a child needs to do to stay safe.

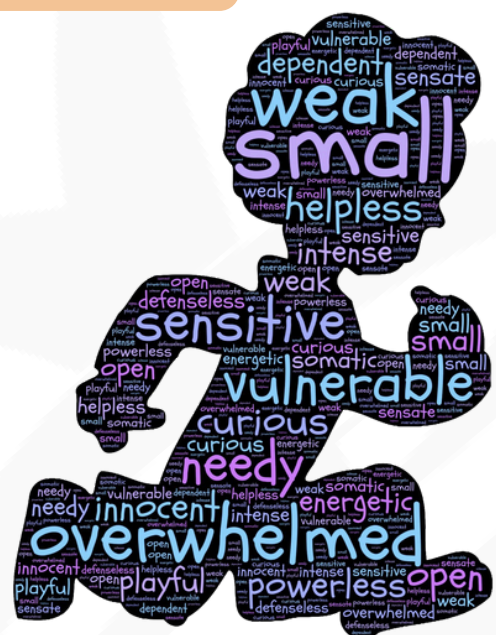
The nervous system doesn't retire when you leave home

The brain's stress-response system was shaped by that early environment. It built a baseline, a resting level of alertness, that made sense then. But when you leave home and the original threat is gone, that baseline doesn't automatically recalibrate. The system keeps running. It keeps scanning for the signal it was trained to find. And when it doesn't find it, it often generates the feeling anyway, just in case.

Parentification: when the child becomes the carer

Psychologists use the term parentification to describe what happens when a child takes on the emotional responsibilities that belong to the adult. It doesn't have to be dramatic. It can be as quiet as: always checking whether Mum seems okay before saying anything.

Knowing not to mention your own needs when Dad is in a certain mood. Learning that the safest way to love a parent is to cause as little disruption as possible. That child grows up highly attuned to others, and often completely out of touch with their own needs and feelings.



2. How Your Nervous System Learned to Brace



Bessel van der Kolk

Documented in *The Body Keeps the Score* that early relational stress reshapes the brain's stress-response system, creating a constant readiness for threat that persists long after the original environment has gone. The anxiety isn't in your imagination. It's in your physiology.

Gabor Maté

Traces many chronic conditions back to the emotional suppression children learn when their feelings are too big for their caregivers to hold. When a child learns their emotional needs are inconvenient, they don't stop having them. They learn to disconnect, and that disconnection, maintained over decades, carries a real cost.

The most important thing to understand is this: anxiety isn't irrational. It's historical. It was the right response to the environment in which it was built. It just never got the memo that the environment changed.

3. Six Practical Tools for Right Now



These tools won't resolve the root cause that requires deeper work. But they can meaningfully reduce the volume of anxiety in daily life and help your nervous system begin to find a different resting state.

1 Name it to tame it

1

When anxiety spikes, pause and name it out loud or in writing: "My nervous system is running an old alarm. There is no current threat." This isn't positive thinking — it's neurological. Naming activates the prefrontal cortex and begins to interrupt the alarm response.

2 The 5-4-3-2-1 sensory anchor

2

When you feel overwhelmed, name 5 things you can see, 4 you can touch, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, 1 you can taste. This brings your attention into the present moment, which is the only place your body can actually begin to feel safe. The past isn't here. The threat isn't here.

3 Slow your exhale

3

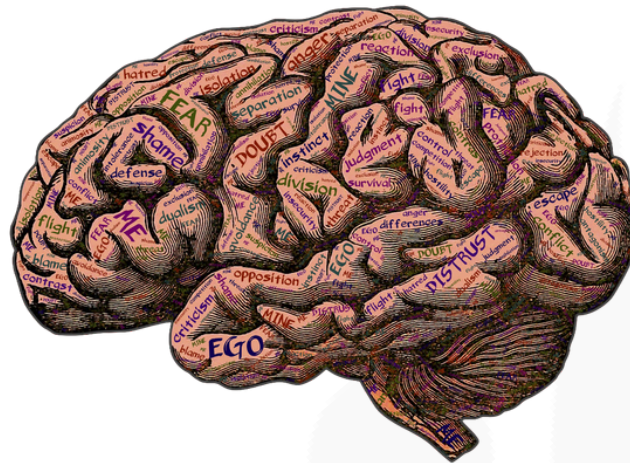
Anxiety lives in the inhale. Calm lives in the exhale. Try breathing in for 4 counts and out for 6–8 counts. The extended exhale activates the parasympathetic nervous system, your body's natural off-switch for the stress response. Do this for 2 minutes and notice the difference.



These tools won't resolve the root cause that requires deeper work. But they can meaningfully reduce the volume of anxiety in daily life and help your nervous system begin to find a different resting state.

Notice whose feeling it is

Much of the anxiety that adult children of emotionally immature parents carry isn't even theirs. When you feel a surge of tension around someone else's mood, pause and ask: Is this mine? Or am I picking up someone else's emotional state? You don't have to fix it. You're not responsible for it. You can simply notice it and choose not to absorb it.



Create a real safety cue

Your nervous system learned to associate certain signals with danger. You can consciously create new associations with safety. A specific song, a particular scent, a physical gesture (hand on heart) used repeatedly in calm moments, these become genuine anchors your system can reach for. Over time, the brain learns to respond to them.

Move the energy through

Anxiety is energy that has nowhere to go. Your body prepared for a threat that never fully materialised and the preparation energy is still there. Physical movement (even a brisk 8-minute walk) helps discharge it. Not because exercise cures anxiety, but because the body was built to complete the stress cycle and movement helps it do that.

4. What Healing Actually Looks Like



This is the part that most articles leave out, so let's be honest about it.

It's not about understanding more

You might already understand the pattern. You might have read the books, named the dynamic, traced the lineage. And still the anxiety is there. That's because understanding lives in the conscious mind and the anxiety lives somewhere else entirely. It lives in the set point your brain established before you had words for any of it.

It's not about blaming your parents

Healing this kind of anxiety doesn't require you to condemn the people who raised you. They were almost certainly doing their best with what they had. Understanding that your anxiety has a source doesn't mean assigning blame, it means taking the weight off yourself. You didn't develop this because something is wrong with you. You developed it because something was missing.

It is about updating the programming

Real shifts happen when the work goes to the level where the pattern was formed. The nervous system doesn't update through logic or willpower, it updates through experience. Through being given, at the level where the original wound lives, a new felt sense of safety. One that the body can actually believe.



4. What Healing Actually Looks Like



What it looks like in practice

- ✓ The background hum begins to genuinely quiet, not suppressed, but gone
- ✓ Conflict stops feeling physically threatening
- ✓ You can enter a room without first scanning it for emotional weather
- ✓ Rest starts to feel like rest
- ✓ Other people's moods stop being your responsibility to manage
- ✓ You feel entitled to your own needs, without apology

"The anxiety that was never yours to carry? You can set it down."

— Nicholas Dob, Zest Quest

Ready to Address the Source?

If you've recognised yourself in these pages, you know, "the hum, the hypervigilance, the exhaustion of always reading the room", then I'd love to have a conversation.

A free 45-minute Rapport Session is the place to start. No obligation. Just an honest conversation about where you are and whether this work feels like the right fit.

Book Your Free Session Now: zestquest.com.au

*You've got this!
I've got you!*

If you want more support

Lasting change usually comes from a combination of understanding yourself better, working with the stored beliefs, taking away the charges/triggers which set responses in motion that you'd like to change, and helping your nervous system feel safe.

This is properly addressing what's underneath your discomfort, not from forcing yourself through it with willpower, apparent logic and unreasonable exposure techniques.

Trauma informed processes and working with you, no matter where you are at and considering your personal circumstances offer real solutions.

Solutions which involve a holistic approach for your body (nervous system reactions), mind (thoughts, memories & beliefs) and emotions (healthy internal responses), so you can shift your experiences to being calmer, increased confidence, resilient and more energised.

Wouldn't you like to engage in the world on your terms?

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Disclaimer: This guide is educational and not a substitute for personalised medical or mental health care.

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