Understanding Anxiety: A Quick Guide to Your Brain

Anxiety can feel overwhelming — but it makes more sense (and feels less scary) when you understand how your brain works.

The Alarm Brain (Amygdala)

- Like a smoke detector, its job is to keep you safe.
- It reacts instantly to anything that ***might*** be a threat — before you even think.
- This can be helpful (like jumping out of the way of a car)… but it often misfires, like feeling panic before public speaking or jumping at a sudden loud noise.
- The Alarm Brain believes: "Better to be safe and wrong, than sorry." That's why you can feel anxious even when there's no real danger.

The Thinking Brain (Cortex)

- This part handles logic, planning, and perspective.
- It tries to make sense of things: "I'm not in danger. I've done this before. I'll be okay."
- But it's slower than the Alarm Brain — and not always in control.

Why You Still Feel Anxious Even When You "Know Better"

- Knowing you're safe doesn't always stop anxiety — because the Alarm Brain doesn't learn through logic.
- It only learns through experience.

How the Alarm Brain Learns

- You teach your brain by facing fears, staying in the situation, and discovering: "That felt scary… but nothing bad happened."
- This creates new learning: over time, the brain starts to rely more on the memory of safety than the expectation of danger.
- This is called inhibitory learning — you're not erasing fear, but building new safety memories that gradually become stronger than the fear response. Both can exist, but the more the brain sees the feared outcome doesn't occur, the more it relies on the safety memory than the fear memory.

The Goal: Not to get rid of anxiety completely, but to: Change how you respond to it • Reduce how much it interferes with your life • Teach your brain you can move forward even with anxiety

We may not control when anxiety shows up, but we can control how we respond to it. The less we struggle, the less we suffer.