

To Fear or Not To Fear

In her book, *Bossypants*, Tina Fey struggles with a decision as she approaches the age of forty. Should she have a second child, or should she continue focusing on her career? She feels that she needs to choose between the two options, since, as she puts it, “Science shows that fertility and movie offers drop off steeply for women after forty.”

After months of anxiety, she found herself at her physician’s office for an annual check-up. The moment her doctor entered the room, Tina burst into tears. Her physician listened to her anxiously weigh the pros and cons of each option, then calmly told her, “Either way, everything will be fine.” That’s all it took. Her anxiety melted away.

So often, we suffer in a state of fight-or-flight: “Will I get there on time?” “Am I going to get the job offer?” “Should I use ‘sincerely’ or ‘yours truly?’” “Is this couch the right color?” “What if nobody likes my brownies?”

As I mentioned earlier, our brain doesn’t know the difference between a psychological threat and a physical threat. So when you give yourself these messages throughout the day, your primitive brain hears, “Am I going to live or am I going to die?” This can cause a lot of anxiety.

During these times, the single greatest thing you can say to comfort this primitive part of yourself is this: “It’s going to be okay either way.”

Many people who develop anxiety or TMS symptoms have an underlying foundation of fear, based on an unconscious premise that the world is unsafe. The phrase, “It’s going to be okay either way” is a great way to self-soothe, and over time can help teach this primitive part of you that the world is safe.

Now does this mean that one option isn’t preferable to another? Of course not. It’d be great if everyone liked your brownies. And it’d be a bummer if you didn’t get a job you really wanted. But there’s a difference between telling yourself, “One outcome is acceptable and the other is unacceptable” and “Both outcomes are acceptable though one would be better.”

“It’s going to be okay either way” is a loving and effective way to provide comfort to the primitive part of your mind, letting it know that your life isn’t in danger, and freeing you from the bonds of fight-or-flight.

Of course, 1% of the time, it really isn’t going to be okay either way. For example, if you’re told that you have a tumor, and will find out in three days whether it’s malignant or benign, one outcome truly isn’t okay. In these cases, all you can do is use the coping mechanisms that you have to get through that waiting period, and hope for a positive outcome.

99% of the time though, it really is going to be okay either way. And telling yourself this, when you find yourself worrying about a particular outcome or struggling over a decision, can go a long way toward reducing your anxiety and helping you to feel safe.

By the way, Tina Fey ended up having a second child *and* continued making movies into her forties. Which goes to show you, not only do most of the things you worry about never actually happen, often when you stop worrying, you allow your life to unfold in ways you never could have imagined.