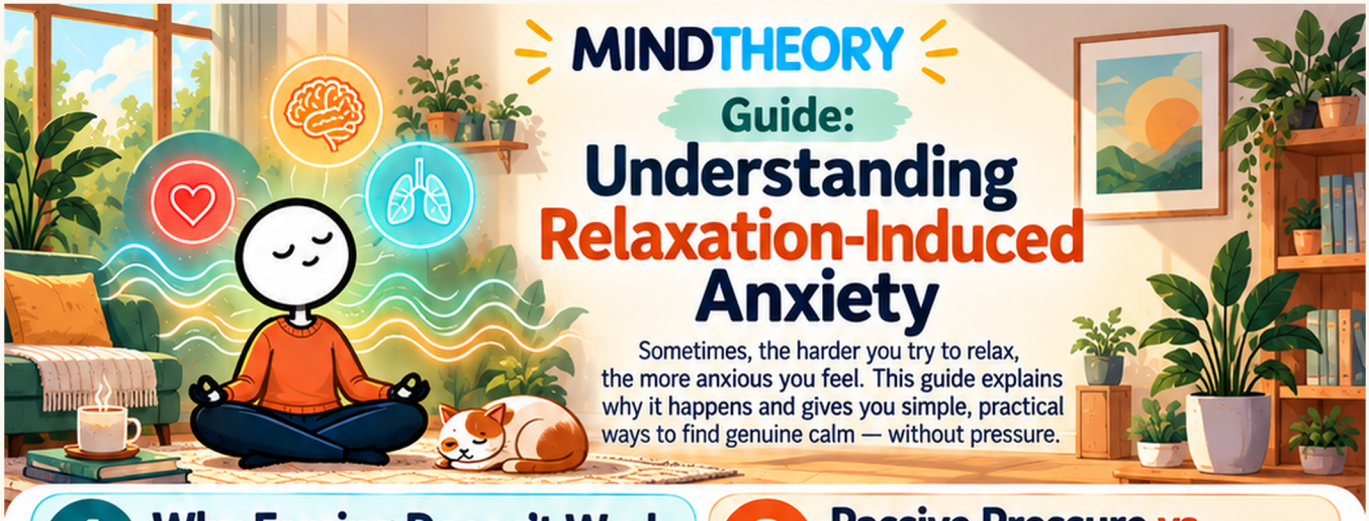

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Guide:

Understanding Relaxation-Induced Anxiety

Sometimes, the harder you try to relax, the more anxious you feel. This guide explains why it happens and gives you simple, practical ways to find genuine calm — without pressure.

1 Why Forcing Doesn't Work

Your brain and body treat forced relaxation like a goal to achieve — and this can actually increase anxiety.

Ironic Porcess Theory



- When you try too hard to relax, your mind keeps monitoring whether you are relaxed or not.
- This constant checking creates more mental tension and makes relaxation harder.
- It's like trying not to think about something — the more you try, the more it shows up.

Somatic Hypervigilance



- When you focus intensely on your bodily sensations, small feelings (like a faster heartbeat) can feel bigger.
- This heightened body awareness can trigger worries and make you feel more anxious.
- It creates a feedback loop, where anxiety increases physical sensations, which then increases anxiety further.

2 Passive Pressure vs Active Grounding

There are two very different ways to approach relaxation. One creates pressure, the other builds genuine calm.

Passive Pressure (What Not to Do)



- ✗ Telling yourself "I must relax."
- ✗ Focusing on the lack of relaxation.
- ✗ Judging how you feel.
- ✗ Expecting immediate results.
- ✗ Forcing your mind or body to be calm.
- ✗ Feeling frustrated when it doesn't work.

Active Grounding (What to Do)



- ✓ Allowing relaxation to happen naturally.
- ✓ Shifting attention to what you can do right now.
- ✓ Being curious and kind about your experience.
- ✓ Noticing and accepting bodily sensations.
- ✓ Creating a safe and comfortable environment.
- ✓ Letting go of expectations.

3 4 Ways to Ground Without Pressure

You don't have to force calm — these simple, effective strategies can help you feel more relaxed and safe.

1 Try Active Movement



- Go for a light walk, stretch or do gentle movement.
- Move your body to release built-up tension.
- Physical activity helps regulate your nervous system and improve mood.

2 Label Your Thoughts



- Notice what's going through your mind.
- Label the thought: "This is worry," "This is overthinking."
- This creates distance and reduces its power.

3 Use Temperature Cues



- Try cool water on your face, a cold drink, or a warm shower.
- These temperature changes can help calm your nervous system.
- They give your mind and body a gentle, natural reset.

4 Practice Radical Acceptance



- Allow your current feelings to be there without fighting them.
- Remind yourself: "It's okay to feel this way right now."
- Acceptance reduces inner struggle and helps calm your mind.

Key Takeaway

Relaxation works best when you allow it, not when you force it.

By understanding why forced relaxation can backfire and using these gentle strategies, you can create a calmer, more resilient mind.

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