

Difficulty Relaxing

Relaxing isn't easy—but it can be learned



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Who is this booklet for?

This booklet is for anyone who wants to understand a psychological symptom that may be experienced by those with anxiety: **“Difficulty relaxing.”** The idea is to learn what this symptom is, observe an example of it in daily life, and find out what can be done to cope with it.

Why is it so hard to turn off your mind?

You know that feeling of muscle tension, mental agitation, and restlessness that you can't control? Do you feel like you're always physically and psychologically exhausted? When this happens, you're in a state of "difficulty relaxing." This is one of the symptoms associated with anxiety.

Several factors can trigger this state, such as a stressful moment, anxiety disorders, sleep problems, and even the constant pursuit of productivity, influenced by the environmental context.



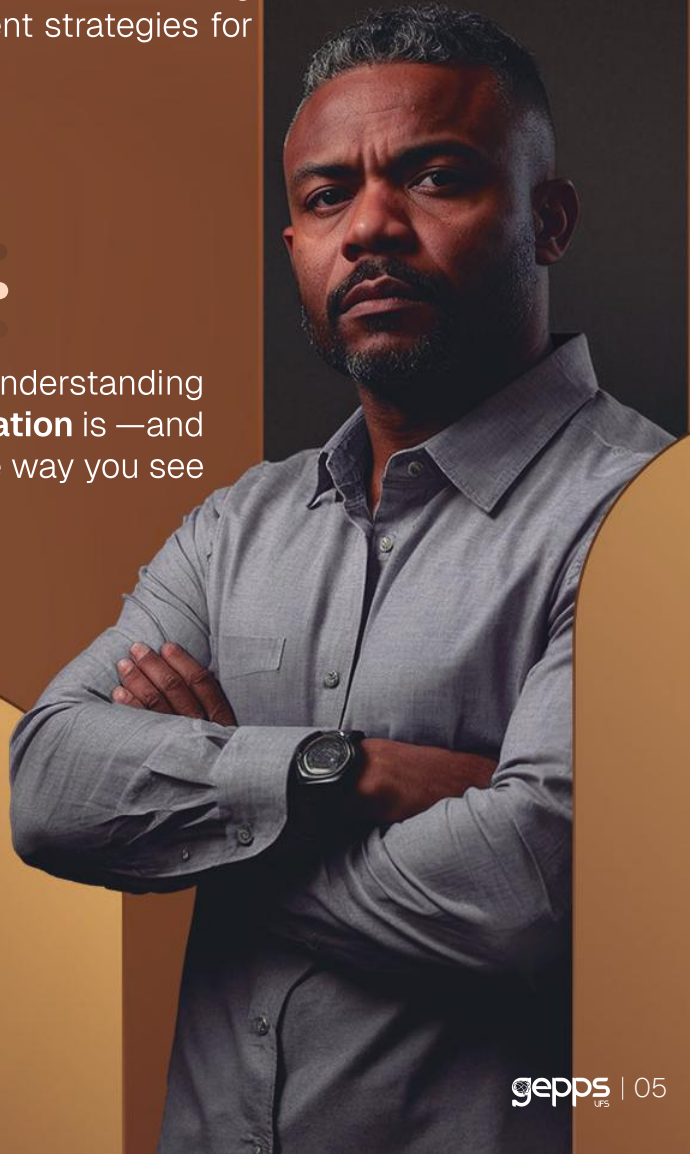
In addition, two ways of thinking—which we call personalization and “should” statements—seem to be directly linked to this symptom. If you feel this way, these two types of thoughts likely come up quite often.

Did you know that this symptom can be managed?

The good news is that we can change the way we think. If you're interested in learning ways to address this issue, in the following pages we'll present strategies for dealing with it.

First...

Let's start by understanding what **personalization** is—and how it affects the way you see the world.



When everything seems to be your fault: The trap of personalization

Personalization is a way of thinking in which you attribute responsibility to yourself for events that are beyond your control, even without any evidence to support this belief or any control over the outcome.

People with this type of thinking often interpret negative situations as being caused solely by their actions, thoughts, or personal characteristics, without considering.

This way of thinking puts you in a constant state of alert, in which you are always worried about the possibility of having caused something bad and feel constantly responsible for preventing or fixing problems.



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white t-shirt and blue jeans, is sitting on the floor with her legs tucked under her. She is looking upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. The background is dark and out of focus.

In other words...

Personalization is a thought pattern that distorts reality, making you feel guilty or responsible for things you didn't cause. It's as if you feel at the center of all negative events.

For example,

Blaming yourself for external negative events:

Believing that a flight delay is your fault, even if the cause is a technical problem with the plane.

Have you ever been through something like this?

This might help you...

Evidence Check

The “examination of evidence” technique is a method that helps you assess whether your thoughts are true by looking for evidence that supports or contradicts them.

It can help you gain more control over your thoughts, enabling you to modify them or replace them with more realistic ones, and develop healthier thought patterns.

It’s like being a detective of your own thoughts, investigating whether they match reality.

Shall we practice?

It’s time to be the **detective** of your **thoughts!**





01. Identify the thought:


What thought keeps “hammering” in your mind and causing you suffering?


02. Look for evidence that confirms or refutes the identified thought:

Ask yourself: “What evidence is there that this is true? And what evidence shows that this thought isn’t real?” This evidence may include past situations, observations of the present, and other relevant information.

03. Analyze and evaluate the evidence:

Evaluate each piece of evidence for or against and conclude whether the identified thought is true (real) or false (distorted).

| | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| Negative thought: | |  |
| Evidence in favor... | Evidence against... | |
| CONCLUSION: | | |

If you are using a computer, use the  for annotation.

“Should” statements:

A relentless “judge”!

“**Should**” statements are a pattern of thinking in which we create rigid rules about how things should be, or how we or others should act.

When we don’t follow “these rules,” we feel **guilty** or **frustrated**. We can’t focus on the present moment or relax, which can worsen anxiety symptoms.

In other words...

These are demands we place on ourselves about how things should be. It’s as if there were an **internal judge** in our head saying, “You didn’t do what you should have.”

For example,

In relationships, you might have thoughts like: “I should always please others” or “I should be able to solve all my family’s problems.”



Alternative Perspective

To help change thoughts that trap us in **excessive self-criticism**, we can use the **Alternative Perspective** technique. The idea is to reflect on how someone else would evaluate the same situation we're holding ourselves accountable for.

Imagine someone who planned to make lunch, do laundry, wash dishes, and clean the house in one morning but didn't manage to do it all. And suddenly, they think, **"I failed because I didn't finish everything I was supposed to. I'm a failure."**

They might ask themselves, **"What would my best friend say in this situation?"** A possible response would be: "You made lunch, which was the most important thing. You made sure everyone in the house ate. You're not a failure." **That would be a fairer and more balanced assessment of the situation.**

Applying the Technique

Step 1 – Recognize the voice of the “inner judge”

Am I telling myself “I should” or “I have to” right now? If so, recognize that this is the “inner judge” speaking.

Step 2 – Call on your friend

“What would he or she say about what I’ve already accomplished?”

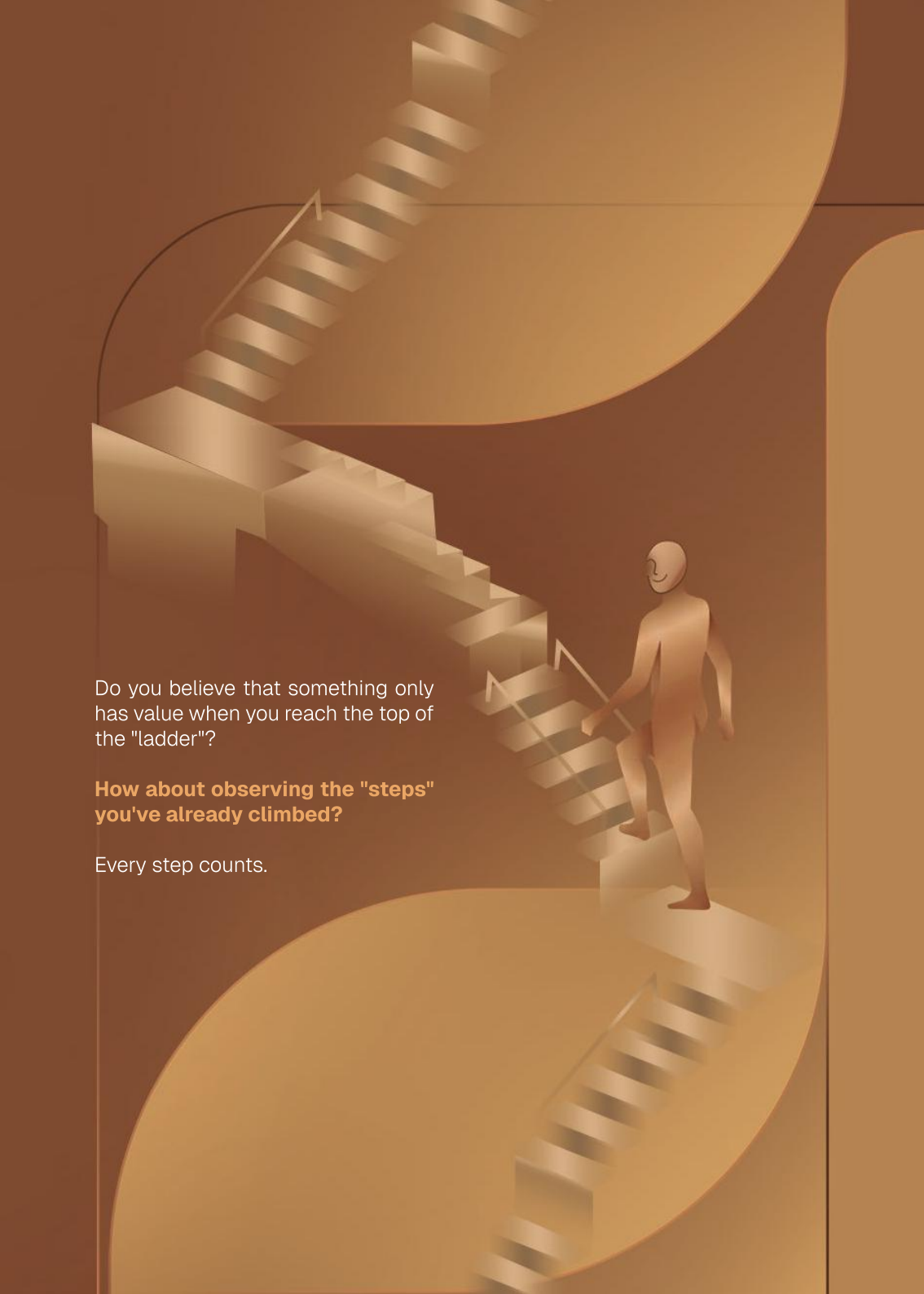
Step 3 – Give a more realistic response

For example: “Today I managed to do part of what I planned. That gives me a foundation to move on to other tasks.”

Step 4 – Recognize the value of each completed task

Repeat to yourself: “Every step is part of the journey. It’s the sum of them that will lead me to the final result.”





Do you believe that something only has value when you reach the top of the "ladder"?

How about observing the "steps" you've already climbed?

Every step counts.

You're on the right track: think differently, feel better

Transforming our way of thinking happens through practice and persistence. Now that you know the “examining the evidence” and “alternative perspective” techniques, practice them whenever you find it hard to relax. That way, you'll be better prepared to face it when it arises. Every step counts—and today, you've made great progress. Keep going!



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How to cite

Santos, J. J. D., Santana, S. O., Gazza, G., Palhano, D., & Faro, A. (2025). Difficulty Relaxing: Relaxing Isn't Easy—But It Can Be Learned [Digital booklet]. Study and Research Group on Health Psychology – GEPPS (Federal University of Sergipe, UFS, Brazil).

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