

# Cultivating the Non-Anxious Presence

BY JACOB PANNELL

There is a big list of resources at the end

[jacobpannell.com/slides](http://jacobpannell.com/slides)



Faithful Fatherhood

Failed Interviews

Ezra was born

Read parenting books

Shift from parenting to parenthood How do I be a better father rather than how do I parent better?

What is the problem my kids will encounter that they need tools to overcome?

“ Anxiety is so high now that **normal samples** of children from the 1980s **outscore** psychiatric populations from **the 1950s**. ”

JEAN TWENGE

Twenge, J. (2000). The Age of Anxiety? Birth Cohort Change in Anxiety and Neuroticism, 1952-1993. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. <https://doi.org/https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/psp7961007.pdf>

## Jean Twenge Review

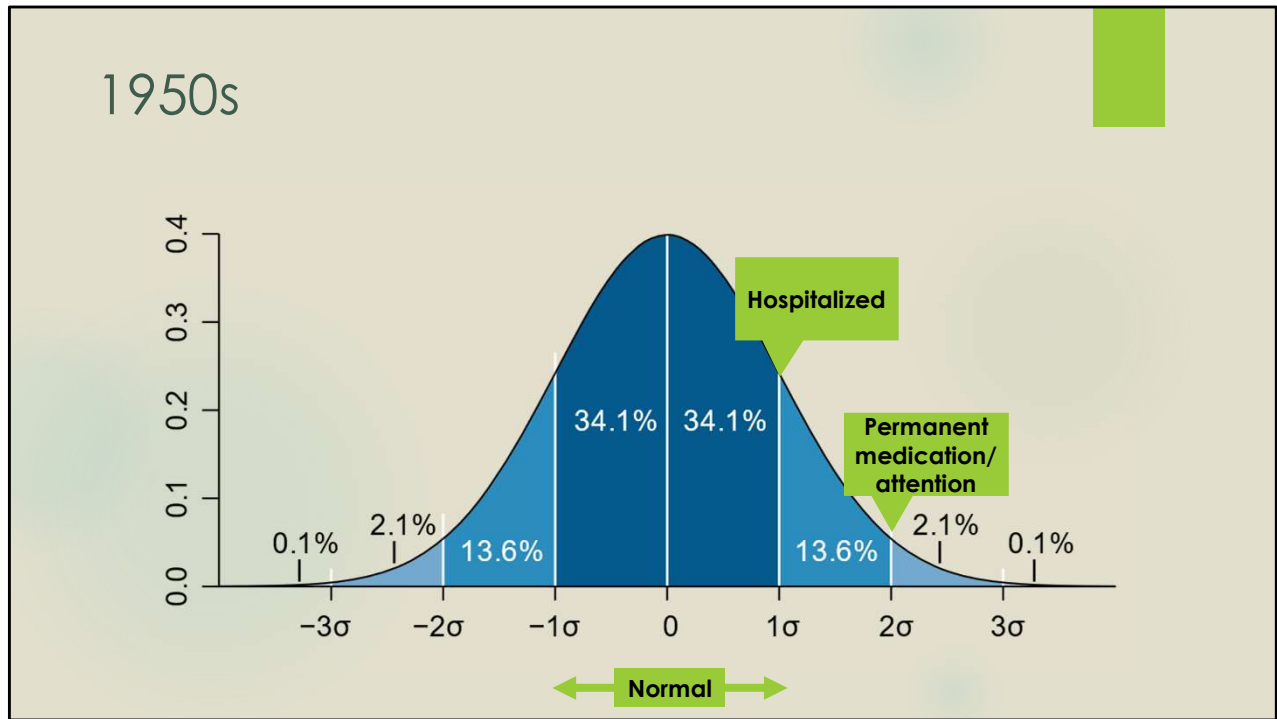
### The Age of Anxiety

“Decreases in social connectedness and increases in environmental dangers are leading causes”

Economic factors play little role

Change of one standard deviation

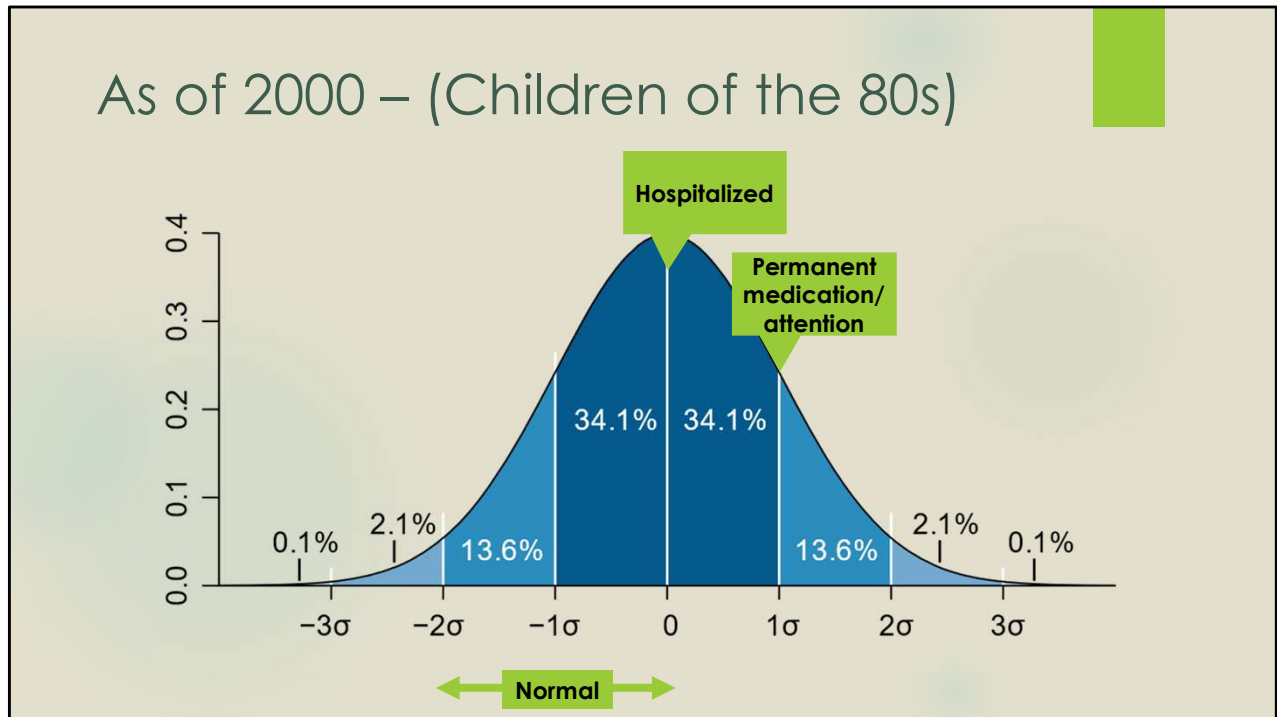
1950s



This is what the standard deviation shift looks like, as described by Dr. Twenge. Now the difference here is treatment here isn't sought out until the same level as in the 1950s. What that practically means is that right now if you were born during or after the 80s, half of us carry the biochemical markers necessary for an up to one-week stay in a psychiatric ward.

The scarier part is that this study was completed in 2000. Before the advent of social media and the smartphone. Twenge has spent her career between then and now studying the terrifying trends among our children and how this age of anxiety is even worse than she first published.

## As of 2000 – (Children of the 80s)

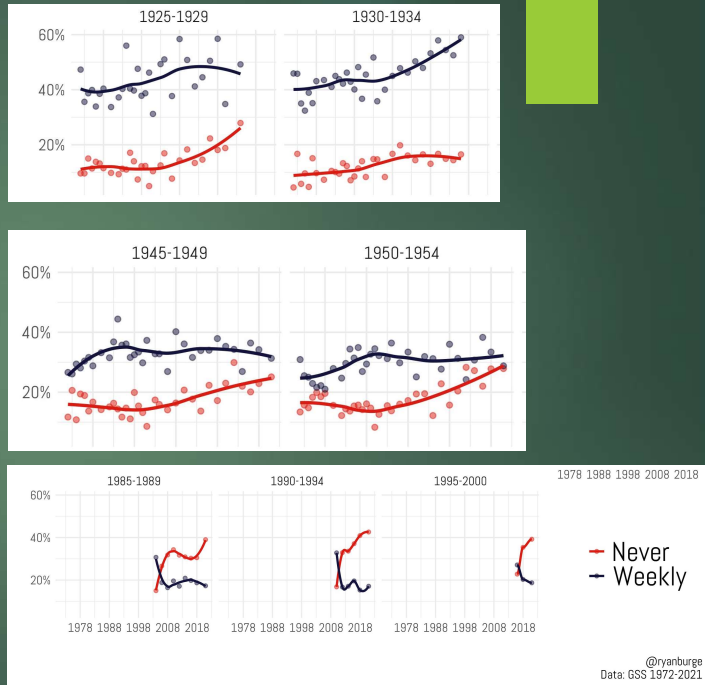


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# The Rise of the Nones

- ▶ Among those born in the early 1930s, 60% attend church weekly. 17% never attend.
- ▶ Among those born in the early 1950s, 32% attend weekly. 29% never attend.
- ▶ Among those born in the early 1990s, 18% attend weekly. 42% never attend.



Coupled with this rise in anxiety, we see a marked rise in nones. This work is from Ryan Burge.

The main factor that people should be talking about for the rapid rise in nones in our country is the fall of the Berlin Wall. When the Cold War ended, we were no longer fighting atheist, communist Russia, and as theorized by Dr. Burge, the forced association of America and Christianity began to fall apart. Someone born in the 90s is 30. They are going to need clinical pastoring. They lack a common religious framework's structural ideas and support because they affiliate with none.

What that means for us is that we cannot rely on the platitudes and some of the dimensions of our religions to coach, counsel, and comfort people going through their worst and most vulnerable moments.

We cannot rely on religious stories to bring people to a basic, structural level. There is no reminding them of how Zacchaeus or Jairus felt. Think of how Sarah handled Abraham nearly killing her son. These stories that many of us assume are basic or common knowledge aren't.

I first encountered this as a youth worker/pastor in Chicago. I met children who had gone

to church their whole lives and couldn't give me a basic timeline of the Biblical narrative. For example, which came first, Jesus or Moses? If these children attend church every Sunday for years, can children and adults outside any faith recognize any hallmarks of the faith?

“Anxiety is a **powerful illustration** of how deeply affected we are by our innate human **drive** to be **storytellers**. ”

DANIEL KIRK



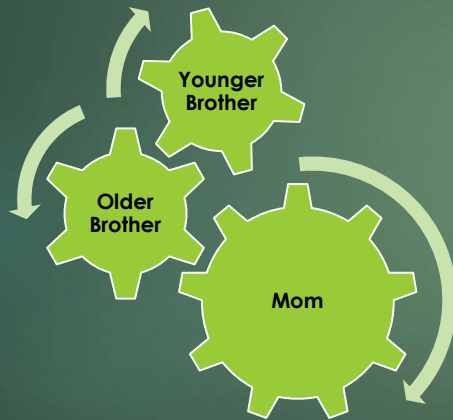
Daniel Kirk is the author of Romans for Normal People

This is what we are going to work on today. Telling different stories. Changing Narratives. In my experience and among others one of the best ways to do this is the Non-Anxious Presence.

So I am going to tell you stories about how to tell your story better and enable others to tell their story better.



# Family Systems Theory



- ▶ Murray Bowen
- ▶ Fixing the Patient?
- ▶ Fixing the system?

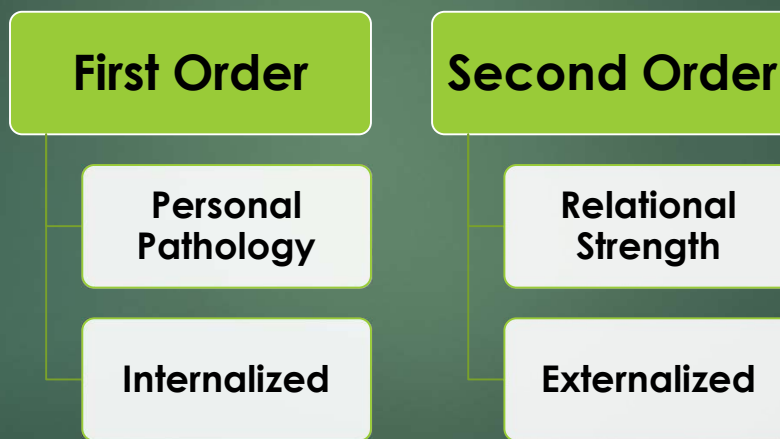
The idea of a non-anxious presence began with Dr. Murray Bowen.

Dr. Bowen who worked in the National Institute of Mental Health and then taught and worked at Georgetown University came up with Family Systems Theory

It focuses on fixing the interaction of groups and the dynamics at play rather than simply the individual

For Murray and eventually Edwin Friedman, working on people and their problems was a bottomless pit, and no progress could be made. This is why they focus on the system. For both of them, it was the systemic fixes that ultimately allowed for both deeper individual expression and family togetherness.

## Second Order Change vs First Order Change



In the family systems theory, there are two orders of change. Conventional techniques focus on the first order changes. They usually fall under manipulation or motivation. Neither of those has to be sinister but they both rely on a pathology to overcome a greater pathology. Friedman in particular describes a First Order approach like a surgical removal of a cancer. The patient is said to go into remission simply waiting for the pathological cancerous cells to reappear. The metaphor is apt for first order fixes because they make function for a time and be far easier to implement than systemic changes. But you are always waiting for the other shoe to drop and it is the second order changes that often bear out as more efficient in the long run despite requiring greater initial effort. But the inertia of the second order change often repairs not one pathology but prevents future pathologies from arriving because the person is truly healthy.

## Edwin Friedman

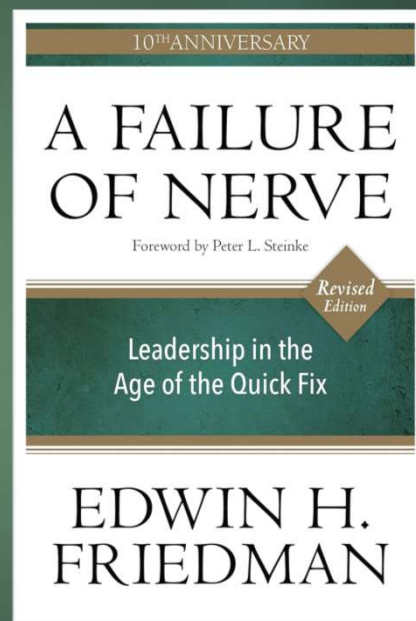
- ▶ Rabbi and Therapist in Washington DC
- ▶ 1950-1990
- ▶ Student of Murray Bowen



By Edwin Friedman - Original publication: Generation to Generation Immediate source: epcpastor.org, Fair use, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=37554539>

Friedman was a rabbi and therapist in Washington DC for over 4 decades during some of the most tumultuous internal strife in our nation's history. The tools we developed to handle our anxiety during these formative decades are the ones we still use today as a nation. Friedman points out that most of these tools are first order changes. These first order changes ask us to keep searching for new tools and techniques as band-aid solutions for deeper wounds. To Friedman Americans and their leaders lack the nerve to go after adventure and play reorienting our questions for places of anxiety to places of strength. We fear the risk to the status quo rather than embrace the possibilities that lie beyond because those possibilities will disrupt the status quo.

## Self-Differentiation and the Non- anxious Presence



Friedman's two main contributions were the idea of Self-differentiation and the Non-anxious presence

And it is these two concepts working in concert that give us the power to open up the possibility of the change of a narrative running in peoples heads. Changing the narrative opens us up to the possibility of changing the status quo. It not only helps us confront the risks, but also makes the gains more than obvious... essential.

## Reorientation around strengths



The reason a non-anxious presence brought about by self-differentiation works is that instead of working on the negative dynamics Friedman reoriented around the relational strengths in any group, organization or family.

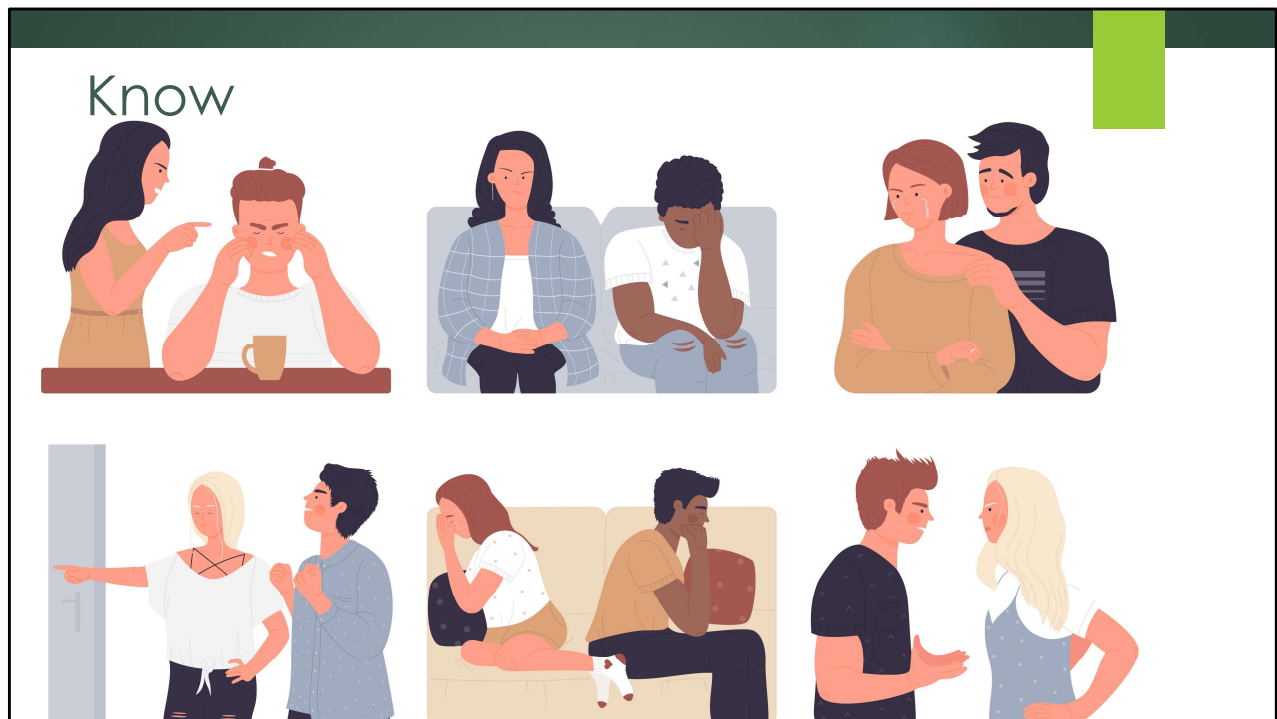


In action, basketball story focusing on renegotiating the dynamic based on the shared relational strength of achieving the same goal, winning the game.



# Know, Match, Catalyze

How I do it



Friedman and the children

What I am talking about here is a mixture of prejudice (re: prejudice) and present experience. Prejudice can help us get in the door, but as we all know everyone is a little bit different. That person's heart is a few millimeters to the left and their veins are a little less elastic than we would like them to be. A knee that is replaced needs to be returned to its original length not the ideal length or the hips get thrown out of alignment. As healthcare professionals we notice and adjust to these small details all the time.



Knowing in the Non-anxious presence sense is avoiding the weak side of prejudice and being willing to drop judgments as you encounter new information. Prejudice is only really a problem when we hold on to it too tightly.

That means reading the room. What kind of people are you working with today? Who is talking? Who has to have the last word? Who isn't talking? Who controls the room once you leave? Anxiety takes both passive and aggressive and passive-aggressive forms. There are so many relational connections happening in any room in a healthcare setting. And you have to do your best to take them in with some prejudices at first that are willing to be dropped as you learn more about these people you are serving.

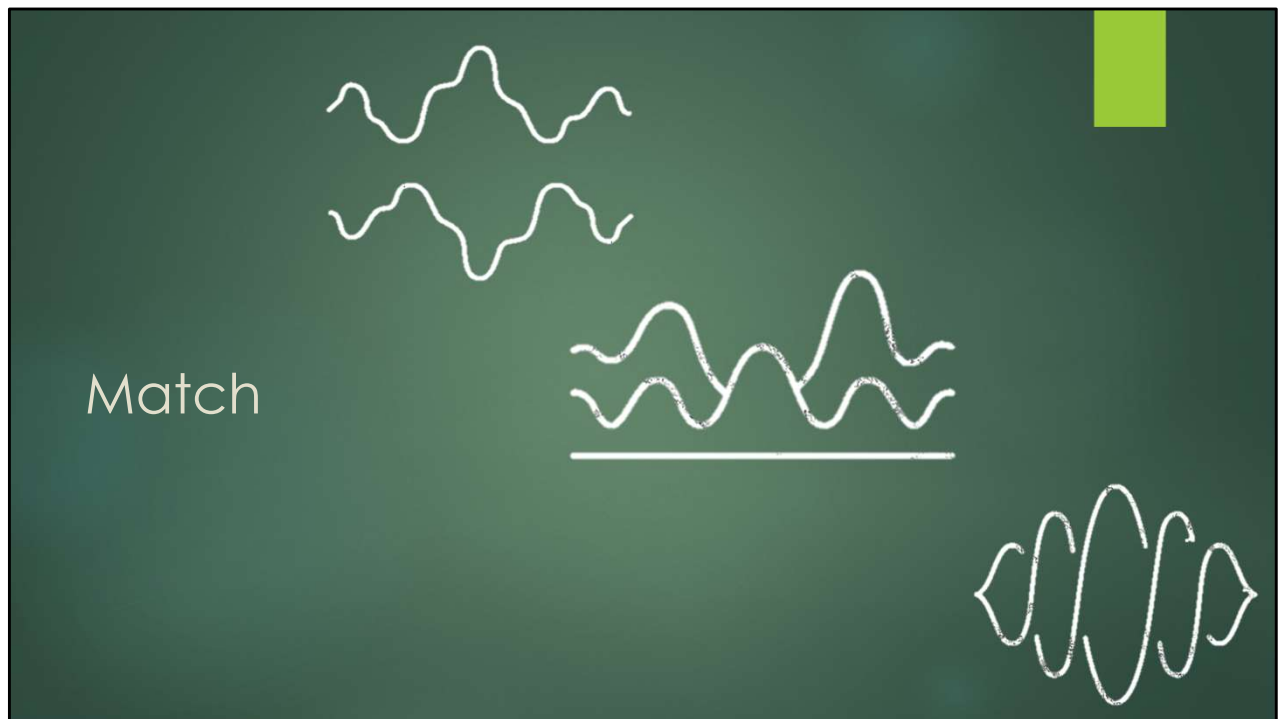
Knowing is often the hardest part because knowing requires that you neither be aloof nor anxious yourself. The concern is off you and on to them. You are evaluating and re-evaluating these people in your presence so that you can extend to them a presence that actually helps them.

Beyond relationship dynamics, you should be noticing who and what the strengths and weaknesses are. Did everyone hate the person who underwent the procedure or did everyone love them? Is Stan

physically more imposing but mentally less dominant than Johnny? Who gets asked the questions? Who interprets? Who prays? Who leads and why? How do they lead?

All of this is information that you can sometimes gain in minutes and other times takes hours. But as you gain information you can begin the next step. This is the step Friedman taught the non-anxious children first.

Content vs process



Once equipped the children were very capable of matching

The important part of matching is not getting it exactly right but connection. People will often tell you if you aren't getting it right, but they will appreciate that we are trying to connect (unless that triggers their anxiety even more which triggers are coming later as well). Connection keeps us from being lonely and anxiety in particular if often expressed as a covering emotion for loneliness or broken connection. Some people wall off. Others flail and wail. Others run. And others melt into puddles on the ground. In the end we all need space and

connection to process.

A good way to match is to find the rhythm of the room. Hartmut Rosa, a German philosopher who writes about resonance, describes the world through a lack of resonance or dissonance. Dissonance has no rhythm or throughbeat. What is the heartbeat of the room you are walking into? If you can match the rhythm you are on your way to creating resonance. Resonance opens you up to the next step, catalyze.

Peak resonance was once described to me as a concert with all the people who loved the same songs/bands that I do.



But here is the wrinkle and why this is so effective. When you catalyze, the end goal isn't to satisfy a weakness. It is to bring out a strength.

In many ways, this is the crux of what Friedman noticed. We, most of the time, spend our time on fixing weaknesses, but Friedman found the strongest member of the family and helped reorient the family around the strengths it had rather than solely focusing on the problems. When you do this with children, they are often the strength in and of themselves. We can often see our best selves in them or more importantly the strengths of their

spouse. When we can see the good things about someone, we are often willing to overlook or minimize the bad things.



# Putting it into action

What story are we going to agree to tell?



In a word - story.

Story is the most powerful tool we have for creating, maintaining, and altering relationships. Is a person a villain, a hero, a tragic asshole, or a comedy of errors or something else? Is that person a father, son, brother, elder, beloved, hated, disliked, or an enemy? Is not every person a bit of them all? The catch is what story do we tell ourselves? Almost as important, is that story true. The best stories are true from multiple perspectives.

And you know what you get to do when you enter



the room for bad news? You get to ask them to tell you a story. You get to listen. And then you get to ask them about the story. You get to ask them why they told that story and how it affected them. The story often times doesn't change their relationship. It reminds them of the strength of the relationship. Better still, the story is an awesome way to gain more information. Which helps you match the rhythm of the room better which makes you catalyze and help them begin the process of relationship renegotiation that we call grief.

## Anxiety in the Group

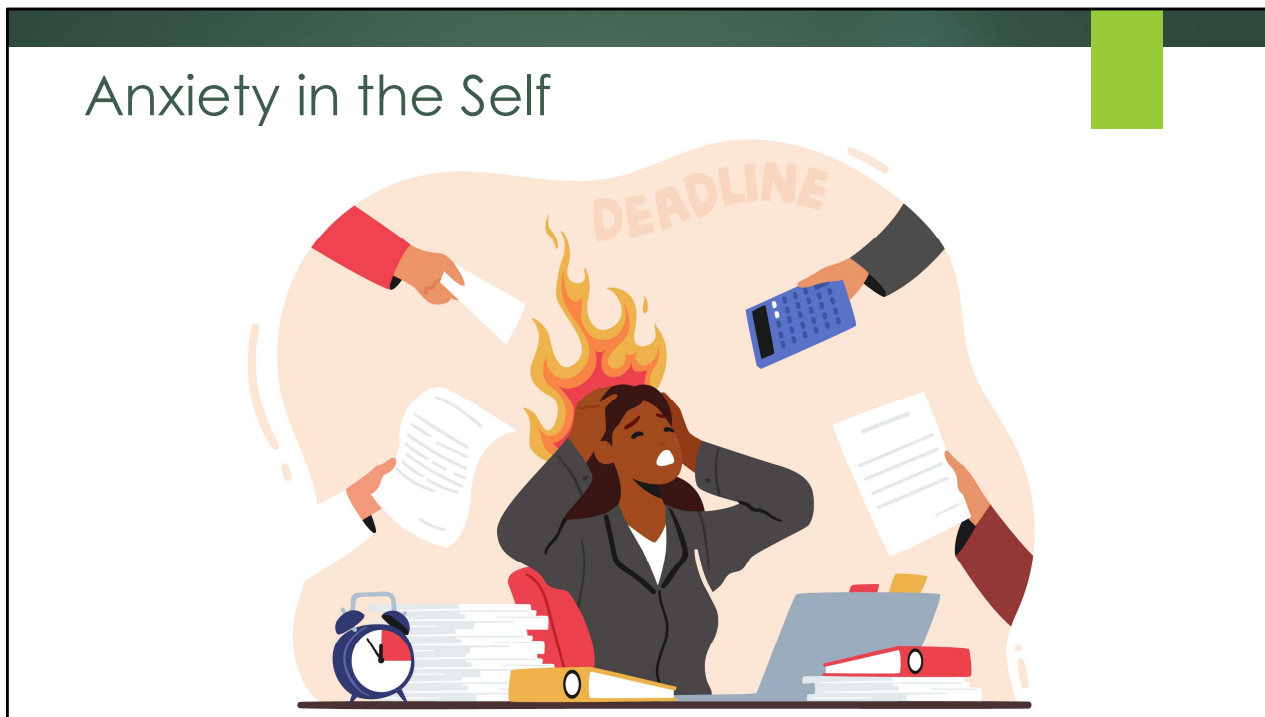


Here are the quick hit things to notice if you are going after creating and maintaining a non-anxious presence.

Who is the most anxious person in the room?

Who controls the room – and it isn't always the loudest. Its the outlier that gets paid attention. Uncle Johnny could be an outlier and be the only one screaming and wailing, but if Aunt Marge isn't moving (and she should be), but everyone else is staying still and eyeing her then she is the most anxious or the person who is least anxious and also therefore one of the best people to talk too.

## Anxiety in the Self



But guess what you can't bring what you aren't.

Want to help and serve these people with a Non-Anxious presence and a renegotiated story? Then you have to enter into and maintain a non-anxious presence. Easier said than done.

# Self Leadership



# The Non-Anxious Presence



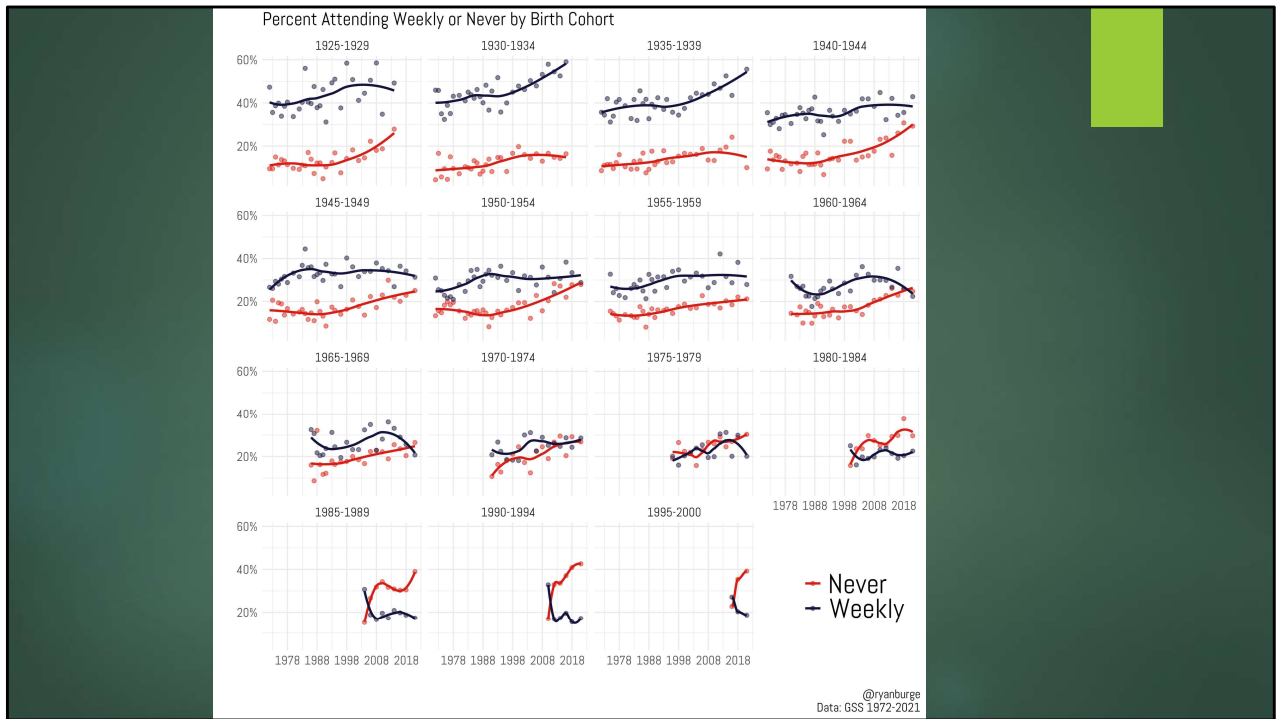
This is the end of the first presentation.

# Contact Me

- ▶ [jacobpannell.com/slides](http://jacobpannell.com/slides)
- ▶ Substack
- ▶ Twitter @Jpa89



My Story



This is the full data set from Ryan Burge for you to peruse.

## Resources

- ▶ *Generation to Generation and Failure of Nerve* Edwin Friedman
- ▶ *Managing Leadership Anxiety* Steve Cuss
- ▶ Jean Twenge Articles, Interviews, and associated books
- ▶ Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast
- ▶ *A Non-Anxious Presence* Mark Sayers
- ▶ *Resonance* Hartmut Rosa
- ▶ *A Secular Age* Charles Taylor
- ▶ *Dare to Lead and Atlas of the Heart* Brené Brown
- ▶ *I and Thou* Martin Buber
- ▶ *On Repentance and Repair and Nurture the Wow* Rabbi Danya Ruttenger
- ▶ *Divine Echoes* Mark Gregory Karris
- ▶ *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* John Mark Comer
- ▶ *Essentialism* Greg McKeown
- ▶ *This is Marketing* Seth Godin
- ▶ *Slideology, Slidedocs, and Resonate* Nancy Duarte

This is a list of resources I used to create these presentations. You can find many of my ideas in these works.

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