

What I Say and What I Mean



Which way I go depends on me.

The human body's ability to survive is an amazing thing. So many different systems all work together to alert us to possible dangers, trigger instantaneous reactions that automatically sound the alarm, activate the body to deal with threats, then gradually settle everything down and reset it all so the entire system is ready to go the very next time anything seems amiss. Spoken language and logic are important parts of this alarm and defence system, but ones that regularly seem to fade into the background and operate outside of our conscious awareness. This means there can be huge differences between what I say and what I actually communicate to myself.

A trap of language and logic that is typically hidden from view but can activate the body's alarm systems and cause panic occurs with what I call [conditional statements](#). Conditionals refer to situations that can go one way or another, depending on some other variable. You'll know one when you see one because of telltale words like "WHEN" and "BECAUSE".

For example, in a moment of tension, a person who is [afraid of flying](#) might say to herself:

“I will be safe **WHEN this plane lands.”**

If she accepts that statement as true, then the conditional trap means she must also, automatically accept the opposite as true, namely:

“I am not safe **UNTIL this plane lands.”**

If she's not safe UNTIL her plane lands, then her brain will immediately conclude:

“I am not safe **NOW!”**

and her body's anxiety and panic alarms will instantly fire, even when the flight she's on is actually quite safe and fine. All it takes is that one moment of automatic thinking to set off the alarms.

You can learn to cope with your own [anxiety](#) and worry by paying attention to the language you use to talk with yourself. Practice noticing when your mind is making conditional statements like these; notice how they activate your body's arousal systems and then decide – really consciously decide – whether you want to allow yourself to panic or regain your sense of calm. You can't stop your body's alarm systems from turning on automatically, but you can learn to ride out those moments of fear and build better coping skills by paying attention to what you're really saying to yourself.

Let us help you learn to cope better with anxiety, panic and worry.

Shift Cognitive Therapy + Assessment

[Dr. Ian Shulman](#)