PROJECT #4

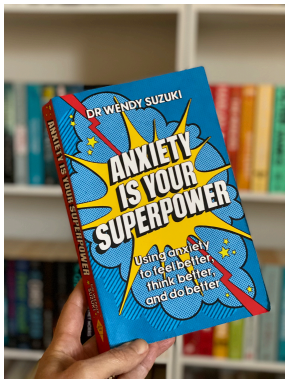
CHANGE YOUR STORY

For this project, you will need:

Paper (consider using small 2 x 3? papers so students can add their artwork to their OK Kits as a reminder of their changed stories)

Writing/drawing materials (pens, pencils, markers)

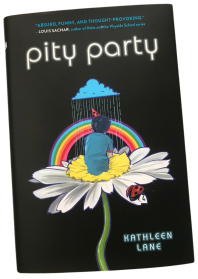
(Optional) collaging materials



Hi! My name is Kathleen and I started OK You because I wanted to share something with you that took me too many years to realize:

Anxiety is not a sign that there is something wrong with you.

Feeling anxiety is not only a normal part of being human—it can actually be a superpower! Entire books have been written about this, like this one by Wendy Suzuki.



Why is it important to find the positive in our emotions? Because telling negative stories about our feelings affects how we see ourselves. As C.S. Lewis (author of Narnia and other books) said: “We are what we believe we are.”

I wrote about this after my book, *Pity Party*, was published. Here’s an excerpt (you can read the whole essay here):

“The stories we tell ourselves matter. If we believe we are weak or broken, that’s how we show up. If we give our energy to everything we believe is wrong in us, we’ll miss all that is right. And the truth is, it’s so often in our weirdness and worries and difficult moments that we find our unique gifts and powers.”

Here’s how artist Natalie Dee expressed her unique power as someone who experiences anxiety.

Are you ready to find your unique superpowers? Okay then, let’s get started!

Step 1 of 12

First, an important note:

If your feelings ever get too big, won’t go away, or stop you from doing the things you

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enjoy, please talk to a trusted adult.

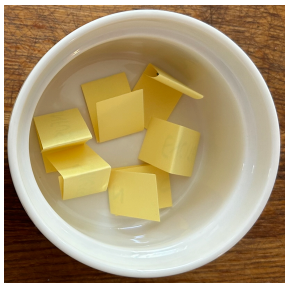
Step 2 of 12

Okay, to kick things off we're going to play a little warm-up game. You can do this exercise on your own or in a group.

This game is about noticing how negative and positive labels feel in our minds and bodies.

First, let's brainstorm some negative names that we can sometimes call ourselves, like STUPID, or a WORRIER, or LAZY.

If you're in a group, have everyone write down a negative name on a piece of paper. If you're working on your own, you can write down one or two negative names that you sometimes call yourself and move on to step 5.



Step 3 of 12

Okay, now we're going to fold up those papers and put them in a bowl, bag or other container.

Next, everyone is going to reach into the container and pull out a paper to open.

You can either take turns reading these labels out loud, or say them to yourself. You can also choose to pass if you'd rather not share.

For example, if you opened WORRIER, you would say: I AM A WORRIER.

After everyone has had a chance to share or pass, discuss how it felt to say these words out loud.

Step 4 of 12

If you're working on your own, say the word(s) that you came up with out loud.

How did that feel? You can either take a moment to think about how it felt, or you can write your thoughts and feelings down on a piece of paper.

Step 5 of 12

Now it's time to crumple up those negative words and toss them away! AND, more importantly, it's time to come up with new positive words to call ourselves.

As a group or on your own, brainstorm the positive side of the negative names you came up with.

For example, worrying can also be called imagination. When we worry, our minds are making up stories, right? — and it takes a whole lot of imagination to think up all those dreadful, tragic stories.

Our ability to imagine things going wrong also makes us very good problem solvers. It's thanks to those of us who are so good at worrying that we have such inventions as the life jacket, the airbag, and of course, most importantly, the shoe umbrella.

Step 6 of 12

So, instead of I AM A WORRIER, try saying this out loud:

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I AM IMAGINATIVE

If you're in a group, try saying it together. How did that feel?

It can be difficult to find the positive in some of our negative labels, but we promise they are there! Let's try this one: STUPID.

Everyone on the planet, even rocket scientists, find some subjects harder than others. So, you are not stupid if, for example, you struggle with math. You are just using your brain in other ways.

Next time you are tempted to call yourself STUPID, try this instead:

I AM SMART ABOUT THE THINGS THAT INTEREST ME.

Or:

I AM USING MY BRAIN IN OTHER WAYS.

Step 7 of 12

Have you ever gotten upset about something and called yourself "too sensitive"?

Did you know that being sensitive is a sign that you have empathy? Empathy is the ability to feel what other people are feeling, and that is a beautiful gift.

So, another name you could call yourself is: EMPATHETIC.

Or you could try this:

I AM SENSITIVE AND THAT'S A GOOD THING!

Being sensitive is a sign that you care — that you are paying attention to the world and others. And you know what? The world could use more sensitive people like you.

Step 8 of 12

Here's another one to think about:

Have you ever been scared to do something or go somewhere?

We ALL have because being afraid is another one of those normal human emotions. I remember saying the most awful things to myself when I was scared, like "I'm such a wimp!"

But here's the thing: We have all done plenty of scary things.

For example, maybe you didn't want to go to a party but you went anyway. Or maybe you didn't want to jump off a diving board, but you jumped anyway. And that is the very opposite of being scared. In fact, here's a new name you can call yourself:

COURAGEOUS

Step 9 of 12

Here's a video that captures some of these ideas:

Step 10 of 12

Okay, now it's your turn.

What is a negative name you've called yourself? Take your time and when you're ready, write it down.

Now see if you can come up with a different, more positive way of looking at that negative label.

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For example, if you wrote down “I’m too quiet,” how is being quiet a good thing? A lot of times quiet people notice more than people who are always talking. So, what if you called yourself a good noticer instead? Or a good listener? That probably makes you a great friend.

If you are having trouble coming up with positive ideas, try asking a friend for help.

Step 11 of 12

Now that you’ve identified your superpower, here are some ways to remind yourself of your new story:

1. Create a superhero drawing like Natalie’s “Anxiety Girl.”

2. Design a poster that expresses your new story. It could be all words, like: I AM COURAGEOUS. Or you could add photos or illustrations to your poster.

3. Make a mini version of your superhero drawing or poster to include inside your OK Kit, along with other reminders of your inner strengths and gifts.

Step 12 of 12

Remember, you have the power to change your story! And the more you tell your new story, the more it will become your truth, and the more confident you will feel. So the next time you’re tempted to call yourself a negative name, stand up tall and proudly proclaim your powers instead.

Want to share your new story, superhero drawing, or poster in our gallery? We’d love to see it!

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