

THE COACH NATALIE

The High-Functioning Anxiety Reset

*5 ways to come back to calm, for when
you're the one who holds it all together*

A FREE GUIDE BY NATALIE PEÑA

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If you look fine but you don't feel fine

From the outside, you look like you have it all handled. You're the responsible one, the high-achiever, the person everyone leans on. You hit the deadlines. You answer the texts. You keep the plates spinning.

Inside, it's a different story. Your mind races at 2 a.m. You replay conversations. You brace for things that haven't happened yet. You're tired in a way sleep doesn't fix. And somewhere along the way, holding it all together started to feel lonely, like no one really knows how hard you're working just to seem okay.

That's high-functioning anxiety. It's not a character flaw, and it's not "just stress." It's a nervous system stuck in overdrive, and the very competence that makes you so capable is also what keeps you from putting it down.

The good news: your nervous system can be taught to settle. Not with a 12-step overhaul you don't have time for, but with small, repeatable resets you can use in the middle of a real day. Here are five I come back to again and again, with my clients and in my own life.

1 Breathe out longer than you breathe in

When you're anxious, your breath goes shallow and fast, which tells your brain there's danger. You can reverse the signal in about a minute. Take two inhales through your nose (a big one, then a small sip on top), then a long, slow exhale through your mouth. Repeat three to five times. Research from Stanford found this "physiological sigh" eases stress faster than meditation in the moment, because the extended exhale switches on the part of your nervous system responsible for calm. Use it before a meeting, in the car, anytime your chest goes tight.

2 Name it to tame it

High-functioning anxiety loves to stay vague, a low hum of "something's wrong." The fastest way to turn the volume down is to name the feeling specifically: "I'm anxious because I'm afraid I let them down." Putting precise words to an emotion measurably quiets the brain's alarm center. You're not trying to fix it or argue with it. Just name it, out loud or on paper. That naming creates a half-step of space between you and the feeling, and in that space you get to choose your next move instead of reacting.

3 Give worry a window

You can't white-knuckle your way out of overthinking, but you can contain it. Pick a "worry window": ten minutes, same time each day. When an anxious thought shows up outside that window, jot it down and tell yourself, "Not now. I'll get to you at six." It sounds almost too simple, but it works: you're teaching your brain that the worry will be heard, so it stops sounding the alarm every five minutes. Most of what you write down won't even feel urgent by the time your window arrives.

4 Drop one rope

Over-functioners hold a hundred ropes at once: every task, every feeling in the room, every outcome. You don't have to drop them all. Just one. This week, pick a single thing you've been gripping out of habit or guilt and let it go: the text that can wait, the "yes" you don't have to say, the standard no one asked you to meet. A boundary isn't selfish. It's how you stay whole enough to be there for what actually matters. Notice that the world keeps turning. It will.

5 Reach toward one person

Here's the quiet cost of holding it all together: it isolates you. When you're always the strong one, people stop knowing how to show up for you, and you stop letting them. The antidote isn't a grand vulnerability moment. It's one small, honest reach: a text that says "rough week, can we talk?" or simply "thinking of you." Connection is a nervous-system regulator too, maybe the most powerful one we have. You were never meant to do this alone, and you don't have to.

A gentle next step

If you read this and thought "this is me," I want you to know it doesn't have to stay this way, and you don't have to figure it out by yourself.

I'm Natalie. I'm a therapist and coach, and I help high-achievers quiet the anxiety no one can see, and start feeling like themselves again. If you'd like to talk, I offer a free, no-pressure 15-minute consult. No pitch. Just a real conversation to see if we're a fit.

Let's talk. It's free.

Book your 15-minute consult at thecoachnatalie.com

Come say hi on Instagram @thecoachnatalie

You hold so much for everyone else. Let's make a little room for you.

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