



# Dealing With Scary Thoughts

By Dr. Linda Hancock

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

## Published

July 9th, 2018

In June I was on a holiday in the Maritimes. Part of the trip involved me driving from Charlottetown Prince Edward Island to Halifax Nova Scotia. Suddenly negative thoughts seemed to be coming from nowhere. I found myself thinking "What on earth are you doing, Hancock? You are in a province that you have never been in, driving on a road that you don't know in a rental vehicle. Are you crazy?"

Immediately I could feel stress in my body and knew that I had to do something quickly in order to not be at risk. There were some very specific things that helped that might be implemented when you are in a similar difficulty:

1. Stop the negative - Do not escalate the situation by repeating negative messages that just cause distraction and stress.
2. Think about past successes - I started saying things to myself like "You have had a driver's license for several decades without having an accident. You drove through the mountains in Idaho on your own without problems." These are called affirmations and should be implemented to remind you that you have the experience necessary to succeed again.
3. Focus on the present - I started thinking about what I could do to be safe in the moment. These included things like staying within the speed limit, practicing the defensive driving techniques that I have learned and making sure that I was paying attention to my surroundings.
4. Use available resources - Road signs were not very helpful because I really didn't know the area or the cities that I needs to go through in these provinces. However, the exit signs allowed me the option of pulling off the main highway in order to calm down and make a plan. Also, my GPS is much wiser than I am and when I trusted it, by following its directions I usually did well. When I thought that I knew better, I was pleased to realize that GPS is very forgiving and recalibrates so that it can adjust for deviations.
5. Do some self-care - Taking a deep breath is all that is needed to relax the body. Having an open bottle of water allows a few sips that will replenish the body.
6. Eliminate distractions - Turn the radio off! Having additional noise in the environment can subconsciously interfere with focus even if you think it is soothing.
7. Celebrate - Success breeds success. When you have accomplished a difficult task, allow yourself to feel good about it and store the memory so that you have confidence for future endeavors.
8. Re-evaluate - Several days after the driving incident I suddenly realized what had started the whole chain of negative thoughts. I am not used to roundabouts and remember that a few years ago when I was in England with my daughter she had spent considerable time studying videos about how to properly navigate them. I had not studied them so let myself become intimidated by the thought of going through one without familiarity or preparation. I just didn't expect that I would be facing roundabouts in the Maritimes and let the thought of them stress me unnecessarily.

Sometimes we have reactions to cues that we don't see. When this happens, though, just follow the formula above and within minutes you will be back to your capable self!