

Recall past successes

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My daughter was acting uncharacteristically jumpy and frenetic. It was confusing and annoying until I asked her what was really going on. She started to cry and admitted she was feeling very nervous. The following day she would be performing her first-ever solo in front of all her fifth grade peers (to be followed by an all-school performance a few days later, and then an evening concert for parents).

In a rare moment of quick-thinking parenting brilliance, I encouraged her to remember other times she had been nervous and had succeeded. We talked about her Shark Tank experience at school earlier this year. "But I didn't win." "No, but you got a lot of compliments on your speech, right?" "Yes."

Then we talked about her presentation on Louisa May Alcott, which she had worked hard on, rehearsed several times and delivered with great success.

And even getting selected for a solo was a big deal. She thought she had bombed the audition, but she ended up being the only one selected to perform by herself!

In just a few minutes, she felt reassured. Not by me saying, "You'll do great!" but instead by recalling other times she had been successful. She went to bed a few minutes later and fell asleep instead of tossing and turning.

This is a strategy that works very well in a variety of situations, and I need to remember it more often in my own life:

- I often get nervous before initial sales calls and follow-up calls on proposals I've sent. I will be much more confident if I recall other sales conversations that went well.
- Even though I love speaking to audiences more than anything else, I still sometimes feel anxious before I get started. "What if they don't like me? What if they don't laugh at my jokes?" Remembering other speeches that went well can help bolster my confidence and remind me that no matter how this speech goes, there are people out there who have been positively impacted by me. And then I'm more relaxed - and subsequently the talk goes better.
- This strategy might work for other emotions as well... I've recently been feeling hurt by some people not responding to my texts or Facebook messages. The lack of response made me fear they're mad at me. I started to get offended, but then I looked for proof that those individuals like me just fine and are in my corner. Recalling examples of times they did respond or times they liked or shared my posts made me feel reassured and kept me from sending desperate "Are you mad at me?" messages.

Facing something scary? Feeling out of sync? Look for positive proof. Recall past successes.