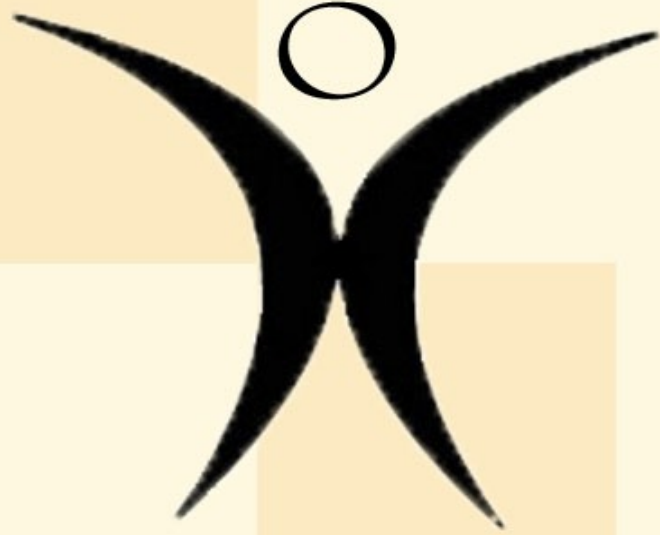


INTRODUCTION TO
THE
NICOLA
METHOD
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BY JOANNA NICOLA

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INTRODUCTION TO THE NICOLA METHOD

Welcome to the Nicola Method. This introductory guide is for anyone who would like to know a little more about how the Nicola Method works to stop high conflict. This method was originally developed to give partners of high-conflict women emotion-lowering techniques they could use to stop their partner's negative behavior patterns.

Along with a behind-the-scenes look at how the method works, you will be given instructions and demonstrations on how to use the basic tools in real-life scenarios. This will allow you to try out some of the tools in situations with other people before you try the full method out with your partner. You may want to overcome difficulties with a co-worker whose behavior causes you to feel uncomfortable. You might want to try it out with an extended family member who you feel acts inappropriately with you. Some people have a parent or in-law who they have difficulty with. You can also use the tools in this guide to help an upset friend get back into emotional balance when they are upset with someone. The language you will use will let you do all of this without the other person knowing that you are the one that lowered the conflict.

The first area you will need to learn about in order to understand the Nicola Method is how emotional regulation works. This is a method that allows you to naturally regulate other people's emotions.

NATURAL EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Emotional regulation is a complex word for a very simple and natural neurological process. It is the process of lowering emotions by calming ourselves down when our emotions are too strong. This is a process that we use every day without even thinking about it. We may calm ourselves down or hype ourselves up, depending on where our thoughts are focused. Most of the time we aren't even aware of the process of emotional regulation.

The Nicola Method teaches you how to help someone who is in a high-emotion state bring their emotions back down into a calm state. This can be very hard to do when someone is angry at you. Yet this is exactly what you need to do to lower the conflict. The Nicola Method will provide you with language that has been developed to help you get past the natural defenses that people tend to use to protect themselves from getting hurt. These defenses usually present themselves in the form of anger which is what causes the conflict.

THE USE OF LANGUAGE TO LOWER CONFLICT

The Nicola Method uses a special kind of phrase. When said at certain times, it will lower the conflict. These phrases have been developed to allow you to change the emotional state of a person who is upset with you. Some of the phrases work with simple neurology. They take advantage of the fact that we use different parts of our brain for emotional processes than we do for cognitive or thinking processes.

These phrases, in a very subtle way, direct an upset person to think about things from a very specific perspective. When their focus shifts to that perspective, they move naturally from an emotional or feeling state of mind into a cognitive or thinking state of mind where emotions are naturally low. This process breaks them out of the emotional loop that people tend to get stuck in when their emotions are out of balance.

Another kind of phrase that the Nicola Method uses is based on simple psychology. You may have heard of the word “trigger” used to describe circumstances which set people off, putting them into a high-emotion state of mind that they are unable to move out of.

The Nicola Method teaches you what could be referred to as positive triggers. These are phrases that can lower the emotions by reversing the upset that a negative trigger causes. They work by offering an upset person a different interpretation of their situation that makes them feel better about their problem. Many people naturally know how to use positive triggers to help calm down a friend, but the Nicola Method gives you language that can lower the emotions of people who may temporarily be seeing you as their enemy.

Another type of phrase that the Nicola Method uses is also based on psychology. This type of phrase can be used when a person is only pretending to be highly emotional in order to make you feel bad about yourself or to get you to do something that is in their interest but not in yours. This third type of phrase allows you to direct the person to the weak link in their attempt to make you feel bad so their justification falls apart without them knowing it was you that pointed it out.

All of these phrases have been developed to either go around defenses or deactivate them. The result will be that the emotion surrounding a conflict situation will drop away, and the person you are using the method with will find themselves no longer wanting to interact in a negative way with you.

Now that you know a little bit about the mechanics behind the method, it's time to get started with your first tool for lowering conflict.

Tool 1:

THE ANGER-REGULATION SENTENCE

We are going to begin with a very simple phrase that is used in all of the different applications of the Nicola Method. It is a useful phrase to start with because all you need to do is memorize it and say it calmly when you notice someone is acting more upset than you think the situation calls for. The sentence will do the work for you. It is a sentence based on neurology that redirects a person to a state of mind where thoughts become very strong and emotions become naturally lower.

This is a very difficult state of mind for a person who is stuck in a loop of high emotion to reach by themselves. In order to lower their emotion, you will be given a phrase to use that will lift the person out of their high-emotion state by giving them a mental boost into a different state of mind. When the person takes the subtle suggestion you give them and changes the focus of their thoughts, they will shift into a certain cognitive or thinking state of mind where emotions naturally become lower. By using this sentence you will be doing what we will refer to as regulating

another person's emotions. Speaking scientifically, they will actually be regulating their own emotions, but you are the one giving them the boost they need to get there.

Here is the phrase you can use with anyone who seems more angry at you than you believe the situation requires. It is called the anger-regulation sentence because it regulates or calms the emotion of anger. You will need to memorize this sentence because it has a certain construction that allows it to work. You will find that the sentence itself does not sound mysterious at all. It is constructed to come across as a casual comment that doesn't attract any special attention. Here is the emotion-lowering tool that we will be calling the anger-regulation sentence:

“When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.”

Your instruction for the use of the anger-regulation sentence is as follows: When you notice someone is out of balance emotionally or more upset with you than the situation calls for, simply state it as though it were a casual observation. The sentence will do the work for you and after they pause to think about what you did wrong, you will notice the person you said it to will become less emotional.

Here is the sentence again, just so you can get used to the way it is constructed:

“When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.”

This is the most powerful tool of the Nicola Method, yet it can be the easiest to use. Let's take a look at a real-life scenario and the results you might expect when you use the anger-regulation sentence.

* * * * *

THEM: This place is a mess. I can't believe it. What's wrong with you? Don't you even know how to clean up after yourself?

YOU: When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.

THEM: It's not that you did anything wrong, it's just that I can't stand seeing the house a wreck in the morning.

* * * * *

THEM: I can't believe you went this way. This traffic is a mess. I would never have gone this way if I was driving.

YOU: When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.

THEM: I know it's not your fault. I just hate traffic jams.

* * * * *

THEM: Oh, great. Now we are going to be late. I can't believe it takes you this long just to get ready for work.

YOU: When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.

THEM: You didn't. I am just mad because I am going to hit the coffee line rush. It totally ruins my day when I can't get started with my work before 8:00.

* * * * *

You will notice that the person in this scenario is not acting angry anymore. You may not see an apology given, but you will get the sense that they are ready to drop the subject. This is how you will know that the person's emotions have lowered.

You may have the occasional experience of the person responding to the anger-regulation sentence by saying that you, in fact, did do something wrong. When this happens it doesn't mean that the sentence did not work. It is healthy and appropriate for people to bring up issues, as long as they do it in a respectful way. There will be occasional times when the person will want to talk about something they feel you did wrong after you use the anger-regulation sentence. As long as they have moved into a low-conflict state, you will find you can talk with them about it without conflict. However, If during the discussion the person gets upset again, you can simply repeat the sentence to lower their conflict and then proceed until you both reach a comfortable understanding.

NON-VERBAL ANGER AND THE ANGER-REGULATION SENTENCE

One of the most difficult challenges in resolving conflict is that sometimes the person who is upset with you doesn't tell you directly. Instead they show you through symbolic body language and words that have hidden meanings behind them. This kind of communicating causes you to feel negatively judged but doesn't give you a way to defend yourself or even find out what you might have done wrong.

The anger regulation sentence works just as well for hidden anger as it does with verbal anger. You can use the anger-regulation sentence for someone who shakes their head, slams a door, raises their eyebrows, folds their arms, rolls their eyes, leaves the room, starts doing another activity while you are talking, or does anything that leads you to believe they might be angry but aren't telling you. Let's take a look at how this phrase can work to lower the emotion of hidden anger.

Instead of saying:

“When you **said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.”**

You can say:

“When you **did that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.”**

Here are a few examples:

* * * * *

(For a slammed door)

YOU: When you did that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.

THEM: You didn't do anything wrong. I'm just having a really bad day.

* * * * *

(For leaving the room)

YOU: When you did that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.

THEM: I guess I am just feeling like you're off in your own world. I wish you would spend some time with me.

* * * * *

By now you might be wondering what is happening in the mind of the person when you shift them into a low-emotion state. They will experience a transition as they think about this new question. They will feel a mental shift and see things more clearly. Usually this is followed by an impulse to tell you what was really bothering them. You will notice that their focus shifts from you being a bad person to what they are feeling or thinking.

As you get more practice in using these phrases you may want to write the sentence on a piece of paper and ask a friend or close family member to try it on you sometime if they notice you seem angry. Because this tool is based purely on neurology, it will work even if you know someone is using it with you. You will be able to experience for yourself this cognitive shift followed by a clearer understanding of what is upsetting you. In fact, if you are angry or upset at someone you can regulate your own emotions by simply asking yourself what it was that the other person did wrong and why you think it was wrong.

WHAT TO DO IF THEY DON'T LISTEN

If the upset person ignores the anger-regulation sentence, you simply need to repeat it. It doesn't need to be exactly the same the second or third time. Your objective is to get them to focus on what you might have been doing wrong.

Here are a few examples of how to get a person to focus on the anger-regulation sentence in case they ignore it the first time you say it.

* * * * *

YOU: When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something

wrong.

THEM: That's just your opinion.

YOU: But it really does seem like you thought I did something wrong.

* * * * *

YOU: When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.

THEM: Why do you always have to argue with me?

YOU: I was just saying that it seems like you think I did something wrong.

* * * * *

YOU: When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.

THEM: I don't know what you are talking about.

YOU: Are you saying you weren't thinking that I did something wrong?

* * * * *

When they calmly let you know what is behind the anger or what they are really feeling, this will be the signal to you that you have gotten under their defenses. Usually they will let you know what was making them more upset than the situation called for, and you can casually drop the subject and move on to something else. Often when the emotion recedes, the perception of the issue as a problem fades away as well, and you will not need to talk about what they didn't like about your behavior at all.

Sometimes people that are upset with you may seem out of balance emotionally, but they are actually perfectly in control. This happens when you really have done something you shouldn't have done and the person's anger is valid, in other words, the emotion is in balance with the situation. When an individual really has done something wrong to someone else, that person can be quite angry but still remain in emotional balance and think perfectly clearly. Therefore they would not need to have their emotions regulated. Hopefully in this situation you can do your best to clear up your part in the situation.

WHY THE ANGER-REGULATION SENTENCE WORKS

At this point you may be wondering how this one sentence can lower any kind of anger or upset. After all, every situation is different, so how could you possibly know what is upsetting another person. The reason that the anger-regulation always works to give an upset person the words behind their feelings is that every time you or anyone else gets angry at another person, there is always a belief that the other person did something wrong. Not only that, but there is also a belief that the other person knew it was wrong and did it anyway.

You can test this fundamental observation about conflict out yourself by thinking of times you were angry at someone and asking yourself if you thought they did something wrong, knew it was wrong and did it anyway. You will find that this piece of insider knowledge about the mechanics of anger, along with the use of the anger-regulation sentence, gives you a key that you can use to unlock the defenses of any angry person.

You are now going to learn another use of the anger-regulation sentence to lower the emotion of another person. With a one-word modification, you can use the anger-regulation sentence to lower the emotions of someone who is angry at someone else, a third person.

Let's take a look at how to use the anger-regulation sentence to lower someone's anger at a person who is not present:

THIRD PERSON ANGER-REGULATION SENTENCE

If someone is angry at another person, you can regulate or calm down their emotions towards the other person by switching up a word in the anger-regulation

sentence. You can simply substitute the name of the person they are angry at in the place of your name, or the word “I”. Here is the classic anger-regulation sentence followed by the third-person use of the anger-regulation sentence so you can compare the two.

“When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.”

“When you said that it seemed like you thought Jane did something wrong.”

When you casually suggest that the upset person might think about why what Jane did was wrong, this will regulate the person's anger at Jane. The suggestion built into this phrase will give them a boost out of the high emotions and into a cognitive or thinking state.

Once they make the transition they will realize what is really behind the anger at Jane and they will probably let you know what that is. This version of the anger-regulation sentence is a very useful tool to help people out of a repetitive cycle of continually getting upset at someone in their life but never taking steps to resolve the situation.

You will find that it is painful for people whose emotions are high to be told how to resolve their problems. However, it feels very good to them when you lower the emotions for them so they can figure it out for themselves. Once you use the anger-regulation sentence to get behind the defenses and to the real issue, you will notice that you can now talk to them in a more meaningful way. Often just being able to express their feelings behind the anger is enough for them to resolve their uncomfortable feelings without needing to take any further action.

Let's see how this version of the anger-regulation sentence plays out in real life:

* * * * *

THEM: I hate Jane. I can't believe she went to Tahoe with Suzie instead of me.

YOU: When you said it seemed like you thought Jane did something

wrong.

THEM: Maybe it wasn't wrong, but it really, really hurt my feelings.

* * * * *

There is one more use of the anger-regulation sentence that we haven't yet covered. It requires another change to the original sentence that will vary according to the nature of the put-down. This will be your second tool, and it will work to stop all of the put-downs, insults, manipulative or disrespectful behaviors from anyone you may encounter. To make it easy to remember it will be called the put-down sentence. You can use it with anyone who you sense may be trying to put you down.

Tool No. 2:

THE PUT-DOWN SENTENCE

Any time someone insults you or tries to manipulate you, you will be able to use a modification of the classic anger-regulation sentence you learned in the last section to get them to take back their insult or to clarify their true intentions behind any questionable behavior.

To make the put-down sentence work, you will use the classic anger-regulation sentence but with a twist. You will add a new ending to the sentence depending on what you think the person is insulting you about. The rest of the sentence will be the same to make sure that the person still thinks you are just making a casual observation.

The put-down sentence allows you to stop the negative behavior of a person who is only pretending to have strong emotions or is purposefully pumping their emotions up in order to get you to feel bad about yourself. Because the person is only pretending to be emotional, you will not be regulating this person's emotions. What you will be doing is directing them to the flaw in their argument that suggests you should feel bad about yourself. There is always a hidden flaw in one person trying to make another person feel less worthy, and the phrase you will use is an easy way to point it out without any confrontation. Here is how it works:

* * * * *

“When you said that it seemed like you thought (I didn't care).”

“When you said that it seemed like you thought (I wasn't going to keep my word).”

“When you said that it seemed like you thought (I was going to be late).”

* * * * *

Every time someone insults you, you are going add whatever you think the

person might be implying to the end of the sentence. Here is what you might expect when you use the put-down sentence to stop an insult:

* * * * *

THEM: What's the matter with you? I told you to do that ten minutes ago.

YOU: When you said that it seemed like you thought I didn't care.

THEM: (Pause) It's not that I don't think you care. I'm just in a really bad mood because my mom said she couldn't watch the kids and I had to cancel my nail appointment again.

* * * * *

THEM: I can never count on you for anything.

YOU: When you said that it seemed like you thought I wasn't going to keep my word.

THEM: (Pause) Well, last time I asked you to do it you didn't, and that made me really angry and that's why I said that.

* * * * *

THEM: It's completely impossible to try to get anywhere on time with you.

YOU: When you said that it seemed like you thought I was going to make you late.

THEM: (Pause) I know you weren't going to make us late, but you know how nervous I get when we don't get to places early.

* * * * *

Because this sentence is so useful in deflecting all kinds of attacks on your character, you can use it with anyone. However, when you use the put-down sentence with people who you have a more formal relationship with, you may want to add some words to the front to be more polite. You don't want to offend them, just move them to a different neurological state without them knowing you were the

one that did it. Here are some words you can tack onto the front of the sentence when talking to people you have a more formal relationship with:

I may be taking this way too seriously, but...
I may be jumping to conclusions, but...
I may be misreading things, but...
I may be being oversensitive, but...

Then the middle of the sentence will remain the same:

“I may be taking this way too seriously, but when you said that it seemed like you thought...”

Then you will use whatever you think that person might be insinuating. Here is an example of using the put-down sentence with an insulting coworker:

* * * * *

“I may be taking this too personally, but when you said that it seemed like you thought I didn't have enough skills for the job.”

* * * * *

When people insult you, they are usually too embarrassed to say what they are insinuating directly to your face. When you call their bluff and suggest the possibility that they say it directly, they will back down from their insult. Here are a few more real-life scenarios that let you understand how to use the put-down sentence to stop insults:

* * * * *

“I may be misreading things, but when you said that it seemed like you were thinking I might not be able to meet the deadline.”

“I may be jumping to conclusions, but when you said that it seemed like you were thinking I was not as competent as I need to be to get the job done.”

* * * * *

One more interesting function of the put-down sentence is it works equally well whether someone is really insulting you or if you were misreading them and they

weren't insulting you after all. The put-down sentence will still work, but just in a different way. This makes it safe to use the sentence any time you even suspect someone is not treating you in the way you feel you should be treated.

If the person really was insulting you, using the put-down sentence will call their bluff and they will back off or take back the insult. But if the person wasn't really trying to insult you, instead of making them back off of an insult, the put-down sentence gives them the permission they need to say what they were trying to get across but might have not have been successfully communicating to you.

We will use the same scenario we did a moment ago, but this time imagine that the person wasn't really trying to insult you:

* * * * *

YOU: I may be taking this too personally, but when you said that it seemed like you didn't think I had enough skills for the job.

THEM: I'm glad you brought that up. I just didn't know how to say this without you thinking I am a jerk. You may not have done this kind of project before, but there is one step we always take, and I'm worried that if we don't we won't get the results we need. Do you mind if I suggest a small thing that we might want to include?

* * * * *

Here is another scenario where the insulter wasn't insulting after all. You can see how this sentence helps clear the communication. In this scenario, you can imagine your parent just heard all about your exciting plans to purchase your first house:

* * * * *

THEM: Are you sure that buying that house is a good idea?

YOU: When you said that it seemed like you didn't think I was responsible enough to handle it.

THEM: Oh, no, not at all. I am very confident in your ability to be responsible. I just didn't want to rain on your parade since it's really exciting news. I hope you don't think this is butting in, but the payment on the loan you are about to sign up for is going to go through the roof at

the same time Raymond gets into college.

* * * * *

When you tack on the formality words at the beginning of the put-down sentence such as, "I may be taking this too personally," or, "I may be completely misreading things," sometimes people try to sneak out of taking back the insult. Here is a good way to keep people from backing out of having to take back something inappropriate that they were implying:

* * * * *

YOU: I may be taking things too personally, but when you said that it seemed like you didn't think my cooking was very good.

THEM: Oh, yes, you sure did take that too personally. I don't know why you always do that.

YOU: I thought I may have. Can I ask you what you really meant?

* * * * *

Asking what they really meant keeps your insulter from wiggling out of the take-back. You will find very quickly that when people who chronically insult others find that they can't get away with their underhanded tactics, they will stop using them. When you use the method to stop people's defensive negative behavior, you are not only protecting yourself, but you are also giving them the opportunity to develop good habits.

Here is a put-down sentence that can be used when a parent is trying to make you feel guilty:

* * * * *

"I may not be reading things right, but when you said that it seemed like you thought I was not being a good son."

* * * * *

You can use this put-down sentence for people who have put-downs for your parenting skills.

* * * * *

"I may not be reading you right, but when you said that it seemed like you thought I was not being a good father."

* * * * *

These sentences work very well on rude teenagers. If you don't need to worry about offending, there is no need for formality words in the beginning of the put-down sentence.

"When you said that it seemed like you thought I wasn't being a good parent."

* * * * *

Here are a few more put-down sentence variations that are helpful to use for insults from close family members:

* * * * *

"I may be reading too much into this, but when you said that it seemed like you thought I wasn't smart enough."

"I may be taking this too personally, but when you said that it seemed like you thought I wasn't good enough."

"I may be mis-reading you, but when you said that it seemed like you thought I wasn't capable enough."

* * * * *

You may need to be a little careful when you are using the put-down sentence with people that you can't afford to offend. It can be easy to mix up the wording and this can lead to an occasional misfire, although you can usually do some fancy back-stepping and apologize your way out of it.

When approaching a supervisor it may be wise to only use one version of the put-down sentence unless your boss is chronically insulting you. You can always use the classic version of the anger-regulation sentence, "When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong," with a boss or with anyone without worrying about offending. If you want to use the put-down sentence with a supervisor there is a safe modification you can use if you feel like they have

insulted you:

* * * * *

“I may be misreading this, but when you said that it seemed like you thought I might have done something incorrectly.”

* * * * *

With practice, you will become very good at disarming almost anyone who tries to insult you with the put-down sentence variations. This tool in a roundabout way actually teaches people to use words to communicate respectfully instead of using anger or underhanded insinuations. It also allows you as the messenger to deliver this message without getting blamed for it.

REVIEW OF THE TOOLS

Let's go through a quick review to make sure you have a good understanding of the tools before you try them out.

THE ANGER-REGULATION SENTENCE

“When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.”

Use this sentence any time you sense someone is more angry at you than you think the situation calls for.

You can regulate someone's anger at someone else by changing the “I” in the classic anger-regulation to the person's name. It looks like this:

“When you said that it seemed like you thought (John) did something wrong.”

If the person ignores the sentence, just casually repeat it. You can change the words the second or third time. Just get them to think about what you did wrong. If anyone ever wants to know why you use that sentence so much, be sure to tell them that it is very important that you know when you have done something wrong. That is a stance that is hard to argue with. Stick to this argument and you will always have this sentence available to regulate others' emotions.

THE PUT-DOWN SENTENCE

Your second tool is the put-down sentence. Use this sentence when anyone puts you down or seems to be trying to make you feel bad. Here are a few examples:

“When you said that it seemed like you thought I couldn't handle the responsibility.”

Or it might be:

“When you said that it seemed like you thought I was being selfish.”

Try to figure out what the hidden insult is, and put words to it. This one tool works with two kinds of situations. The put-down sentence works to regulate the emotions of people who are out of emotional balance and saying things they don't mean. For those people who are trying to make you feel bad on purpose, it will stop their underhanded tactics and force them to state their insult to your face. Most people who regularly insult others are not brave enough to stand behind their insults and they will quickly back off.

You now have access to all of the tools you need to navigate through the daily conflict that most people encounter in their lives. With the tools you have learned so far you can even change your relationship with people who you have a hard time getting along with and you will be able to feel more comfortable around them. However, if you have a partner who you feel fits the description of a high-conflict woman, a partner who you feel is regularly out of balance emotionally and chronically much more upset at you than you believe the situation calls for, you may want to take the next step in learning the Nicola Method.

YOUR NEXT STEP

The Nicola Method for high-conflict women has been designed to allow you to not only stop your partner's negative behaviors but also provides a way for you to rehabilitate your partner over time so she gets over her relationship insecurity and gains the trust that is necessary for any low-conflict relationship.

You can learn the full Nicola Method for high-conflict women which includes all of the tools and instructions for rehabilitating your partner through Skype or phone consultation sessions. You also have the option of learning the full method through the use of a self-help workbook that is available on the Nicola Method website.

Initial 15-minute consultations are free, so you are welcome to call me at (510)778-1580 or to e-mail me at NicolaMethod@gmail.com if you have any questions or concerns about the method and how it can work for your situation. Thank you for reading the Introduction to the Nicola Method, and I look forward to hearing from you!



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