



COST ACTION CA22104
Behavioral Next Generation in Wireless
Networks for Cyber Security
(BEING-WISE)

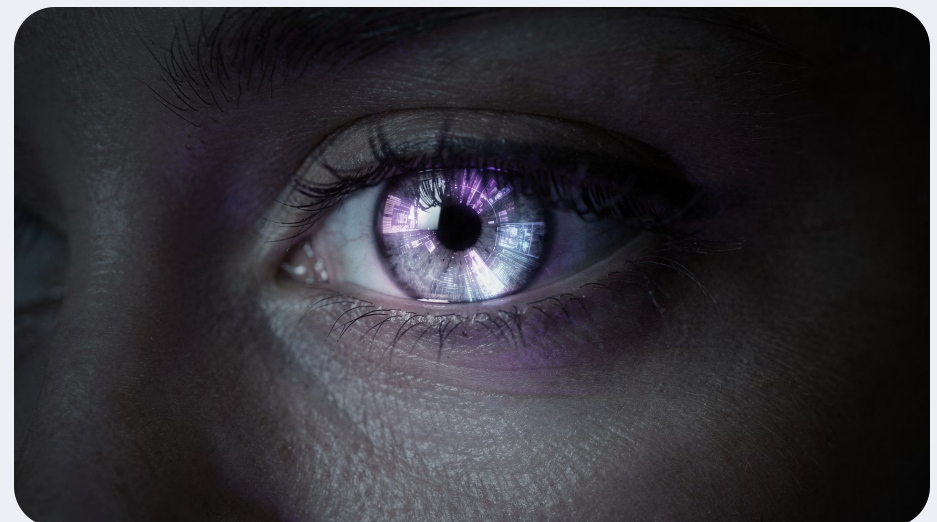


This educational material is based upon work from COST Action BEING-WISE CA22104, supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology). COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) is a funding agency for research and innovation networks. Our Actions help connect research initiatives across Europe and enable scientists to grow their ideas by sharing them with their peers. This boosts their research, career and innovation.
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BEING-WISER AWARENESS SERIES

Your brain thinks you're in danger. But are you?

Sometimes the scariest threats online aren't the real ones. Keep scrolling to find out why and how to tell the difference.



WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

By the end of this, you'll see online risk differently.

01

Understand perceived vs. actual risk

Learn why what you feel isn't always what's real

02

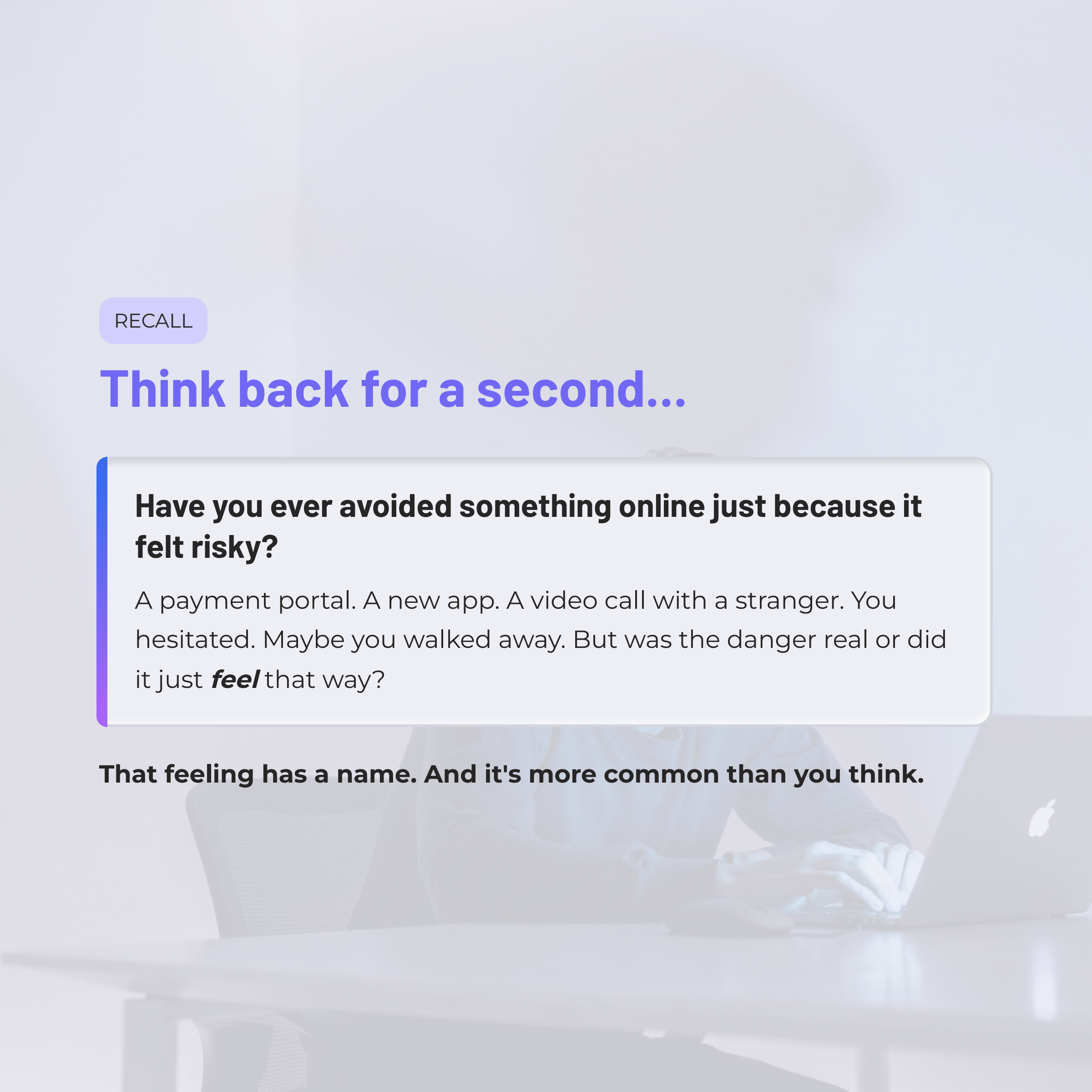
Spot emotional amplification

See how fear, media, and culture distort your threat radar

03

Make smarter, calmer decisions

Build calibrated judgment; not paranoia, not blind trust

A blurred background image of a person sitting at a desk, working on a laptop. The person is wearing a light-colored shirt and is looking down at the laptop. The desk is dark, and the laptop is silver with the Apple logo visible. The overall tone is professional and focused.

RECALL

Think back for a second...

Have you ever avoided something online just because it felt risky?

A payment portal. A new app. A video call with a stranger. You hesitated. Maybe you walked away. But was the danger real or did it just ***feel*** that way?

That feeling has a name. And it's more common than you think.

⚠ CORE CONCEPT

Meet False Vulnerability

"False vulnerability is when your **sense of danger** is much higher than your **actual level of risk** and it changes how you behave online."

You feel exposed

Even when systems are secure and risk is low

You pull back

Avoiding tools that could actually help you

You focus wrong

Worrying about unlikely threats, missing real ones

THE SCIENCE BEHIND IT

Risk gets magnified by more than facts.

Your perception of online danger is shaped by forces that have nothing to do with actual threat levels.



Fear

Amplifies awareness — but can warp your judgment



Distrust

Uncertainty makes even safe things feel threatening



Media framing

Headlines make rare events feel everyday and inevitable



Cultural mindset

How your community talks about risk shapes how you feel it

EMOTIONAL AMPLIFICATION

Fear is useful until it distorts the picture.

Fear that protects

You notice a suspicious link. You pause. You check. You stay safe. Fear did its job.

Fear that distorts

You avoid all online banking. You refuse video calls. You delete helpful apps. The threat wasn't there but fear decided for you.

- 📄 Research shows strong fear can motivate protection but also cause **avoidance, fatalism, and poor decisions.**



FELT VS. REAL

Your shadow looks bigger than you are.

Perceived vulnerability $\neq$ actual vulnerability. The gap between what you *feel* and what *is* can be enormous and that gap drives real behavior.

%

More likely to avoid

People who feel highly vulnerable are far more likely to avoid digital tools even safe ones

$\neq$

Feeling $\neq$ Risk

Higher perceived vulnerability does **not** predict higher actual threat

Let's test your instincts.

The Scenario

Maya gets an email from her bank saying her password is expiring. The email looks official. She's heard about phishing. She feels **terrified** so she ignores all bank emails for the next month, including one about a real fraud alert on her account.

A

Maya made the smart call avoiding suspicious emails is always right

B

Maya's fear was reasonable but her *response* made her less safe, not more

C

Maya's bank should stop sending emails entirely

ANSWER + INSIGHT

It's B, and here's why it matters.

Maya's fear was understandable. But blanket avoidance based on emotional overwhelm **increased her real risk**. Calibrated thinking, not paranoia, not dismissal, is the goal.



Pause before reacting

Take a breath. Fear is a signal, not an instruction.



Ask: what's the actual evidence?

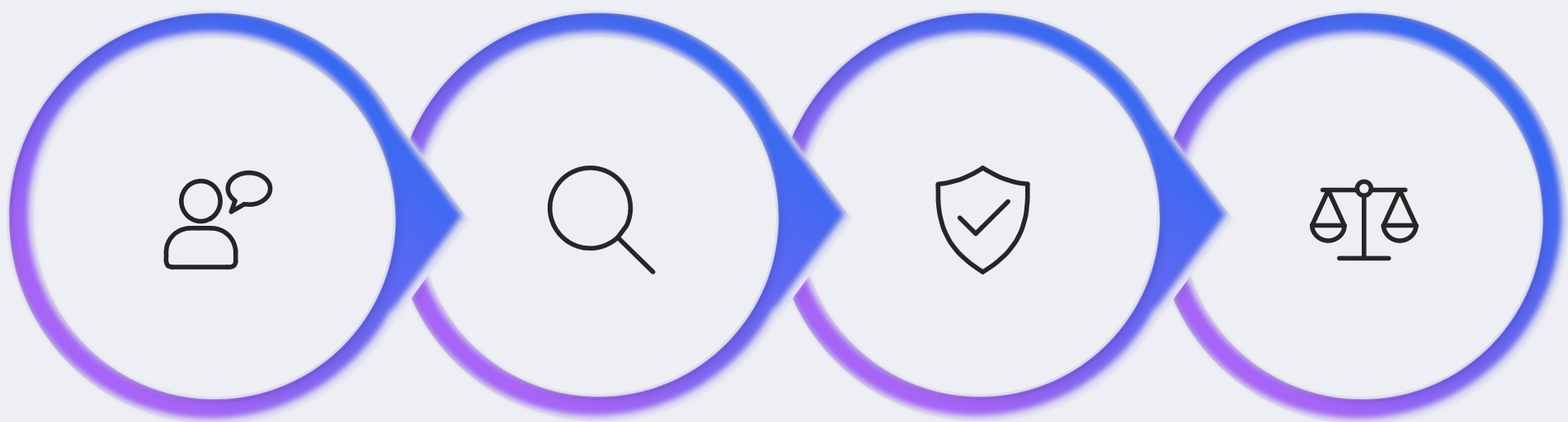
Separate the feeling from the facts in front of you.



Use a second check

Log in to your bank directly (not via any link) to verify what's real.

How to assess risk more clearly



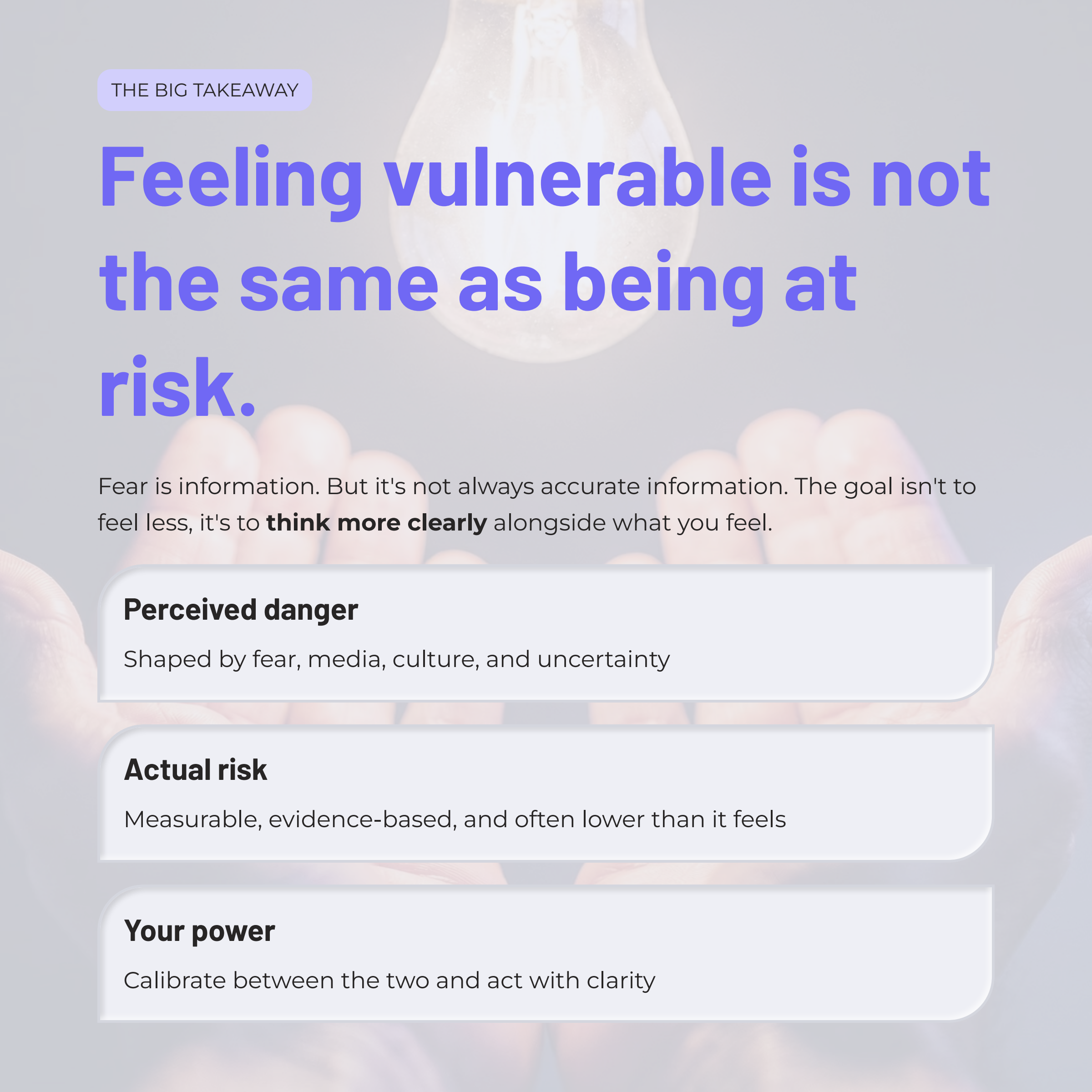
Name fear

Find evidence

Check source

**Choose
response**

This four-step habit takes less than 60 seconds and can prevent both overreaction and dangerous naivety. Better cybersecurity decisions require calibrated judgment, not maximum anxiety.



THE BIG TAKEAWAY

Feeling vulnerable is not the same as being at risk.

Fear is information. But it's not always accurate information. The goal isn't to feel less, it's to **think more clearly** alongside what you feel.

Perceived danger

Shaped by fear, media, culture, and uncertainty

Actual risk

Measurable, evidence-based, and often lower than it feels

Your power

Calibrate between the two and act with clarity