

A SIMPLE HOME REMEDY FOR FEARS

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In many cases, when you have a specific kind of fear or anxiety, such as test anxiety or speech anxiety, a crucially important part of the fear is a wish to avoid or escape from the feared situation. As long as the wish persists, reciprocally the fear will persist. If you can persuade yourself to experience the fear without trying to avoid it, the vicious circle of fear leading to the escape urge, leading to more fear, can be unwound. (The footsteps that follow you past the cemetery in the dark become louder and more menacing the more you hurry. Only when you stop and permit them to approach do they disappear.)

The home remedy for fear is simply to experience the fear, deliberately and as fully as possible. The technique is probably more efficient if you have a sympathetic friend present so you can verbalise and act out the fear. Think about the feared situation or object. Imagine that you are in the feared situation, or actually put yourself in the feared situation. In some cases it may be easiest to do this in progressive stages. As you do so, do not attend primarily to the feared situation or to the wish to escape the situation. Concentrate on the fear itself. Attend as actively as you can and experience as fully as you can the unpleasant emotions and all the concomitant bodily sensations that are aroused. If it is appropriate, go on to imagine all the undesirable consequences of being in the feared situation, the failure and loss of self-esteem that will result, and the ensuing scorn, ridicule, and rejection by friends, parents, and others.

Take for example an agoraphobic person, say one who cannot walk from home to his/her place of work alone. He/She might begin by going to the foot of his/her front-door step, where he/she experiences all the fear possible there. When he/she has tried and tried to feel all the fear possible, and becomes so bored by it that he/she cannot feel more, then he/she advances, say, 25 yards or so down the side-walk, or until the fear is rekindled. There again he/she is to stand still and experience his/her emotions, and so on.

It is very important for you to understand that the aim of the exercise is to experience the fears and all the bodily sensations that always accompany them, and not simply to achieve such-and-such a distance, or such-and-such a contact. One often meets people, particularly people with phobias of situations rather than objects (situations are less easily avoided), who say they *can* do so-and-so if they have to; but the mere doing of it does not at all reduce the phobic abhorrence the next time. Facing a feared situation by sheer willpower is possible in many cases, but this does nothing to reduce the fear. For successful fear reduction, full attention to and experience of the internal unpleasantness is essential.

In some cases where it is more convenient to imagine the feared situation, it may be necessary to repeat the treatment a number of times. Say you are suffering from text anxiety and you use this method to reduce the fear. You may do so at a time when you are not faced with a test. As the date of an actual examination

approaches, you may begin to experience some fear. Do two things. First, every time you feel a little wave of spontaneous alarm, **do not** push it aside; **do** enhance it, augment it, try to experience it more profoundly and more vividly. Second, if you do not spontaneously feel fear, make a special, deliberate effort to try to do so two or three or six times a day, no matter how difficult or ludicrous this might seem.

This technique works best with specific fears, the more specific the fear, the more effective the technique. It works best if there is a sympathetic friend present, to whom you can describe your sensations as you experience your fear. Like most good home remedies, it sometimes doesn't work at all, but it can cause little harm, and sometimes it works amazingly well.

