

Strategies for phobia treatment



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“ Being frightened is an experience you can’t buy.” Said by Anthony Price, quoting a good example for phobias. Phobias can be defined as the fear of something or something that give high levels of anxiety to someone. There are countless ways to gain a phobia, such as getting bit by a dog or near drowning. In this essay, I will discuss a few different ways to obtain a phobia and what they might cause to your body and mind.

Classical condition is something that can cause nearly everyone to have a phobia. Let’s take spiders for instance, most people in this world have a huge fear for spiders because they believe every spider is poisonous or know some are, this fear was imbedded into almost everyone from seeing and hearing negative things about spiders, it isn’t until people get a chance to experience spiders with hands-on and learn a little more about them that they slowly learn not to fear them. Another prime example of classical conditioning is the experiment with a little baby known at “ little albert.” In the 1920’s a man by the name of Ivan Pavlov took a 9-month-old child that apparently didn’t fear anything. Ivan would then sit this child down and give him a white rat to play with. Every time the toddler played with the rat, Ivan would hammer a piece of sheet metal and cause a negative reinforcement in the child’s brain. After 7 weeks of doing this, little Albert couldn’t stand being around the rat, Ivan would try to put down a white rabbit instead but little Albert was also terrified and would attempt to crawl away.

There are some phobias known as traumatic phobias, which means you gained a fear of something from a traumatic experience in your life. Let’s say you were bite by a dog at a very young age, then it would be perfectly acceptable to grow a lifelong phobia towards dogs. Things like visiting the

dentist can also be a traumatic phobia, no one likes going to the dentist because dentist usually drill on people's teeth and cause them extreme pain. Traumatic experience doesn't have to be pain induced, someone that was a sexual assault victim at a young age could also grow up not liking to remove their clothes in front of people because they might have a memory recall of that childhood experience.

Ancestral phobias are very much like classical conditioning. Let's say you mother has a fear of dogs, then you can very well obtain the phobia from your mother. These phobias do not have to start with the parents, this could go back generations or even be part of a biological instinct. A great example is the fear of snakes. Most people who fear snakes have never encountered one in the wild, let alone suffered a life-threatening snake-bite. So where does this fear come from? If we consider that those who maintained a healthy fear of snakes in years gone by were more likely to survive long enough to bear children, we can start to speculate that over thousands of years, fear of snakes became a dominant trait passed down the generations that helped to enable survival. Something as simple as fear of flying is also ancestral, just because you've never flown, and never experienced these stimuli, it is very easy to have a fear of flying.

The least understood category of phobias is, anxiety- organized phobias. these manifesting phobias bring up issues like driving or swimming or even vomiting. These phobias serve as a "hook" or "container" to help manage overwhelming anxiety that would otherwise be persuasive and incapacitating. For example, a fear of vomiting (emetophobia) may relate back to never having been able to express feelings and always needing to be

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perfect or have O. C. D., this could result in a pre-existing fear of the rejection or punishment that might happen if the real self, with all its ugly feelings, were to force its way out. Those that help treat the people with phobias must try and help with the anxiety before they can treat the phobia itself. By only treating the phobia, the patient would lose their “hook” or “container” and make the patient have completely out of control anxiety in every aspect of their life. This would result in something as a phobia of swimming escalating to maybe the fear of even being around water. After the anxiety, has been tackled and reduced to manageable levels it is then appropriate to begin working on the phobia itself. The treatment would be to work on what cause the phobia in the first place so that the patient can move passed the incident.

The best way to treat phobias is to sit down with the patient and look at what makes the anxiety wise the most and look at their past for specific locations and times with every detail possible. Treatment starts by providing the client with several tools to use to manage the daily manifestations of the phobia - including Thought Field Therapy (Tapping) and learning how to identify and tolerate feelings of anxiety in the body. Phobias manifest from the limbic system and are not from the cognitive part of the brain treatments will vary depending on if the person has a trauma based phobia or an anxiety based phobia, but most treatments will go through EMDR therapy. The problem with anxiety based phobias is that they need to be more in depth because they arrive from an earlier stage in the person's life. Unlike the anxiety based phobias, the trauma based phobias are easier to deal with because we are aware of what traumatizing event lead to the phobia in the first place.

Treatment for phobias take a long time and it is important not to rush them into whatever it is the patient fears. It can take years for someone to recover, but eventually after several sessions and coping exercises to help manage stress levels, the patient can be introduced to his/her fears and most times there is a significant success with managing a phobia.

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