

Getting Over Your Fear of Fear

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In line with the research of the month cited above, here is a handout for helping yourself or others reduce fear of fear.

Sometimes we have to face things we are afraid of to get to where we want to go: we must have that difficult conversation we have been avoiding; we need to venture into the unknown in order to find someplace new and better; we must stand up to fear that is keeping us small and stuck. Here are a few hints that might help.

Separate fear of physical danger from emotional danger

Gavin deBecker has written a book called "The Gift of Fear," in which his premise is that we have a well-honed intuition that tells us when we are in danger and we should trust it. When we are walking down a dark alley and get a sense that there is someone there who is waiting to attack us, we should attend to this feeling and get ourselves to safety. I think he is probably right-about physical danger. But emotional/psychological danger is a different matter. There have been surveys that have indicated that fear of public speaking is higher in the list of fears than fear of dying. you almost certainly won't die from the anxiety you have about public speaking, so this fear seems overblown.

Facing emotional fears often diminishes them. Facing physical fears may well do that too, but the consequences are more permanent and perhaps even deadly. Face and walk through emotional fears.

Repeated exposure to emotional/psychological fears and their related sensations typically reduces your fear of them

If you have sensations of dizziness when you get anxious, choose a time when you are feeling relatively comfortable and then deliberately induce dizziness for yourself by spinning around in a chair or twirling around (make sure you have a soft place to land if you are standing when you spin).

If you fear increased heart rates or sweaty palms associated with anxiety, deliberately increase your heart rate and sweating by vigorously exercising.

If you have images of disaster, try deliberately thinking of worse-case scenarios until they no longer hold such anxiety or worry for you.

Strengthen your courage muscle

Start with something small you have been avoiding due to fear (like making a phone call that isn't too intimidating, but about which you are a little nervous), then work up to bigger stuff that scares you. Make a commitment to do something psychological/emotionally frightening once a day or once a week until your courage muscle gets noticeably stronger.

Fear has an agenda: to keep you small, confined and stuck

Stand up to the fear bully every chance you get. Violate the boundaries and limits fear has promised you will keep you safe. Each time you do, you regain a bit of your freedom, autonomy and power.