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Phobias: it's all going to be ok

Phil Parker, personal development expert and designer of the Lightning Process, reveals some of the myths surrounding fears and phobias.

Phobias are extremely common. It is estimated that 10-20% of people have one, although many people don't particularly like to admit to or talk about them too much, so it is unclear just how widespread they are. There are a number of reasons for people's reticence to discuss their phobias. Firstly people naturally get scared even thinking about them and secondly they often feel a bit embarrassed about not coping well in certain situations, imagining that everyone else apart from them is fine and fear free.

What are phobias?

Fundamentally a phobia is when you feel really scared about something, but it's a lot more than just feeling a bit nervous. In some cases the fear can be so strong that it makes people physically sick and they will do anything to avoid those situations. Often even the thought of the thing they fear, hearing someone talk about it or seeing it on TV, is enough to bring on the horrific phobic feelings.

A common misconception is that phobias are a sign of weakness. Phobias occur in all kinds of people from everyday children and adults to celebrities and top executives. Phobias are not a sign of weakness; actually they are a sign of how clever our brains are at learning quickly. When you think about it, most phobias only take a second to learn. A small child might learn to be fearful of confined spaces after being stuck in a cupboard for a few minutes, or after being surprised by a spider in

the garden; and then they have installed this learnt fear response for decades afterwards. If only we could remember our friends mobile numbers, or important revision points with such ease!

What happens in a phobia?

Whenever the phobic object (spiders for example) is thought about, or appears, a part of the brain that knows exactly how to respond (with fear) is instantly activated. This changes our heart rate, blood pressure and activates mood altering hormones, which all take a while to die down once the 'spider' has gone.

What are the most common phobias?

Look away if you have a phobia, here comes the list! Spiders, snakes, heights, open spaces, crowds, dogs, thunder and lightning, injections, social situations, flying, germs, and dentists are amongst the most common.

What are strangest ones?

I have seen people who are as phobic of knees, elbows, daffodils, bananas, pencils as others are of spiders and snakes.

Phobia cures

A popular myth surrounding phobias is that they are impossible to cure. This is not true, although if you have a powerful phobia it is not unusual to have difficulty imagining that it would ever go away. Phobias are one of the easiest things to resolve, as long as you use the right method.

Many people think that getting over them takes a long time and is very uncomfortable. Again this is not true. The traditional approach, which involved gradual exposure to the phobic object over time, is often uncomfortable and does

take a long time. Luckily the more modern technique of Neuro Linguistic Programming is very effective, fast and fun, taking under two hours in most cases to completely free the person from their phobia.

Why does relaxing or facing your fears rarely work?

Because of the way the part of the brain that creates the fear is wired up, trying to remember to relax as your whole body springs into its fear response doesn't really work very well. Equally trying to force yourself to overcome your fear by facing it often, results in just making the fear response even stronger by repeatedly stimulating it.

What are the solutions?

Overcoming phobias is very easy to do with a skilled NLP practitioner, but difficult to do on your own. Seek professional advice to discover that you can completely get rid of those secret fears, which you actually don't have to suffer from anymore.

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