



Fact sheet: Fear & danger

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Unwanted fears

If we are more scared than we need to be, then we make our world more restricted than it should be. Our choices are limited unnecessarily. Many people have learned to be scared of things that they know can't hurt them, yet they can't seem to overcome their fear.

If a fear is associated with one object or event that can't hurt a person, then it can be described as a phobia. Phobias can restrict what a person is able to do. If there are many unwanted fears, the sufferer can be said to be highly anxious or neurotic.

This is a very crippling condition. For instance, some agoraphobic people are so crippled by fear that they can't even leave the house to go shopping.

It doesn't have to be this way.

Fear and danger scores

I want to introduce you to two scores, one is for fear and the other is for danger. Let me illustrate with an example. Sue is afraid of green frogs. She was asked to rate this fear on a 10 point scale (where a zero is no fear and 10 is absolute terror). She rated her fear of frogs as an 8 out of 10.



The second score is the danger rating. A zero is for totally safe and 10 is extremely dangerous. Sue then rated the danger that green frogs posed to her. In other words, how could a frog actually harm her? She knew that green frogs couldn't hurt her so she had to give the danger rating as zero.

If we subtract the danger rating from the fear rating we get the "phobic score". This is the amount of unwanted fear in the situation. In Sue's case, her phobic score was 8. Anxious people have lots of phobias.

Panic attacks

Often, highly anxious people will suffer from panic attacks. This is where the body reacts as if the person was facing an extremely dangerous situation. It is a very unpleasant feeling of being out of control. It can involve shaking, sweating, hyperventilation, feelings of terror and more.

At the reckless end of the scale

For some people, the danger rating can be more than the fear rating. In other words, the phobic score has a negative value.

When this is the case a person can take unnecessary risks. It may result in reckless behaviour. This condition can cause serious problems such as dangerous driving, drug taking and gambling.

Whatever is learned can be unlearned

Recovery from fear

Just as fears are learned, they can be unlearned. If it was easy to do, psychologists would have much less work. It's not easy, but it can be done!

There are many techniques for unlearning fears such as Systematic Desensitization, NLP, EMDR, Tapping, Voice dialogue, hypnosis and so on. I will just deal with a couple that I use.

Energy Tapping

Tapping is the most effective way that I know of to reduce unwanted fears. The tapping works at some deep level to make changes that don't seem to be available by ordinary talking. I have seen profound fear reduction with tapping. (See separate hand out on Energy Tapping).

Voice Dialogue

Hal & Sidra Stone, developed the theory of "Voice Dialogue". They referred to our inner parts our "Inner Selves". One of our inner selves is the Frightened Child.

For Sue, her Frightened Child was in charge of maintaining the belief that frogs are dangerous. Her frightened Child learned this at the time she was 9 years old and some boy put a frog inside her shirt. She was terrified.

We can learn to negotiate with the Frightened Child and teach this part how to match its fear to the real level of danger.

Just because the fear feels real, doesn't mean that it is based on reality.

Score matching

The aim of anxiety reduction therapy is to match the fear score to the danger score. When this happens a person can react normally. They are able to make an accurate judgement about how scary a particular object (or situation) should be and act accordingly.

Successful life change

People do recover from anxiety. I have known of people who were terrified of public speaking. They are now confident teachers. Talking in front of a crowd is no longer an issue. I have seen a person who was terrified of spiders learn to be comfortable with a large tarantula crawling over their hand.

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