

## Fear and How to Strategize Against It 1

### **Fear and How To Strategize Against It.**

Have you ever been at the top of a diving board when all the sudden you freeze up? How about when you see a dog, do you feel the need to run? These are fears and sometimes they are good, like when you are afraid of deep water because you aren't a very good swimmer. Other times, however, they can be bad, like being afraid of dogs. Being afraid can protect you but it can also stop you from making memories and having fun experiences. When you have a fear like the fear of dogs you will most likely want to overcome it so you can pet your next door neighbor's furry friend. If you want to know how to overcome fear you will need to know what fear is and how it happens. Fear is an unpleasant, often strong emotion caused by the expectation or awareness of danger. Two strategies used to overcome fear or help control it are relaxation techniques and exposure therapy.

Everyone knows that fear is when you feel scared or afraid but most people don't know what causes this feeling and how it happens. When your eyes see something that could be dangerous it sends a message to the amygdala, the brain's threat center. The amygdala and other parts of the brain then proceed to process the image and determine if it is a threat or not. The way it happens is our sensory organs, one of which is the eyes, sees or senses danger and sends it to the thalamus. The thalamus processes the image and sends a blurry picture to the amygdala. The amygdala then sends out signals to other parts of the brain to

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take action. It warns areas in our brain stem that triggers our bodies freeze response. The amygdala then alerts our facial muscles which makes our expression change, to show fear. This can warn others that there is danger nearby and will make them avoid it. The hypothalamus is then signaled and floods our body with hormones like adrenaline. This starts our fight or flight response and boosts heart rate, blood pressure, and sweating. While all of this was happening the thalamus sent the same image to the visual cortex through a longer path. The visual cortex then sends a clearer image to the amygdala. With this clearer image the amygdala can see if the danger is true or false. If the danger is confirmed, the amygdala reinforces the flight or fight response. This will make our body choose if we should stay and fight or run away. If the danger is proven false the amygdala orders a stand down and our body relaxes. This is how fear happens.

Now that you know what fear is and how it happens you can focus on ways to overcome it. When it comes to fear one of the best ways to help and stay calm are relaxation techniques. One relaxation technique is deep breathing. If you ever face your fear, head on, breathe in deeply for five seconds and breathe out for five seconds. This will help release muscle tension and calm you down so you are prepared for whatever comes next. Yoga, another relaxation technique, can also help you. Yoga helps move energy and can raise a higher awareness of your fear which will allow you to better understand it. One of the key concepts of overcoming fear is understanding what it is that causes this fear. Some balance

poses that are commonly used in yoga can be a great way to see how fear feels in your body.

Fear can be overcome in many different ways and another effective strategy is exposure therapy. Exposure therapy is when you take small steps toward your fear, therefore growing accustomed to it. There are many different types of exposure therapy. For example in vivo exposure is when you directly face a feared object or situation. Imaginal exposure is when you vividly imagine a fear, while virtual reality exposure is when you take a simulation. For example, if you are afraid of flying you would take a flight simulator. Then there is interoceptive exposure which is deliberately bringing on physical sensations that are harmless yet feared. This all helps by showing you there really isn't anything to be afraid of. By doing exposure therapy you start to see that your fear is irrational and it is really nothing to be afraid of.

In conclusion, fear is a strong emotion that is caused when the amygdala sees or senses danger. There are many ways to overcome fear but two common strategies used are relaxation techniques and exposure therapy. By using these techniques you are raising awareness of your fear so you can understand it better. By learning about distressors you can stay calm in fearful situations and get over the fearful feeling. The truth is everyone has fears but it's better to overcome them than to let them take over your life.

