



Mountains Into Molehills

Author: Brian A Martin MSc CTA HPD MBACP
www.brianamartin.co.uk

Mountains Into Molehills aims to build understanding of self and others. It integrates relevant theory with practical step by step guides to coping with stressful situations, and handling difficult situations assertively.

Chapter Six

Overcoming Lack Of Confidence In Some Situations

- Curing Phobias
- The Nature of Fear
- The Prison of Fear
- Terminology
- Instant Calming Technique: Panic Attacks
- Preparing for a specific situation
- A Ten Step Plan To Change The Way You Are
- Anchoring a resourceful state
- Coping Statements
- Some ways of obliterating scary thoughts
- How fear is overcome
- Reading List

About the author: Brian Martin provides face to face Counselling, Mediation, and Life Skills Coaching services to clients. He is located in Hinckley, Leicestershire, UK – on the border with Warwickshire and midway between Leicester and Coventry. He also provides Telephone Counselling & Coaching.

To visit Brian's home website page at www.brianamartin.co.uk simply click this link

To return to www.selfhelp.brianamartin.co.uk page simply click this link

Phobias

It's most unlikely that you can cure a full blown phobia without professional help

You have a phobia if you suffer extreme anxiety in certain situations when there is no real reason to be afraid. It is most unlikely that you can cure this by self help methods and you should get professional help from someone specialising in phobias. Those therapists who practice Neuro Linguistic Programming [NLP], and Hypnotherapy are best qualified. Transactional Analysts have a small animals phobia cure for phobic fear of mice, rats, frogs, snakes, spiders and other small creatures.

Simple phobias [fear of one specific thing] can sometimes be cured in one session. Complex phobias [fear of several things] take longer, sometimes much longer, depending on the root causes of the phobia.

Self Help Techniques For Fears Not As Intense As Phobia

This Chapter describes some of the techniques which you can use on anxieties not as intense as phobia e.g. nervousness in social situations, meetings, interviews, big events, and lack of confidence in specific situations.

The Self Help Approaches Described In This Chapter

- 'Instant Calming' technique
- Preparing for a specific situation
- Progressive Exposure Using A Ten Step Plan
- Technique for anchoring a confident state of mind
- Coping Statements & Positive Self Talk
- Self Help Reading

The Nature Of Fear

Fear is a perfectly natural emotion. Fear is one of the basic emotions which all human beings experience.

The purpose of fear is to keep us safe, to get us to avoid situations where we might get hurt or killed. Whenever we are afraid it is because our brain has that situation stored as dangerous. In making us anxious and afraid our brain is trying to protect us from danger. Sometimes however, there is no danger and our brain has got the wrong message.

Fear can be very helpful. It teaches us to look before we cross the road, not to lean over the edge of tall buildings, not to stick our fingers in the fire.

Fear stops being an asset when we develop irrational fear of situations where there is really nothing to be scared of, or when our fear of normal everyday life situations becomes so exaggerated that it seriously interferes with our lifestyle and happiness.

You will never be completely free from fear because you are human and to be human is to be afraid sometimes. What you can achieve is a big reduction, or even total elimination, of fear in some situations where your fear is irrational.

The prison we construct from fear

When we avoid situations which scare us we reinforce our self limiting thinking. We become a prisoner in a prison we have constructed for ourselves from our own fear. When we learn to push at the boundaries of our fears we wear away the thoughts and feelings that keep us prisoner.

If you wait for fear to be absent before you do things that scare you, you will never escape from your prison.

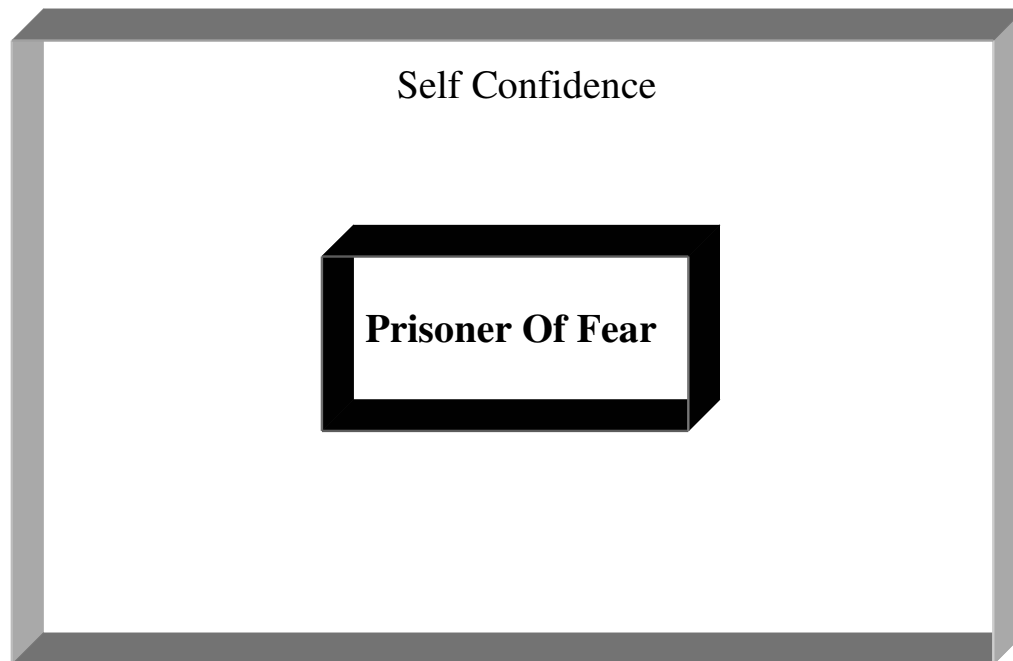
Terminology

Anxiety	Reaction to a stressful situation
Normal Anxiety	Results from exposure to external stresses which are worrying e.g. losing a job, marriage difficulties, children becoming ill
Rational Fear	Response to an immediate threat e.g. an attack by a dog, danger of falling over a cliff, aggressive strangers
Irrational Fear	Disproportionate fear of situations which would produce lower levels of fear in the average person e.g. meeting new people, speaking in front of a group, conflict
Simple Phobia	Symptoms of intense anxiety, and intense fear of one specific stimulus which would not frighten the average person e.g. spiders, flying, dogs
Complex Phobia	Symptoms of intense anxiety, and intense fear about a number of stimuli e.g. social phobia [fear of many social situations]

- Panic** Sudden unexpected and intense surges of anxiety in response to a stressful situation but sometimes with no obvious cause
- Depression** When we feel 'down', overwhelmed, lose our appetite for life, and the future seems bleak and hopeless
- Obsessive Thoughts** Often accompany phobia. Phobics sometimes feel compelled to carry out Compulsive Rituals over and over again against their better judgment e.g. hand washing, checking locks, cleaning

Overcoming Phobia is outside the scope of this article. Phobia is so irrational that self help approaches to anxiety and lack of confidence usually won't work.

Simple phobia can be overcome by NLP, TA, or Hypnotherapy Therapists. Complex Phobia and Obsessive Behaviour usually need extended therapy because there is often underlying psychopathology which needs identifying and resolving. Some of the books listed at the end of this chapter have useful contacts for phobia sufferers. Also you could contact '**No Panic**' an organisation specialising in phobias. Visit www.no-panic.co.uk .



Instant Calming Technique

When you have an anxious uninvited thought about a specific event its vital not to let the anxious thought have the last word

How to use this instant calming technique

As soon as you experience anxious thoughts about a specific event or situation

1. Say to yourself 'STOP'. Visualise a red traffic light at 'STOP'
2. Start breathing **slightly** more deeply than normal and imagine that as you breath the breath goes direct to that part of your body where you are experiencing the anxiety. 'Breathe into the feeling'.
3. Repeat your favourite coping statement/s [Page 13] to yourself

THEN

4. 'Fast Forward' your thinking to a point in time when the situation about which you are anxious has passed and think of a treat to give yourself.
5. Start doing something else that needs your concentration

Panic Attacks

The Instant Calming Technique is about overcoming feelings of anxiety about specific future situations. However it will also help you manage panic attacks.

There are three additional things that you need to always remember when coping with a panic attack:

1. Cup your hands around your mouth and breathe back in air from your last breath out. This cuts down the oversupply of oxygen which comes from panic breathing [hyperventilation]
2. You will not die. There is no evidence that people die during panic attacks. It may feel as if you will die but you won't. Try to make your palpitations worse – you will find it impossible!
3. Full blown panic attacks do not last long. In a few minutes the panic will inevitably subside and the palpitations reduce if you follow the advice given here.

Preparing for a specific future situation

The previous page was about dealing with UNINVITED anxious thoughts and calming yourself down. This page is about DELIBERATELY making yourself anxious in order to prepare for a future situation.

1. Deliberately try to get anxious by thinking about the future situation
2. Notice Your Anxiety Level
Give yourself a score on an Anxiety Scale of 0 to 10 how anxious you feel [0 = completely calm 10 = terrified]
3. Try to feel more anxious
Notice if your reading on the anxiety scale changes: you may be surprised to discover that you cannot make the anxiousness worse and trying to make it worse often makes it easier
4. Visualise yourself as you would like to be in the situation
5. Plan a treat you will give yourself when the event is over
6. Fast Forward
Imagine a point in the future when the event is over. Imagine yourself enjoying your treat. Check your score on the Anxiety Scale. Notice that the anxiety has greatly diminished or gone completely.

Maybe You Have So Far Lacked Confidence In Many Situations?

First steps in changing the way you are.

1. The first and most important step is THE DECISION to change the way you are.
2. If your fear/s are irrational [not based on any real danger] recognise that YOU alone are keeping yourself the way you are by avoiding the situations you fear.
3. Stop waiting for fear to be absent, until you are cured fear will never be absent and you will never change the way you are.
4. Don't keep your fear of situations a secret – it will blackmail you with the dread that you may let the cat out of the bag and show nervousness

5. Construct a TEN STEP PLAN
6. Make sure each step is realistic – don't be too ambitious too soon: don't rush the steps – take as long as you like.
7. Learn how to build your confidence before tackling each step in your plan [see Page 8]
8. Learn how to ANCHOR and use a good feeling to instantly reduce anxiety
9. Choose some personal coping statements

NOTE: This list of tactics is about lesser anxieties, less than phobia level. It will help you manage your phobia but is very unlikely to be sufficient to cure a phobia without professional help.

Make A Ten Step Plan To Tackle Situations Where You Have Normally Been Anxious

1. Make your decision to overcome your past lack of confidence in the situations which have been making you anxious.
This is the most important step.
2. Decide what would be the toughest challenge for you to face. Write it down. Give it the label 'TEN. Ultimate Challenge'.
3. Write down ten increasingly tough 'Challenges' on the way to eventually doing your Ultimate Challenge. These should be specific things that you have so far been avoiding. The easiest [but not easy] Challenge should be numbered ONE and the hardest 'The Ultimate' numbered TEN.
4. Decide when you will do Challenge ONE.
5. Plan a treat for yourself for when you have completed the challenge
6. Prepare For Challenge ONE Use The Preparation Method on page 8.
7. Whenever you have an anxious thought about your forthcoming challenge use the 'Instant Calming Technique'
8. Do the challenge. Then reward yourself with the treat you planned.
9. Keep redoing Challenge ONE until your anxiety on a scale of 0 - 10 drops significantly
10. When you are ready for Challenge TWO repeat Steps 1 - 9
11. Continue the process until you have completed all your challenges; until you have successfully faced your ULTIMATE CHALLENGE.

**DON'T WAIT FOR FEAR TO GO AWAY BEFORE YOU
DO EACH CHALLENGE. IF YOU DO YOU ARE BEATEN.**

**AS THE TITLE OF SUSAN JEFFERS BOOK SAYS
'FEEL YOUR FEAR - AND DO IT ANYWAY'.**

- Don't wait until your fear of each Challenge has completely gone before you tackle the next Challenge. The fear won't go away permanently until you have done each Challenge repeatedly
- Get a friend to be with you when you first do a new challenge.
- Be patient with yourself: be satisfied with small solid steps
- Take as long as you like to work through your nine steps
- Expect setbacks – sometimes its two steps forward and one step back.

Nothing can be achieved without courage: it will at times be painful to face your fears. Have the courage and the wisdom to accept that pain in the short term is an investment in a happier future.

The choice is yours:

Be prepared to accept discomfort initially

Or

Do nothing. Try to play safe by avoidance and stay in the prison of fear.

The longest journey starts with a single step.

The first step is THE DECISION. Will you work for freedom from low self confidence and fear? Or will you stay a prisoner?

- Practice pushing out the walls of your prison
- Learn to walk before you try to run – don't try anything too ambitious at the start
- The longest journey can be achieved in small steps – so your confidence can be developed a small step at a time

Remember – courage is not being without fear
– its feeling the fear and doing it anyway

Calm Yourself In A Few Seconds By Anchoring A Resourceful State

Get yourself into a comfortable position in a quiet place where you won't be disturbed, switch on a relaxation tape or CD, then....

- 1) Change to deeper slower breathing than normal pausing at the end of the 'in' breath and again at the end of the 'out' breath. As you breathe think of a word, colour, place, person it makes you feel good to think about. This is to be your 'Anchor Word' to use when you want to feel calmer. Do this for a least five minutes.
- 2) When you feel very really relaxed set your Anchor. This is done by gently but firmly pressing your thumb against the first two fingers of your non dominant hand [the one you don't write with] Hold that while you breathe in and out five times feeling yourself relax even more as you do so. Then release the contact.
- 3) Continue in your relaxed state and visualise a previous situation which went well for you in the past and which you feel really good about. It does not have to have anything to do with anything in particular just so long as it's a situation from anytime in your life that has strong good memories for you.
- 4) When you experience the positive emotions you attach to that good event gently but firmly press your thumb against the first two fingers of your hand again.
- 5) Hold that while you breathe in and out five times. Then release the contact.
- 6) Continue in your relaxed state. Next visualise yourself as you would like to be in the future situation. Hold the visualisation in your mind and gently but firmly press your thumb against the first two fingers of your hand. Hold that while you breathe in and out five times. The release the contact.
- 7) Visualise the event being over and you giving yourself a treat. Hold the thought of the treat in mind and gently but firmly press your thumb against the first two fingers of your hand. Hold that while you breathe in and out five times. Then release the contact and immediately return to full alertness.
- 8) On return to alertness busy yourself with something completely different to whatever caused you to do this preparation exercise.

Coping Statements

Coping statements are an important way of softening fears.
Choose the two or three you like best. They should be used:

Before Whenever your thoughts turn to the anxiety provoking event and as part of the 'Instant Calming Technique'

During The Event

And After Start the preparation for the next time by implanting positive memories of the event just past.

Coping Statements – Before

- Whatever happens I will find a way to handle it
- When I choose to face my fear, I choose to grow
- The anticipation is always worse than the reality
- Its never as bad as I think its going to be
- The first two minutes is the worst bit, after that I will be fine
- Each time I face the situation it will get that bit easier
- Its all part of my decision to be more confident
- Once the first bit is over I will probably enjoy it
- It won't kill me; I will survive the experience
- I've got my treat to look forward to when its over

Coping Statements – During

- The first two minutes is the worst bit, after that I will be fine
- It will soon be over
- It won't kill me; I will survive this experience
- I've got my treat to look forward to when its over

Coping Statements – After

- **'Yes..'** I did it. Accompanied by punching the air!
- I took another step towards the new me
- I am courageous, I didn't let fear stop me
- The longest journey starts with a single step – I took another step to-day
I am proud of myself

Self Help Reading List

Feel The Fear and Do It Anyway Susan Jeffers | ISBN 0 09 974100 8
Global best seller . **If you only read one book on this list read this**

Changing Lives Through Redecision Therapy Goulding M & R Goulding
Brunner/Mazel The Transactional Analysis approach

NLP at Work Sue Knight ISBN 1- 85788-070-6
A must – especially ‘Anchoring Resourceful State’ Pages 150-155

Overcoming Panic Derrick Silove & Vijaya Manicavasagar

The Big Book Of Calm Paul Wilson ISBN 1-85487-701-1
An excellent summary of over a hundred calming techniques and approaches

Phobias & Obsessions Joy Melville ISBN 0 356 20238 0
Interesting reading. Informative for sufferers

Self Hypnosis Valerie Austin Thorsons ISBN 0 7225 2924 4

The Feeling Good Handbook David D Burns MD ISBN 0-452-28132-6.
A brilliant best seller with advice on fears, phobias, panic, self defeating attitudes and much more

Using Your Brain For A Change Bandler R
The author is co founder of NLP Therapy

What To Say When You Talk To Yourself
Shad Helmstetter Thorsons ISBN 0 7225 2511 7
Self talk –considered by some as the most powerful easy way to make personal progress