

Newsletter received from America - www.fearofflying.com (18th January 2005)

IMMEDIATE HELP IS AVAILABLE - Call me at (877) 332-7359 or (203) 258-4803 anytime as these numbers go into my cell phone.

Though we call it - thanks to author Erica Jong - fear of flying, in most cases it is fear of having a panic attack on the plane.

Ordinarily, if a panic attack starts, one can take action, such as going someplace else to get away from something that is triggering the panic attack. But on the plane, you can't escape panic by going someplace else. Simply being unable to escape can become a trigger. Usually people cause this version of the problem claustrophobia. You feel the need to be able to escape confinement so you can escape what if something does trigger panic, and not having that option causes anxiety.

We can stop panic attacks on the plane by learning and practicing the Strengthening Exercise. This exercise is taught in the SOAR Video Course on DVD in the section called "The Control of Anxiety". To understand how the Strengthening Exercise works, we need to understand panic.

What Causes Panic? - Panic is the feeling of being overwhelmed and dissociated. One thought (image, awareness, representation), no matter how awful, is NOT enough to - alone - cause overwhelming feelings. If this is not thoroughly understood, see the "free video" at www.fearofflying.com.

For overwhelming feelings to develop, there must be either: a. a sequence of thoughts, each causing a measured hormone release, or b. what was once a sequence of thoughts and started firing in such rapid succession that it is not recognizable as a sequence, or c. the sequence of thoughts has become a constellation of thoughts firing all simultaneously, each thought in the constellation causing its one measured hormone release, and the sum of the hormone release causing the panic experience of overwhelm. The thoughts (images, awarenesses, representations) may be very different that what one might expect. They may not be in the form of what is recognized as a memory of some event. They may not be well-defined.

For example, terror in childhood caused by such simple things as being left to cry ones self to sleep causes the child, before falling asleep, to go into a dissociated state in which there is no sense of connectedness whatsoever. It is as if one is in outer space and nothing exists. For example: dreams of falling endlessly and never hitting bottom are an expression of recalled dissociative experiences. This connects with flight anxiety during cruise as one feels no connection with the earth, or feels there is a risk of falling and falling and experiencing overwhelming terror.

The very experience of being overwhelmed is a dissociative state, and - in my opinion and that of other theorists and researchers - it does not occur without being caused by inadequate parenting. People become upset with me for what they see as blaming parents, but parents are only human and can only do what they themselves are equipped and trained to do. Thus, generation after generation, being poorly equipped or trained to parent is passed on again and again and again. This inadequacy results in an early childhood of terror. So, most of us do not learn to regulate emotions very well. Emotions can be overwhelming, and so are run from. We learn to use dissociated states because to have an emotion at all is a threat of having an overwhelming emotion.

What I have been leading up to is this: since a dissociative state is so strongly associated with terror, that anything that is representative of dissociation can trigger panic. This is why people fear the part of flight that is physically the safest. The physically safest part of the flight is the most emotionally unsafe, and that is when the plane is - we might say - dissociated from the earth, which causes you as the passenger to experience feelings of disconnection, powerlessness, dissociation, extreme and profound aloneness and isolation.

It is emotionally difficult to not be connected with the ground physically. It is more emotionally difficult to not be connected even visually, as when you can't see the ground because of clouds or at night.

Whichever is the case, - sequence or constellation - it can be dismantled and each thought (image, awareness, representation) in the sequence neutralized by associating it with a positive experience with another calming and soothing human being. When there is no experience at all with another person which is calming and soothing, we can instead use some experience in nature.

If you would like to do some work on this, you need to learn the basic Strengthening Exercise which is the key to getting rid of panic.

Here is the best relaxation exercise I have found. I'm recommending that you begin to monitor your stress levels, and when stressed, take a break and run this exercise. It takes only a few minutes.

NLP INSOMNIA CURE/RELAXATION EXERCISE

Sit or recline comfortably. Focus on some point (a spot or object) on the wall directly in front of you. Keep your focus on that spot throughout the exercise. Try doing the exercise out loud first. Later, try it silently. See which works better for you.

Maintaining the focus point, name - one by one - five things you see using only your peripheral vision (don't move your eyes off the focus point). For example: I see a lamp, I see a table, I see a spot on the lampshade, I see . . . (running out of things, it is OK to repeat) a lamp, I see a table.

Then maintaining the focus point, name one by one - five things you hear. For example: I hear the computer running, I hear a car outside, I hear my breathing, I hear my voice, . . . (running out of things, repeat one of them), I hear my voice. Then maintaining the focus point, name one by one - things you feel. For example: I feel the chair under me, I feel my arm against my leg, I feel my foot on the floor, I feel tension in my neck. I feel . . . an ache in my arm.

That completes one cycle. You then decide if you are as relaxed as you would like to be, and if you are, stop. If you want to be more relaxed, or to fall asleep, start the second cycle. The second cycle is done just the same as the first EXCEPT, instead of naming five things, you name four.

After the second cycle, you decide if you are as relaxed as you want to be and stop, or if not, continue with a third cycle in which you name three things.

If you do still another cycle, you will name two things. If you do yet another cycle, name just one. If you lose count, that is good because it means you are getting so relaxed that you are losing count. That's a good thing.

Here is an outline for this exercise:

"I see" 5 4 3 2 1

"I hear" 5 4 3 2 1

"I feel" 5 4 3 2 1

If you still want more relaxation after doing 5 4 3 2 1, start again at 5.

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