

FEARS & PHOBIAS

'Fear makes the wolf look bigger' (German saying)

Everyone feels fear

It's one of the things that keeps us alive, warning us of dangers and preventing us from doing life-threatening things. It is a normal reaction. However, when people consult a therapist for treatment for fears, they are usually talking about irrational and persistent fears such as fear of flying or of particular creatures such as dogs or snakes, fears over which they apparently have no control and which restrict the way they live their lives. That describes a phobia.

Phobia

is really another word for fear; when it's said that someone 'has a phobia' it means that they have an automatic fear of some kind of thing or situation, though the reactions may, in more extreme cases, be much more debilitating than what would ordinarily be described by the word fear. In all fear reactions, the so-called 'fight or flight' mechanism is triggered and the emotional brain is 'on alert', producing a variety of symptoms which may range from mild sweating and tension to alarming palpitations, shortness of breath and nausea etc.

Fears & phobias can be cured

because they have been learned through experience, whether or not this learning is consciously remembered. Phobias and fears are not genetic. We do not have them by inheritance, though some may certainly have been learned from parents, whilst there may be people who are more inclined than others by natural temperament to develop phobic reactions. But any learned experience can be modified by new learning, especially when the new learning is shaped intelligently with a knowledge of how the brain works and a deep respect from individual differences.

Intelligent therapy for fears & phobias

- changes the way an emotional memory is stored in the brain, so that the 'alarm mechanism' no longer trips automatically. In scientific terms, the memory is considered to move from a part of the brain called the amygdala to the neo-frontal cortex. Or to put it in less technical/mechanical terms, the reaction is brought under a more conscious control so that you have more choice
- teaches the client physical and psychological skills of using deep relaxation
- develops knowledge and understanding of how fears and phobias work
- develops useful thinking and acting strategies to prevent phobias and fears re-asserting themselves through future experiences

Treatment for fears & phobias

need not take a long time. Many clients dealing with simpler fear reactions report significant change after just one session. Three sessions generally deal fully with common fears and phobias. Those dealing with multiple issues associated with more extreme phobias (confidence, stress, anxiety, panic attacks and possible PTSD.) may need more sessions, though therapy is never long term

Courses of treatment

for extreme sufferers continue to ease and dissociate traumatic memories etc (which may be indicators of PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) . and to teach deep relaxation through the guided use of the Imaginative mind, whilst also setting effective and progressive tasks between sessions, exploring metaphors and using a variety of other techniques. Goals are agreed at an early stage and are reviewed regularly. Therapy is terminated once these are achieved to avoid dependency on therapeutic sessions, though clients can return for occasional 'booster' sessions as and if necessary.

We generally suggest ways of getting immediate feedback to confirm the effectiveness of therapy.