

Phobias: What They Are and How To Treat

By **Mandana Roushanmeidan, M.Ed.** - May 3, 2018



A phobia is a type of anxiety disorder, presenting as an abnormal fear or reaction to a specific trigger. People have a variety of different phobias such as fear of being in a large crowd, fear of heights, fear of spiders, fear of dogs, etc.

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The therapist can teach patients how to track these behaviors. After identifying these behaviors, the therapist identifies the person's triggers. For example, if someone was in a car accident, they may exhibit anxiety responses, such as sweating palms every time they sit in a car. Over time this phenomenon becomes a learned behavior. Thus, the therapist identifies the same conditions.

What phobias can do to our lives?

Phobias often lead to avoiding certain situations and can have a negative impact on a person's quality of life, such as avoiding restaurants, certain foods, and even their own families.

A previously negative paired event can trigger anxiety and result in uncomfortable and unsteady responses such as palpitations, upset stomach, and heavy breathing, which may be repeated over and over in different situations.

How to treat phobias?

Research has shown that the science of Applied Behavior Analysis is an effective therapy for anxiety and phobias. Therapists help their patients as to how to measure their own problematic behaviors and decrease them.

Treating phobia (explained as a behavioral response to anxiety-provoking paired events) requires identifying the triggers and how they have transformed a neutral event or object such as height or driving in a car, into a phobia-provoking event. The therapist identifies the patient's current acts of avoidance directly. A behavior therapist can work with patients to help them identify the triggers in observable terms. The next step is to teach patients the skills to un-pair the events that are causing the phobia. The last step is to use a replacement behavior for anxiety and phobic responses.

At some point in our lives, we all face some situations that are so unmanageable, we may seek help and treatment. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, 28.8% of people in the United States have a mental health condition. Women are 60 percent more likely to suffer from anxiety disorders than men. Unfortunately, 60 percent of those with anxiety disorders do not receive treatments that are adequate.

What causes phobias?

A phobia is a type of anxiety disorder, characterized by a specific trigger. People have a variety of different phobias such as fear of a large crowd, fear of heights, fear of spiders, etc.

To better understand these complex human behaviors, one must identify the problem. Clinically, a phobia is an observable disease, therefore, requires first identifying the problem. When a patient with anxiety tells the therapist that she is afraid of heights, the therapist identifies these behaviors as problematic behaviors and educates patients to identify these behaviors.

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Mandana Roushanmeidan, M.Ed. is a board certified behavioral analyst and therapist with nearly a decade of experience working with children and adults with behavioral and psychological challenges. In the New Wave Program, she uses Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) to target and treat those behaviors that cause problems and set forth a behavioral plan to target and treat those behaviors. She also provides emotional education of young children and youth, increasing the language capacity of bilingual students, and behavior analytic techniques. She also works with children, adolescents and adults with ADHD, Anxiety, and dysgraphia.