

Making scary safer

Prepare thoroughly; learn more about the activity and what is actually needed, learn how to do the thing that you are scared about. Role play. Don't think about it at all. Deliberately think about something else at the time or do something else to distract you while undergoing the scary activity. Tell a friend how you feel about it; go with a skilled person who can bail you out; share out the tasks so you have less to do; go with a friend who does nothing but supports you with their presence; rehearse the activity in a safer place; imagine you are someone else, or imagine the scary person dressed in funny clothes; feel the fear and do it anyway. Work out what is the worst thing that can happen and plan for it; decide that the worst thing that can happen is not so bad after all; recognise that what will probably happen will be less serious than the worst that could happen. Allow yourself to fail; think about the last time you did it when it worked out well and celebrate success; think about the positive outcomes from the scary thing (e.g. enduring the exam gets you the coveted qualification); look at what the outcome would be if you didn't do the scary thing (e.g. toothache if you don't go to the dentist); change the situation; acknowledge your own skills – that you really can do it very well, actually; find your own way of doing the thing, rather than struggling with someone else's way. Get to know people who are there first, before you do the thing alongside them.

Do a personal risk assessment. Talk about it. Experience it. Do it with a friend. Design your life to avoid the activity altogether. Go equipped to deal with it. Face it by doing it more often, like every day until it feels easier. Build confidence. Mind over matter – decide not to be afraid or work out the best 'self-talk'. Run away and scream. Create a safe environment. Follow a desensitisation programme. Do relaxation routines, like deep breathing, meditation or talking to yourself. Pray. Learn to say no. Use a hypnosis tape. Work out what the risks really are – the worst possible outcome is very rare indeed. Try not to think of the worst possible outcome. Get someone else to deal with it. Find out about the steps or stages of the process. Take drugs, alcohol, sedation, medication, lucky charms. Reduce your experience of it – e.g. don't look down! See someone else (perhaps a child) deal with it and so feel ashamed to be afraid. Look to someone else to be an authority figure in the situation – if they are in charge it will be OK. Listen to an authority figure's tone of voice or watch their face – if they seem relaxed then everything may be alright. Find out why it feels scary – was there something in the past for me? Build in an escape route so you can leave the activity part way through. Build in rewards – buy yourself some chocolate after you have done it. Go and get some professional help. Find the humour in the situation and laugh about it.

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