

Agoraphobia Exposure

[Blog](#)

[Forum](#)

[Reader's Questions](#)

[Guest Post](#)

[Coaching](#)

[Subscribers](#)

BLOG POST ARCHIVE

VOLUME

1

CONTENTS

Click on a post title to jump to it

- * [**You Must Learn To Sit Comfortably With Anxiety**](#)
- * [**You're Not Afraid Of The Situation, You're Afraid Of How You'll Feel**](#)
- * [**Stop Identifying With Agoraphobia**](#)
- * [**Anxiety Turns You Into A Coward**](#)
- * [**Attaining A Sense Of Achievement**](#)
- * [**Every Exposure Is Progress**](#)
- * [**Am I Panicking? I Can't Tell!**](#)
- * [**Your Amygdala Is Your Friend**](#)
- * [**The Perfect Recipe For Overcoming Agoraphobia**](#)
- * [**If You Panic, Stand Your Ground And Take It**](#)

You Must Learn To Sit Comfortably With Anxiety



Anxiety and panic attacks are unpleasant, no doubt about it. However, the way you experience anxiety or a panic attack can be different depending on your mindset.

If you freak out in response to a panic attack, the experience of it will be distressing. But anxiety doesn't have to be a big, dramatic thing. Remember, it's your attitude that makes all the difference to your progress when doing exposures. And it's the main factor that will help you overcome agoraphobia.

If you're out and about and you start to get anxious, don't blow it out of proportion. Just sit with the feeling comfortably. Ride it like a wave. It's there, just accept it. You're not going to be able to wave a magic wand and be back home, so just accept that you're there and be with the feeling.

Try this. Bang your hand against a hard surface. Make sure it's hard enough to hurt. But before you do it, be prepared for the pain, and accept it. Now, when you do it, you'll probably (hopefully) find that it's not particularly distressing. Painful yes, distressing, not really. This is because you've accepted it. Go ahead, do it.

Now, do it again, but this time do it with no preparation. You might want to do it right now as you read this, or whenever you like, but don't give yourself time to think.

If you're anything like me, that was probably worse. Why? Because you weren't ready. When you're feeling anxiety or having a panic attack, it's amazing what a difference your attitude makes. If you accept it, and let it accompany you until it fades, you'll find that although it's not nice, it's also not such a big deal.

You've got to develop the automatic habit of being in the present moment, and let whatever

feelings you have wash over you, without getting distressed. If you can do this, you'll find that it opens doors. You'll be able to become calm again quite quickly, and in the long term it will make it easier for you to beat agoraphobia.

Fear is like a mouse that can become an elephant in an instant if you take it too seriously. So don't let the feelings of anxiety or panic overwhelm you. They're just sensations, the responses of an overactive amygdala. They're not the real you. The real you can override all that at any time. If you can separate yourself from it all and not give it any importance, it won't be that bad.

So next time you get anxious or panic, experience it, casually observe it without paying it too much attention, see it as just another feeling that comes and goes, then let it hang around until it naturally fades. It might take a while but that's OK.

[Previous post](#)

[Back to contents](#)

[Next post](#)

You're Not Afraid Of The Situation, You're Afraid Of How You'll Feel



When you're feeling anxious or panicking, what is it that you're reacting to? Something dangerous? I'm sure it feels like it. But actually, no. What you're reacting to is something else.

There's nothing to fear about being far from home. You know this. It's the same with being in certain types of environment, or knowing that it's going to take you a long time to get back home. In fact, you know very well that there's no danger otherwise you'd see it, and then you'd either fight it or run. To overcome agoraphobia it's important to keep this in mind.

So what is it that you fear? Well, what you're really afraid of is the confusion, helplessness and distress that come when your brain is telling you that you're in danger but you see no danger.

Think of yourself as two people. One is you, the person reading this, and the other is your amygdala. This is the part of your brain that is there to sense danger and arm you with adrenaline so that you can deal with it. The problem is, your amygdala is out of whack. It's basically wasting your time telling you that there's danger when there's none.

When you're feeling anxious, that's you reacting to your amygdala. It is not you reacting to danger. Your amygdala is screaming at you telling you that something dangerous is going on, but you know there's nothing. This is making you feel confused because you see no danger. It makes you feel helpless because what if there is something dangerous and you can't deal with it because you can't see it?

And all of that is causing you distress. That is your reaction to your amygdala. Not your environment. If you were reacting to a genuinely dangerous environment, you'd be fighting or running. You are not in danger. If you were, you'd know it.

If sometimes you feel like there's a conflict going on inside you, you're right. One part of you is saying "Danger!", while the other part is saying "Where?" It doesn't sound very good but this is great news.

It means that you can separate yourself from your amygdala whenever it goes off the rails and malfunctions. It confirms that the problem is not a dangerous environment at all. The problem is an overactive amygdala. And that is not a difficult problem to solve.

Painful? Yes. Changing habits is rarely painless. But difficult? No. No matter how bad your agoraphobia is, you are more than capable of understanding that you're not in danger. And you are capable of reminding yourself of this next time you become anxious.

[Previous post](#)

[Back to contents](#)

[Next post](#)

Stop Identifying With Agoraphobia



You know what your problem is? You have a habit of thinking that you're in danger when you're not. It happens when you're far from home or doing certain things. We call that agoraphobia. It's a bad habit. But it's not who you are. Stop identifying with it.

When you label yourself as an agoraphobia sufferer, or someone with an anxiety disorder, or whatever it might be, it has an effect on you. It's like you're giving yourself permission to stay that way. And it's a label that takes away responsibility from you, turning you into a helpless victim with a condition. If you want to overcome agoraphobia you have to separate yourself from it.

You might think, but I do have a disorder or condition. Sure, but it's the habit that you currently have, it's not who you are. Malfunctions can be fixed. Maybe not all of them, but this one can.

Rather than clinging onto an identity based on your bad habit, you should hate agoraphobia. Reject it. Don't give it any status or importance in your identity. It has no place in it, it does not belong to you, it's not who you are.

Look at what it's done to you. Look at what it's turned you into. Think of all the things that you can't do because of it. How's your self esteem? If agoraphobia was a person, would you kiss it and love it and cling to it? Then why would you identify with it, as if it owns you or you belong to it?

Resent it and separate yourself from it as much as possible. And don't use words that make you into a victim. Condition. Disorder. Relapse. You should be disgusted by all that.

If you're one of those people who prides themselves on some ridiculous label, stop it. Anxiety, agoraphobia, panic attacks, none of that has anything to do with who you really are. You're just someone who has a really bad habit of avoiding certain situations because of how you'll feel. If you want to beat agoraphobia, stop being a victim and stop hiding behind an identity that allows you to be one.

[Previous post](#)

[Back to contents](#)

[Next post](#)

Anxiety Turns You Into A Coward



The definition of a coward is someone who is afraid of something, and they let whatever they fear get the better of them. They avoid doing whatever they're scared of. They fail to summon the courage.

Courage is when you're afraid but you go ahead regardless and face whatever you're scared of. In this case, going far from home or being in a situation that makes you feel like you're in danger. Summoning the necessary courage to overcome agoraphobia is a must.

Agoraphobia has turned you into a coward. And you've allowed it.

We all let fear get the better of us from time to time. I don't doubt that you have courage when it comes to other things. But when it comes to being away from home or being stuck somewhere, or whatever you find challenging, you're a coward. You cower. You avoid.

It takes humility and courage to beat agoraphobia. It takes courage to face your fears, but it takes humility to put your ego aside and admit that right now you're a coward. It also takes humility to accept that you might have to take baby steps at the beginning.

This isn't an insult or a condemnation, it's simply a statement of fact. And it's the first step to changing your life. Do you have the humility to be honest with yourself? Are you willing to go all the way back to Step 1 if necessary and take it from there? Or is that too humiliating for you?

You might be uncomfortable hearing that. That's fine, but if you can get over that you'll be able to move on and access the courage necessary to face your fears. None of us are that special. Believe it or not, it is possible for you to have a character flaw, and unfortunately

you've developed one.

How does it feel every time you avoid leaving home? Does it feel good whenever you decide not to do something for fear that you'll panic? Do you admire yourself when you play it safe? Of course not. And that's what a lack of courage does. It stops you doing stuff and makes you feel like a loser.

You're better than that, which is why you must learn to be disgusted with your cowardly attitude. And keep your ego out of this. Life is too short to get defensive. If I can handle saying all of these things to myself (which I have done), then so can you. You have courage in you. Whether you summon it or not is up to you.

[Previous post](#)

[Back to contents](#)

[Next post](#)

Attaining A Sense Of Achievement



Exposure therapy is challenging, but if you do it for long enough, you may notice something very interesting. I call it attaining SOA. In other words, reaching a point where you feel that you've attained a sense of achievement. When you reach it, it changes everything.

When I started doing exposures to overcome agoraphobia I would usually be a bit nervous, as you'd expect. I'd plan my journeys and decide on a destination. For example I might decide to get on a train and get off a few stops away from home. Then I'd walk for a mile. And then I'd get a bus back home. What would often happen is that once I reached the end of the walking part of the journey, I'd feel absolutely fine.

Other times I'd get a sense of achievement when I reached a place that felt familiar. Or when I knew that the rest of the journey home would be quick. But what all those situations had in common was that it made little difference where I actually was, or how far from home I was.

In fact, it was possible for me to be more nervous while on the way to a particular location than when I got there. I used to think to myself "Why am I now feeling OK, even though I'm now further from home than I was when I felt nervous?"

This proves that it's all in your mind. How you choose to view things makes all the difference. Once I achieved SOA, I felt untouchable. On top of the world, like I could handle anything.

In fact, I'd often spontaneously take a detour and challenge myself further. Many otherwise average journeys became long journeys as a result. I would even start assessing the journey

even before it had finished. I would talk to myself as if it was already over, that's how calm I was.

When you do exposures, keep in mind the possibility that at some point you may get that feeling of achievement. See it as something that you expect to happen. Expecting that you will achieve SOA will make it easier for you to face journeys with multiple steps.

Once you achieve SOA, you should make the most of it. Use that good feeling by going further. Make the journey more memorable. Create positive associations. By making the most of a sense of achievement, you'll prove to yourself just how much you're capable of. This will give you the confidence to plan more challenging journeys and make greater progress.

[Previous post](#)

[Back to contents](#)

[Next post](#)

Every Exposure Is Progress



This is for anyone who has tried exposure to overcome agoraphobia, and has run into problems. No matter what happens during a journey, no matter how you feel, and no matter what you think, you are making progress.

The reason why you get scared in some situations or places is because your amygdala (the part of your brain that senses danger and arms you with adrenaline to deal with it) has become too sensitive. This causes you to feel the same stress that you'd feel if you were actually in danger. Except that in your case, you are in no danger at all.

The reason why we do exposure is to demonstrate to that part of your brain that you are not in danger. We do this by showing up. By going to the scary place, or doing the scary thing. Just that alone sends a very strong message. Your actions, regardless of your feelings, are what count.

During exposures we remain as calm as possible when we feel anxious or panic. This tells your amygdala that it is wrong to give you adrenaline, muscle tightness and all the signs of anxiety that you're familiar with. This is why you shouldn't react to your amygdala's danger signals.

By acting calm (as in going through the motions of someone who is calm), your amygdala becomes confused and starts wondering if perhaps it is wrong. Over time, if you do this repeatedly, it will begin to get the message.

If you get anxious in a particular situation, for example if you're a mile from home, you should try to resist the urge to go back home. Turning back confirms to your amygdala that there is danger. You should try not to do this. But don't even worry about that too much,

because no matter what you do, and no matter how you feel, one way or another you have made some progress. Every time you do an exposure you're chipping away at your agoraphobia.

If you start walking down the street and you back out and scurry home again, well, although that's not ideal, it's still progress. You still went out there, even if it was only for 5 minutes.

If you go to a train station and get scared at the last moment and choose not to get on the train, the fact that you made it there at all sends a message. It shows your brain that you are willing to dare. It shows your amygdala that you're toying with it, and not taking it that seriously. You're challenging it.

Once you've made a fair amount of progress, you'll look back and see just how far you've developed. And any new issues that come up will be issues that you never used to have before. They will be the kinds of challenges that once upon a time you wouldn't have even dared to face. And that's progress.

So don't get demoralized. I don't think I'm being unrealistic when I say that as long as you keep doing exposures, it's all good. Every exposure is progress.

[Previous post](#)

[Back to contents](#)

[Next post](#)

Am I Panicking? I Can't Tell!



I'm going to describe the difference between anxiety and a panic attack. To overcome agoraphobia I think it's important to know the difference. Anxiety is when you feel a level of nervousness when you're far from your home, or in a location where you may feel trapped or isolated.

The nervousness and sense of worry is bad enough to make you uneasy and uncomfortable, but not so bad that you can't keep it together. It's like a scary few seconds where you feel out of your depth, but you also feel like you have enough control to bring yourself back to normal, eventually.

A panic attack is made of the same stuff, but it's worse. With a panic attack, it's at such a level that the sense of control is much less, and you really feel an urgent sense of dread, like you're in immediate danger. You feel like you want to get back to safety immediately. You can usually tell when you've crossed the line into a panic attack. It feels like you're free falling.

You may feel a bit sick, or you may feel like crying. You might even start to think that you've lost the ability to make your way back home. Basically you feel very helpless.

When you start doing exposures, at any moment you'll either be totally calm, or you'll have anxiety, or you'll have a panic attack. Either way, you'll always know the difference. Each one will be distinct.

But if you do them for long enough, you'll notice something strange. It is possible that you may at times have a feeling that you can't easily categorize as anxiety or a panic attack.

I'll give an example. I once made my way to a town a few miles from where I live. There

was something about the place that gave me bad vibes. For whatever reason I didn't like it there. But I got on with it and walked around for a while, before going to a train station to go home. As I walked into the station, I started getting very nervous.

I examined the feeling. I observed it. Here's how it felt. It was kind of like a panic attack, but muted. Like turning down the volume on the TV. Sort of like a miniature panic attack. It was certainly scary, but for some reason I felt very able to handle it. Technically I'd say it was a panic attack, but the level of it was about the same as anxiety.

It's odd but for a few seconds I almost even enjoyed it. There was even a moment when I said to myself words to the effect of "Oh come on, stop it, just calm down, this is nothing". Eventually it faded. By the way I had a smile on my face the whole time. OK I'm exaggerating. I was smiling on the inside.

Very strange. But this is the kind of thing that can happen after you've been doing exposures for some time. I believe I'd done well over 100 exposures when this happened.

And it's a good sign. It means that your amygdala is changing the way it responds to your environment. And it also shows that you are responding differently to your amygdala. It's a good indicator of progress when you can have a panic attack (or something that sort of feels like one even if you're not sure) without getting distressed.

[Previous post](#)

[Back to contents](#)

[Next post](#)

Your Amygdala Is Your Friend



The job of your amygdala is to scan your environment, sense possible danger, and then arm you with the tools needed to either fight a threat or run from it. That means adrenaline, muscle tightness, and being on high alert.

To overcome agoraphobia it's important to understand that your amygdala is oversensitive and is judging your environment incorrectly. But it's not permanent. It's just a bad habit that it has developed for one reason or another.

The way you react to your environment, and the way you react to your amygdala's reactions to it have contributed to the problem. So you've kind of done it to yourself to some extent.

But your amygdala is there to serve you. All it wants to do is help you. However, it doesn't "think" the way you and I do. It's like a computer program. It just reacts based on what it regards as dangerous.

What you need to do is help it to get realigned with reality. You have to demonstrate to it that there is no danger when you go to the supermarket, or when you're on a train, or whatever the situation may be. And you need to do this repeatedly. Think of it like training a dog.

If you've ever been concerned that agoraphobia is irreversible, there's no need. Your amygdala is very flexible and open to change. But it does take time. As long as it "believes" that you're in danger, it will hang on to that idea. This is why it takes time.

But once you've retrained it with your actions, as well as your reactions to the adrenaline and so on, you'll find that eventually there will no longer be a disconnect between the fact

of you knowing that you're safe, and how it reacts to your environment.

Beating agoraphobia can be thought of as a battle between you and your amygdala. But really it's more like a series of gentle, friendly nudges. As long as you keep persisting with your message ("there is no danger"), it will, over time, take you more seriously and begin to back off with the distressing overreactions to your environment.

Your amygdala is your friend but it's not doing its job correctly. You have to take charge and show it the right way.

[Previous post](#)

[Back to contents](#)

[Next post](#)

The Perfect Recipe For Overcoming Agoraphobia



Here are five things that you should keep in mind and work on when you do exposures.

First, showing up. Just the fact that you have chosen to put yourself in a potentially anxious situation has an effect on your amygdala. This is the part of your brain which is responsible for scanning your environment for signs of danger, and arming you with the adrenaline necessary to deal with threats. If you show up to a place where you're likely to become anxious, what that tells your amygdala is "No, actually this situation is fine, there is no danger here".

Then there's your attitude. By this I mean your overall mindset. Your determination to face whatever happens. It's your acceptance of and submission to the possibility of panicking. It's your way of placing a bet that you'll be OK. You must have the attitude of "Here I am, and I'm taking a chance, because I believe that there is no danger, even if I panic". Your attitude accompanies your actions, and makes them more powerful.

Next is self talk. Backing up your actions with positive self talk makes for a potent combination. I've said before that positive self talk and mantras alone won't help much. You need to show as well as tell. When you say to yourself "I'm in no danger...I feel OK...this is safe" while actually being far from home or in a challenging place, your amygdala will find it hard to disbelieve you. Why? Because you're not only affirming it with your words, but you're demonstrating it. Your self talk becomes meaningful.

Induced feelings. This means making yourself feel positive and brave. The way I've done this is to have cheerful music playing in my mind. I'm quite good at doing this but if you're not, you can hum, or you can take some music with you. Other ways of doing this include

thinking about nice memories. Whatever it takes for you to get into a good mood. Even if you become anxious, nothing can stop you from doing this. And the fact of you defiantly making the choice to do so sends a clear message.

Posture. If you're sitting, sit up straight and take up space. If you're walking, strut with confidence. In either case, breathe normally and smile. It seems so counter intuitive, the last thing you'd feel like doing. But doing this has pulled me out of anxiety many times. It really works. You can almost hear your amygdala thinking "Huh? What's going on here? You mean we're safe? Oh, alright then, err...I'll back off. I guess there's no danger here". Doing this is really powerful and will give you a sense of control. Remember this and you'll thank me.

Work on all these things and you'll be in a very good position to beat agoraphobia.

If You Panic, Stand Your Ground And Take It



Next time you have a significant amount of anxiety, or even a panic attack, sit or stand up straight, breathe normally, and smile. No matter how you feel, put on an act. Be like a defiant oak tree. The anxiety expects you to take it seriously. Show it that you're the one who calls the shots, and respond in a way that it does not expect.

Experience it fully. Let the horrible feeling get you. It won't kill you. It's just a few seconds of unpleasantness. Let yourself suffer a bit. And if it goes on for longer, so what. Suffer some more. Be as thick skinned as you can be, and just take it. And while you're doing this, remind yourself that you are becoming stronger for doing it.

Observe it. Examine the feeling, just let it be, and get curious about it. Look at what's happening to you as if you're someone else watching. Get detached from the situation and you'll see that it's really nothing. It's just an experience.

Look at the anxiety as if you're watching an irritating child who follows you about. Be dismissive and condescending towards it. Disregard its demands. Rise above it while you do your own thing, and let it fade in importance and relevance. Ignore it. Pretend it's not happening.

You might feel like it's the end of the world, or like your whole self is somehow falling apart, but it's just a bunch of sensations. You've got to learn to be rebellious and not care. Your real self is underneath the whole thing, totally calm and relaxed. Get in touch with it.

Some of what I've said sounds contradictory but I'm trying to convey the mindset that you should have. Be willing to observe it calmly, while ignoring it, in the sense of not letting it affect you. There's no contradiction. The point is not to care. Be indifferent to it, like it has

nothing at all to do with you.

And then when it's over, give yourself permission to strut smugly. You've earned it.

[Previous](#)

[Back to contents](#)

Agoraphobia Exposure

Guidance And Encouragement To Beat Agoraphobia One On One Exposure Coaching

The most effective way to overcome agoraphobia is to put yourself into potentially anxious situations.

By repeatedly experiencing anxiety or at least the risk of anxiety, you take away its power, reducing it to no more than a mild, occasional annoyance that you can easily handle.

But it's not always easy. For some, it can be so scary that they wouldn't dare to try it, unless they had encouragement, support and guidance. There's nothing wrong with that, everyone is different.

And that's what I'm offering to you if you're one of those people. I will give you the guidance and encouragement that you need, if you'll let me.

To find out more, click [HERE](#).

Agoraphobia Exposure

[Blog](#)
[Forum](#)
[Reader's Questions](#)

[Guest Post](#)
[Coaching](#)
[Subscribers](#)