

Agoraphobia Exposure

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Create Positive Memories When Doing Exposures



The reason why you have agoraphobia is because your amygdala interprets perfectly safe situations and places as dangerous. In other words, you've developed negative associations with being far from home, or being in situations where you might feel trapped or lost.

The way to overcome agoraphobia is to expose yourself to those situations, so as to train your brain into perceiving them as safe. And you need to do this repeatedly so that it gets the message.

One way that you can make the process more effective is to create positive associations to replace the negative ones. I'll give one example of how I've done this.

One evening many years ago I went out to meet some friends at a bar. When I arrived I was nervous but not too bad. However, after a while I very quickly started to get anxious, and within a few moments I was having a panic attack.

I wanted to get away fast so I started making moves to get home. I walked to a bus stop nearby. A bus came and I got on. But a part of me felt the need to make the night memorable in a different way. I didn't want to let myself down. So here's what I ended up doing.

I got off after just one stop, and walked back to the bar. When I got there, I not only was totally OK, but I made the most of my time by being as outgoing as possible.

Once I'd satisfied myself that I could turn things around, I went home. On the bus I had a

conversation with the person sitting next to me and I was very impressed with myself. But then at some point I realized that I was on the wrong bus.

For a moment I was worried, so I quickly got off, and my intention was to get another bus home. However, I saw another bar, and I decided to go in. I got a drink and sat near some people, and before I knew it I'd joined their conversation and was having a good time. I was on a roll.

Now I was really satisfied, and so I finally went home. My point is that I found my confidence, and I allowed one thing to lead to another. For the rest of my life that night will always be the night that I turned panic into confidence. I created a positive memory.

Originally I intended to make my point here by explaining it. But as you can see an illustration just as effective, maybe more. So next time you get anxious or have a panic attack, ask yourself, what can I do right now to start turning this into a positive, memorable event?

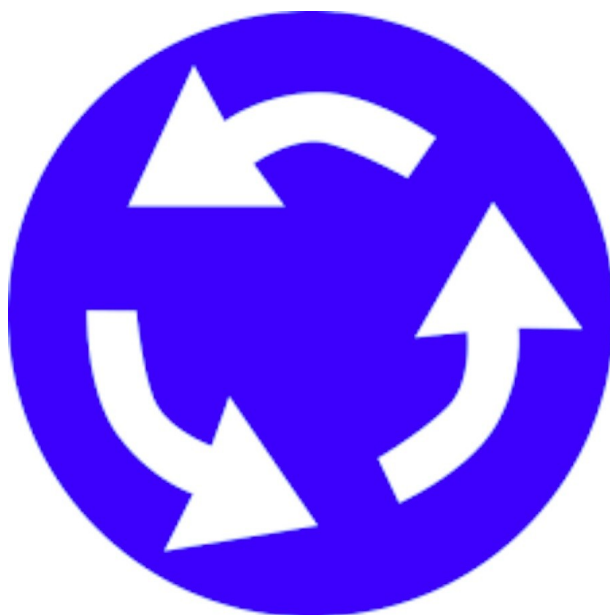
Even in a difficult situation, stay alert for any brief moment when you feel OK, and grab that opportunity to do something defiant. Make a spontaneous move. Shake things up. Do the unexpected. Create a positive memory so that your amygdala will associate the place or situation with good things.

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Reader's Question : How Do I Avoid Relapsing?



Q : I'm looking into starting an exposure plan. I'd like some tips and also a general idea of what a good exposure plan would look like. I've tried looking online to see examples but there aren't really any for agoraphobia.

How do you stay consistent? And how can I avoid relapsing? I was doing fairly well a few months ago. I made immense progress but then I relapsed.

Now I'm at a point where I can go to the nearest town once a week, but I feel like it isn't enough. I want to keep going further.

My anxiety has been higher since my relapse. I'm going to have to push through the fear. It's definitely just a setback and a struggle, but I want to have an achievable ladder.

A : You've made it to the level where you can go to the nearest town. That shows that you're capable of making progress. And you want to go further. That shows a certain amount of determination and bravery. The fact that you say you want to go further tells me that you want to reach your potential and overcome your bad habit (agoraphobia). So far so good.

You're asking me to give you ideas for creating an exposure plan, one that you can consistently succeed with without having a setback. You want to see yourself making consistent progress. The idea of falling backwards is something that I can see you want to

avoid as much as possible.

I'll give you some ideas that you can use to create an exposure plan. These are just my ideas, I'm sure you can combine them with your own ideas. Go to that town again. If you can't make it there, go halfway, or as far as you can. Then stay right there and hang around for half an hour, then go home. Do this over and over until you have very little emotional reaction to being there.

Then travel away from home in a different direction, and do the same. Keep doing that, until you're able to travel away from home in any direction, up to whatever distance you can make it. Then after that, it's just a matter of gradually expanding that distance. It's simple repetition, and gradual advancement, at a pace that suits you.

While you're on your journeys, you should from time to time stop (whenever you're walking) and interact with your environment. Sit somewhere, touch a tree, ask someone for directions, go into a shop, any kind of interaction with your surroundings or other people.

Be aware of whatever is going on around you. The more you involve your senses, the more you'll feel involved in your environment. The purpose of this is to tell your brain that everything is normal and you are not in danger.

I could go on with tips and ideas, but I want to address the real issue here : You are desperate to avoid setbacks. You want perfection. You want a magical plan that if you follow it, you won't run into any problems and everything will work out smoothly.

The thing is, setbacks are part of progress. The path to your goal isn't a straight line, and it sometimes goes backwards. But that doesn't mean that progress isn't being made. In fact, as you progress, the nature of the issues that you will run into along the way will evolve.

Think about it. Your problem is that you went to the next town, had a setback, and now your anxiety is worse. Well, imagine being housebound. A housebound person doesn't have that problem. You're lucky to have such a problem, because it means that you can at least make it to the next town.

If you really want to progress, then you have to accept setbacks. Pick a few places that you know you can easily make it to, go to those places, and take it from there. You will have more setbacks. Accept this now. You will have anxiety too. Accept it. Keep bouncing back from the setbacks. That's actually a big part of beating anxiety, which is why you have to become thick skinned.

The road to overcoming agoraphobia is filled with setbacks and anxiety. It's messy and you have to go through it all. You'll have a lot more peace of mind accepting this than you will by trying to achieve perfection.

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Safety By Association



I want to give you some encouragement. You have to remember that you have agoraphobia because your amygdala is trying to protect you but it's doing it wrong. There are certain types of places and situations that your brain has decided, for whatever reason, are dangerous to you even though they're not.

For the sake of clarity, let's say that your brain has a list of things that it wants you to avoid. However, anything that resembles anything on that list gets added to the list. Just in case.

That's how you've gotten to where you are now, with your amygdala trying to keep you away from a growing list of places, which is why you feel anxious when you're in them. But it's also how you can get yourself out of it. And that's my message of encouragement. Here's what I mean.

The more you demonstrate to your amygdala that a situation is safe (by putting yourself in it repeatedly), the more it will begin to understand that there is no danger in those situations. But even better than that, your amygdala will also start to associate anything that resembles those situations as safe. In other words it will start to use the same process but in reverse.

Every time you do an exposure, whether you're aware of it or not, you're training your amygdala that not only is that situation OK, but also any other situation that resembles it in any meaningful way. And with repetition, you reinforce this.

For example, let's say you have a problem being in train stations. If you go to train stations

often, it will get easier because by showing up you're proving that there's no danger. But because your brain wants to keep you safe, it will regard any place that is similar to a train station as safe also.

That could mean shopping malls (because they're busy), or museums (because they're full of people standing around), or any place where announcements are made, or where there are vehicles coming and going. Any place that is similar to a train station.

It will be different for each person, because we all have our own ways of interpreting things. Some people might not feel that there's much similarity between a train station and a museum, but others will. And of course, this process does take some time, so you need to be patient.

Whenever you expose yourself to something, keep in mind that by doing so, you not only get closer to removing that scenario from the danger list and adding it to the safe list, you're also adding who knows how many other places and situations to the safe list, just because they are similar.

So expand your safe list by doing more exposures, because each one will benefit you in a way that will have a compound effect over time.

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Braver Than Most People



Everyone has to exercise courage from time to time. Courage is the ability to face something that you're scared of. Most people usually only have to show courage in the face of what they perceive to be real threats. But you have to also deal with an irrational fear. The fear that you're somehow in danger while in situations that you know very well are not a threat to you at all.

It's one thing to face something that you and your brain agree is a real threat. It's quite another to contradict your own brain (specifically, your amygdala) and face something that you know to be safe but you feel is dangerous.

Overcoming agoraphobia is a bit like fighting in a civil war. The government (your amygdala), whose job it is to warn and arm you against danger, thinks it knows best. But in this case you know better, and so there's conflict and tension.

You have to keep disregarding its signals and stay right where you are, or remain in the situation that you're in. You have to contradict it when it tells you that you're going to fall apart if you don't take action. You have to remain calm in the face of all those horrible sensations.

That takes a lot of nerve. People who don't have agoraphobia don't have to deal with that. For them, there's either real danger or there isn't. For you, you also have to keep having those unpleasant conflicts within yourself whenever your amygdala decides that something is out to get you. Not to mention having to endure feeling stupid every time it happens. And then there's the fear of other people seeing you look weird or whatever. It's a lot.

So I say if you can get on board with exposures, that makes you braver than most people. You have a unique challenge. Imagine how strong a person you're going to be once you have this under control.

Right now your amygdala has the habit of portraying safe situations as unsafe. But if you can learn to access the courage to stand your ground against it, just think how much easier it will be to deal with real threats in life. That's something to look forward to.

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Reader's Question :

How To Manage Panic Attacks During Long Car Journeys



Q : I have a big question about how to manage panic attacks during gradual exposures. When I do trips in my car that are longer than 10 minutes, I have trouble using my regular coping methods because of the lack of space, and it's insanely scary.

When I have a panic attack or a negative experience, I tend to take backwards steps and become very let down. It really deters me from trying to push myself again. I was wondering how to manage that and what steps can be taken to avoid that.

A : It sounds like you're very afraid of setbacks. And you're afraid of the feeling of being demoralized. Setbacks seem bad, and being demoralized isn't a good feeling. But if you want to make the kind of progress that keeps increasing, you have to accept that setbacks and feeling negative are part of the process.

Whenever your progress seems to freeze and you feel like you're going backwards, don't worry about it. Your progress can't be constant. There need to be pauses, and rests. That's what your setbacks are. It's your mind going through the process of coming to terms with the fact that things are changing in a positive direction. And your mind needs time to do that.

But that's no reason to get hopeless. In fact, it's the opposite. Those are the moments when you ought to remind yourself that you've turned a corner. Just give yourself time and when

you're ready, continue with your exposures. Think of a setback as a time to reflect and get yourself together again for the next round.

Why do you want to cope with panic attacks? What do you mean by coping? Do you mean being able to make a panic attack go away? That's not the way to think. When you panic, you should relax into it and accept that it's happening. It's there anyway so you might as well experience it in a way of your choosing, rather than in a distressed way.

I've had panic attacks while being almost completely relaxed and calm. It's a strange feeling. You've got all that discomfort happening on one level, while on another level, you're detached from it. You're just an observer. This is achievable for you but to be able to do it you need to not freak out when you panic.

Your mind is responding to your environment as if there is danger, but you know there's none. So pick the side that is in tune with reality. Let your mind keep thinking whatever it wants. Your mind is like a computer that you carry around. But you (your consciousness, or however you want to think of it) can be above it all. You can be detached from your panic attack, and that's when you'll be able to have it without distress.

About driving, you say that you find it very challenging driving for longer than 10 minutes. OK, can you manage 10 minutes and 15 seconds? If so, why? Is it because 15 seconds is next to nothing? Right, so if you can do that, then I'm sure you can add another 15 seconds next time, and so on.

You're worried that you don't have the space inside your car to do your usual coping methods. Forget about coping. If you panic, stop somewhere and relax for a moment, then continue. If you're really worried that you might crash or whatever then stop, and continue your journey on foot, then when you're ready walk back to your car and drive home.

There's always something you can do to deal with those situations. I'm sure you could come up with your own ideas. But again, forget about coping. I think that's what you're really concerned with. Just do your exposures, and if you panic, feel it. If you're too scared to go far, then take it step by step.

To recap, don't be so concerned with avoiding or escaping anxiety. And don't worry about setbacks. They're a necessary part of your progress. Basically just take it easy, do your exposures at your own pace, and just keep moving forward.

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Your Attitude Will Determine Your Progress



How you feel during an exposure is not very important. Just by doing the exposure, you're proving to your amygdala that you are safe, regardless of how you feel.

What matters is your attitude. You can be scared while at the same time have a positive, courageous attitude. And it is your attitude that leads to the right actions, which in this case means going to the scary place and staying there for a while.

How you feel from one moment to the next doesn't really matter. What matters is your overall frame of mind, and your determination to prove to yourself that the situation that you're in holds no danger. Your attitude can override whatever feelings you have in any given moment, and steer you towards actions that chip away at that agoraphobia.

So before you put yourself in a challenging situation or place, take some time to get clear on what your attitude is going to be. It's important to be mindful of your thoughts while you do exposures. You don't want to slip into a pessimistic frame of mind.

And then when you're doing the exposure, let your attitude lead the way, and don't get too involved in the feelings that will come and go like the wind.

Keep your attitude strong, and over time your feelings will catch up with it, and get on board with it, and you'll feel more in sync with yourself.

Your attitude is your overall direction. Your feelings are just the scenery along the way. One moment you might feel really nervous, but give it some time because seconds later you could very well be feeling calm and optimistic.

And when you're finished with your exposure, be sure to frame the whole thing in your mind in as positive a way as possible.

Don't let fleeting moments of nervousness rule your thoughts. When they happen, shift your attention and emphasis back to your overall attitude and mindset. That's all that matters.

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What Are You Actually Afraid Of?



People experience agoraphobia for various reasons. What exactly makes you nervous? Unfamiliar environments? Distance from home? The amount of thinking involved in getting back? Being stuck or trapped?

Everyone has their own particular combination of things that they find challenging. For me, it was the thought that it would take a long time to get back home. Not necessarily the distance itself.

It was possible for me to be far from home and feel fine, just as long as I knew that I could jump on a bus or a train and soon find myself close enough to home to feel comfortable. On the other hand, if I knew that the journey home would involve multiple steps or long waits for buses or trains, that's when I would get anxious. I'd also get scared if I got lost somewhere.

I used to think that my issue was that of feeling trapped or stuck. And that was true, but I felt that there was more to it than that. So I started paying attention to how I felt and at what exact moment I'd feel anxious. I'd recall scary situations to see if I could define what it was that bothered me.

After some thought, I realized that for me, what made me feel insecure was being in a place or situation in which I had to be in a frame of mind that was different to what it would be on a day to day basis.

More specifically, it was the idea of having to switch from my usual frame of mind (for example, what it felt like to be at home or somewhere close and familiar) to a different one.

For some reason, having to think differently and acknowledge that I was “out there” made me feel like I was no longer grounded.

At some point you should think about what it is that sets off your anxiety. As you enter a place or situation, pay attention to how you feel. See if you can grasp the exact moment when anxiety creeps in, and try to define what is causing it.

As you do more exposures, you will figure out the things that worry you the most. Then you'll be able to plan journeys that challenge you on those things. This will cut out a lot of time, allowing you to focus on what is most likely to make you anxious, and plan journeys accordingly.

Once you identify exactly the thing that scares you, you can do exposures that address it. Not only that, but you can disregard all other factors. It's easy for things to get conflated and mixed up in your mind.

You might feel as though you're scared of one thing, but in fact you're actually scared of something else. If you can get clear on what exactly it is that sets off anxiety, you can address those things and let go of everything else.

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Overcoming Agoraphobia Is Easy And Simple



To get rid of your agoraphobia with exposure, all you have to do is go to places where you think you'll have anxiety, and then stay there and hang around. Then just repeat, until you no longer have agoraphobia. That's it.

It's not hard or complex. From now on I want you to be aware of and acknowledge the fact that overcoming agoraphobia is easy and simple.

It may not feel like it, but it's true. When something is difficult, it means that it's tricky or requires skill. Skill which you may not have, and which you may need to acquire. Or it may involve having to develop a knack, because some things are just very tricky and require repetition to get them just right. It could take a while for all the required skills to come together and for the task to become second nature.

When something is complicated, or complex, it means that there are multiple factors to consider and coordinate. It may well take some time to learn to get it just right, so that you can successfully accomplish the task at hand. One wrong move could result in a poor result, or no result.

Beating agoraphobia is challenging. This means that you have to overcome something to accomplish it. Something can be challenging because it's difficult, or because it's complex. But if overcoming agoraphobia isn't difficult or complex, then what is it that makes it challenging? What else can make something challenging?

It is painful. That's it. That's why it's "hard". It's not literally hard (difficult), it's painful. And the reason why it's painful is because it requires courage, endurance, patience, and the

maintenance of morale. And all these things require you to improve your character. Changing yourself is painful.

Again, overcoming agoraphobia is an easy and simple process, as described in the first paragraph. There's nothing about it that you are incapable of doing, or that is overwhelmingly complex.

Your challenge is to endure the pain of change until those changes make you better and the pain eventually goes away. You can't become immune to something without getting stronger, and you can't get stronger without going through pain.

Next time you think about how "difficult" it all is, remember, it's not actually difficult. Or complicated. It's easy and simple. But it does require putting up with the pain and discomfort that will eventually become your new thick skin.

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Signs That Your Amygdala Is Starting To Get The Message



There will be times when you'll wonder how long before you start to see the benefits of doing exposures for beating agoraphobia. It does take a while for the benefits to become apparent, so it's important to just keep doing them. Eventually you'll feel the difference.

Here are some things that you may notice after you've been doing exposures for a while. These are signs that your amygdala is starting to change how it responds to your environment and circumstances.

While you're actually doing an exposure, you may find yourself suddenly wanting to deviate from your planned route. I had moments when I was walking down the street and when I saw an alley or a side street, or maybe a park, I decided to go off route and do something different.

Sometimes I'd allow myself to end up going somewhere unexpected, and sometimes I'd just explore and then head back and follow my original route. But either way, I recognized this as a sign of increasing confidence.

Feeling both nervous and excited at the same time is another strange thing that can happen. It shows that your amygdala is beginning to get confused, which is great. That's how change sometimes starts. With confusion.

Being gentle with yourself when you get anxious is what one would expect anyone to usually do. However, if you're anxious and you get harsh and critical with yourself, this is good. It shows that you're starting to expect more of yourself.

The nature of your anxious moments and panic attacks can also change. After doing lots of exposures, don't be surprised if your panic attacks start to feel more like mere anxiety. In other words, the same general feeling of a panic attack, but milder and less like you've fallen over the edge of a cliff.

And sometimes you won't even be able to tell whether you're panicking or just anxious. Again this kind of confusion is a good sign of progress.

Also, as you get better at exposures, you'll find it easier to remain calm. Panic attacks won't feel so dramatic. You'll be more aware than before of the fact that they don't last long, and you'll be able to ride them out without too much distress. Your panic attacks will also become shorter. Perhaps they'll come and go in brief waves.

When thinking about future exposures, you may start planning or at least considering journeys that are increasingly adventurous and daring. Take that as a major sign of progress.

As you get more confident you may begin to really look forward to doing exposures. You'll likely get the urge to explore new places and go further.

A very weird thing could happen when you're at home going about your business or just sitting down. Be ready for this one. It's possible that you will have a panic attack when you're in your comfort zone and there's nothing going on. Don't be alarmed if this occurs. When this happened to me I was very confused and disappointed at first. But after a while I liked it.

I actually started to enjoy the fact that one one level, I was experiencing the physical sensations of a panic attack, while on another level, I was completely above it all. I was like an observer. Nothing bad happened, I was just calmly sitting at home having a panic attack, eating my cheese sandwich, and not caring at all. I was actually pretty amusing. So if that happens to you, don't worry. It's a huge sign that you're doing well.

And lastly, when you've been doing exposures for a long time, you'll begin to get annoyed at yourself for letting agoraphobia affect you.

I can't give you a time frame for when these things will happen, or guarantee that they will all happen, or happen quite how I've described. Everyone is different. But I just wanted to give you an insight as to what progress could look like. Keep exposing yourself to the things that scare you and you'll most likely notice at least some of these interesting changes.

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Courage Requires Humility



To beat agoraphobia by exposing yourself to whatever you fear, you're going to need courage. You're not going to overcome it with avoidance, and the sooner you accept this, the better.

Courage isn't a skill that you have to learn. Courage is an ability. And the good news is that you already have it. You have all the courage you'll ever need built into you. You don't need to develop it, what you need is to access it.

But if it's already there and all you have to do is get to it, what's stopping you?

Well, if the stakes are high enough, and the situation urgent enough, most of us are willing to face a scary situation.

But when it feels like you've got all the time in the world and you know you're not going to see immediate benefits, it's easy to stay comfortable and continue avoiding. This is what happens to a lot of people with agoraphobia. It's just so easy to stay comfortable.

Something is blocking you from grabbing your courage and using it, and that something is a lack of humility. When facing a situation that might make you anxious, it's possible that you'll look or at least feel a bit stupid at times. You may also become demoralized and pessimistic about your chances of improving.

You might even have a fear of succeeding, wondering "If I beat this, who will I be, and how will I function?" In other words, you might not know how you'll move forward without your "comfortable" agoraphobia habit.

All of those fears and concerns boil down to ego. If you want to get rid of your agoraphobia habit, you need to be OK with not always being in control or knowing the exact outcome to everything. That is to say, you need to learn to get out of your own way. Stop being precious about yourself and get your hands dirty. Overcoming agoraphobia is going to be messy.

It's an internal struggle. Embarrassment, feeling weak, inadequate and self critical. The frustration of slow progress and setbacks. You're going to have to put up with it all.

You already know there's nothing to be afraid of out there. But because you feel fear, you need to face it so that you can watch it dissolve and disappear.

But the only obstacle is you. Get over yourself. Your ego is the only thing standing between you and an anxiety free life.

If you feel like you lack courage, you don't. What you're actually feeling is threatened ego. Like I say, you already have all the courage you need. So push that ego aside so you can get on with facing your fears. It won't be so bad with you out of the way.

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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](#).

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