How to use hypnosis
to tame anxiety and fear
(and stop your imagination running wild)

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Uncommon Hypnosis Blueprint Nº 5
How to use hypnosis to tame anxiety and fear

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How to use hypnosis to tame anxiety and fear (and stop your imagination running wild)

This Blueprint gives you background information about how we respond to perceived danger, and step-by-step instructions on how to use your hypnotic skills to keep fear in line and control it so that you can effectively address real dangers and calmly dismiss imagined threats. It will also change how you think about fear in general.

THE only thing we have to fear is fear itself.

-FD Roosevelt-
Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear.

Ambrose Redmoon

Therapeutic hypnosis is to fear and anxiety what water is to fire. Hypnosis can transform frightened minds into calm, able and relaxed minds. It’s so important to know how to do this, because living with fear in all or any of its guises can be hell.

There are very real costs to constant anxiety, stress, tension and panic.

The cost of excess stress

Continual stress:

- inhibits the immune system (making physical illness more likely)
- inhibits the prefrontal cortex in the brain (making it harder to think clearly)
- raises blood pressure (increasing risk of heart and kidney problems)
- interferes with sleep (thus causing even more stress).

In addition, being ‘an anxious person’ can also spoil our relationships, as anxiety tends to make us negatively misinterpret what others say and do.

I see stress in all its forms – from panic to free floating worry – as a ‘beast’ that needs to be tamed so that you control it rather than it controlling you.

But first I want to talk about taking the trash out.
Sarah and Jane put the trash out

It’s 11pm and Sarah has just finished watching that classic comedy *Airplane*. She is chuckling to herself and life seems just... funny to her, right now. She goes to put the trash out before going to bed. A stranger walks past in the street, an old man walking his dog. Sarah bids him good night. The man smiles. Sarah remembers a scene from the movie and smiles to herself again as she turns to go back indoors. In the shadowy darkness she trips over a watering can she’d left out near the front door. What a classic comedy moment, she giggles to herself, picking up the watering can and setting it aside before going inside and shutting the door.

It’s 11pm and Jane has just finished watching that classic horror movie *The Evil Dead*. She feels decidedly spooked, but she has to put the trash out before going to bed. Someone is walking up the street, his shadow elongated in the rather dim light from the street lamp. Who is he? She rushes back to her front door but suddenly... crash! She screams in shock, and practically wakes up the whole neighbourhood. When she calms down a little she sees she has tripped over her watering can. Leaving it where it has fallen, she scurries inside and triple bolts her door.

Okay, so what has all this got to do with using hypnosis to alleviate fear?
Are you biased?

If we are stressed, anxious, depressed, angry, in love or indeed experiencing any reasonably strong emotion, then we have a bias as far as reality in concerned.

Remember those old school physics lessons where you first saw light entering a prism and bending?

Well, we all have a significant ‘bent of mind’ when we are emotional. Strong emotions are trance inducing. Under their influence, we see what we want to see, (what fits the ‘emotional trance’) and we don’t tend to see what doesn’t fit the emotional ‘bias’ or ‘mental set’.

So Sarah had been ‘primed’ (by the comedy movie) to see amusement everywhere, whereas Jane had been ‘primed’ with fear (by the horror movie) so that every shadow and movement contained threat for her.

Now if you live in a continuously highly stressed state (and you might not even know how stressed you are) then you will have a strong bias in your mind, and you’ll see reality in ways that confirm and reinforce your emotional state.

IF you are continuously stressed you will be STRONGLY negatively biased.
Seeing only what you (don’t) want to see

Depressed people see reality incredibly selectively. They only start to allow in more hopeful balanced viewpoints once they start to feel better.

When someone is highly fearful, the first thing we need to do is calm them right down. Only then will they be able to see that the thing/person/event that seemed so threatening is actually something innocuous, or even desirable.

For example, a man I helped over his morbid terror of flying told me later than that he now quite enjoyed flying but sometimes found it boring. Previously, both enjoyment and boredom had been filtered out by his inflexible terror response.

A woman I worked with for fear of socializing afterwards found she was able to look forward to, and have fun at, social events. Again fun, relaxation, the joy of connecting, all these elements had been excluded from her experience by the narrowing, limiting effects of her former anxiety and self consciousness.

As fear lifts and stress diminishes, life literally starts to feel more varied, offering more possibilities.

Fear constricts not just the workings of the body but also the way we see and inhabit our reality. Something I often say to clients is:

WHEN fear lifts and YOU become different IN A SITUATION... then...... that situation becomes DIFFERENT.
So if we think about Jane’s horror movie fear biased way of putting the trash out, what else does that tell us about stress and fear?

**Fear needs a shape**

Ever noticed how generally anxious people can get anxious about *anything*? They will just *find* stuff to worry about and will often become fearful about what in reality are *opportunities*, not *threats*.

Liquid naturally assumes the shape of whatever is holding it, or whatever it is flowing through. It’s the same with fear. It can’t really exist in a vacuum, it will assume a shape, a context. We human beings like to find a narrative, an explanation for *why* we feel *what* we feel. So if we feel *generally* stressed, we will find ourselves fearing and worrying about stuff that would never normally bother us at all. Fear has found a ‘shape’ to inhabit.

So next time you find yourself wondering: “Why am I so scared of that? Why am I even *thinking* about that?” remember that fear is just *attaching itself* to the first thing that offers.

That is what happens if your anxiety is general.

But millions of people also have quite *specific* fears.

**The waking nightmare of traumas and phobias**

A ‘phobia’ is a terror panic response to some very specific trigger, such as heights or spiders. Phobias are often brought into existence by traumatic experiences that ‘stamp’ the fear learning deep in the ‘emotional brain’, in the ‘fight or flight’ centre of the brain known as the amygdala.

PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) works just like a phobia, but in this case the ‘phobia’ is a particular *memory*, or series of memories.

I’ve worked with hundreds of traumatized people, from war vets to abuse survivors and plane wreck survivors. Anything that even vaguely reminds the subconscious mind of the sufferer of the original trauma can set off ‘flashbacks’ (hypnotic reliving of the event) and panic.

I describe fear as hypnotic. Let me explain.
The worst kind of hypnosis

Fear is hypnotic in that it both narrows attention very tightly and makes people highly suggestible.

I once did a public demonstration of a phobia cure (the Rewind Technique). Mary, my volunteer subject, had a fear of heights which would be activated even when she stood on a chair, or went up steep stairs.

Mary knew when and why her phobia had started, but this knowledge made no difference to her fear. Sixty years before, when she was five years old, she had climbed a ladder up toward the attic. Her mischievous, and possibly sadistic, brother thought it would be funny to remove the ladder before she had climbed into the attic. She was left dangling 10 feet in the air.

She had, of course, been terrified. Although she was safely rescued by her father, the terror she went through conditioned her for future experiences of being high up.

For six decades she struggled with steps and elevation in general. The initial fear was hypnotic and made her highly suggestible to the idea that height was very dangerous. So whenever she later encountered anything like steps, she experienced the post hypnotic response of feeling just as she had during that first awful experience.

The hypnotic exercises offered in this Blueprint (there are many others) can help you get over a phobia or PTSD, but I also recommend that you check out our full library of fear related hypnosis downloads and/or get help from someone skilled in the Rewind Technique.
Two key principles for the treatment of fear

There are two important principles to bear in mind when dealing with fear.

**PRINCIPLE 1**  Emotion subsides when we inwardly recall or imagine the feared event from a dissociated perspective.

**PRINCIPLE 2**  Regular deep relaxation dramatically reduces vulnerability to stress.

When you apply Principle 1, you can overcome specific fears and phobias.

When you apply Principle 2, you arm yourself against the cumulative harmful effects of long term stress.

Relax deeply at least once a day, even if only for 10 minutes. The benefits of daily deep relaxation spill over into your wider life, meaning it becomes harder to get quite as stressed as you would have done before – about anything.

Just as the value and benefits of exercise don’t just happen while you are actually exercising, so too the reduced tension will continue *outside* of the time you take to relax deeply.
How hypnosis will help you control fear and anxiety

Because fear itself is so powerfully hypnotic, it makes sense to respond to it by using the power of therapeutic hypnosis to bring it into line. The hypnotic exercises that follow all counter the negative hypnosis imposed by fear with positive hypnosis that leads to beneficial outcomes.

In using these exercises you will discover that you are not the helpless victim of terror (even in genuinely threatening situations). And you will be training yourself to direct and control your responses, and manage your emotional states, in such a way that good outcomes to stressful situations become very much more likely.

The best way to tame fear is to do it in advance of a situation in which you would expect to feel fearful. The first two exercises are designed to help you do this. (If your concern is more about a traumatic experience that still affects you, I strongly recommend that you seek the help of a therapist skilled in the Rewind Technique.)

In the first exercise – Feel better about past anxious times – you identify a situation that makes you feel fearful, and that you expect to encounter again, such as giving a presentation, talking with a certain person, or anything similar. As you do the exercise, you will change how you feel about your past experiences of that kind of situation.

You can continue to the second exercise immediately after you have completed the first, or you can leave a period of time between them.

In the second exercise – Feel calm about an upcoming event – you hypnotically rehearse dealing successfully and calmly with similar situations in future.

But sometimes you can find yourself feeling fearful when you are already in a situation. The third exercise – Relieve anxiety right now – is for ‘on the spot’ treatment of fearful feelings.

Repeat these hypnotic exercises as often as you need. Until you no longer need them.
1 – Feel better about past anxious times

1. Find a comfortable and peaceful place to sit or lie, where you can be sure you won’t be disturbed for a while. Close your eyes and use any method you know to plunge deeply and peaceably into hypnotic trance.

2. When you are nicely relaxed, call to mind that time you were thinking of that caused you anxiety in the past.

3. Now get the sense of drifting out of yourself and just watching that time from a distance, as if seeing those events unfolding before you in a movie, just watching it all objectively and oh so calmly.

4. Take this opportunity to note and really learn something about that time that you had never noticed before.

   This could be something about you in that time, or about another person, or about something else entirely.

5. Take time to notice how much more relaxed you feel about that time when watching it ‘from the outside’.

6. Then let the image fade. Spend an ‘interval’ just allowing yourself to relax even deeper in whatever way appeals at this time.

7. Now start to watch a ‘movie’ of the events once more.

   But now, watch it all happening as it would have happened if you had stayed calm and composed in that time.

8. As you watch that you remaining completely calm as those old events unfold, notice all the differences you can observe in that time as it would have been.

9. When your unconscious mind lets you know that you have learned everything you need from this experience, allow yourself to drift back into the room, feeling relaxed and alert.
2 – Feel calm about an upcoming event

1. Find a comfortable and peaceful place to sit or lie, where you can be sure you won’t be disturbed for a while. Close your eyes and use any method you know to plunge deeply and peaceably into hypnotic trance.

2. When you have reached a very comfortable state of peaceful yet alert and curious relaxation, call to mind the upcoming event that is similar to the old events you now feel so much better about.

3. Get a sense of observing yourself, perhaps on a beautiful home movie screen, looking and feeling relaxed and at ease, and acting with calm composure as that event takes its course.

4. Observe yourself carefully.

5. Notice what it is about the you in that future event that lets the you here watching know the you there in the future is calm, relaxed, comfortable and perhaps even ‘in flow’ (in the zone).

6. Pay particular attention to the body language of that future you, the way you stand, sit and move with assurance, the open gestures you use, the way your face radiates deep calm confidence. Take note of anything else that seems significant to you as you watch.

7. Watch that event right the way through from the very first moment to its satisfactory conclusion.

8. Notice what it’s like to be thinking about this upcoming situation while feeling totally calm and relaxed.

9. When you have absorbed everything you need from this and feel that you are ready, bring yourself gently back into the present time feeling relaxed and energized.
3 – Relieve anxiety right now

1. Focus on breathing **out**.
   
   Let your outbreath **lengthen**, making sure it’s longer than your inbreath.

   Breathing out more than you breathe in will calm you down within 30 seconds or so.

   **Note:** People in panic sometimes hardly breathe out at all, but just breathe in rapidly.

   This causes them to hyperventilate and produces more panic.

   It’s when we **breathe out** that we mobilize the **relaxation response** known as the parasympathetic nervous system.

   People naturally sigh when they are stressed, without knowing how **sighing** (which extends the outbreath) **triggers calm**.

2. Now (with your eyes shut if this is appropriate in the situation, or keeping them open if not) **strongly imagine**, just for a few seconds, stepping **outside** of yourself and **seeing yourself** in this situation as if you are looking at it **from the outside**.

3. Just **notice** in your mind what’s it’s like to see yourself looking **calm**, **relaxed** and **confident**.

4. Continue to do this for around **30 seconds**, as you continue to breathe out more than you breathe in.

5. Next take a few moments to **imagine** being in **the future** (when the situation you are in has been over for a while), **looking back** on this time and ‘remembering’ **how calm you felt**.

6. Then come back into the present moment, noticing how **wonderfully calm** you feel.
There are so many ways that fear rears its head in life, and of course sometimes, (although much more rarely than people imagine) we might actually need the energy that panic provides when we are presented with real physical threats.

But it’s much more often the case that fear, worry and stress are not required – and that’s when we need to take back control.

As well as doing the hypnotic exercises and studying the Blueprint, you’ll find it worthwhile to read what I’ve written about How To Stop A Panic Attack.

If anxiety is an unwelcome long term lodger in your life, you’ll find my 5 Tips for Generalized Anxiety Disorder illuminating.

And you can find out more about the mysteries of phobia in Phobias - Strange But Simple, Terrible But Treatable.

Have fun using hypnosis to conquer your fears!

All my best

Mark