**How A Fear Can Turn into A Phobia**

Fear is a natural emotion that occurs when we feel threatened. It’s an important warning sign that tells us to stay alert and proceed with caution. In such cases it's a good kind of fear because it protects us. However, our modern-day fears may become more of an obstacle than a benefit.

Today, our fears are so numerous and compounded that they can be extremely limiting – or cripple us if we allow them to control us. Our modern fears are more based on emotions than on direct physical survival. We fear failure, we fear taking risks, we fear expressing our emotions, accepting change… the list is endless.

These are the types of fears that can easily become obsessive and over time, turn into serious phobias. What’s the difference between a fear and a phobia and how does a fear become a phobia? Read on to find out.

***How a phobia develops***

The simple definition of a phobia is an irrational. It's irrational because what you're afraid of can't really harm you or is very unlikely to happen. A phobia develops over time when a specific fear gets overblown and exaggerated so that it becomes an obsession.

Obsessing about a fear keeps you thinking about it constantly and imagining unrealistic outcomes or scenarios related to the fear. Over time, your fear becomes associated with such negative thoughts that it no longer just scares you, it terrifies you and floods you with emotions of helplessness and panic. Nothing short of a real life-threatening situation should make you feel this way.

***Signs that it’s a phobia and not a fear***

Here are some common signs that indicate that fear is becoming or has become a full-fledged phobia:

**The fear has a recurring pattern**

Let's say you made a bad business decision in the past that resulted in a big financial loss. Now, you dread making decisions because rather than learn from past mistakes and move on, you keep reliving or obsessively.

A pattern will start to emerge whereby the need to make a decision reminds you of the past failure. You create horrible scenarios where this time, you'll lose everything you own, nobody will want to have anything to do with and you'll end up homeless on the street.

The result is that you either postpone making the decision, delegate it to someone else or not make a decision at all, even if the outcome is to your benefit.

In the case that you're forced to decide, you do so in utter panic and spend many sleepless nights terrified that you've made the wrong decision. These symptoms may even extend to making simple day-to-day decisions such as what color shoes to buy or what to order at a restaurant.

This recurring and irrational pattern indicates that the fear of making decisions has become a phobia.

**You start making irrational choices**

Let's say you have a fear of speaking in public (everyone does, by the way!) You have horrible fantasies of tripping over your feet, stuttering uncontrollably and more or less making a total laughingstock of yourself.

You know this is unlikely but your fear is so bad that you go to extremes to avoid it. This could result in some very bad choices indeed.

If your best friend asks you to make a speech at his wedding, you might actually make some excuse not to attend rather than speak in public. You might call in sick at work on a day you're supposed to give a presentation, causing a mad scramble to find a replacement.

It's not hard to see how a phobia can damage relationships and seriously hinder your ability to function in certain situations.

**Physical symptoms of distress**

Someone with a phobia may actually become so distressed that they exhibit physical symptoms like sweating, trembling, clammy hands or a racing heartbeat.

While these symptoms naturally occur in situations of real danger, they're totally irrational as symptoms in a phobia because there's no real threat involved. Other symptoms may include angry outbursts, irritability and even tears.

**You know it's irrational**

The strange thing about phobias is that people who suffer from them know they’re being irrational and that their fear can't hurt them. Nonetheless, they feel real terror and panic. The symptoms become a subconscious reaction over time because their phobia is controlling you and overriding your rational thinking.

**Conclusion**

A phobia doesn't mean you're abnormal or mentally unsound but it can affect your emotional health and eat away at your self-confidence. The good news is that, phobias can be overcome with honest self-reflection and identifying the root fear behind them. After that, it's sheer willpower to force yourself to do the thing that terrifies you. And it works!

Now that you're more informed about how a fear can turn into a phobia, you're well-armed to take decisive action. If you start seeing the signs, act at once to stop them from escalating by breaking the pattern and addressing the root fear.

Remember, prevention is better than the cure! Fear is normal at times bit phobias are not. It's in your hands to make sure that your fears stay in the natural range of a gear that's normal and valid.