

H3-1 Self-Help for Fears

Fears, such as test anxiety, can interfere with daily life and prevent you from reaching important goals. To help yourself cope with fears, follow these steps:

1. **Confront your problem.** It is normal to avoid facing problems, especially those that make us fearful. However, changing requires that we first admit that we need to change. Try to get past the rationalizations and take an objective look at yourself. Test anxiety might make you wonder whether you are capable of doing college-level work, when really you are terrified by tests. Are you really not interested in a law career, or do you fear speaking in front of others?
2. **Critique your ideas.** Get in the habit of questioning yourself whenever you feel anxious. Identify the source of this feeling and subject your fearful ideas to criticism. Are other people really so interested in you that they observe your every move, just waiting for you to embarrass yourself? Ask yourself, “What is the absolute worst thing that can happen?” Imagine it happening. Is this really so catastrophic?
3. **Rehearse and prepare.** Fear is decreased by preparation. If you have social anxiety, set goals for performing in front of or meeting others, and then reward yourself for achieving your targets. Try role playing. Copy the behaviors of people who have learned to cope with anxiety and practice them. The more you practice, the less you will be afraid.
4. **Learn to relax and develop coping skills.** Relaxation is inimical to fear. Learn some relaxation techniques and practice them, especially before tests and performances. Use such coping skills as positive self-talk to reduce fear.
5. **Keep trying and get assistance.** Fears are easier to avoid than to overcome. Success is not always swift. Don’t expect to go from fear to fearlessness overnight. By all means seek assistance from a mental health professional if your fears are overwhelming or unmanageable.

SOURCE: Adapted from Schwartz, S. 2000. *Abnormal Psychology: A Discovery Approach*. Mountain View, Calif.: Mayfield.