



## Fear and Phobias

Fear is an emotional response to threats and danger. It can be seen as a basic survive response as a result of being exposed to some kind of danger which may include pain or the threat thereof.

It is important to note the difference between fear and anxiety as fear is brought on by an external source as opposed to anxiety which does not require an external source.

According to Charles Darwin in his book *"The expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals"*...

" Fear is often preceded by astonishment, and is so far akin to it, that both lead to the sense of sight and hearing being instantly aroused. In both cases the eyes and mouth are widely opened, and the eyebrows raised. The frightened man at first stands like a statue motionless and breathless, or crouches down as if instinctively to escape observation. The heart beats quickly and violently, so that it palpitates or knocks against the ribs... That the skin is much affected under the sense of great fear, we see in the marvellous manner in which perspiration immediately exudes from it... The hairs also on the skin stand erect; and the superficial muscles shiver. In connection with the disturbed action of the heart, the breathing is hurried. The salivary glands act imperfectly; the mouth becomes dry, and is often opened and shut."

The facial expression of fear includes the widening of the eyes (out of anticipation for what will happen next); the pupils dilate (to take in lighter); the upper lip rises, the brows draw together, and the lips stretch horizontally. The physiological effects of fear can be better understood from the perspective of the sympathetic nervous responses, as compared to the parasympathetic response, which is a more relaxed state. Muscles used for physical movement are tightened and primed with oxygen, in preparation for a physical fight-or-flight response. Perspiration occurs due to blood being shunted from body's viscerato the peripheral parts of the body. Blood that is shunted from the viscera to the rest of the body will transfer, along with oxygen and nutrients, heat, prompting perspiration to cool the body. When the stimulus is shocking or abrupt, a common reaction is to cover (or otherwise protect) vulnerable parts of the anatomy, particularly the face and head. When a fear stimulus occurs unexpectedly, the victim of the fear response could possibly jump or give a small start. The person's heart-rate and heartbeat may quicken.

### Varieties

Fear can be described with different terms in relation to the degree of fear that is experienced. It varies from mild caution to extreme phobia and paranoia. Fear is related to a number of additional cognitive and emotional states including worry, anxiety, terror, horror, panic, and dread. As an individual emotional state, fear can affect the unconscious mind, where it can become manifested in the form of nightmares. Fear may

also be experienced within a larger group or social network. In this way, personal fears are compounded by social influence to become mass hysteria.

The experience of distrust can be explained as a feeling of mild fear or caution, usually in response to an unfamiliar or potentially dangerous person. Distrust may occur as a feeling of warning towards someone or something that is questionable or unknown. For example, one may distrust a stranger who acts in a way that is perceived as odd or unusual. Likewise, one may distrust the safety of a rusty old bridge across a 100-foot drop. Distrust may serve as an adaptive, early warning signal for situations that could lead to greater fear and danger.

Terror is an acute and pronounced form of fear. It is an overwhelming sense of immediate personal danger. It can also be caused by perceiving the object of a phobia. Terror may overwhelm a person to the point of making irrational choices and atypical behaviour. Paranoia is a term used to describe a psychosis of fear. It is experienced as longstanding feelings and perceptions of being persecuted. Paranoia is an extreme emotional state combined with cognitions, or more specifically, delusions that one is in danger. This degree of fear may indicate that one has changed his or her normal behaviour in extreme or maladaptive ways.

### **Common Fears**

According to surveys, some of the most commonly feared objects are spiders, snakes, heights, water, enclosed spaces, tunnels and bridges, social rejection, failure, and public speaking. In an innovative test of what people fear the most, Bill Tancer analyzed the most frequent online search queries that involved the phrase, "fear of...". This follows the assumption that people tend to seek information on the issues that concern them the most. His top ten list of fears consisted of flying, heights, clowns, intimacy, death, rejection, people, snakes, success, and driving. In general, people appear to be most afraid of two things: the threat of pain or death, and the threat of social rejection or isolation.

In a 2005 Gallup poll, a national sample of adolescents between the ages of 13 and 15 were asked what they feared the most. The question was open ended and participants were able to say whatever they wanted. The most frequently cited fear (mentioned by 8% of the teens) was terrorism. The top ten fears were, in order: terrorist attacks, spiders, death, being a failure, war, heights, criminal or gang violence, being alone, the future, and nuclear war.

### **Fear and Death**

Psychologists have addressed the hypothesis that fear of death motivates religious commitment, and that it may be alleviated by assurances about an afterlife. Empirical research on this topic has been equivocal. According to Kahoe and Dunn, people who are most firm in their faith and attend religious services weekly are the least afraid of dying. People who hold a loose religious faith are the most anxious, and people who are not religious are intermediate in their fear of death. A survey of people in various Christian denominations showed a positive correlation between fear of death and dogmatic adherence to religious doctrine. In other words, Christian fundamentalism and other strict interpretations of the Bible are associated with greater fear of death. Furthermore, some religious orientations were more effective than others in allaying that fear.

In another study, data from a sample of white, Christian men and women were used to test the hypothesis that traditional, church-centered religiousness and de-institutionalized spiritual seeking are distinct ways of approaching fear of death in old age. Both religiousness and spirituality were related to positive psychosocial functioning, but only church-centered religiousness protected subjects against the fear of death.

Fear of death is also known as death anxiety. This may be a more accurate label because, like other anxieties, the emotional state in question is long lasting and not typically linked to a specific stimulus. The analysis of fear of death, death anxiety, and concerns over mortality is an important feature of existentialism and terror management theory.