Why Hypnosis Can Cure Social Anxiety

Why do you think we have emotions? Wouldn't life be simpler without them? Do we have emotions to give middle class people something to talk about or to provide soap opera writers with script material?

Of course not. As with everything else in human makeup, emotions exist to keep us *safe and alive and able to thrive.*

**Emotions Motivate Movement**

Embedded in the word "emotion" is another word: "motion". Emotions are there to make us move. Either *towards* something or *away* from it.

We all have deep basic needs - for warmth, security, love and connection and, of course, food and shelter. We have needs for status, significance, attention and to feel safe in our lives. We need stimulation, to exercise our creativity to learn and produce in the world. Some emotions drive us toward experiences that would help meet these needs and ensure our survival. And other emotions serve to drive us *away* from experiences or situations which, we feel, would prevent us meeting our essential needs.

But what happens when we get directed the wrong way by our feelings?

**You Are Pulled Towards Social Contact By Your Needs, And Away From It By Social Anxiety**

The "motion" in "emotion" has us moving either towards what we feel we need or away from what we feel we don't want. Think lust, love, anger, greed, hunger - all feelings that motivate us towards an experience. And think about feelings that drive us away from something - fear, terror, disgust.

Hopefully, our emotions get it right and drive us toward what is good for us and away from what is bad for us. But sometimes they don't.

The social phobic both wants and doesn't want social contact. They are pulled and pushed in different directions by their feelings. If social contact was bad for us, it would be great to be terrified of social events because it would be life saving. But a socially anxious person instinctively knows they *need* social contact *at the same time* as fearing it; they are pulled and pushed at the same time by their emotions... tricky! And it gets worse.

**We Avoid What We Fear - But Also Fear What We Avoid**

One problem is that the more you avoid something, the more the fear around it increases. It's as if your "emotional brain" draws conclusions from your behaviour: *"She's avoiding this situation all the time, so it must be genuinely dangerous. So I'll ramp up her fear of this situation even more to make sure she won't go near it."*

On the other hand, people can switch off their fear around stuff they *should* fear simply because they have *made* themselves go towards it. I'm thinking of the old-time circus lion-tamer calmly putting his head in a lion's mouth, and of those perennial favourites, the human cannonballs, getting themselves fired from a cannon. Not hobbies I'd recommend. The point is that even dangerous acts like these can start to feel "normal" to your emotional brain if you *voluntarily* and *repeatedly* do them (the "emotional brain" concludes *"This must be safe, else why are we doing it?"*).

So yes, we avoid what we fear, but we can also come to fear something *just because we avoid it so much.*

A number of approaches have been tried over the centuries to overcome the difficulties this presents. None are as successful as hypnotic therapy. Consider, for instance, what happens with "exposure therapy" and "cognitive therapy" in the context of dealing with fears like shyness and social anxiety.

**Exposure Therapy: A Step Too Far?**

The understanding that emotions are physical drivers *away from* or *towards* something is extensively used in exposure therapy. (1) This approach typically has you gradually having more and more contact with what scares you. So the spider phobic might on week one see a drawing of a spider, on week two see a photo of a spider, on week three see a toy spider, on week four touch the toy spider, week five has them seeing a movie of a spider and week six an actual live spider. This can be very effective *if* the person can be induced to remain calm through the gradual exposure (sometimes known as "systematic desensitisation"). (It would be easier and faster to use hypnosis and the [rewind technique](http://www.hypnosisdownloads.com/training/rewind-technique?6077!art1).)

The idea is that spiders need to start to feel a "normal" part of experience, and this is done through *forcing oneself* to go towards rather than away from; classic behavioural therapy, and probably what the lion-tamer did to get the nerve he needed...

Another kind of exposure therapy takes a less gradual approach and is known as "flooding". Yikes! This might see the spider phobic being put straight in a room full of spiders, with the idea that fully experiencing your worst fear - and surviving it - will put an end to that fear.

So does it work?

**Therapy For The Therapy**

Yes, it can work - provided the person undergoing the therapy is taught to relax deeply. But (you knew there was a "but") I can't tell you how many clients I've had to treat to help them recover from the effects of this kind of therapy when it's gone wrong. These are the ones who didn't get better, the ones who couldn't get past the photo of the spider on week two, the ones who were deeply traumatised by being thrown in at the deep end of having to speak in front of a hundred people when they were still chronically shy.

There has to be, and fortunately is, another way.

**The Beauty Of Hypnosis When Treating Fears**

Hypnosis, used sensibly, is the perfect way to expose someone in a *safe* and *relaxed* way to a situation they had been avoiding. As far as your emotional brain is concerned, if you have relaxed deeply and felt spontaneous at a party a few times while in hypnosis, this is a sufficiently strong indication that this situation is not dangerous, and that this kind of social event can now be "retagged" as something you can potentially go safely *towards* *- before you've even been to an actual party.* Someone who hasn't left the house for years can "leave their house" in hypnosis and "experience it" before they go out the door in real life. The exposure therapy is fully within their own control, in sync with a relaxed mind and body.

When they then "do it for real", it will already feel more familiar and therefore not as threatening. The previously dreaded social event may even, dare I say it, turn out to be relaxing and fun.

It's important to understand here that we are talking about more than just what a person *believes*.

**Feelings And Thoughts Can Be At Odds**

You can fully believe something is good for you and still fearfully flee from it. You can fully believe something (or someone) is bad for you but still be emotionally driven towards it (or them). Cognitive approaches to dealing with fears often come unstuck over this, as fears aren't driven so much by "faulty thinking" as by more primitive emotional conditioning geared towards survival. It is much easier to access, and modify, these primitive drivers through the use of hypnosis than through reasoning.

When we help someone with social phobia it's generally obvious the phobia has gone the moment they open their eyes, because calm, disassociated hypnotic exposure to the previously feared trigger while feeling completely relaxed has transformed their response. They know it wasn't "real" - but nonetheless a new positive blueprint for responding with calm and being in flow when in social situations has become established in their subconscious. Being socially relaxed is the new "normal".

The new [10 steps to overcome social anxiety course](http://www.hypnosisdownloads.com/10-steps/social-anxiety?6077!art2), like all the ten steps courses, has a hypnotic download for each step of the way. This is partly because social skills can be developed and honed during hypnotic rehearsal but also because we want people to experience hypnotic "safe" social experiences *before* they go into these situations for real. In this way the horrible *away from* feelings of fear can gently be replaced with the happier *toward* feelings of pleasure and positive expectation when it comes to socializing and meeting new people.