

## **Countering Stage Fright**

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Hello friends, I am here once again to continue my discussion on systematic desensitization of stage fear, public speaking skills, and performance anxiety. Well, you have to make sure before you go to the stage that you know your subject well. This may sound obvious, but it is important that you are confident in your subject. Plan your speech, practice it, say it out loud, and imagine a positive outcome of the speech. This will help you to get into the right frame of mind for a speech you are about to make. Practice again and again and learn the points where you need to use emphasis or pose, which is the tone-tonal quality.

You are not a robot; you are a human being. So, you need to speak with the tone, the level, and the rhythm. Make them in your speech in a clear and precise way. You need to behave like an actor.

So, take the stage like an actor. How to justify the stage is also one of the important points when we talk of stage fear. Actors will spend a few minutes before going on the stage, working out where they have just come from as a character and what they have been doing. This distraction takes their minds off their concerns about their performance. The same habit can work for someone just about to speak in public.

By spending a few minutes before your speech thinking about the positive aspects of what you are about to do, you can take your mind off worrying about your performance. Just take care of this. So, you might ask, what will be the outcome of my speech for my audience? What will I have achieved by giving it? You can then take the positive emotions and these questions evoke onto the stage. That will give you strength. The emotion may be excitement or a sense of fulfillment, but the effect is the same in that it will create a distraction and provide an outlet for your adrenaline.

You know, in the previous lecture, I discussed some exercises. So, in continuation of breathing exercises, I can say again that breathing a few minutes before you go on to

make your speech is quite profitable and helpful. Just before you start your speech, breathe in, count up to 7, and breathe out. When you reach, do this 3 or 4 times. It helps slow the buildup of adrenaline and reduces your heart rate, thereby diminishing feelings of nervousness or anxiety.

A short burst of physical exercise is another good way of countering the effect of the adrenaline that our bodies are expecting to use in our muscles. Warming up is another exercise. Back in your standing position, rotate your shoulder, and then extend your arms out to the side and repeat the rotation. This will also help relieve any tension. Now jog gently on the spot for a minute or so, ensuring that you are moving your arms and finally shake out your arms and legs, but remember you are not trying to exhaust yourself.

So, do not overdo it you have to save your energy for speaking up and transferring your energy to your audience. You must make adrenaline, your friend, a final thought. The research in Forbes 2011 shows that adrenaline is your friend because it makes your body and brain work better. Once you get used to controlling your adrenaline, you can then make sure you always have enough to give your speech or performance that extra boost, but not so much that it makes you feel like running away. So, it is very important to know the cognitive distortions when we talk of stage fright because this is all related to the brain.

So, a distorted thought or cognitive distortion, and there are many, is an exaggerated pattern of thought that is not based on facts. And it consequently leads you to view things more negatively than they really are. So, in other words, cognitive distortions that are happening in your brain are your mind convincing you to believe negative things about yourself and your world that are not necessarily true. Our thoughts have a great impact on how we feel and how we behave. When you treat these negative thoughts as facts, you may see yourself and act in a way based on faulty assumptions.

Everyone falls into cognitive distortions on occasion. It is part of the human experience. This happens particularly when we are feeling down. But if you engage too frequently in negative thoughts, your mental health can take a hit. You can learn to identify cognitive distortions so that you will know when your mind is playing tricks on you.

Then, you can reframe and redirect your thoughts so that they have less of a negative impact on your mood and behaviors. So, there are 15 common cognitive distortions and you should know about it. The most common cognitive distortions or distorted thoughts include filtering. Mental filtering is draining and straining all positives in situations and instead dwelling on its negative. For example, it is performance review time at your company, and your manager compliments your hard work several times.

In the end, they make one improvement suggestion: you leave the meeting feeling miserable and dwell on that one suggestion all day long. Even if there are many more positive aspects than negative in a situation or person, you focus on the negative exclusively. Polarization, what is polarization? Polarization thinking is thinking about yourself and the world in an all-or-nothing way. When you engage in thoughts of black or white with no shades of grey, this type of cognitive distortion is leading you. For example, your co-worker was a saint until she ate your tiffin or your sandwiches, etcetera.

Now, you cannot stand her. Or you got a B on your last test. So, you have failed at being a good student despite getting only A's before that. All-or-nothing thinking usually leads to extremely unrealistic standards for yourself and others that could affect your relationship and motivation. Black or white thoughts may also set you up for failure and for example, you have decided to eat healthy foods.

But today, you did not have time to prepare a meal, so you ate a bacon burger. This immediately leads you to conclude that you have ruined your healthy eating routine, so you decide to no longer even try. When you engage in polarization thinking, everything is in either oblique or categories, and this might make you miss the complexity of most people and situations. Overgeneralization, when you overgeneralize something, you take an isolated negative event and turn it into a never-ending pattern of loss and defeat. With overgeneralization, words like always, never, everything, and nothing is frequent in your train of thought.

For example, you speak up at a team meeting, and your suggestions are not included in the project. You leave the meeting thinking, "I ruined my chances for a promotion." "I never say the right thing." So, over-generalization can also manifest in your thoughts about the world and its events. For example, you are running late for work, and on your way there, you hit a red light.

You think, "nothing ever goes your way." Discounting the positive. Discounting positives is similar to mental filtering. The main difference is that you dismiss it as something of no value when you do think of positive aspects. An example is if someone compliments the way you look today, you think they are just being nice.

And if your superior or boss tells you how comprehensive your report was, you discount it as something anyone else could do. If you do well in that job interview, you think it is because they did not realize you are not that good. So, jumping to a conclusion, when you jump to conclusions, you interpret an event or situation negatively without evidence supporting such a conclusion. Then you react to your assumption and the example is your

partner comes home looking serious. Instead of asking how they are, you immediately assume they are mad at you.

Consequently, you keep your distance in reality, your partner had a bad day at work. So, jumping to conclusions or mind reading is often in response to a persistent thought or concern of yours, and for this example, you feel insecure about your relationship. So, when you see your partner looking serious you assume they might be losing interest in you, false assumptions that you keep on doing. Catastrophizing is related to jumping to a conclusion, and in this case, you jump to the worst possible conclusion in every scenario, no matter how improbable it is. So, this cognitive distortion often comes with what-if questions.

What if he did not call because he got into an accident? What if she does not or she has not arrived because she really did not want to spend time with me? What if I help this person, and they end up betraying or abandoning me? Several questions might follow in response to one event. The best example is what if my alarm does not go off, what if then I am late for an important meeting, and what if I get fired after I have worked so hard for this job? So, personalization leads you to believe that you are responsible for events that, in reality, are completely or partially out of your control. This cognitive distortion often results in you feeling guilty or assigning blame without contemplating all factors involved. An example is when your child has an accident, and you blame yourself for allowing them to go to that party. You feel that if your partner had woken earlier, you would have been ready on time for work.

So, with personalizing, you also take things personally. For example, your friend is talking about their personal beliefs regarding parenting, and you take their words as an attack against your parenting style. So, when we come to control fallacies, this word fallacy refers to an illusion, misconception, or error. Control fallacies can go two opposite ways. You either feel responsible or in control of everything in your and other people's lives or you feel you have no control at all over anything in your life.

For example, you could not complete a report that was due today. You immediately think, of course, "I could not complete it. My boss is overworking me, and everyone was so loud today at the office. Who can get anything done like that?" And in this example you place all control of your behavior on someone else or an external circumstance.

This is an external control fallacy. The other type of control fallacy is based on the belief that your actions and presence impact or control the lives of others. Again, in the example that you think you make someone else happy or unhappy, you think all of their emotions are controlled directly or indirectly by your behavior. The fallacy of fairness is that this

cognitive distortion refers to measuring every behavior and situation on a scale of fairness. Finding that other people do not assign the same value of fairness to the event makes you resentful. In other words, you believe what is fair and what is not, and it upsets you when other people disagree with you.

The fallacy of fairness will lead you to face conflict with certain people and situations because you feel the need for everything to be fair according to your own parameters. But fairness is rarely absolute and can often be self-suffering. For example, you expect your partner to come home and massage your feet. It is only fair since you spent all afternoon making them dinner, but they arrive exhausted and only want to take a bath. They believe it is fair to take a moment to relax from the day's chaos so they can pay full attention to you and enjoy your dinner instead of being distracted and tired.

Blaming- blaming refers to making others responsible for how you feel. You made me feel bad is what usually defines these cognitive distortions. However, even when others engage in hurtful behavior, you are still in control of how you feel in most situations. The distortion comes from believing that others have the power to affect your life even more so than yourself. The best example is this: your partner comments on your new dress, and you feel upset for the rest of the day.

You make me feel bad about myself, you tell them. "Shoulds" as cognitive distortion should statements are subjective ironclad rules you set for yourself and others without considering the specifics of circumstances, and you tell yourself that things should be a certain way with no exception. Do you think people should always be on time or that someone who is independent should also be self-sufficient and never ask for help? When it comes to yourself, you might believe you should always make your bed or you should always make people laugh. You should be better, you constantly tell yourself, and when these things do not happen, they really depend on many factors. You feel guilty, disappointed, let down, or frustrated.

You may believe you are trying to motivate yourself with these statements, such as "I should go to the gym every day." However, when circumstances change, and you can't do what you should, you become angry and upset. You go out of work late, and you can't get to the gym to continue your daily workout. Emotional reasoning leads you to believe that the way you feel is a reflection of reality.

"I feel this way about this situation. Hence, it must be a fact" defines this cognitive distortion. An example is feeling inadequate in a situation that turns into "I do not belong anywhere." And this cognitive distortion might also lead you to believe future events depend on how you feel. And the example you may firmly believe something bad will

happen today because you woke up feeling anxious. You might also assess a random situation based on your emotional reaction.

If someone says something that makes you angry, you immediately conclude that person is treating you poorly or badly. Then, the fallacy of change has you expecting other people will change their way to suit your expectations or needs, particularly when you pressure them enough. An example is that you want your partner or colleague to focus only on you despite knowing that they have always been very social and value time with friends. So, every time they go out, you let them know it is not ok with you. Eventually, you know they will change their way and want to stay home all the time.

Global labelling. Well, labeling or mislabelling refers to taking a single attribute and turning it into an absolute. So, this happens when you judge and then define yourself or others based on an isolated event. These levels assigned are usually negative and extreme; for example, you see your new teammate applying makeup before a meeting, and you call them shallow, or they do not submit a report on time, and you label them useless. So, this is an extreme form of overgeneralization that leads you to judge an action without taking the context into account, and this, in turn, leads you to see yourself and others in ways that might not be accurate. So, assigning levels to others can impact how you interact with them and thus, in turn, could add friction to your relationship.

So, when you assign those levels to yourself, it can hurt your self-esteem and confidence and lead you to feel insecure and anxious. So, always being right again, this desire turns into a cognitive distortion when it trumps everything else, including evidence and other people's feelings. In this cognitive distortion, you see your own opinion as facts of life, and this is why you will go to great lengths to prove you are right. Well, here I want to conclude the discussion. You must have seen the kind of cognitive distortions and fallacies under which you are going and developing this stage of fear, but you yourself need to address this to neutralize it with systematic desensitization.

You have to break the kind of wall you have created around you, and thus, you need to improve your public speaking capability or skills without any fear. Thank you.