

How to Stop Fear in Its Tracks

Fear may be a little word, but it has a big voice that commands attention. Just look at what can happen when people listen:

Frances was lonely, but so afraid of rejection by men that she would never even accept an invitation to meet for coffee, much less put up a profile on a dating site.

Barbara's fear of going into business to sell the jewelry she loved to design kept her from quitting a job she detested; her continued unhappiness constantly spilled over onto her family.

Bob loved to dance but at parties, he wouldn't ask anyone to dance for fear he'd look clumsy and ridiculous.

Fear is that nattering voice inside our heads that says, *you can't, you shouldn't, what if.* Fear keeps us from taking risks that might enrich our life or holds us back from doing some things we need to do. Experience new and exciting vistas? Accomplish something really great? Fear says, "Not on your life."

This isn't to say fear is all bad. At its best it's an instinctive, natural ability to help us survive. Without fear we might attempt to stroll across freeways or scratch behind a lion's ears. But given the upper hand, fear can dominate our life and make even the innocuous—taking a walk or answering the phone—a daunting experience.

It's like there's a voice inside our head always heralding doom and disaster before we even start something—even if the reality is that most of what we worry about never actually happens.

On its own, fear won't disappear. Following are some strategies to help you deal with fears that might be holding you back from something

you want or need to do.

- **Get information.** In an information void, fear clicks in to do what it thinks is its job. But when you find out about what scares you, you replace fear with knowledge.

- **Learn how to do it.** If there's something you'd like to do, but you're afraid to try, take lessons. We're not born knowing how to ride horses or make pottery.

- **Find models.** Let someone who's not afraid model courage for you. Just as fearful behavior breeds the jitters, courageous behavior invites confidence.

- **Talk to yourself.** Self-talk filled with positive messages can change fear energy into positive energy. Eliminate the can'ts, shouldn'ts and ought-tos from your self-talk vocabulary.

- **Use your imagination.** Before you arrive at the party, imagine other guests are as frightened as you. See your audience as people who really want the information you have. Visualize yourself doing what you are afraid to do; see yourself as graceful, strong and capable.

- **Focus on the little things.** Keep your mind on the details, not the big picture. Complete the report word by word, pay the bills one by one, see the group individual by individual.

- **Expand your comfort zone.** Take a small risk each day. Make one phone call, ask for one thing you want, go to one new place. Little by little your confidence will expand.

- **Relax and breathe.** Sometimes the physical response to fear creates even more fear. Physically relax your body and breathe in and out to release tension. *

10 Ways to Be Present

"Most of the time, we are lost in the past or carried away by the future," says Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist monk and poet. Staying present will bring a more peaceful, joy-filled life. Try these 10 ways.

1. **Pay attention to the details:** Notice the food you eat, the sun on your back, the quality of the light; literally stop to smell the roses.

2. **Make a list of what you want to accomplish today.** List only the portion of a major project that can be completed today. Include pleasures as well as tasks.

3. **Concentrate on the task at hand,** not the outcome. Give it your best, knowing there is no perfect outcome.

4. **Write "morning pages,"** author Julia Cameron's method to empty your mind of worry and chatter. Three non-stop pages every morning, first thing.

5. **Let thoughts and feelings come and go** without judging. Neither cling to nor reject them.

6. **Don't hang onto mistakes.** Fix what needs fixing, then move on.

7. **Make notes to yourself.** Jot things down so you don't forget them. Don't try to juggle everything in your mind.

8. **Be where you are.** When you find yourself drifting off elsewhere, a gentle reminder to "be present" can help.

9. **Take a moment to transition yourself** from place to place and task to task.

10. **Let go of the past.** Make amends, forgive, grieve. Ask for help if you're unable to let go. *

A Letter From

Margaret Hood Black



The nagging voice of fear can be loud, insistent and incessant, filling our minds with all manner of anxious, worried thoughts. Listening to it limits not only our experience of our world, but also of ourselves, as this issue's page 1 feature article explores.

One way to sidestep the voice of fear is to stay present with what is before us today. Living in today while maintaining a forward motion toward tomorrow is how we get from here to there. This issue's Top Ten list provides suggestions for staying in today.

Other articles include the page 3 article on forgiveness with its accompanying feature on self-forgiveness, as well as the page 4 article on blame. To let go of blame is one of the steps to forgiveness, and forgiveness is a way of releasing any negative attachment to the past. It's often said that we can't change the past, but we can change the way we see the past.

And be sure to take the quiz on how well you take responsibility for yourself. When you do, you empower yourself to take your life in your own hands.

Please don't hesitate to call if you have any questions about any of the articles in the newsletter, or if you'd like more information.

Do You Take Responsibility for Yourself?

Lack of self-responsibility leaves people feeling dependent, impotent or victimized, blaming others for their problems and waiting for somebody else to come along and make their life all right. The good news is your life is in your hands. You get to make the choices, elect the options and take the actions that come with self-responsibility.

Take the following quiz to find out how well you take responsibility for yourself. You won't be scored at the end, but answer true or false to the following questions, and elaborate a bit on those that feel especially relevant.



True False

- 1. I believe that my actions are the primary force in how I live my life, and that I am solely responsible for my actions.
- 2. When other people, events or circumstances affect my life, I am responsible for my reactions.
- 3. I take responsibility for my body and my physical well-being. I eat healthfully, exercise regularly and maintain good hygiene.
- 4. I may not always be able to select co-workers or team members, but I am responsible for the companions I choose and the company I keep.
- 5. What I say and how I say it is my responsibility. So is listening well.
- 6. I am responsible for my own emotions. Someone else doesn't "make" me feel a certain way.
- 7. My behavior with others is up to me—I'm responsible whether I "go along" with the crowd or remain passive in the face of actions or behaviors I don't agree with.
- 8. My personal happiness is my own responsibility. It's no one else's job to give me what I need or want to be happy.
- 9. Everything in life is a choice, and I take responsibility for mine—both the good and the not so good. I also take responsibility for how I handle the results of my choices.
- 10. I accept responsibility for doing the right thing even though it may not always be the easiest path.
- 11. I am responsible for choosing the values by which I live.
- 12. How I spend my time is up to me. Even though I may be required to work a certain number of hours or to be present at a specified time and place, the quality of my time is my responsibility.
- 13. I am responsible for how I use the earth's resources and realize that my decisions have implications that reach beyond the personal to the global.
- 14. I don't wait for someone else to make my life interesting. It's my responsibility to engage my curiosity, explore my interests, and follow my passions.
- 15. The manner in which I maintain my spiritual well-being is my responsibility.

Although self-responsibility may not always be easy, the results are empowering and life-affirming. If you have any questions or if you'd like to talk about your responses to this quiz, don't hesitate to call or write. ✱

Letting Go So You Can Get on with Your Life

When people get hurt, they often react with resentment, anger, rage, even hatred. While some of these feelings may be appropriate responses, holding onto them can cause emotional pain and stress.

Nurturing old wounds and resentments is like tending weeds in a garden. The more care you give them, the more they take over until there's no room for the feelings that can nourish you.

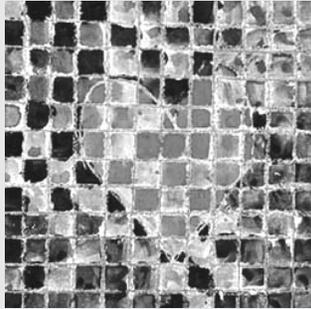
Forgiveness doesn't mean condoning inappropriate behavior and excusing personal violations. It doesn't mean giving up or hiding or denying what was done. To forgive someone or something doesn't necessarily mean turning the other cheek so that you can be hurt again. To forgive doesn't mean you forget that you were harmed. Or that you felt the way you did as a result.

What it does mean is letting go of the feelings of anger or resentment so that you can get on with your life. Forgiving is a process—sometimes slow—that heals wounds and returns our power to us. So long as we hold onto old feelings, we give control of our lives over to those who have hurt us. Forgiveness sets us free.

Ways to Forgive

It's not as though you can simply decide to forgive someone and it is done. Forgiving is an active process. To get from here to there is a journey to be traveled. But you don't have to take it alone. Don't be afraid to ask for help along the way.

Acknowledge all the feelings. Though anger and resentment might be on top, beneath may lay feelings of hurt, betrayal, loss and grief. Uncovering



these more tender emotions may be painful, but, like curves in the road, it is part of the journey to be traveled.

Stop blaming. So long as you hold someone else responsible for your feelings or circumstances, you don't own your own life. You stop blaming by accepting total responsibility for your life.

Release the desire for revenge. The wish to inflict suffering or pain on the person who hurt us keeps us in a place of suffering and pain. We cannot experience the freedom of forgiveness until we are willing to move away from the need to punish.

Learn to accept. It's virtually impossible to stop judging. However, the fewer negative judgments we make, the easier it is to accept. And, according to author Wayne Dyer, "Acceptance is forgiveness in action." Think of how useless negative judgments are: does it affect the weather because we say it's awful? Imagine complaining to Mother Nature about the quality of a sunset. Judgments say very little about the judged, but communicate lots about the one who is doing the judging.

Decide to confront or not. Talking with the person who has harmed you may or may not be the best action to take. Professional counseling can help you in making this decision.

Let go. Only through releasing all feelings of anger, resentment, or animosity can forgiveness be unconditional. "Sweet forgiveness cannot hold any taste of bitterness," says Brian Luke Seaward. "When feelings of anger are released, the spirit once held captive by the encumbrance of anger is free to journey again." *

Forgiveness: It's Not Just for Others

Forgiveness is not just an outward expression toward others. Turning the open hand of forgiveness inward is one of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves.

When we forgive ourselves we acknowledge our human limitations, release ourselves from our own judgments and practice self-acceptance. These actions are essential for a life of freedom and joy.

Through action or inaction, out of fear, pain or confusion, we may harm ourselves or others. But when we say, "I'll never forgive myself," we sentence ourselves to a life of guilt and shame.

4 Ways to Practice Self-Forgiveness

- accepting yourself rather than judging yourself
- honoring yourself rather than blaming yourself
- nurturing yourself rather than criticizing yourself
- releasing the past rather than holding onto it

Forgiveness, even self-forgiveness, cannot be forced. And it may not come easily. Like many other skills we must learn, self-forgiveness takes practice. If you are unable to immediately release the past and move on, be forgiving of yourself and continue the practice. *

Blame Is a Handy Tool, But It Doesn't Really Do the Job

When things go wrong, blaming others is an easy way to take the spotlight off ourselves and shine it on someone else.

But when we do, we give up not only responsibility for our lives, but also our power. Let's explore the drive to blame and what we lose when we do.

Why Do People Blame?

- Blame is a ready outlet for anger, hurt and disappointment. But it's a way of letting yourself off the hook.
- Having someone to blame allows us to maintain our self-image. In our own eyes, we can remain that punctual, efficient person we would be except for the interferences and inefficiencies of other people.
- Blame is a reflex action. It's the first thing you say when you've been caught and you need to preserve your dignity. Remember the time you tripped over a loose brick left on the sidewalk and immediately cried out, "What idiot left that here?"

- Blame is a convenient form of procrastination. To our own ears, the flimsiest of excuses can sound like a reasonable explanation when someone else is at fault. "I would build that bookshelf for you today if Ed had returned the tools he borrowed."

- Blaming others is less painful than blaming ourselves. If we regret choices we have made in our lives, pointing the finger at someone else means we don't have to own up to our decisions, some of which might not have been the wisest.

- Blame can be a potent psychological weapon. Making others feel guilty can give us a feeling of power.

- Blame obscures the true nature of problems. As long as someone or something else is responsible for our feelings, our failures, our lives, we don't have to do anything. The problem is not ours, but theirs. Or so we may think.



The Problem with Blame

The real problem with blame is that it holds us in the past and keeps us from moving forward toward growth. People who consistently blame others for their problems are more likely to stay stuck in the role of victim, powerless to change anything.

While we may not always have complete control over what happens, we do have control over our own reactions and emotions. One way to claim our lives is by taking 100 percent responsibility for what we feel. Rather than "you make me feel..." say, "I feel..."

Like using chewing gum and baling wire for a repair job, blame may be a handy tool, but it won't hold up over time. Using blame makes us forget we have power over our own lives and that we're responsible for ourselves. *

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