

Life... Scripting for the next Severe Panic Attack

Situation:

When I have a major panic attack I freeze up. I can't move and it's hard for me to think of anything much that is positive or secure. The only thing I can do from the beginning is silently repeat "distressing but not dangerous." I can't even say the words out loud. I think I even stop breathing. Feeling that I can't breathe and can't move really scares me. I had all these feelings again yesterday while I was driving. The feelings come over me instantly. Can you help?

Answer:

Here's something that might help – script out what you can say to yourself the next time the panic sets in. When you're at home, safe and relatively calm, get a sheet of paper and divide it in half, top to bottom, so that you have two columns. On the left side of the paper write down all the scary feelings and thoughts you experienced during your last panic attack. In the right hand column write all the secure/realistic thoughts.

Example

Fear producing thought:

I can't move

I can't breathe

I can't say the words out loud;

Calming thoughts:

It only "feels" as if I can't move.

I CAN move

I CAN breathe.

Breathing is an automatic process.

I can speak.

I can command my mouth to talk.

Do take the time to recall as many scary thoughts as possible. And for each one, find a calming thought – something that's going to demolish the danger thought, a thought or a fact that's going to break through the fear. Don't be surprised if you find yourself feeling the feelings as you recall them. Don't be concerned – it happens to a lot of people.

When you're finished with the list you've got a study guide – yes I did say study guide. Rather than go at your practice hit or miss, during your calmer moments, take the time to memorize the calming thoughts. You're more likely to have them "on the tip of your tongue" ready to use when you need them. And, take your list with you the next time you go out so that you'll have your personal tools at your fingertips when you need them.

If you're feeling panicky in a store, pull out your list and read it. Don't be embarrassed about other people seeing you. If they pay any attention at all, they'll think it's your shopping list. If you feel panicky while driving, there's nothing wrong with pulling off the



road, parking the car, and reading through your list. Do not, I repeat, do not try to read while you're still driving.

Some people I know make their own tape recordings – some record just the calming/secure thoughts on their list, others find it more helpful to record both the scary and the calming thoughts. Either way – it's another valuable learning aid. If you have a list of let's say ten different secure thoughts, record them one through ten and then repeat them again to fill up a fifteen minute tape.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with using a written list or cheat sheet to provide yourself the secure thoughts when you need them. Yes other folks may know all those nifty slogans by heart – and you will too someday. Don't make the mistake of beating yourself up because somebody else is more adept at using the tools.

We all forget how difficult and frustrating it was for us to learn our multiplication tables when we were in school. That learning took discipline and practice, lots of it, and so does this learning process. And yes, you will get frustrated at times, but do push forward. You are going to make it!

That's the key. Wellness is a process.

