

FEAR is in control of part of your life.

FEAR, Be Gone

Part 6, **7 Ways to Respond to Fear**

What options do you have when you experience fear and/or anxiety? All of us are aware of the options of **Fight**, **Flight**, and **Freeze**. Anxiety can be considered very intense fear that can appear without any conscious triggering event or warning. Joseph, a friend of mine, suggested that there might be far more options than just those three. The more I thought about it, the more that I became aware that he was correct.

When it came to fear and anxiety, I had not considered any other options then the three listed above. He suggested that there was at least a total of seven. I would like to suggest that there might be even more options. Are there any options you would add to the list?

At some point in your life, everyone will experience some degree of fear or anxiety. The question then is what to do with it? When confronted with fear or anxiety, I would like to give you as many ways of responding as possible. I will examine each one of these seven fear responses, starting with fight, and the various forms of fighting from which you can choose.

If you are in the military and in a dangerous situation, the option they hope you will choose is to fight. However, the military has seen many examples of all seven of these response options.

FIGHT

Fighting can take several forms including physical and verbal. Physical fighting can be done up close and personal or from a distance. You can fight hand to hand, with a sword, a spear, a gun, or a predator drone. The goal in physical fighting is to destroy your opponent. That is not always true of verbal fighting.

Verbal fighting can be done in several very different ways. Verbal fighting can be done with or without rules. Verbal fighting can be also done indirectly using judgments and threats, or directly using your feelings.

Indirect verbal fighting has no rules, it is a kind of verbal free for all. In this style of no-holds-barred fighting, the goal is to destroy the other person emotionally with the use of name calling, putdowns, sarcasm, blaming and threats. Indirect verbal fighting uses “You Are” statements. “You are lazy and irresponsible. You have never done a loving thing in your whole life.” Often, words like “you always,” “you never,” are used to “prove” it is your fault, your bad, you’re wrong. (However, no one is so perfect they can **always** be wrong. Occasionally you have screwed up and done some things right.)

Direct verbal fighting has rules and is an internal report of what you are feeling emotionally. It uses “I am messages” and Verbal Aikido. (There has been a lot written about Verbal Aikido. Check the library section of my website and/or try Googling it.) For example, take the “you are” message: “You are always putting yourself first.” Now, using Verbal Aikido, the proper response would be, “You’re right. I **sometimes** do put myself first.” In Aikido, you take your opponent’s energy, blend with it, and then move off in a different, more positive direction.

I make a distinction between “I messages” and “I am messages.” Examples of “I messages” would include, “I feel like killing you.” And, “I hate your guts.” “I feel like scratching your eyes out.” I messages are often used to threaten and sometimes to warn the other person that they are getting too close, and that you are feeling threatened. If you choose to use these types of “I messages,” be aware that you may be escalating the conflict between you and the other person. Are you prepared that this might end in serious physical conflict?

These messages **might** work to scare someone off by creating fear and anxiety in them but, if your goal is to de-escalate the conflict and, at the

same time, reduce the overall fear and anxiety between you and the other person, I would suggest using “I am” messages.

“I am” messages are internal reports about how you are feeling right now. “I am feeling used, and not loved. You may love me very much, but I’m not feeling loved.” Make sure that you make the distinction between feelings and judgments. When you are expressing feelings, your finger is pointed inward. When you are expressing judgments, threats, and control, your finger is pointed outward at the other person.

Make an “I am” feeling statement about your mate. “My mate is a loving person.” Now, look at where your finger is pointing? If your finger is pointing at your mate, you got it wrong! Try it again, “I am feeling loved by my mate.” Now, where is your finger pointing?

The wonderful thing about “I am” messages is that you can never lose an argument. Isn’t it true that the only person who knows what you feel is you? You can only guess at what people might be feeling. So, if someone tries to tell you that you shouldn’t feel the way you are feeling, you can always respond with: “Nevertheless, that is what I’m feeling.”

When experiencing anxiety or fear, one of your options is to fight, physically or verbally. But, be aware that you have several options. You can choose to escalate the fight, by expressing your feelings indirectly or de-escalate the fight by expressing your feelings directly. Or, you might choose one of the following options.

FLIGHT

When it comes to flight you again have several options. Running works well if you are faster than the other person. Just remember, you cannot out run a bullet.

In the military, there is the option of going AWOL, Absent With Out Leave. That can work if you are okay with being dishonorably discharged.

In mental health, flight can take on several different forms, but all include running from your feelings. The inability to accept certain feelings that you judge as unacceptable can create Dissociation. **Dissociation** is a mental process of disconnecting from one's thoughts, feelings, memories or sense of identity.

There are different types of Dissociative Disorders they include: dissociative amnesia, dissociative fugue, depersonalization disorder and dissociative identity disorder. When everything around you, including yourself, is frightening and creates anxiety, the only solution would be flight.

Some forms of schizophrenia can be viewed as escape or flight mechanisms. These would include Paranoid Schizophrenia, where you project your unacceptable feelings on to those around you. "You hate me and want to hurt me." Here, the person cannot accept their feelings of loathing for themselves and their need to be punished. As a result, they project these feelings onto people around them.

FREEZE

Freezing behavior can be seen in many animals, as well as in humans. When you respond by freezing, it usually indicates that you do not believe that you can win, either by fighting or running. Children, in abusive homes where the parents are fighting in destructive ways, will often freeze and/or run and hide.

Catatonic schizophrenia is where the person will sit very still in one position for hours. You can take and raise their hand and come back hours later and their hand is in the same position. For these people, movement creates body feelings, and body feelings lead to emotional feelings that they are afraid to experience.

Fight, Flight or Freeze can happen to a person with Panic Disorder, to a person with a difficult boss, or to a person who is confronted with a gun.

FAWN

The **fawn** response can happen when you cannot fight, run and freezing will not work. Instead, you choose to go along, trying to win over a person who is abusing you. Fawning is defined as: Displaying exaggerated flattery

or affection; obsequious in order to get a positive reaction. Example: “His anger changed to meekness, and his words were mild and fawning.”
Charles Dickens

We often see this in marriages where one person is loud and demanding. And, the passive person in the relationship thinks, “If I can do everything that he wants with love and **fawning**, then he will see how much I love him, and he will treat me the way I’m treating him.” Lots of luck with that one.

Unfortunately, the message that he often gets from her is that it is okay to treat her with anger, disrespect and demands. He believes it must be okay because, “I would never let someone treat me that way, so it must be okay to treat her that way or she would say something.”

Often, the person who exhibits fawning behavior is seen by others as a Victim, as in codependency. (Codependency is defined here as the inability to express rights, needs and boundaries in a relationship. It is a disorder of assertiveness that causes the individual to attract and accept exploitation, abuse and/or neglect.)

A man will often use this fawning approach when he suddenly realizes that the man he has been harassing in the bar, suddenly stands up, and he is a lot bigger than he thought. “Hey man, I was just teasing, I didn’t mean anything by it.”

It important to recognize that the fawning response is present in *all of us*. We are born dependent on others for physical and emotional nurturance, safety, and security. To get these basic needs met, the child often develops survival behaviors, such as fawning.

FLIP

Flipping is dismissing the threat as not harmful. One place to see this behavior is in women who stay in abusive relationships. I had a woman tell me, “I would rather be beaten than to be ignored. The physical pain will be gone in a day or two, but the emotional pain lasts forever. Besides, it was my fault because I kept pushing him.” I see this as part of the mechanism of rationalization and denial.

I have a friend who worked in Pleasant Valley prison in California. She fell in love with one of the inmates who had a history of drug abuse and violence. But she loved him and “he loves me.” It was not long after he was released that they married, and not long after that the physical and verbal abuse started. After she got out of the hospital, I listened to her rationalizations. “He is so sorry. He said he would never do it again. In fact, he is even going to church with me!” It was less than a year later that he put her into the hospital for three weeks. And, he went back to prison. She continued to emotionally support him and take his phone calls. “He doesn’t have anyone else but me. His whole family has turned against him.”

In most instances, flipping is a way to cope with dangerous situations. It is not the healthiest or safest way to respond.

CHANGING YOUR BELIEFS

Fear vs. Freedom & Empowerment

All fear is the result of what you: 1) believe/think (left brain, cognitive processes) and 2) what flashbacks (“pictures” that are stored in your right brain). We are not afraid of the bear, it is fear of what the bear could do to us. We have mental pictures of bears attacking and killing someone. And, in that mental picture, we imagine ourselves as the one who is being attacked. One way to go from fear to freedom is to change what you believe or think.

This is not a new concept. Three thousand years ago, it was written, “*As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.*” Then, about 2000 years ago, Epictetus, a Greek slave of the Romans, said, “Men are not disturbed by things, but by the view they take of them.” About 100 years later, Marcus Aurelius, Roman Emperor, said “*If you are pained by external things, it is not they that disturb you, but your own judgment of them. And, it is your power to wipe out that judgment now.*” Fear does not come from the outside. It comes from your interpretations, beliefs, and judgments of what you “see.”

Knowing this truth can set you free from much of your fear and anxiety. So, what is your truth when it comes to you getting up in front of 500 people and speaking to them? It is not the large group of people that frightens you, it is your beliefs. “I’ll get up in front of those people and forget what I’m supposed to say. I’ll make a fool of myself. People will laugh at me and put me down. I think I would die of shame and humiliation.” How much of what was just said is rational and logical?

Fear can be changed by changing your beliefs about fear. Here are some beliefs that you might want to accept and incorporate into your life.

- Fear has never stopped anyone from doing something they really wanted to do. Fear is the excuse we use for not doing something.
- You were born with the fear of falling. But, all of your other fears are learned. Even the fear of falling can be unlearned, for instance, think about professional skydivers, rock climbers, hang gliders, etc.
- You get through fear by doing what you are afraid to do.

What fears could you change by changing what you believe?

FINESSE

When it comes to communications, Verbal Aikido is the ultimate in **finesse**. Verbal Aikido is based on the martial art of Aikido. Both are based on the principle that you take the other person's energy and you allow yourself to blend with it. Both of you then flow in the same direction. In Aikido, there is no hitting, punching, or resistance. And, there is no blocking of the other person's aggressive moves!

I have written a couple of articles on Verbal Aikido. You can find them in the library section of my website, DocDPhD.com. There are many good articles and videos on both Aikido and Verbal Aikido that you can Google.

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Myron Doc Downing PhD

Specializing in Building Relationships,
Alleviating Depression, Anger management &
Dealing with Anxiety Disorders
Email: DocD@DocDPhD.com
Website: DocDPhD.com