Debbie Waller Hypnotherapy

Hypnotherapy and Phobias

Why do we have phobias?

Your subconscious mind automatically warns you when you are in a situation that is (or might be) dangerous. It does this by releasing hormones which make you feel uneasy, anxious, or scared. That's your signal to be careful or to remove yourself from the situation.

This is natural, and a good thing to have. If you had no anxiety about anything you'd end up in some very dangerous places!

When you have a phobia, this mechanism is over-sensitive. It's still aiming to keep you safe, but it can make you anxious even if the risk is very low; sometimes when there is no risk at all. Phobias can be about anything, from thunderstorms, to public speaking or even clowns.

You can think of this part of your mind as a kind of 'personal security guard'.

An efficient guard who checks ID and allows people into a building only if they have genuine business there increases safety and security. An over-zealous guard who locks all the doors and windows and won't let anyone in at all would certainly keep the building safe and secure. But they would also prevent anyone from using it.

This is what your mind is doing when you have a phobia; keeping you so far away from what it fears that it stops being useful and starts being difficult to live with.

How hypnotherapy helps

The goal of therapy is to help you find out why your inner 'security guard' is so sensitive. This might involve learning coping strategies to control the symptoms of your phobia, and/or looking at why your phobia developed in the first place. I may also include other therapies such as EMDR which help to desensitise you to elements of your phobia.

Everyone is different and every phobia is different too, so the right balance between these approaches is decided at your therapy sessions. This is why it's difficult to say how many sessions you might need before you begin. But the average is around four to six.

Of course, therapy is not mind control or a magic wand. You'll need to commit to change and to put in some effort between sessions. But remember that how you live is a choice, and making the new choice will get easier with time.

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EMDR

What is EMDR?

EMDR stands for Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprogramming, and it is used to help reduce the stress that you feel after you have experienced a trauma. The word 'trauma' is used in day-to-day language for some very extreme circumstances, but therapists use it for any scary or upsetting experience, such as a relationship breakup, or an embarrassing experience.

Just about everyone who experiences a trauma reacts to it by becoming more anxious, worried, or scared for a while. For most of us the feelings fade with time, but some people continue to react as if they (or others around them) are in danger, or to feel that their stress or anxiety is out of control. Some people seem to get over the event at first, but the feelings return later. Either way it can lead to anxiety, worrying, phobias and even more serious conditions like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

How does EMDR work?

We're not sure exactly how EMDR works, but there are theories. We do know the left and right hemispheres (sides) of the brain control different elements of our experiences.

When we experience events, we receive them first in the right-hand side of the brain. If the event is not important or emotional (like buying a sandwich for your lunch) it quickly passes across into the left side of the brain and becomes a memory. We can recall it if we want to, but when we do we understand it is part of our past.

If we experience a scary or emotional event (say someone robs the sandwich shop at gunpoint while we are there) the right-hand side of the brain hangs onto that experience and kicks off production of stress hormones. It's thought that sometimes the event is not passed across to the left brain properly (or at all) so our brains continue to react as if it was happening right now. This is when the feelings start to intrude into your day-to-day life and become a problem.

EMDR is thought to encourage the brain to process more normally so the trauma becomes just a memory. The techniques are simple and nonintrusive, such as following a light with your eyes while you think about the situation which is giving you problems. Afterwards, you still remember the event, but the emotional punch is less powerful and may not be there at all.

Some people say this works because the eye movement mimics REM, the way our eyes flicker when we are dreaming. Another theory is that asymmetrical movements encourage both halves of the brain to be active so the message passes more easily from one to the other. Either way, there are many studies to show EMDR works well with this type of issue. (See links to these on my website.)

Can EMDR be used for anything else?

Yes, it can be used in many circumstances in which you have intrusive thoughts or emotions such as OCD, cravings (for food or tobacco), phobias etc. It may be combined with other approaches such as coaching, counselling, hypnotherapy or relaxation techniques.

I may suggest combining hypnotherapy and EMDR if you come to me for help with a phobia but the final decision about whether to do this is yours.

Extra Support

I give all my clients a support audio at their first session. Usually for people with phobias this has a general stress reduction and relaxation theme. Stressed people usually find their phobias become more extreme, and relaxation techniques can help convince your mind there is nothing to be worried about.

Appointments

As well as seeing clients I run a multi-accredited hypnotherapy school, and my clinic times must be arranged around my teaching hours. I usually offer Saturdays and some midweek appointments, but please see my website, email, or phone for current availability.

Please note that although I am happy to take calls until 6 pm, I do not offer evening appointments.

If you have any questions about how I can help you, please ring or email for further information. If you prefer to meet me before deciding whether to go ahead with therapy, you can book a free discovery session.

telephone 01977-678593
email debbie@debbiewaller.com

Online appointments are held on Zoom
In person appointments are held at:

The Loft Complementary Therapies,
2A Assembly Street,
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The Loft is situated close to junction 31 of the M62, easily accessible from Wakefield, Castleford, Leeds and the surrounding areas.

Paying for your Hypnotherapy

Please see my website for fees and the payment methods currently available. You can choose to spread the cost of therapy by paying ‘as you go’ or save money by paying for a block of sessions in advance.