

PHOBIAS

Oliver Hollis, Mar 2024

Hi Oli,

Hope you are keeping well.

Just thought you'd be interested to know that I had my gastroscopy yesterday... at last!...

I will never feel scared of an endoscopy appointment again. I used the Sun King again when I was in the dentists waiting room this morning.

In 2 week's time I'll be accompanying my friend for her gastro.

So I just want to say thanks for all your help and support Oli, without it I wouldn't have got this far.

Kind regards,

This is from someone who had debilitating emetophobia but who needed endoscopy.

What I love is she has gone from her initial, "you're not going to make me think of anything horrible!" to being willing to help her friend.

An ACT approach

The cognitive model said it was the content of thoughts that matters, not the social context you have them in

learning to step back from what you are thinking, notice it, and open up to what you are experiencing

(both quotes from, (Hayes, Steven, "A Liberated Mind" locations 131 and 132 of 977)

The misery of phobia – four cases

Spiders

Flying

Emetophobia

Wasps



Not all phobias are alike – What's in front of you?

RIGID DEMANDS, DRAMA, and I CAN'T COPE

Compulsion

Fear

Disgust

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The “fear of flying” case was actually a rigid demand, “I must not be in a space where I cannot leave as I choose.” “I can't cope if a spider is in the same room as me.”

The emetophobia was rooted in early learning about disgust

But the clients came saying, “I have a phobia about x”

Cognitive techniques?

You can't reason with a compulsion

Fear is an internal experience – you can't escape it

Exposure and Response Prevention

(It's like physio rehab – hard work, but worth it)

[1] Willingness Ladder – to prepare: hard work and toleration

[2] Exposure and Response Prevention doing a lot of the heavy lifting

You can't be bored and scared at the same time

What are we doing?

It's a technique called "The Willingness Ladder" (Howard Cooper). He did the "fly without fear" course for Virgin Atlantic and fearful flyers for several years. The Willingness Ladder can be found by searching for Howard and "Rapid Change Works".

The core idea of the Willingness Ladder is found in ACT.

For some people their fears are so severe they cannot even approach the idea of exposure therapy – and the Willingness Ladder is a way to approach fear: either fear of exposure therapy and/ or fear of the phobic cue.

PS - the final "rung" of the Willingness Ladder addresses the important issue of relapse prevention.

I did not cover this in the presentation but it's baked into the WL training and ACT approach