

FEARS AND PHOBIAS

SCENARIO

Kelly is afraid of flying. Instead of facing her fear she avoids it altogether. She hates the feeling of being confined in a small space and is afraid something will go wrong with the plane. Even when she just thinks about flying, she starts to feel anxious.

Kelly has a severe phobia of flying because she lets her fear impact on where they have family holidays.

FEAR OR PHOBIA?

Often that's the difference between being fearful and having a phobia. While it is common for everyone to be afraid of something, it becomes a phobia when your fear alters your behaviour or you start to panic when thinking about it.

A phobia can bring on severe anxiety or panic when you are placed in a fearful situation or just by thinking about being in the situation. Often phobias make us afraid when we feel we are unable to escape from a situation or when we become afraid of losing control.

WHAT TYPES OF PHOBIAS EXIST?

Phobias tend to fall into several broad groups:

- Fear of animals or environment (such as heights, storms, being touched.)

- Fear of blood or injury.

- Situational fears (tunnels, bridges, elevators, flying etc.)

Some common phobias are:

- Claustrophobia (fear of confined spaces, caves.)

- Agoraphobia (fear of places where you might not be able to escape from.)

- Arachnophobia (fear of spiders.)

- Nephophobia (fear of clouds.)

- Chorophobia (fear of dancing.)

- Phobophobia (fear of developing a phobia.)

STATISTICS

Some fears are inbuilt, such as a natural fear of spiders. There is also an increased risk of developing a phobia if your family members have the same fear.

Females are twice as likely to have a specific phobia as males. While most phobias are common in the general population (up to 60% of people have some kind of fear), for a smaller number of people (about 10%) phobias can be debilitating and can severely limit their social world and activities. Most people, like Kelly in the scenario above, manage their phobia by avoiding the thing they fear. But depending on what the phobia is, we can't always avoid some situations. Phobias can limit our lives and shrink our world.

HOW CAN I HELP A FRIEND WITH A PHOBIA?

If a friend tells you they have a phobia, don't laugh it off or dismiss their fears even if it sounds trivial to you. What is fearful for one person may not affect another. Help them to see that while their fears might not be based on anything, you understand and support them. If it's appropriate, you might be able to provide them with some understanding of the feared object. For example, if they have a fear of flying you could talk to them about the safety features of a plane or have them to talk to a pilot or steward about the safety features of an aircraft. Did you know that there's more chance of being hit by a bus than being in an air disaster! Phobias don't have to control your life. There is help available so you can take control of your phobia.

MORE INFORMATION

phobialist.com
helpguide.org/mental/phobia_symptoms_types_treatment.htm

SALVOS COUNSELLING salvos.org.au/more/get-help/phobias

All information on this page is provided by professional counsellors, but is not a substitute for face-to-face professional help. If you or someone you know is struggling with this issue, please seek help as soon as possible.