

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb

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Not a day would go by where I didn't focus on my social anxiety from morning to night. It preoccupied everything I did and thought. But not anymore. Change is possible with a little bit of courage and dedication.

I am writing this so that people who are looking for guidance or help may hopefully gain some insight or at least some hope with their own social anxiety issues.

I am 24 years old now and began to notice my anxiety when I was 20. It is incredible to look back over the last 4 years and the journey that I have undertaken. I watch my descent into deeper and deeper social anxiety issues through my last two years of college, to the point when I decided something was wrong and I needed to take proactive steps to getting better, through the difficult strainful periods of coming face to face with my anxiety triggers and finally to where I am today, living my life how I want to live it not built around avoiding my anxieties.Â

It was hard to recognize for a long time that I was living a life full of anxieties. After 2 years in college of smoking a lot of pot daily, drinking myself stupid 3-4 nights a week and getting average grades my self image deteriorated and I was left feeling helpless and frightened. The whole time I drank, smoked and failed to achieve the grades I knew I could get I was slowly, knowingly letting myself down. Not showing myself the respect which I knew, deep down, I deserved.Â

Â I began to acknowledge how I was avoiding doing everyday things which I used to not think twice about or even enjoyed. Riding the bus up to school, sitting next to someone in class, using the public urinals, walking down the street, talking with friends, etc. All of these things began to give me anxiety. I began to fear them and did the worst thing possible if you are suffering from social anxiety... I began to avoid them. When I feared something and I avoided it, I was immediately relieved because at least I didn't have to feel that intense discomfort. But let me tell you that when you avoid doing something you fear that fear slowly grows bigger and bigger. The more you avoid the bigger the ball of fear grows.

Â One of the most memorable moments of my anxiety was when I was talking with a friend in my kitchen with a night of casual drinking and i began to become self concious of my eyes looking at him. I detached myself from the conversation and instead became very preoccupied with maintaining eye contact. And I remember when he said, "why are you looking at me like that??" And somehow it was crushing. I was embarassed and felt that it was weird of me. I felt awkward. This spiraled into another fear of mine, eye contact. I avoided looking people in the eyes for a long time. And that ball of fear kept getting bigger and bigger.

Â Here is the painful yet simple truth; We simply must do that which we fear until we learn that it is really nothing to fear. It is the same thing as learning to first swim when our moms are not holding on to us. We cry and scream and are scared at first and then slowly the more we do it the more we learn that we will be okay alone without our moms holding on. Well this is how I learned and as far as I can tell is the only way to beat your anxiety. Find out what you are scared of and do it until your brain just stops being scared. AND I KNOW, it feels like it will ALWAYS be scary, but it slowly goes away. Exposure is the only way to treat it.

I used to ride public transportation for hours at a time so that I could sit across from people and next to people knowing that I would feel that voice in my head screaming " AHHHH this person knows thinks I am awkward, they think I'm crazy, get outta hear you fool, why are you just sitting there!?! " But eventually the voice goes away. You can just relax and be comfortable. YOu just gotta sit through the pain to get to the pleasure. It's the only way. Don't try and change or manipulate the situation just sit in it or do it until it goes away.

Â Now I know that I it is easier said than done. But do it. Do it everyday. Join a public speaking club, join up with random people on meetup.com, bottom line is it will be painful now but there will be relief.Â

I also recommend finding out what you enjoy and doing it. Art, hiking, music, reading, sports, excercise, etc. Making your life more full and well rounded will take your focus in life away from anxiety. My life used to revolve around my social anxiety and getting rid of it. But the harder I pushed the harder it pushed back. The more I wanted to change it the less it changed. The trick I learned was to let it be there and just ignore it. Give it it's space. let it scream and cry and try and get my attention but I would simply ignore it and eventually it just stopped trying and I could live my life in peace.

I used to tense up anytime anyone said the words weird, awkward, anytime someone sat next to me on the bus, or wanted to talk to me, anytime I walked down a street I would feel self concious and aware of every movement. But it all goes away, it slowly just becomes background info your brain fliters out as unimportant details. It just takes dedication and courage. You're not perfect and don't have to be, SO gather yourself and go out there and do what you are afraid of because you only have one life and you deserve to make it a happy and full one.

love,

Karl

PS: I highly recommend the book: Dying of Embarassment

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