

Fear Factor

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"I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain."

--- **Frank Herbert, *Dune* - Bene Gesserit Litany Against Fear**

What Exactly Is Fear?

Fear has been defined as a temporary heightened negative emotional response to stimuli. But is it as simple as that? What about the different kinds of fear? Can any type of stimuli cause fear? Are we born with some innate fears? So many questions surrounding a simple idea. Fear involves both the mind and the body. It can be individualistic or collective. It can be rational or irrational. Within the framework of our lifestyle, fear takes on an entirely different dimension.

Fear drives mankind everyday. We fear so many things it has become hard to deal with each other openly. Our lifestyle is one way mankind can still reach out to each other and alleviate the fear we all feel. Just think of how many times in a day you worry or are afraid. Afraid you will be fired, your spouse will leave you, the kids will get sick, etc.

In our lifestyle we meet fear in many scenes and situations. Fear has many different levels: social, emotional, psychical, and life condition. As dominants we need to be able to recognize fear and either choose to use it or assist in its termination. Submissives willing to place their fears in our trust do so in the hope of moving beyond these crutches. They have the strength to allow us to take them into their fears and bring them safely out the other side.

But as the dominant person in the relationship, we often forget we have our own demons to face. If we do not confront and control our own fears, how can we enable our submissives in dealing with their own? One of the first lessons we need to learn is how to identify fears so we can recognize them when they are occurring in a scene. This may seem a mute point, but if we are aware of the signs of distress, we can deal with the physical and psychological factors immediately.

How does the human body react to fear?

Psychologists have discovered that the part of our brain connected to fear is the Amygdala. Output from the Amygdala to our hypothalamus controls autonomic fear responses. All of our nervous systems become activated in preparation for dealing with the stimuli. However, my intent with this seminar is not to delve too deeply into the mechanisms of fear but to show how it affects our interactions in our lifestyle. Also, how we might use it to both control the scene and assist our partner in facing their fears.

Some of the common signs of a person responding to stimuli with anxiety or fear are:

- **Increased heart rate**
- **Increased breathing or shortness of breath**
- **Perspiration**
- **Clammy skin**
- **Rapid eye movement / eye dilation**
- **Raised eye brows**
- **Trembling / shaking of body**
- **Feeling dizzy**
- **Nausea**

These factors can be compromised in a scene due to the fact a body already in a state of heightened awareness can have a fear reaction quicker and harsher than one in a relaxed state. Therefore as Dominants we need to closely monitor the psychological signs of our subs.

A submissive that has an illness such as diabetes will be affected more so by the panic attack. Each external symptom is accompanied by an unseen internal one which can lead to fainting, blackouts or unconsciousness if not regulated by the dominant. Panic attacks or fear responses that are connected to specific stimuli are called situationally bound or cued attacks. Things such as knife or fire play will fall in this category

Are there different types of fear?

To deal with the fears of those we play with we need to spend time on two major issues. First we need to talk at length with them on their history. Incidents of past abuse, trauma or harm will have an affect on the type of responses a submissive will have to BDSM interaction. Be aware that even after full disclosure, a submissive may not know of what we call a "trigger": something which may bring on an anxiety attack. Subconscious fears may be brought to the surface by the type of play occurring at the time. Fears instilled in childhood may be maintained by conditioning through avoidance of the fear causing stimuli. If you are afraid of snakes, you will avoid all snakes, thus reinforcing your fear. Irrational fears need to be dealt with maturely and wisely by the dominant regardless of our own personal thoughts on them. If my submissive is frightened of teddy bears or clowns, I need to assist them in confronting this fear, not ridicule them for it.

Second, we need to identify the type of fear in the submissive person we are dealing with. Know thy partner. Do they have emotional fears mainly, or are they afraid of coming to psychical harm? If you are playing with a masochist threatening them with more beatings or a severe toy will most likely not illicit the fear response you might desire. Verbal recrimination of a service sub will most likely result putting them in tears. If you desire to use fear as a control factor, do so with the full consent of your partner. Keep in mind, the key to fear scenes is control. These scenarios are structured and self contained by the dominant to control the fearful emotion in their submissives. This control is what allows us to delve deeper into this fears and fantasies. Otherwise, you might be crossing a line we strive not to cross in our lifestyle. Many submissives use play to overcome their fears or anxiety. If a submissive was administered corporal punishment as a child, they may desire to experience it now to move past their abusive memories. They turn to us as the one in control to be able to take them on this journey safely.

Fears found frequently in our lifestyle:

- **Knife**
- **Wax**
- **Restraint**
- **Claustrophobia**
- **Blood letting / Loss of blood**
- **Fluid expulsion / Loss of bodily functions**
- **Needles**
- **Fire**
- **Temperature**
- **Rape**
- **Kidnapping**
- **Death**
- **Castration**
- **Forced sex or beatings**
- **Loss of body part**

Fears that may be used in our lifestyle to illicit responses and/or assist the submissive in overcoming them:

- **Spiders (non-poisonous, please!)**
- **Heights**
- **Loud noises (this is instinctual to us all)**
- **The Dark**
- **Strangers**
- **Germs**
- **Vomit**
- **Food / meat**
- **Water**
- **Snakes**
- **Dentists / doctors**

Behavioral techniques to deal with fear:

A very simple technique to begin dealing with your fears is to identify it. Say it out loud! "I am afraid of the dark." Seems simplistic, but it is effective. But by naming your fear, you rob it of its power. Acknowledging it to yourself, your intimate ones and the universe can be very freeing.

One formally popular behavioral method of dealing with irrational fears is systematic desensitization (commonly called "breaking down"). While this theory is no longer popular in generalized therapy, we often use it in our lifestyle. It consists of the systematic exposure to the fear in gradually increasing degrees until the fear is extinguished. One way we introduce a new toy or a more severe toy is to start out lightly with it, let the submissive try it on themselves, or administer it in a safe non threatening manner. The next time we will increase the sensation and so on.

Visualization is a good technique to teach a submissive to move beyond their current limits. Have them visual the fear in a non harmful way, rendering it powerless. Many of us will know this technique by the public speaking tip of viewing the audience in their underwear. We can use the same thing in our scenes. If a submissive is afraid of wax, do not start with the hottest, messiest candle on their soft tissue. Start with a candle that does not burn so hot on a less sensitive area. Gradually increase the instrument or item of their fear. I know this may seem like common sense to many of us, but take this idea beyond the simple. If a submissive is afraid of spiders start out with a plastic spider, not a real one.

Rage Expulsion and/or Cathartic release was first made popular by Freud. He felt catharsis was good for one's psychological well being. The basic premise is to release your pent up stressful emotions such as fear, worry, anger or hurt through a burst of emotions such as yelling, screaming or some other type of physical outburst (with no harm to yourself or others). Given the activities we do in our scenes this technique should be approached with care. Plenty of negotiation and discussion should occur prior to doing such a scene. As much as we may enjoy the reactions of our submissive, when we have one releasing such emotion, we need to be in full control of ours so we can be aware of what may be needed in the aftercare. This type of release can leave your submissive with any number of reactions from joy, elation to sadness, anger. At this time, other techniques such as the journal will help.

Self report is one way to help your partner deal with their fears. Have them keep a fear journal. Whenever they feel fearful they are to note it down as soon as they can in the journal. Review the journal with them to discover triggers, possible trust issues and successes in moving beyond the fear. Fear patterns can also assist us in dealing with fears. Write down your feelings

Some recommended books and links on the topic:

The Gift of Fear: Survival Signals that protect Us from Violence by
Gavin De Becker

You Can't Afford the Luxury of a Negative Thought by Peter McWilliams

<http://www.leathernroses.com/generalbdsm/shadows.htm>

http://gloria-brame.com/domidea/mbarhive/endorphins_in_fear_play.htm

<http://www.sexuality.org/l/subnet/AboutBDSM3.html>

<http://www.takeninhand.com/node/216>

<http://alist.com>