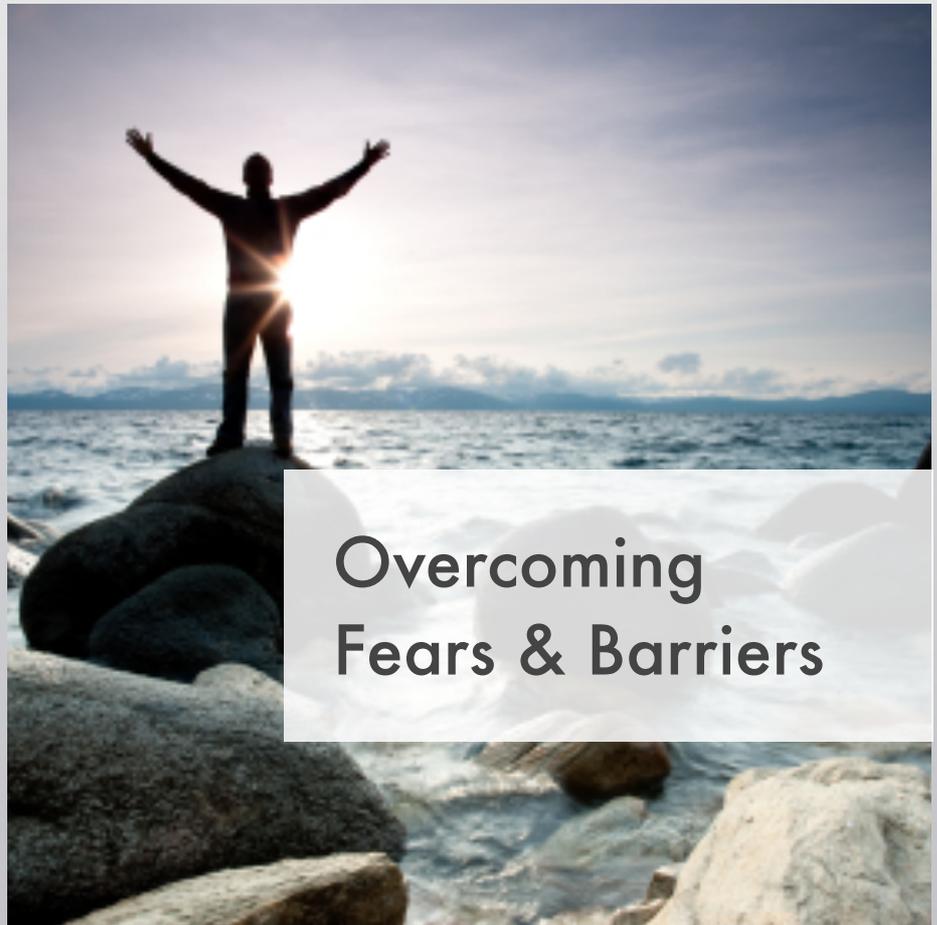


## TIP SHEET

"You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing which you think you cannot do."

—Eleanor Roosevelt



## Overcoming Fears & Barriers

### What is Fear?

Fear is an emotion experienced in response to a perceived imminent threat. The threat can be either physical or emotional, and is generally associated with danger, pain or harm. The fear response causes a change in brain and behavioural function.

### When is it a problem?

Fear is primarily an adaptive response to threat, a survival mechanism which prepares the mind and body for action. This response releases hormones which prepare us for physical action against the threat. These hormones also increase activity within the amygdala in the brain in order to focus on the danger and store it effectively in our memory. However, fear can become a problem when it is chronic and the response triggered is out of proportion to the danger of the perceived threat. This kind of persistent fear can have negative effects and disrupt everyday function.

### In your day to day life, do you recognise any of the following?

- Physical effects: Do you often experience sweating, increased heart or breathing rate, muscle tension in response to situations or objects? Do you find that after the situation or object is gone that it takes some time to get back to normal function? Have you experienced long term effects from fear such as a weaker immune system or gastrointestinal problems?
- Behaviours: Do you find yourself freezing, hiding or running away in response to threats? Do you attempt to avoid situations or objects that you fear? Do you have difficulty sleeping and experience exhaustion due to fear? Do you engage in risk taking or excessive behaviour of any kind?
- Thoughts and feelings: Do you find yourself fearful in response to distinct memories such as sights, sounds or odours that were formed during previous fear responses? Do you often feel that your fear is out of proportion to the danger of the threat? Do you find yourself feeling increased anxiety as a result of ongoing fear? Have you experienced long term effects such as impaired long term memory or a decreased ability to regulate emotions?

## How to manage fears more effectively? Here are some ACTIONS:

### Calm yourself using relaxation techniques

There are a range of different techniques that can be practiced to help calm you when you are experiencing worries. Some people find that different things work better for them, so it is worth trying a few. One of the most common relaxation techniques is simply deep breathing exercises. There is also benefit to be found in meditation which can be guided through a CD or self-practiced. Another option is to practice mindfulness, which is done by focusing on the sensations of the present moment to distract yourself from your fear. Some people also benefit from listening to calming music, going for a walk, or doing something creative such as painting.



### Change your lifestyle

It may not seem like something that can help you more effectively manage your fears; however making a few changes to your lifestyle can promote positive changes in your mental well-being. One of the places to start is with your diet to make sure your nutrition is making your mind and body feel good. Another great idea is to get into a regular exercise routine, even if it is just walking or riding a bike. The final part of your lifestyle to consider is your sleeping habits, whether you are getting enough and if it is of good quality. It is important to follow good sleep hygiene and see a doctor if things don't improve.



### Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

The aim of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is to encourage people to take action towards creating a meaningful life, but being accepting of any negative thoughts or feeling. Fear is considered a barrier that individuals need to acknowledge and accept. As part of ACT, mindfulness skills that bring awareness to the present moment are used as a coping mechanism for fear. See below for online resources for ACT and mindfulness.



### Exposure therapy

If you have a specific fear, then exposure therapy also known as systematic desensitization may be suitable for you. This type of therapy intends to help people to gain control over their fear. An important part of this therapy is the teaching of relaxation skills. The individual is then gradually exposed to their fears at increasing intervals while they use the relaxation skills in order to cope with the fear. Exposure therapy is usually only conducted by experienced mental health professionals.



Challenge your fears!

Many people who experience fear a lot tend to get into bad thinking habits where they overestimate the danger of potential threats and consider every negative thought as true. These bad thinking habits are called cognitive distortions. It can be helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

What is the evidence that my fearful experience is true?

What is the evidence that my fearful experience is not true?

What would you say to a friend who had this same fear?

Is the way I'm thinking about this fear helpful?

Are there other ways that are more positive and realistic that I could look at the situation?

What is the worst thing that could happen and what could you do to handle it?

### TALK TO SOMEONE!

ADAVIC can refer you to therapists who specialise in working to overcome fears. You may also want to share your experiences and seek support from others going through the same thing. We can link you to peer support groups and online forums.



### BOOKS

- The Confidence Gap: A Guide to Overcoming Fear and Self-Doubt (Harris, 2011)
- Coping with Fears and Phobias: A CBT Guide to Understanding and Facing Your Anxieties (Mansell, 2007)

### ONLINE RESOURCES

- Smiling Mind - a free app and website which guides you through Mindfulness programs <http://smilingmind.com.au>
- Information about fear and practical tips for overcoming it <http://www.bandbacktogether.com/fear-resources/>
- Information and resources about ACT - <http://www.actmindfully.com.au/>