

Stop Panic Attacks In Their Tracks

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Question: “What method do I have to use to stop panic attacks from reoccurring and take control back?”

Answer:

Throughout this newsletter I've provided various suggestions for alleviating panic attacks and taking back control; however, I think there is one thing that strongly needs to be said: on some level you never need to be concerned with this.

What do I mean?

Shirley Swede, who co-authored a famous book on panic attacks, has suggested that when one experiences a panic attack he or she should stop doing whatever he/she is doing.

For example, if you're walking or in the middle of becoming entrenched in your own thoughts, just stop. Become still.

Let's look at a more realistic example.

If you have ever spent time in the outdoors whether you were hiking, camping, or whatever, you may have had the experience of losing your bearings; in other words getting off course and not being able to find your way back. You know the feeling if you've ever experienced it. It can be pretty scary. Your heart starts racing, your mouth gets dry, it's hard to think straight, etc.

Many people will tell you that the best thing you can do if you get lost is to not panic, but moreover, you should stop walking. Consult a compass. Reason things out. Walking around in circles can only exacerbate the situation.

Just think about what many of most experienced outdoors persons have suggested: that while one can lose his or her bearings when in the woods, instead of getting into panic mode experienced persons know that they can reason out where they are and devise a plan to find their way back. They will consult their compass and estimate how far they are out in the woods. They will listen for the buzz of traffic from the nearest highway, listen for the nearest stream or water.

Even if one finds themselves lost in the woods, one can spend a night in the woods safely by building a fire and temporary shelter. Then the next day, once rested and once the daylight returns, one is in a much better position to navigate the way out.

So it would seem that the thing to most fear in this situation is not the weather and animals but your own fear. This is especially true with panic attacks.

Again going back to Shirley's suggestion, if you can stop doing whatever it is you're doing, stop exacerbating the situation, control returns because you are no longer feeding your anxiety with your behaviour and you begin to enable yourself to think more clearly.

Allow yourself to think about the worst case scenario. That is, what would happen if you stopped doing whatever it is you're doing when you feel a panic attack coming on? Many people at first believe that they'll spiral out of control, but this is not the case. Rather, by not feeding your anxiety, you begin to feel better and regain the control that you never really did lose.

Like anything, this technique requires practice.

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