

THE ROLE OF NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING(NLP) IN THE TREATMENT OF DIFFERENT TYPE PHOBIAS

Umirkulova Madina Baxtiyarovna
Teacher

Umarova Madina
Student

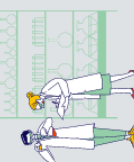
Abstract

While about 2- 6 % of people have the specific types of phobia all around the world, this number increases in children's cases accounting for 3-9%. What is a phobia? Phobia is an irrational, uncontrollable and persistent fear of specific places, objects or situations. There are several reasons to overcome these problems as early as possible, so phobias do not affect different aspects of a person's life. Since phobias can severely adverse one's social life and mental state, the early signs should not be neglected, especially in children.

Keywords: Phobia, neuro-linguistic programming, dissociation, reframing, treatment, mental health.

Introduction

Phobia is an uncontrollable fear of specific events, situations or places that is connected with a certain interpretation of this condition in mind. Even though there are many different types of phobias, the main categories include social phobias, specific phobias and agoraphobia (an anxiety disorder that causes an intense fear of becoming overwhelmed or unable to get help). According to the National Institute of Mental Health, approximately 12,5 % of adults experience a phobia of a specific situation or at some point in their lives. Many people do not need treatment because avoiding the object of their fear is enough to control their phobias. However, it may not always be possible to avoid certain objects of fear or conditions such as crowds. Therefore, some people have no other choice than searching for treatment methods. Whereas some take in different antidepressant medications to ease the intensity of fear, others try out exposure therapy to overcome the fear by exposing themselves to the certain object or condition continuously. These methods may seem useful and trustworthy; however in reality, they might not give expected results as they are not focused on dealing with the core of the problem but only with its consequences. The basis of the disease is connected with severe interpretation of fear for specific cases by our cognition. Thus only by addressing the core of this issue the main solutions can be found. Neuro Linguistic-programming(NLP) is one of these promising methods which involves dissociation and skillful use of submodality interventions, and can cure phobias in one session quite easily. Phobia is connected with the concept of anchor (association) in a person's mind that correlates certain situations into the panic response. NLP



practitioners use different NLP pathways like good sensory acuity or state calibration, anchoring, capability with submodalities, clear understanding of association and dissociation. In this article I will explain how I used NLP reframing and dissociation methods to deal with a mild phobia and compare two techniques.

Key words: NLP, phobia, fear, dissociation, reframing.

Methods

We will choose a person with a mild phobia to ensure that the consequences of the experiment will not be detrimental. We will use two techniques: the first one disassociation and the second one reframing.

Dissociation

Dissociation is a mental process of disconnecting from one's thoughts, feelings, and memories. To use this technique a person with a mild phobia will be asked to identify an emotion that is not welcome (in this person's case fear) and imagine stepping away from this emotion. The person will look at this emotion from an outsider's perspective. This will help distance oneself from fear and remain calm. It allows a person to think why he or she is having this emotion and can be done to make space for more positive feelings instead.

Reframing

Reframing is the practice of turning negative experiences and situations into positive thoughts. For example, you can reframe feelings of fear into feelings of excitement during the flight if you have aerophobia. This helps you to shift your reality to a positive one instead of a negative one.

Experiment

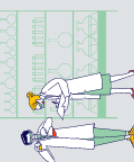
I asked a person with a mild phobia of darkness to participate in this experiment and got her consent. We first practiced dissociation technique. Here are the steps we followed:

Step 1: Establishing Rapport and Create Relaxation

1. I engage in a brief conversation with the participant to establish trust and rapport, ensuring they feel comfortable and at ease.
2. I guided the participant through a relaxation process. This includes techniques such as deep breathing exercises or progressive muscle relaxation to help the participant enter a calm, open state.

Step 2: Identifying the Problem Memory or Emotion

1. I asked the participant to bring to mind a specific memory or event that triggers negative emotions (such as anxiety, anger, or fear).
2. I instructed the participant to vividly recall the memory but encourage them to simply observe the emotion, not to become overwhelmed or overly immersed in it.



Step 3: Setting Up the Initial Dissociation Process

1. I instructed the participant to imagine themselves watching the negative memory on a movie screen. The screen should be placed at a distance, and the image should appear in black and white (or another color that reduces intensity for the participant).
2. I guided the participant to mentally step back from the memory, becoming an observer rather than a participant in the event.

Step 4: Increasing the Disassociation

1. To deepen the disassociation, I guided the participant to mentally shrink the image of the memory on the screen. The image should become smaller and farther away, even to the point of it turning into a small dot in the distance.
2. I suggested additional layers of detachment: for example, have the participant imagine they are sitting far away in a movie theater, watching the memory from a distance.
3. I introduced another form of disassociation by suggesting they mentally "pause" the movie or place the memory inside a filter, like a snow globe or a picture frame, to make it more abstract and less vivid.

Step 5: Change the Emotional Response

1. Once the memory feels distant and abstract, I asked the participant to notice how their emotional response has shifted. The negative emotions should now feel lighter or less intense.
2. I inquired whether the participant is able to view the memory without being emotionally affected, or if they feel more neutral or detached about it.

The participant responded with positive feedback telling the fear seems neutralized and they feel calmer.

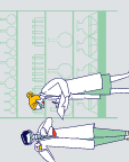
Then we practiced reframing technique after a week. Here are the steps we followed:

Step 1: Identifying the Phobia

1. I started by asking the participant to clearly describe the object, situation, or event they are afraid of.
2. I encouraged them to describe how they feel when they encounter the phobia and what specific thoughts or images arise. It's important to understand the intensity of the fear and how it affects them emotionally and physically.

Step 2: Understanding the Positive Intention Behind the Fear

1. I asked the participant what they believe the fear is "trying" to protect them from. Phobias often have a protective intent, even if it manifests in an exaggerated or irrational way.
2. For example, if the participant has a fear of flying, the positive intention might be a subconscious desire for safety or to avoid danger.



3. The goal here is to help the participant see that the fear is attempting to serve a positive purpose, even if that intention is misguided.

Step 3: Challenging the Limiting Belief or Perspective

1. I gently challenged the participant's beliefs or assumptions about the phobia. I asked questions such as:
 - "What's the worst thing that could happen if you faced this fear?"
 - "How likely is it that this fear will actually cause harm?"
 - "What if this fear is just your mind reacting to something that's not as dangerous as it seems?"
2. This helps the participant begin to question the validity of their fear and opens the door to the possibility that their reaction may be exaggerated or out of proportion to the actual risk.

Step 4: Presenting a New Reframe

1. I offered a new perspective on the phobia.
2. I encouraged the participant to imagine how they would feel if they were able to face the phobia with ease. I asked them to focus on positive feelings like calmness, confidence, or even curiosity.
3. I encourage the participant to view the phobia as something manageable or even harmless, and to see themselves as capable of handling the situation with a sense of control.

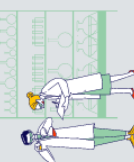
Step 5: Anchoring the Reframed Perspective

1. To make the reframe more powerful, I anchored the new perspective to a physical gesture or positive emotion. For example:
 - I asked the participant to take a deep breath while visualizing themselves calm and confident in the face of their fear.
 - I had them touch their fingers together or press their thumb and index finger together as they experienced a new, positive emotion.
2. This will help them associate the new, empowering belief with a specific physical action that they can use whenever they feel the phobia arise.

The participant also gave positive feedback after this experiment Participant had more positive feelings after this experiment.

Evaluation

While dissociation technique is more complex and intense and based on disguising the fear into less vivid memory, reframing technique is more safe and promising as it is based on the reframing of the core of the problem, the fear into the positive feeling through positive intentions. I think reframing technique is more trustworthy and effective in dealing with phobia.



Conclusion

Phobia or any kind of distress can be resolved with the power of selectively chosen words by the practitioner; thus, showing the significance of language in constructing cognitive functions. In methods like NLP the power of words is used to treat many complex and delicate cognitive problems and to ease people's lives.

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