

Countering Stage Fright

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Hello friends, I am Professor Smita Jha and I am here to tell you how to counter stage fright. Well, this is a very prevalent topic in the present scenario, because stage fright is something with which everyone is struggling with. Well, in this lecture, I will first define what is stage fright, and what type of fear or fright we develop whenever we give a talk on the stage or to a public gathering. So first I will define it and then also the symptoms. It sounds very easy, that stage fright is nothing. It may develop with practice.

Very true. It may develop with practice. But even sometimes, it goes worse beyond imagination. So what is needed to curtail it, to neutralize the fear? And for that, it is very important to know what is stage fright.

And I would like to start with the quotation that take an active approach to the problem of performance anxiety. Don't let it ruin your life. And as I said that in the present scenario, it needs a lot of endeavor to develop a stage performance in a very right manner. We should not ruin our professional life out of fear of this stage performance. So what is stage fright? What is stage fear? And it is obvious, clear, that it is a feeling of a lack of control about future events which are important to the person.

As I said, beyond control. That is the fear. The thought of failing is very threatening for anyone, whether it is a small child or a grown-up person, to the self-image of the individual, that is, obsession with self-image, between the threats of possible dangers and experienced fear. As I said, this threat can be any kind of threat and that can be called symptoms of stage fear, which I will discuss in next lecture in detail. But at this juncture it is very important to know how do we define stage fright.

We need to understand that only then we can neutralize or pacify, you know the self, while undergoing this terrible experience which is called stage fear. And this can occur at any stage. 5 year child, 10 years, 14 years, 15 years, 30 years, 40 years, even 50 years, because this is an art. So how to be an effective performer? That is the deal of the day. As

an experienced teacher, even I feel that it requires lots of practice and some kind of, you know, expertise, to be an effective performer.

Sometimes, even lots of practice even can't help you. You may get failure at certain point. So, this question is very important- how to be an effective performer? See, whenever we talk of stage fright or stage fear, it entirely depends on good communication, a good flow of communication that comprises both non-verbal and verbal. Well, good communication skills are the key to success. Everything you do and especially in a business life, professional life, even in personal life, communication skills matter a lot.

Stage performance or public speaking is one of the most nerve-racking experience that many of us face in our daily life. Those who are in a professional world, talking to your senior, talking to your junior, talking to your subordinate, addressing a gathering- so every moment we feel it. Part of our fear is about what we are going to say. But the other part is about how we are going to say it. Content and the style.

Content, of course, very important. Who is your audience? And where you are going to speak. But style is more important than how to convince your audience. Honestly, how else would people communicate? So in order to enjoy an agreeable business or personal discussion the communication level has to be excellent. Excellent, fluent.

So how does one communicate effectively? Stage performance, public speaking, is what? A one way communication addressing to your audience. So what kind of communication you are going to use and in which manner- that is very important. But whenever we find ourselves in that particular situation, we feel shaky, we feel nervous and the height of nervousness is so much that sometime, we utterly fail. So again, the question is that why do we get nervous in spite of good preparation? See, when we cook food, we need energy in the form of heat. And we know that how much of heat should be given to a particular food item to cook properly.

And we execute in the same manner. In a similar fashion, you know anxiety is like fire to give energy as fire to cooking. But too much anxiety is not good, as too much of fire or heat may burn the food item. It may burn, you know too much of anxiety may burn your energy level, the right energy level, your right spirit. What actually I am trying to tell you, that see, I mean what is nervousness? Why do we get nervous? And if nervous, then what level of anxiety? And it is very important to understand the spirit of nervousness and also anxiety.

See students are coming to me and they asked that madam what is the meaning of

sensitivity? And being a sensitive person, is it good or bad? And my answer is always that being sensitive is not bad. Rather, it shows that you are careful enough towards your duty. But yes, too much of sensitivity may ruin your career sometimes. Now, it is very important to understand that if we talk of nervousness, what it is and actually about- nervousness is a natural reaction to a stressful situation. It usually hits when you face a new or important challenge such as taking an exam, interview or giving a presentation to a room full of people.

It is quite natural for you to be nervous, waiting for, you know, also waiting for medical result. See, there are n number of things where you may get nervous. Also remember, if you are a working professional, while walking inside the job interview room there are n number of situations. Many physical sensations can accompany nervousness including a dry mouth, sweaty, you know, palm, and dizziness. You may also experience feeling of self-doubt, whether I would be able to deliver in the right manner or not, doubting yourself.

And these feelings and sensations are both uncomfortable and uncontrollable. This is a point to be noted, uncomfortable and uncontrollable. So, nervousness tends to go away once you have gotten through the situation and it rarely leads to you avoid nerve raking situations in the future. See, sometimes, you are trying to learn car driving, remember, or bicycle and you just met an accident. See even after several years, whenever you pass by or you try to drive, you know, that particular incident occurs again and again.

Now what you have to do- you have to handle your mental condition in a way so as to neutralize, minimize, the effect of that incident or accident. Now it is very important to know about nervousness and anxiety because I am using these two words side by side. I am using nervousness and I am using anxiety as well. Well, nervousness is a normal state that affects all of us. See, I mean, even I teach my students that becoming nervous or when we get nervous, it is a normal thing.

Even I get nervous. So, it is a normal state that affects all of us when something threatens our system. What kind of system? The psychological system. The brain system. And this could be a job interview, performing on a stage, giving a speech and alike. When your nervousness becomes you know irrational, not justifiable, feels overpowering and possibly even prevents you from participating in everyday life situation, then you may be experiencing anxiety.

See the distinction between nervousness and anxiety. Because stage fright or stage fear is nothing but getting nervous and getting nervous depends on the level of anxiety. It varies from individual to individual. I usually ask my first year students to introspect yourself.

Try to find yourself where you are.

You are comfortable with the crowd, with your friend, in a public gathering, or you are not comfortable with the crowd or in a public gathering. If you are comfortable, it means that you can handle the situation and you are an extrovert. But if you are unable to handle the situation, unable to control your emotions, then you are an introvert. See, these things are very important- to assess your personality before plunging into some conclusion. So, the difference between nervousness and anxiety is so important, so as to assess yourself while preparing for job interview or any kind of speech performance.

See, it is common to hear someone say this is giving me anxiety when faced with a situation that makes them uncomfortable, nervous. We say- I am not comfortable. See, this is a very common expression, but although the terms anxiety and nervous are often used interchangeably, not much difference as people think. Feeling nervous and having an anxiety disorder are two very different things that you should try to understand. That is why I said that whether you are an extrovert or introvert- try to know about because you are the best judge.

So, how do you know if the nervousness you are feeling is normal or actually an anxiety disorder? See, we are moving on the line that what is a stage fright? Why it is so important to learn? Why there is a fear when we appear on the stage? And if there is a fear, what it is about. Is it nervousness or anxiety? And if we talk about nervousness or anxiety together, what kind of distinction should be there in between- if nervousness is a normal thing or anxiety is a kind of disorder? This aspect is very, very important to understand. Let me tell you very clearly and you should know about it. Anxiety on the other hand, is something you deal with on an ongoing basis. You live your life in a constant state of dread.

And you struggle to calm yourself. True, life is a struggle. You struggle every day. You get up early in the morning if you are a worker, you go for a job, getting ready, reaching well on time, completing the job for the whole day; if you are a student, going to the class, attending the lectures, making summaries out of the lecture, preparing for the test. This is all a struggle, challenges. In addition to the physical symptoms, you know, the suffocating feeling of dread accompanying anxiety disorders can even compel anybody, even you, to avoid places or situations that incite these uncomfortable symptoms.

That is why we are so fearful to enter into the examination hall. A kind of anxiety that is always there, and these feelings and negative coping behaviors eventually begin to interfere with your day-to-day life. So, this is very important to control. You are feeling your emotion in the beginning and you cannot control it in one day.

As I said, this requires practice. For instance, it is normal to feel nervous about going to a doctor because of what you could learn. But if your fear becomes so overwhelming, powerful that you avoid going to the doctor altogether, you may have a diagnosable anxiety disorder. What is my point? My point is that even anxiety, to some extent, is fine. Examination fear, performance fear, but even going to doctor's place- you know, that you are unnecessarily fearful shows that you are suffering from anxiety disorder and this is the reason I told you that individuals vary. Variations at the level of individuals is very important because we all are different and the level of anxiety, the level of nervousness, you know, differ from one to another.

Is it nerves or anxiety? And I am focusing on this because these two words- nervousness and anxiety- come to us very frequently from the student side. Nervousness and anxiety are similar in that both cause a variety of physical and cognitive system, cognitive thought process, cognitive system, but that is where the similarities end. Try to understand my point. Nervousness and anxiety- these are thought processes and it occurs in our mind, brain. So, how these two are different? It depends on the length of time.

Nervousness ends when the nerve raking situation is over, nerve raking situation is over. Anxiety is persistent, persistent. This is, anxiety is a way of life, a mindset. The intensity may ebb and flow, but it never completely goes away. So, this length of time is very important, that is, nervousness coming and going.

Intensity, the other point is intensity, that we may, you know, segregate nervousness and anxiety. Nervousness does not prevent you from doing the things that make you nervous. See, this is very important. Anxiety on the other hand, can prevent you from doing something you enjoy and make it difficult to focus and go about your day. So first, length of time- that makes nervousness and anxiety two different things.

Second is intensity. Third- focus. Nervousness is a response to something specific, while anxiety is often more general. You may feel anxious, but can't always pinpoint what you are anxious about. Means, like heart palpitation, your mental state is also that of anxiousness. And remember that while nervousness can be a sign of an anxiety disorder, it is very common to experience it from time to time without actually having an anxiety disorder. How important it is- with significant meaning, that it is a common experience from time to time, you know without actually having an anxiety disorder.

That is why it is very important to locate yourself. Well, we are discussing stage fear, countering stage fear and symptoms. And I am dealing with stage fear, the definition of stage fear and in the same context, I am telling you that how do we get nervous and the

difference between nervous and anxiety. So see nervousness. It is temporary while anxiety is persistent and ongoing.

Nervousness- less intense, but when we talk of anxiety, it is more intense. That is why the word disorder is there. The phrase is "anxiety disorder." Nervousness responds to something, a kind of response, but anxiety is often more generalized. Nervousness is specific, you know momentary- for some moments.

But anxiety interferes with daily life. It will affect your health also, your mental state also. Nervousness, you know, rarely leads to negative. This is a kind of mood swing. But anxiety may require therapy or medicine. Nervousness, coping behavior- you can control your behavior or coping with the behavior, adjustment, and manageable with self-care.

I am sure that you could understand very well the basic difference between nervousness and anxiety. They are interchangeable, but fine demarcations are there and I hope that you will understand the basic difference. And this is very important, you know, to eradicate if you have anxiety disorder, especially at the time of your stage performance. Now, next coming is phobia. When we talk of nervousness and anxiety in terms of stage fear.

Is it a phobia or an unreasonable fear? Why we are so fearful? To get the very feeling of exam, interview, a stage performance. And we all know that phobia is a fear of an unreasonable thing and is irrational sometimes. And when we talk of phobia, it is also called as fear of speaking. You may be a good orator, well versed with the language. But when you find yourself on the stage, you start, you know, stammering.

Blackout, forgetfulness, memory loss. So fear of speaking. Part of phobia. A stage fright.

This is also a kind of phobia. This can be. Speech anxiety. Not able to say properly. Shyness. Well here comes we are introvert, you are introvert or extrovert. Why this shyness when you are asked to deliver a talk? Performance anxiety, unnecessary anxious or speech phobia. Before speaking, a kind of fear that is not properly defined, that is why I use the word unreasonable fear- that is called phobia.

So, nervousness, anxiety disorder and phobia, they are all part of stage fear. So, what are phobias? As you need to understand nervousness, anxiety disorder while discussing stage fear or countering stage fear. What are phobias? Let me explain to you. A phobia is an excessive and irrational fear reaction. If you are suffering from phobia, you have some kind of phobia, you may experience a deep sense of dread or panic when you encounter the source of your fear.

The fear can be of a central place, situation or object and unlike general anxiety disorder, a phobia is usually connected to something specific. See phobia is related to something with some background. But they are in the same category. For some, a stage presentation can be a phobia and there are various types of phobia. Agoraphobia, what is agoraphobia? Agoraphobia is a fear of places or situations that you cannot escape from.

The word itself refers to fear of open spaces. People with agoraphobia fear, you know, being in large crowd or trapped outside the home. They often you know avoid social situation all together and they stay inside their homes. Out and out an introvert. That is why I said try to find yourself where you are. Many people with agoraphobia fear they may have a panic attack- now again, a new word, panic attack- in a place where they can't escape.

Those with chronic health problems may fear they will have a medical emergency in a public area or where to help is available. See how important this is all about to know. You should know all these types of phobia. Parts of phobia, that is one of the important phobias, social phobia. Social phobia is also referred to as social anxiety disorder and it is extreme worry about social situation and it can lead to self isolation.

In a word you can say, you know, depressive quality. A social phobia can be so severe that the simplest interaction such as ordering at a restaurant, very small thing, or answering the telephone can cause panic. So, people with social phobia often go out of their way to avoid public situation. So, agoraphobia, social phobia. Other types of phobia that many people you know dislike certain situation or objects.

But to be a true phobia, the fear must interfere with daily life. Glossophobia is also a well-known phobia and this is known as performance anxiety or the fear of speaking in front of an audience. People with this phobia have severe physical symptoms when they even think about being in front of a group of people. So, glossophobia, treatments can include either therapy or medication. Acrophobia- this is the fear of height. People with this phobia avoid mountains, bridges, higher floor or building and symptoms include vertigo, you know, stability, body stability, dizziness, sweating and feeling as if they are or they will pass out or lose consciousness.

So, students, I would like to stop here because there are several points yet to explain, you know, phobias like claustrophobia also. But rest of the points related to a stage fear or a stage fright, I would like to explore with you in my next lecture. Thank you.