



Agoraphobia

Is a condition where panic or anxiety attacks are followed by an avoidance of places where the panic attacks have occurred, or could occur.

What is agoraphobia?

What a strange name isn't it? Agora comes from the Greek word that means the market place and 'Phobos' was a terrifying Greek god. Thousands of years ago, to scare the enemy, banners depicting 'Phobos' (or the god of fear) were held up in time of war. Fear - or phobia was believed to be one of the worst punishments to be afflicted with. Some of the first documented cases of agoraphobia were about men who were too frightened to cross the market place. Today there are many more situations to be afraid of if one has agoraphobia. Agoraphobia (often thought to be a fear of open spaces) is also a fear of being closed in, or away from a safe place or person who makes you feel safe, 'if' the dreaded panic or phobic attack happens.

Although agoraphobia was common in the past, there were no lifts, motorways, aeroplanes, nor harbour bridges to be worried about. Modern living and technology created more situations where people who suffer from 'phobic fear' experience a feeling of terror at being 'locked in, or of not being able to escape quickly.

In early history few people could read or write and only a privileged few went to school. So there is little documentation of anxiety/panic attacks as a result of agoraphobia. During times of war there were cases of men suffering from a condition called "horseman's heart". It is thought now that these 'heart' attacks could be men suffering from panic attacks because they went away from their homes for a very long time.

Women often suffered with fainting attacks commonly called the 'vapours'. Perhaps these were in fact 'panic attacks' resulting out of the phobic fears they had about being closed in or away from the person they felt safe with. More recently the late Howard Hughes, well-known and respected aviator and millionaire industrialist bought himself a hotel and lived out his life in seclusion. According to historians he suffered from 'anxiety panic attacks' and a phobia of germs. Today he could have been helped with his problem.

Agoraphobia is an extremely common form of 'phobic fears'. In fact it is the single most common anxiety disorder. (The name used to describe all these disorders which have anxiety or fear as their main feature). It can start in childhood; it is extremely disabling and frightening. However on its own, it is the most easily helped.

If you suffer from Agoraphobia, there will be many places you will want to avoid because you are scared of 'phobic fears'. These thoughts and feelings are called avoidance. The avoidance occurs because you are afraid that you will feel the 'panic/anxiety attacks' when you are in a place, or situation, from which you cannot escape quickly, or when you have experienced 'panicky' feelings before in a similar situation.

You may feel terrified of having a panic/anxiety attack and try to avoid places and experiences such as:

- Going to school
- Being at school
- Going for holidays
- Meeting with friends
- Going out the door
- Thunder and lightning
- Going over bridges or into lifts,
- Going into classrooms or theatres
- When at school going out on the playing field
- Sports where you will be away from the school building
- The dentist, or hairdresser or any place where you feel restrained
- Being in bed on your own
- Having the light off
- The dark
- Walking to school
- Going on a bus
- Going in a car
- Going out in a yacht

If you live in the country... you may have different fears such as:

- Going to school on a bus.
- Waking in the night and thinking you are on your own.
- Having to stay in bed on your own whilst mum and dad milk the cows.
- Walking to a cowshed or paddock
- Doing any farm chores which take you away from home
- Thunder and lightening
- Noises