



Junior Officer Advisory Group

Readiness & Deployment Committee

[Behavioral Health Team]

Practicing Wellness

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Fear of the Unknown

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Fear is a natural emotion that everyone experiences. It is common to worry, experience anxiety about the future, or have negative thoughts. It does, however, become problematic when a person experiences persistent or chronic fear of the unknown that impacts one's social, physical, and emotional life as severely as any other phobia.

Carleton (2016) notes that people have different levels of intolerance for uncertainty, a naturally adopted trait. Those with high levels may find unknown or uncertain scenarios almost unbearable or cannot cope, affecting their ability to function. In most cases, people fear the unknown due to a fear of change. The lack of control and predictability exaggerates the occurrence of fear.

Overcoming Fear of the Unknown

For temporary relief, one can overcome this fear by avoiding the situations that cause uncomfortable thoughts or feelings. Unfortunately, repeatedly practicing this behavior can be damaging long term. Facing unknown situations is essential to the process of managing fear. In dealing with these situations, one has the opportunity to understand the cause of the fear and then brainstorm ways to cope with the hurdles they face. Accepting failure as an option may be required, as most fear of the unknown is driven by the inability to accept defeat.

Meditation, mindfulness, and positive thinking techniques may also help reduce fear responses. Focusing on the here and now can reduce worry and anxiety about what will happen next (Gang, 2015). Practicing the acceptance of uncertainty through coping skills, understanding one's limits of control, and remembering one's past successes are critical steps to increasing tolerance of uncertainty.

Developing new skills can increase self-confidence and lessen the fear of the unknown. The lack of specific skills can influence fear, embracing change, and trying new things. Sharpening or improving current skills can also help increase self-esteem and set realistic expectations.

Lastly, reaching out to friends or seeking assistance from licensed mental health professionals offers a chance to verbalize fears and encourage diverse perspectives of the unknown (Buheji et al., 2020). Friends can challenge the fear, provide support, or suggest coping mechanisms, while mental health professionals can offer a safe space to question and process the fear.

References

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