



ITEC



VTCT

UMH8 – Understanding phobias

Learning outcomes

LO1 Understand phobias

LO2 Understand the causes of phobia

LO3 Understand how phobias can affect individuals and others

LO4 Understand how to manage and support people with phobias



LO1: Content and Assessment criteria

- 1.1. Describe what is meant by the terms 'phobia' 'specific' phobias, 'social' phobias and 'agoraphobia'
- 1.2. Outline the general signs and symptoms associated with phobias



Definitions and descriptions

A **phobia** is an extreme, exaggerated or unrealistic form of fear or anxiety triggered by a particular situation or object even when there is no danger. Phobias can be more pronounced than fears.

- There are **two main** groups of phobias:
 - Specific (or simple) phobias
 - Complex phobias



Definitions and descriptions

Specific phobias

- These centre around a particular object, animal, situation or activity, for example:
 - Animals – typically a fear of spiders, snakes or rodents
 - Environmental – germs, heights and deep water
 - Situational – fear of flying, the dentist, confined to small places
 - Bodily phobias



Definitions and descriptions

Complex phobias

Associated with an overwhelming fear and anxiety of situations and circumstances. Complex phobias can be categorised into **two** main types.

Agoraphobia – fearful of places or situations where escape or help might not be possible if something were to go wrong. This usually results in a person avoiding certain situations such as travelling on public transport

Social phobia – also known as social anxiety disorder, people with social phobias are fearful or anxious in social situations, e.g. a fear of public speaking



General signs and symptoms associated with **phobias**

- Sweating
- Trembling
- Hot flushes or chills
- Difficulty breathing
- A choking sensation
- Rapid heartbeat (tachycardia)
- Tightness in the chest
- Butterflies in the stomach
- Nausea
- Headaches and dizziness
- Feeling faint
- Dry mouth



General signs and symptoms associated with **phobias**

- In more severe situations a person may develop psychological symptoms such as:
 - Fear of losing control
 - Feelings of dread
 - Fear of dying
- Symptoms associated with agoraphobia can vary in severity from slightly apprehensive about a situation to severely anxious and unable to cope with the situation



LO2: Content and Assessment criteria

2.1. Describe the possible causes of phobias



Possible causes of **phobias**

There is no single cause of phobias.

However, they are associated with a number of factors:

- **Traumatic incident or events** – a previous experience of a traumatic event, such as being in a car crash, may lead to a phobia of travelling in a car
- **Learned responses** – these are phobias that are developed early in life and are often associated with learning the response from a family member.
- **Genetics** – there is some evidence to suggest that some people are born with a tendency to be more anxious than others
- **Agoraphobia** is often associated with a combination of a number of interlinked phobias, e.g. a fear of open spaces and a fear of feeling trapped (claustrophobia)



LO3: Content and Assessment criteria

3.1. Describe how phobias can affect individuals and others



How phobias can affect the individual and others

Phobias can affect a person's life in the following ways:

- **Effects on the individual:**

- Fear of exposure to specific phobias
- Panic attacks
- Unable to participate in certain social activities

Left untreated agoraphobia can severely reduce a person's quality of life, including:

- Isolation and loneliness associated with the need to deal with the specific phobias
- Negative feelings leading to depression and low self-esteem
- Financial consequences associated with withdrawal or isolation
- Drug and alcohol misuse as a coping strategy



How phobias can affect the individual and others

Effects on others:

- Stress and anxiety among family members
- Financial pressures associated with phobias affecting family members' ability to work
- Anger and resentment associated with life changes that have to be made to accommodate phobias



LO4: Content and Assessment criteria

- 4.1. Outline the self-help programs to help reduce the symptoms of a phobia
- 4.2. Outline the treatments that can be used to support people phobias
- 4.3. Outline two organisations available to help with the management and support of phobias



Self-help programs to help reduce the symptoms of a phobia

Lifestyle changes:

- Regular exercise or physical activity – this can help to take an individual's mind off of the phobia and anxiety. It has a physical health benefit and can also make people feel more relaxed
- Eating regularly has the effect of reducing irritability and anxiety associated with hunger
- Getting enough sleep helps to reduce anxiety and irritability
- Avoiding or reducing stimulants such as caffeine. Stimulants can make some people feel more anxious



Self-help programs to help reduce the symptoms of a phobia

Lifestyle changes:

- Exposure therapy – this involves gradually increasing the length of time being exposed to a phobia. This is a form of desensitisation to the phobia
- Relaxation techniques – as with physical activity and exercise, activities such as breathing techniques can be used promote relaxation
- Visualisation – this can be used in conjunction with other relaxation techniques to mentally visualise how an individual can deal with phobias or anxious responses to situations
- Self-help groups – meeting other people with similar experiences can be useful to develop coping strategies and talk through anxieties that materialise from being exposed to phobias



Treatments that can be used to support people phobias

- Where it is not possible to avoid phobias, other treatments or a combination of treatments may be used
- Talking therapies – such as counselling, psychotherapy or cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) have been shown to be effective in treating phobias
- Medication – medication is not usually the first choice in the treatment of phobias but can be used to treat anxiety associated with phobias. There are generally in the form of:
 - Antidepressants
 - Tranquilisers
 - Beta-blockers



Organisations available to help with the management support of phobias

- Mind – information on phobias, including symptoms, causes and how to access treatment and support. Get tips for helping yourself, plus guidance for friends and family
 - <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/phobias/treatment/>
- TOP UK – A registered charity specialising in supported self-help for sufferers of phobias
 - <https://www.topuk.org>
- NHS – information on phobias, its types, help and support mechanisms
 - <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/phobias/treatment/>





Learning check

- **Identify** the **three** medications that can be used to treat phobias
- Choose **two** self-help programs from the list above and **explain** how these can be used to help treat phobias
- **Outline** how agoraphobia can affect the quality of a person's life
- **Outline two** factors that could be the cause of phobias
- **Identify three** signs and symptoms of phobias
- **Explain** the difference between complex and specific phobias

