

Feeling Less Anxious During School Presentations

Objective

To reduce your anxiety about making presentations in school.

You Should Know

Are you afraid of making presentations in school? You are not alone. For many students, standing in front of the class and being the center of attention can cause anxiety, fear, or panic. You might be worried about being laughed at by classmates. You could have concerns about stammering or forgetting what you were going to say, or letting classmates see your nervousness. You could be afraid of having a physical reaction that everyone will see, such as fainting, vomiting, or sweating.

Giving presentations in front of your teacher and classmates is a required part of your school work. If you are planning to go to college, your professors will most likely assign presentations. Additionally, you may end up working in an occupation where giving presentations to your team or your customers is an expected task. So, since giving presentations is unavoidable, what can you do?

First, acknowledge that some fear and discomfort is normal – and this includes some physical side effects, such as sweating, blushing, and dry mouth. Next, consider that the more you do something, the less scary it becomes. While avoiding a situation might make you feel better in the short term, it has long-lasting consequences. The situation tends to feel even bigger and scarier the next time it comes around, causing your anxiety to increase even more. When you can stay in a situation even though it makes you feel anxious, you will stop the cycle of anxiety.

What to Do

There is a process called “exposure therapy,” where you “expose” yourself to the situations you fear to overcome your anxiety. So, the more you give presentations or speak in front of groups, the less frightening it will become. Here are some small steps you can take to get started.

- Raise your hand to be “called on” when your teacher asks a question, or ask a question of your own.
- Volunteer to do an exercise or demonstration in front of the class.
- Walk into class after most of your classmates are seated, so that most of them will be looking at you.
- Talk, sing, or play an instrument in front of a small group of your friends.
- Share your fear with others. Tell a few trusted classmates that you are anxious about the presentation, and ask them to help you practice.

What are some other activities you can try?

Now, follow these steps.

1. Select several activities from the list above.
2. Rate the activities on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest level of anxiety.
3. Expose yourself to the activities, starting with the one with the lowest anxiety ranking.
4. Rate the situation again after the exposure.
5. Increase your tolerance by selecting the next highest anxiety ranking, and continue through the list until you are exposed to the activity with the number closest to 10.

Activity	Anxiety Level Before Exposure	Anxiety Level After Exposure	How I Feel Now

Additionally, here are a few questions that will help you challenge some of your anxious thoughts about giving a class presentation.

What are my biggest fears about this presentation?

What is the worst that can happen if these came true?

Understanding that your fears are about the “worst things that could happen,” what is the *most likely* thing that could happen?

How do you think you will feel once you are done with the presentation?

Once you have practiced “exposing” yourself to situations where you might be anxious in front of others, use the following chart to record how you deal with anxiety during real presentations.

Type (Name) of Presentation	Date	Anxiety Level Before (1 to 10)	Anxiety Level After (1 to 10)

Reflections on This Exercise

Have these exercises changed how you feel about giving class presentations? In what way?

Do you feel more confident about giving presentations? Explain your answer.

Are there any other activities that normally make you anxious that you would be willing to try as a result of these exercises?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?
