



What is a Phobia?

It's a natural response to avoid things that might really harm you and to worry about particular situations such as making a presentation at College or School. But if you have a phobia, you'll have an exaggerated or unrealistic idea about a situation or object. You may realise that your fear is out of proportion to the true danger, but you can't control it. When faced with a situation or object that triggers your fear, you're likely to experience intense anxiety and panic. Even thinking about your phobia, may trigger severe anxiety symptoms. As a way of managing the phobia, it's likely that you find yourself organising your life so that you can avoid the thing that you're fearful of. An untreated phobia can interfere with your day to day life and affect your ability to socialise, to attend school, College or University or to engage in activities that you enjoy.

There are a range of situations or objects which can result in phobia including animals (e.g. dogs, birds), natural environment (e.g. height, thunder), specific situations (e.g. flying, enclosed spaces) and phobias about blood and medical procedures such as injections. One of the most common phobias is Emetophobia, or a specific fear of vomiting which is characterised by a marked fear of vomiting or seeing others vomit. A hallmark characteristic of all phobias, is a tendency to make anxious predictions based on over-estimating the probability of coming to harm and under-estimating ability to cope or to be helped by others.

Can treatment help?

Emerging evidence suggests that Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) is effective in the treatment of phobias. A short course of CBT may be helpful but for young people who have experienced a phobia over a long period of time, more sessions may be required to overcome the phobia.

CBT Assessment and Key Treatment Strategies

As part of the assessment, Bristol CBT Clinic invites young people (and if helpful, their parents / carers) to complete some questionnaires that assess the severity of the specific phobia, how it impacts on daily life, what thoughts and beliefs are associated with the problem, and an assessment of other difficulties. Following the assessment, sessions focus on the following:

- Developing a shared understanding of the specific phobia and what is keeping it going
- Working together to agree goals for treatment
- With the support of the therapist, gradually facing the phobic object or situation and at the same time, testing the catastrophic predictions about what may happen when safety behaviours are dropped.
- Agreeing a coping plan focused on how to maintain progress once the CBT sessions have ended.