

## Chapter 3.2 Fast Phobia Cure

Billy suffered from nightmares and flashbacks. When he had a mental image of any of the numerous traumas that he endured from Dahmer, he would feel all the panic, fear, shame, guilt, physical pain and muscle tension that he experienced in the original trauma. Not only did Dahmer torture Billy for the eighteen months that they were roommates in the Army, his memories tortured Billy every day and night for twenty four years thereafter. To do away with this continuous torture was my first priority. \_\_\_All of the therapeutic interventions that I used with Billy worked together and dovetailed with each other. Stopping his nightmares and flashback involved creating an alternate past as a way of changing his limiting beliefs, (see creating an alternate past (Chapter 3.8), curing his panic attacks (Chapter 3.5), reducing his guilt and shame (Chapter 3.6), and resolving internal conflicts (Chapter 3.3).

The method I used most frequently was the fast phobia cure. This is one of the first treatment methods developed by neurolinguistic programming (NLP). An example of a true phobia is that of a five year old girl who saw a snake's head spin in the air after being cut off by a hoe. For thirty years, anytime she saw a snake, she was literally petrified with fear. After treating her with the fast phobia cure, she was able to touch a snake I had wrapped around my arm. Brain pathways change very rapidly. The total time that I treated her was less than thirty minutes.

I picture in the brain a pathway from the image of the snake to the fear which occurred when first seeing that image. When the brain has an image of the snake while at the same time the emotions are calm and relaxed, the brain will select that pathway and the prior pathway will be abandoned. Learning the phobia was a one-time learning, and learning this new pathway is also a one-time learning.

This method depends on dissociation, in fact, double dissociation. An associated mental image is when you see what you actually saw at the time--in other words, the picture projected on your retina through your pupils. You will experience the feelings you had at the time. A dissociated image is when you see yourself in the picture as though the image was taken by a video camera. This detached view disconnects you from the feelings that you had at the time.

It is easy to test this process out. Make a mental image of what you actually saw at a time when you had strong positive feelings. You will notice that you tend to re-experience those feelings. Make that mental image bigger and brighter and closer to you and the feelings will increase. Made the image smaller, move it away from you, and you will notice a decrease in the intensity of the feelings.

Now remember an experience when you had negative feelings. When you make an associated image, seeing what you actually saw with your eyes, you will re-

experience the negative feelings. Often when a loved one irritates a person, he or she will make the image big and bright and increase the irritation. This then alters the person's expression, tone of voice and demeanor in ways that are totally out of his or her awareness. This has a negative effect on the relationship. What is much more useful is to make a dissociated image and see oneself in the picture. Then the negative feelings are less intense. The negative feelings decrease even more if one makes the image smaller and more distant. Now you have one way of having control over your emotions. Throughout the website, I will point out ways that Billy has been able to take the tools of NLP and use them outside of the office setting.

In the example above of the girl with the snake phobia, once she was able to be calm and relaxed while seeing a movie of that snake being beheaded, that phobic reaction was immediately gone. I wrapped a snake around my arm. She didn't like the snake but she was able to touch it. I asked her to try and get the old fear back and she could not. Flashbacks of physical and sexual abuse work the same way.

So how can people become calm and relaxed and remain that way while seeing the images of the trauma? The way this is done is for the person to see himself seeing the images. The client imagines a movie theater and he sees a black and white photograph of himself on the screen. He takes a seat in the movie theater and sees himself on the screen. Then he floats out of his body and goes up to the projection booth. He doesn't see the screen. He sees himself in a seat in the theater watching the movie screen. Then the movie runs until the traumatic incident is over. The therapist is watching the client, and if he starts to get anxious, then the therapist can stop the process and do something else so the client won't collapse into the feelings. I have had the screen be farther away or smaller. I have had the client imagine that he was looking through a window that was shattered so that he couldn't really see himself there but he knew the movie was running. After the movie is over, the added step is to walk down the aisle, make the image at the end of the movie in color, and have the client be inside the movie and feel himself going backwards as the film is rapidly run backward to a time before the incident happened.

Many of my clients including Billy have learned to use the procedure for all sorts of situations. Basically any time a person has a mental picture of an incident and negative feelings are produced, the person can use the fast phobia procedure. In addition to fear and panic, the negative feelings could be shame, guilt, embarrassment, resentment, or irritation. Shame and guilt are a little more complicated because a violation of a standard of behavior is involved. If one has violated a standard of behavior, then one would need to plan how to uphold that standard in the future. If a person feels guilty because he has violated a standard of behavior he has for himself, then he would need to plan how to uphold that standard in the future. Then the fast phobia procedure would be useful in reducing the guilt.

In the first session after gathering information and establishing rapport, I explained the fast phobia cure to Billy, and he said that he had always felt safe and comfortable with me. This was very important. I usually sit beside a client rather than face to face when I am doing an intervention. An important part of the neurolinguistic programming (NLP) therapy is to ask the client about the mental images he makes, particularly where he sees the image. If you are sitting face to face, he will often be seeing the image in the space where you are sitting. Also, when sitting beside the client, I can use anchoring. An anchor is the term for the stimuli that is associated with a particular emotion. For instance people often carry a picture of a loved one in their wallet. Seeing the picture brings back those feelings he or she had with that person. Perhaps you have a memento on a key chain, and touching it can anchor back to feelings connected to the gift. When you touch someone who has strong feelings, that specific touch will anchor those feelings.

I asked Billy to become relaxed, comfortable and safe. I could see that he was relaxing from the smoothing of the facial muscles and the lowering of the shoulders. I touched him on the arm (thereby anchoring the feelings of relaxation) and told him to hold on to those feelings. I continued to touch him which continued the anchoring throughout the intervention. I also breathed in rhythm with him. As my chest would rise with inhalation, there was a slight change in the pressure of my hand against his arm. People have never told me that they were aware of my pacing their breathing. This is a very powerful tool for maintaining rapport and occurs out of the client's awareness. I added these features because of the intensity of Billy's feelings of fear and panic. I wanted to do everything possible to insure that he didn't collapse back into the fear and panic. I then asked him to pick a time to start the movie before the abuse started with Dahmer. Then I asked him to pick an ending point about one third of the way through his 18 month experience when no abuse was occurring. I had him picture a black and white photograph of himself on a screen. Then I followed the procedure of having him sit in the theater, float up out of his body and go up to the projection booth. He could then see himself sitting in the theater seat but could not see the screen. He was able to let the movie play while maintaining a relaxed feeling. I then had him turn the ending picture into color, and be inside the film and rapidly run it backwards. I had him do this five times. Each time I had him run the movie backwards even faster. I even added a swooshing sound to indicate the length of time. I think increasing the speed tends to involve more of the unconscious in the process. I repeated the process for the middle third of the time while he was Dahmer's roommate and then the last third of the time.

Often with a single episode of trauma, one intervention will stop the nightmares and flashbacks. Often with multiple trauma, selecting the most intense one will generalize to the rest.

Billy noted a change, but because of the intensity and severity and duration of the trauma, this first fast phobia cure did not eliminate the flashbacks and nightmares. Over the next ten months, I repeated some version of this procedure

at least eighteen times. He noted that he no longer saw Dahmer's face; he saw his hair but there was a blank space where his face was.

In the next few sessions, Billy remembered specific traumas, and the phobia cure was repeated. He remembered being choked until he passed out. I did the fast phobia procedure of that specific time. He had less fear when remembering being choked. However, his neck pain continued. I realized that the visual images of the trauma also affected his muscles. His muscles remembered how the muscles responded to being choked, and he experienced that muscle tension and the pain associated with being choked. When he had the visual image of being choked, he no longer had the intense fear and panic; however, he still had the muscle tension and pain that he had had. I realized that it was not enough to have him relaxed and comfortable; I needed to relax the muscles that he had tightened up when he was choked. I had him remember when he was a child and played hopscotch and his muscles were loose and limber, particularly his neck muscles. I anchored that feeling in his muscles and then had him view himself viewing the movie. Then the muscle tension in his neck and his neck pain went away.

For twenty five years, he woke up every morning in pain. Dahmer often beat him on his bones (his head, shin, knuckles, toes and knees). He said Dahmer knew what would cause the most pain. He had flashbacks not only to the fear but also to the bone pain. I needed to do the fast phobia procedure and have him not only be relaxed but also to have a different feeling in his bones. I had him remember the feelings in his bones when he was an adolescent and was free of pain. I had him hold on to that feeling while experiencing the fast phobia procedure. This was useful in reducing the pain he felt.

A few months after I did this procedure, he said that he still experienced a lot of pain in his fingers and he showed me how bent his fingers were as the result of the beating with the iron bar. He said the immediate pain was so intense that sometimes he would go numb. At times he had wished that Dahmer would hit him so hard that the fingers would go numb. I asked him to remember a time before he went to Germany when his hands felt really good. He remembered standing up in a convertible with the wind blowing in his hair and a girl at his side. His hands were on her body and she felt very soft. I began a hypnotic induction and asked him to memorize that feeling and to double the intensity and triple the intensity. Then I did the usual fast phobia cure. I asked him to be in the projection booth of a theater and to be unable to see the screen but to see himself in a seat in the theater watching the screen. Then I had him watch himself watching a movie of Dahmer hitting him with the iron bar. Then I had him be inside the film and run it rapidly backwards. I had him repeat this a dozen times. When he came out of the trance, he remarked how good it felt.

He said he had been in a bar, and a man slammed a beer bottle down. Billy said, "I just about jumped out of my skin." He felt like he had no skin--that he was defenseless. I had him imagine that he had a space-age strong transparent

shield covering his body and protecting him. This seemed to help his startle reaction. I thought I could use this fantasy to alter the movie he had seen about Dahmer hitting him with an iron bar. I had him imagine he had this transparent, impervious shield all around his body. I had him imagine that no matter how hard Dahmer hit him with the iron bar, he did not feel it because of the shield. I asked him to see this as a movie. Then he imagined frustration and bewilderment on Dahmer's face. He laughed at Dahmer and really enjoyed this altered movie. I think one sign of change is when the client can see humor in a situation that was formerly dead serious.

Billy felt a lot of shame and guilt related to having been anally raped by Dahmer. I had him do the usual fast phobia procedure. This reduced the fear and panic. However, those memories had been interfering with his sex life. I had him recall sexual experiences he had had before going into the service. He remembered with pleasure that one girl gave him a present of sexual intercourse before he went off to the service. He had some delightful exploratory sexual experiences. The feeling was one of sexual pleasure, fun, and feeling that there was nothing wrong with it. I had him hold on to that feeling while he saw himself see the movie of being anally raped. This resulted in a decreased feeling of shame, guilt and feeling dirty, and sexual problems were less intense. The very intense physical feeling of being dirty is common among sexual abuse victims. For many months after he was away from Dahmer, he took several baths a day.

One of the aspects that really bothered Billy was the feeling that he had no control. It was natural for him to have this feeling since Dahmer did have so much control. I wanted to use the phobia cure to get rid of those feelings of no control. Dahmer probably used ketamine to drug Billy. Billy would awaken tied with ropes in a spread eagle fashion. Dahmer alternated between saying he loved Billy and petting him and beating him. He also anally raped him and stuck his finger up his anus. Billy felt particularly out of control remembering these incidents. I asked him when he felt most in control. Billy said "I like the feeling of doing a wheelie on a bike. I have always had that ability. It just came natural. I can do a wheelie and stay up for long distances. I can do it with just about any bike except a Harley. They are too heavy." I had him hang onto the feeling of doing control during a wheelie while seeing a movie of the sexual trauma he endured. Then as usual in this procedure, I had him step into the movie at the end and run it rapidly back to before it happened. The more severe the trauma, the more I have the client repeat seeing the movie and running the movie backwards. I had him repeat this probably a dozen times. This helped him to have a feeling of control over his life.

Billy commented on the fast phobia procedure, "I often do it over and over again. Each time I do it, it gets longer and harder to remember---The memory gets smaller. I feel like I don't have to be on guard all the time." He has learned to use this as a tool and is able to do it without my assistance. Many of my clients have learned to use this on their own. One client had frequent flashbacks to embarrassing moments. He would feel very embarrassed, and he had no idea

what would trigger these flashbacks. He learned that whenever he had a flashback, he could run a movie of the incident. He would then be inside the movie, run it backwards and the embarrassment would be gone. He could do this quite rapidly.

Billy was beaten with an iron bar. After several interventions he said, "I see the iron bar but it is different. It is spinning like a windmill. It is less scary that way." This was in session #7. He also reported a dream which was not a nightmare. Billy said, "I had a dream that I was on a ship and I was lonely. I met a guy, but we didn't have time to talk. I remember sitting on the bow of the boat and feeling the ocean breeze." It is significant that he was beginning to have dreams which were more normal in nature.

Over time Billy's image of Dahmer faded and became less distinct. The first change was that he didn't see his face any more. He did not exhibit the mannerisms of Dahmer. Only when he was angry did he have the northern accent of Dahmer. The flashbacks stopped.

Billy was with Dahmer almost to the exclusion of other people. He developed a dependency on Dahmer. People often choose the familiar over the unfamiliar even though the familiar may be quite terrible. The first panic attack that Billy remembers having was when he went to the bathroom alone. Dahmer usually went with him. The room began to spin. He felt nauseated; he felt weak, frightened and panicky. I had him do the fast phobia procedure with this experience.

He reported frequent panic attacks in a variety of situations. He said that he had had two car wrecks recently. No one was hurt and the only damage was to his car. The accidents were the result of having a panic attack while driving. He said that when he panicked, what he saw would jump out at him. I think what happened is that he would steer to avoid what he saw jumping out at him. He said he ran over the curb in a parking lot. I had him remember those panic attacks and do a fast phobia procedure with those memories.

The fast phobia cure was used in a variety of situations throughout the course of therapy.

*This is a summary of the benefits of the fast phobia cure.*

1. It lessened the intensity of the nightmares and flashbacks and eventually eliminated them.
2. This was evidence to him that change was possible. For someone who had gone 24 years without significant change, that was very important.
3. Since following directions had worked, he was willing to do whatever was asked of him in other interventions. However, one of the important principles of NLP is to ask about and deal with any objections before going ahead with the intervention.
4. He learned to access mental images and sounds that were previously out of his awareness.

5. He was eventually able to see humor in situations that had been dead serious.

### ***Emotional Management Suggestions***

Many of my clients including Billy have learned to use the procedure for all sorts of situations. Basically any time you have a mental picture of an incident and negative feelings are produced, you can use the fast phobia cure procedure. To learn to do this on your own, select a mildly traumatic or irritating event. Use whatever procedure allows you to have a relaxation response—meditation, music, sitting in your favorite chair, yoga, chanting, or imaging your favorite scene in nature. You need to maintain the relaxed feeling throughout seeing the movie. Have a special someone hold your hand if you think that would help. The movie will start before the incident and end after it is over.

1. See projected onto the screen a black and white photograph of yourself before the incident.
2. Take a seat in the imaginary theater.
3. Float out of your body and up to the projection booth. Check to make sure you are relaxed and comfortable.
4. You cannot see the screen and what you see is yourself in the theater seat watching the screen. Then watch yourself seated in the theater watching the movie of the incident.
5. After the movie is over, change the black and white image of yourself at the end of the movie to color.
6. Imagine stepping into the image on the screen, so you are inside the film, as you run the movie backwards rapidly to a time before the incident happened.
7. Repeat steps 5 and 6 several times.
8. Test your results. You will be surprised that the old feeling is no longer there or at least is a lot less intense.

Then you can repeat with an incident with more intensity of feeling. The crucial element is to be able to remain relaxed while watching yourself watch the movie.