

Systematic Desensitization

Joseph Wolpe's method, and an excellent partner to hypnosis. The fear is not an idea; it is a conditioned response. This dismantles it by degrees.

THE SETUP

Safe place	Find the client's calm, special place and record it	<i>You will return here between every exposure.</i>
Hierarchy	Ten scenes, least to most anxious, one to ten	<i>The client writes them in their own words. Office or homework, but their words.</i>
Signal	Right forefinger rises if anxiety comes	<i>Set this up before you start, and tell them what to expect.</i>

THE WORK

Go to calm	Hypnotize, then take them to the favorite place	<i>Let the calm establish before anything else.</i>
Present scene one	Through suggestion and imagery, the least anxious scene, fifteen to twenty seconds	<i>Watch the finger, not the clock.</i>
Finger up	Return to the calm place until the anxiety subsides and the finger lowers	<i>Every switch between calm and fear is the method working.</i>
Repeat	Back to the scene, again, until it produces nothing	<i>Then move up the hierarchy and do the same.</i>
Finish	When all ten are quiet, the client is ready to meet the scenes outside your office	<i>Consider recording a reinforcement session for home.</i>

PACING AND PROBLEMS

Spread it out	The procedure belongs across several sessions	<i>Rushing a hierarchy undoes it.</i>
If the finger will not drop	Stop for that session. Next time, start at the last scene you fully desensitized, then go on	<i>No shame in it, and no harm done.</i>