



Reducing Apprehension and Anxiety about Communication

The basic theories about why people experience fear or anxiety about communication are usually placed in three categories:

I. Excessive Activation

There is a normal increase in the physiological activation in a person's body when performing. When this normal increase continues to a point that a person can not control it, excessive activation occurs.

Solution: **Systematic Desensitization**

1. Learn procedures for deep muscular relaxation.
2. Visualize participating in a series of communication situations while in a state of deep relaxation.

For more information, please see our handout entitled "Learning to Relax."

II. Inappropriate Cognitive Processing

Some people with high physiological activation do not report being apprehensive when communicating, while others with similar high activation report extreme apprehension. This may be because the person processes the available information differently, having learned communicative apprehension.

Solution: **Cognitive Restructuring**

1. Identify negative self-statements.
2. Learn to substitute positive replacements for negative self-statements.
3. Practice.

III. Inadequate Communication Skills

Some people are apprehensive when communicating because they do not know how to communicate effectively.

Solution: **Skills Training**

Some experts argue that skills training as a method of reducing communication apprehension has limited usefulness. However, if a person has high apprehension about only one type of communication context, skills training is very helpful. For more information on classes in oral communication, see our handout entitled "Resources for Improving Oral Communication."