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Fictional Rehearsal

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When we are anxious about the forthcoming event, where we would have to engage in public speaking, our imagination can be very vivid. Cognitive distortions can lead us to imagine all sorts of disasters, but we can also imagery as an ally and explore all aspects of the situation we are afraid of.

Even when we become aware of the underlying reasons for being afraid of public speaking, that doesn't mean that problem will simply disappear. As you already know, coping with anxiety required effort and determination on your part, with the ultimate solution being exposing yourself to the fear. However, before that, there are certain things you can do to prepare yourself.

The banner features the Explorable logo at the top center. Below it are three quiz cards, each with a representative image and a title. The first card shows roller skates on a wooden deck, the second shows a fan of colorful pens, and the third shows a Ferris wheel at sunset. A link to 'See all quizzes' is located at the bottom right of the banner.

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Quiz:
Psychology 101 Part 2

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Picture the Future

One of the most effective approaches is called guided imagery.

This technique consists of visualization of a future event. In this way, we can cover all the aspects of that situation and go through them, in our minds, before anything has happened in reality. This way, we can face our fears in a safe environment and therefore have an easier time coping, when or if what we've imagined occurs in reality.

The Goal Rehearsal Exercise

Before engaging in guided imagery, there are some things you should do to prepare properly. Firstly, find a quiet place where you feel comfortable. Don't let anyone or anything disturb you (other people, your smartphone, a TV, a computer). Close your eyes and take a couple of minutes to focus on your breathing. Acknowledge your current level of tension, if you are experiencing any, and let it go with each breath.

Set Your Goal

In this case, that can be your public speech. Consider it in detail - what is it that you want to achieve? Don't make your goal unrealistic. For example: "I want to speak publicly and not feel a single unpleasant emotion." Instead, try a more realistic alternative: "I want to speak publicly and to convey a message to the audience, regardless of my feelings."

Imagine it Coming to Life

Rehearse the goal of you speaking in front of an audience in your imagination. Picture that you have all the necessary skills and behaviors, to successfully achieving your goal. Imagine, in detail, the way in which you would like to look, behave and feel in those circumstances - how you seem to others, how you sound, the words coming out of your mouth.

The Audience

Now switch focus from yourself to others. How are they responding to you? Try rehearsing their responses - both positive and negative. Try to imagine how you would react to varied reception, by the audience. Imagine yourself responding to them in the way you would like to respond - at that moment, how would you feel and act, what would you say?

Create a Script

You can also create a script of what you want to say in advance. For example, you can jot down some ideas of what you would like to say, if someone asks you a question you don't know the answer to. You can create different scenarios and rehearse them using this exercise. Imagine how people are asking you questions, as well as the wide variety of responses you can provide - both when you know how to answer, and when you don't. Imagine the audience's reactions in both scenarios. See yourself looking confident and calm - imagine how you feel, what you do, how the situation look from both perspectives - yours and the audience's.

Slowly Come Back

After you complete this simple yet effective exercise, take a few minutes and bring yourself back in the present moment - in the space you are. Open your eyes and look around.

When Should You Do It?

You can use this exercise several times a day - whenever you want. The more you do it, the better prepared and more confident you will feel. Use your it for a minimum of 10 days in a row. At first, the application may be strenuous, because you need some time to construct all relevant scenarios, but once you've gotten on track, you'll find it easier.

As you practice your rehearsal exercise, when you approach a real situation, you'll be better prepared, on an emotional level, and you will, therefore, feel less distressed or nervous.

There are also other useful techniques, which rely on the use of your inner world. You will become better acquainted with them a bit later on, and you can decide if you want to use them all together, or choose the ones that feel most satisfactory to you personally.

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