FRIEND OR PHO-BIA
How fear can hurt one, help one survive

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In-Depth Editor

Fear can be defined as an unpleasant emotion which is caused by the belief something is dangerous, likely and capable of causing pain, or a threat to one's well being.

According to AP Psychology teacher Brad Edmundson, this unpleasant emotion can often times be a hindrance to one's well being.

"Fear can cause a heightened sense of awareness, which can obliterate someone to the point where they cannot function well," Edmundson said.

Phobias, anxieties, and any other types of fear have the ability to take over one's life. For example, someone who suffers from agoraphobia — the fear of public places — are confined to their homes.

In many cases, anxieties are powerful enough to keep people from living a normal life. Ethan Moitra of Brown University found that sufferers of social anxiety are significantly more likely to wind up unemployed or underemployed.

Commonly, fear is perceived as a negative aspect of one's life. However, this is not always the case.

More often than not, fear can help one to improve. While it's often perceived as unpleasant, fear is the mind's way of protecting one from danger.

"If you don't have fear you will allow yourself to be in dangerous situations," Edmundson said.

Every animal in nature is equipped with intuitive mechanisms for detecting fear. In humans, there are three major areas of the brain that detect and react to fear.

When faced with a frightening situation, the sensory cortex is the area of the brain that deals with the perception of the stimuli.

From there, the sensory cortex sends signals to the amygdala. The amygdala is involved in experiencing emotion. After receiving information from the sensory cortex, the amygdala sends a response to the hypothalamus.

From there, the hypothalamus will put one's body into fight-or-flight mode.

"Fight-or-flight is your brain's way of getting the body ready in fight and protect yourself, or ready to run away as a means for protection," Edmundson said.

"It is an important aspect to one's survival when placed in a dangerous situation. This response enables humans to react quickly to life-threatening situations."

According to Harvard Health, "All of these changes happen so quickly that people aren't aware of them."

Aside from fight-or-flight mode, there are many other advantages to fear.

When life was more survival-centered and there were many more dangers in the environment, fear was an effective tool when it came to keeping humans away from dangerous situations.

However, since humans are no longer faced with these types of situations, fear has remained a useful tool.

Nowadays, fear can also serve as a motivator along with being a protector. When one lives with the fear of failure, in money and relationships, it motivates them to avoid those things.

Fear can be a dangerous thing, but it can also be life-saving. It is one of the things that make us humans. Fear has the power to both ruin one's life, but it also has the power to save one's life.

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