

Abolish Stage Fright Forever

Have you ever experienced stage fright? It is not pleasant. You perspire and your hands shake, and even your voice can crack. You feel wobbly on your legs. You feel your heart pounding loudly in your chest, your heart beat sounds so loud that it drowns out just about every thought you have. You start thinking about the audience, do they see your shaking hands and can they hear your pounding heart through the microphone. If this scenario describes you, you are having a classic case of stage fright!

Stage fright also known as "performance anxiety" is common even among people who are not on the stage. It can happen to anyone whose activities bring them in front of an audience, any audience, large or small.

Stage fright is known to many public speakers, but many actors, singers musicians experience stage fright even after many years being on the stage. Dancers can feel stage

fright even though no speaking is involved at all in their performance. Athletes can experience this fright which is caused from the pressure of needing to win and being aware of all the millions watching them on TV and could see them fail.

I find that there are four general ways in which most people tend to experience stage fright.

Some people go to enormous extremes to avoid being the center of attention due to their fears. This is sad because nobody should let their fears influence their life choices. In my field, I come across this constantly. We all need to take charge of our lives and not be ruled by these types of insecurities. It is never too late to change. Stage fright is very treatable. Why suffer and put limits on your life experiences?

There are other people whose fear is less extreme, and they work on their problem and thus learn to deal with their stage fright. But they also will find that this underlying fear will still put dampers on what they do and also

how they do things in their chosen career. For instance, they may be fine acting on film, but limit their personal interviews, or turn down exciting roles on the live stage.

People also put limitations on their hobbies and even their relationships just to avoid things that they fear. For instance, they hold back in their performing, public speaking, and even speaking out at a meeting to air their views on a subject, or delivering a wedding toast, or just anything at all that brings attention to them. Usually these fears are kept secret, and they live their life avoiding any confrontation with their fear. As a result, they never ever feel secure. If you belong to this group, you probably suffer considerable anticipatory fear and constantly worry about any situation that will bring this problem to the fore.

Then, there are those whose professional success has led them to be in a position where it is necessary to do a lot of public speaking. These people quickly realize they must either develop the ability to face an audience, or give up the growth potential and

their successful career. These people usually find a way to conquer their personal stage fright demons, by taking the bull by the horns and taking courses and lessons to overcome their fears and are thus able to rise to even greater successes.

And finally, there are people with a deep secret passion for creative expression. In this group we find performing artists such as musicians, singers, actors and comedians. Would you believe that none of these performers are immune to stage fright? Unfortunately some of the most talented never really build a career in the creative world due to stage fright. So, all their lives they live in regret; longing and wondering about what might have been. What a sad state of affairs. What a shame. This is a loss for them as well as those who would have enjoyed sharing their talent. Only the brave and determined, succeed. Why hide your light under your blanket of fear? The good news is that stage fright is common and very treatable. If you want to overcome this problem, you can! But

in order to overcome it, you must first understand how it works so you can prevent it.

Stage fright is the feeling you have of panic during a presentation or performance. But that is only the beginning of stage fright. Stage fright actually has four stages and you need to be aware of each of them, and learn to conquer them one at a time.

The four symptoms of stage fright are:

- Anticipation: You anticipate your performance, you feel nervous and you dream about it. You begin what I call, the "what if's". You suffer horrible feelings about what if this and what if that. You imagine all kinds of horrors happening, most of them very unrealistic. You are suffering from stage fright way before you are even near the stage. These frightening mental images you began hours, days, weeks and sometimes even months before your scheduled performance. You are scared to death! You are asking yourself over and over again, why did I agree to do

this, and your mind begins searching for excuses to cancel.

- Avoidance: This is when you repeatedly do everything and anything you can to avoid any performances or public speaking of any kind. You freak out at the thought of it. Each and every time you do this to yourself, you are reinforcing the negative and are strengthening your feelings of stage fright. You need to face these fears, and accept the fact that you are afraid, and then make a decision to change and eliminate this fear. You need to begin right away and say over and over to yourself, I will do it no matter what. Constantly repeat to yourself over and over again, I will do it no matter what. Little by little you would learn to accept the situation and in time you will be so comfortable with it that you will actually look forward to performing. It takes time, but believe me, it works. Just immediately change the negative fear into a positive. I WILL DO IT!

- Anxiety and Panic: These feelings are truly the pits. You are on stage, and instead of concentrating on performing, all you can do is think to yourself, what am I doing here, you struggle to breathe, perspiration breaks out all over your body, your heart races, you might even feel a little dizzy. You are thinking all the time while you are performing. You are criticizing yourself over and over again. Telling yourself over and over again, how badly you are doing and you watch the audience, all the while you are thinking that nobody is listening to you. You can't wait till it is over.
- The Critique: The period after a performance, when you come to some conclusions about how you did. This is the time to go over your performance, the positive and the negative. You keep the positive in mind for the next performance, and decide what changes you need to make to eliminate the negative. Now you are ready for your next performance.

It may help you to know, that stage fright, like most of the anxiety disorders, is believed by some to stem from a genetic predisposition. This means that some people are better candidates than others to develop stage fright along with other anxiety disorders. Some people never ever feel stage fright, and you had better believe that fact does not mean they are the most talented of the lot.

Those people who do have such a predisposition, need to realize that stage fright is the product of the way they think about the act of performing in public, as well as the ways they choose to handle this condition.

They see performing as a threat, rather than as a challenge. Thinking of it as a threat sets off the primitive "fight or flight" responses which is a natural response one has to fight off an attacker. For instance, the rush of adrenaline one feels when under threat causes the blood to rush to the muscles and causes the heart to beat faster. This is helpful

if you are preparing to fight, but gets in the way of performing.

In most instances, stage fright is the result of focusing too much on yourself, and your anxieties, rather than on your presentation or performance. You are focused on yourself rather than on your audience and what you have to say to that audience. When you are focused too much on yourself, you cannot perform. Instead, you are worrying about how you look and how you sound; you are imagining nothing is working well, you may become annoyed with your audience and blame them for their lack of attention. You may start imagining that they are criticizing you. You find yourself anxious and want to control it, How many times have you seen a comic make his performance worse by telling his audience how bad they are?

When you do this you contribute more and more to your stage fright. You build a wall between you and your audience. You lose your audience, now you really feel alone and vulnerable. You can feel yourself becoming more self conscious every minute. Since the

audience can feel all your emotions they are fidgeting in their seats, becoming more and more uncomfortable and they, as well as you, are wishing to be someplace else.

If you focus on what you are saying, and not the fact that you are saying it, your audience would become focused on what you are saying. And voila! Success!

Many of us think that because we are frightened and anxious about our performance before we start, that it will get much worse once we begin our performance. It is easy to think that if one is nervous now, it can only get worse when we are on stage.

The truth is, for most people, it's exactly the opposite. The anticipation is the worst part. Once they become involved in their performance, they feel better, not worse.

Unfortunately, reading this is not enough to instantly solve your stage fright problem. You have to work on your fears. You need to perform, sing, speak, be a comic, do your thing. Accept that you have fears, and believe

that you conquer them. Take every opportunity you can to perform. Go on stage and concentrate on what you are saying and what you are doing, but whatever you do, do not think about the fact you are doing it. Be involved with what you are saying and doing so that the audience will become involved with it as well.

TIPS FOR COPING WITH STAGE FRIGHT

1. If you want to talk (or sing, act, etc.), you have to breathe. And if you want to do these things calmly, you'll need to breathe correctly from your diaphragm. Breathing is very important as when we experience stage fright we tend to lose our breath. So learning proper breathing will help immensely.
2. When you are on stage you have a responsibility to the audience to be your

best. Whether the audience is there to see you or just to hear what you say or do, or just happens to be there when you are on stage, you owe them the best you can do.

3. If you concentrate on what you are saying and doing, your anxiety will go away.

If you are giving a lecture, your focus should be on your material and you need to be aware of how the audience is responding to it, because when you give a talk, you are passing along information, teaching, or persuading. Therefore, you need to be aware of how they are reacting to your presentation. This way you can change your approach or even move around your material.

When you give a lecture, it is important to establish eye contact with the audience. They need to feel you are talking directly to them. You may want to ask them questions to get them involved. (i.e., How many of you here have ever had this experience...?) You will feel less anxiety once you get your audience involved.

If you are performing acting or singing, your focus will be different. It's not your job to inform the audience. Of course, as an actor you perform and ignore the audience entirely. As a singer, depending on the venue, intimate club or concert hall, you need to turn your focus to your music, and leave the audience to enjoy your performance on their own. In an intimate club you might want to involve the audience with talking to them in a personal manner and establish eye contact, but when involved in your song, it is best to concentrate on the lyric message and just bring them along for the ride.

At all times, your focus must never be on yourself and your anxiety. Just recognize you are feeling anxious and then just let it go, and be calm and focus on what you are doing or saying or singing.

