

We Can All Be Brave When We Face Our Worst Fears!

By Pamela Brooks

Many may wonder if they are brave enough to face the many challenges presented by the pandemic. The press stories today are of the police officers, nurses, and doctors putting their lives on the line to save someone. We can also read about the terror faced by grocery store employees and transportation people who have lost their lives due to exposure. We even hear about the many owners of small businesses being forced to close their doors because they cannot afford to stay open and are forced to let their employees go. While none of these stories may resonate with you, we are all still facing our version of the fear and anxiety caused by the consequences of the pandemic. So how do we manage ourselves and fears so that we get ahead and demonstrate bravery to those we love?

It is important to know that you cannot be brave unless you have had to face fear. Bravery does not exist without the challenge of something difficult, dangerous or scary, that creates fear and anxiety. It is also important to note that bravery does not exist without courage. We will often say, "That person was so brave! They had the courage to face the difficult and threatening situation. "

In order to understand how to be braver we first need to understand what fear and anxiety are and what is going on in our brain when they exist. Fear and anxiety are normal behavioral responses. We need them as much as we need the air we breathe. However, the stories we create when we feel them will often do us in by creating a negative emotional and neurochemical cocktail that physically hijacks our brain and is then impossible to overcome. Society tends to look down on people who are too fearful or have high anxiety. As if the fear was not enough, we add a coat of shame for them and ourselves to deal with as well.

Research has demonstrated over and over that labeling our emotions is the first step to overcoming them. This article will unpack the emotions of fear, anxiety and shame. It will also help in the understanding of why people sometimes experience and respond to fear and anxiety in different ways.

So, what is fear? Fear is the innate reaction to the threat of pain. When our fight or flight response is triggered it can take us out of our rational and logical brain and make us jump to pure survival mode. The chemical response automatically shuts down our frontal cortex, increases adrenaline so our heart races and allows us to move more quickly in whatever direction is perceived as safer. Our body is attempting to respond in a way to keep us alive and well. Granted, not all fear causes us to jump to fight or flight right away, but it can still derail our thoughts and our actions.

Anxiety on the other hand is typically a group response that is highly contagious. **It is caused by the gap between what is perceived as a threat and what resources exist to overcome that threat.** The greater the gap the more anxiety that develops. The more we dwell on the gap the greater the emotional spiral we create. Have you ever been in a positive mood and you run across someone who is anxious, and then leave with a feeling of doom and gloom? That is emotional contagion at its finest, and we are getting it today from just about every news show we watch.

Finally, we have **shame, which is caused by an inward evaluation of our lack of ability to deal with the pain or threat**, or the feeling that we did the wrong thing when dealing with the pain or threat. It can be debilitating as it causes us to isolate ourselves. When we feel shame, we are more likely to retreat than

ask for help. It is worse than guilt or the feeling that we did something bad or made the wrong decision. If it was an act, we can fix it or pay the consequences, but with shame we are bad at a core and there is nothing that can change it.

Take a moment to reflect on your own emotional state right now.

What do you feel in your body? Is your heart racing, chest tight, hands sweaty? **What are your thoughts?** Is your mind wondering around and around on a problem without moving to the solution? Do you feel a bit of panic, like you are at fault? Or do you feel the need to blame others for what is not working? **What are the actions that follow your feeling and thoughts?** Do you jump quickly into action, do you attempt to appease everyone around, or do you run away hoping you never have to face the pain of what triggered you?

It helps if we can more readily identify the real threat, the real fear or the real risk. It may take us time to unpack it but taking a few deep breaths and quieting our thoughts can help. When did the feeling first hit you? Did your feeling come after listening to or being around someone else? Is it the result of listening to something on the news that struck you emotionally? Is your internal dialogue imploding on you because you feel you are a bad person because you are not doing enough to take care of someone you love?

There are four main ways people can typically respond to any panic situation. We are often a combination of them and what we are not born with, we learn from our family. Understanding them may help you unpack more clearly where your fear, anxiety, or shame are coming from and this alone will help to empower you to overcome the fear and take a brave step to address it in a positive way.

If your initial **next knee jerk reaction is anger** or you feel a strong desire to do something or blame someone for what was not done you are having an extroverted task response. This emotional and behavioral style is typically called **Dominant or Decisive**. You may have been a survivor at an early age, or you may have had to take on adult like responsibility early. Fear is driven by the feeling that there has been a loss of control or chaos and the driving action is to take control. Many dominant people never even acknowledge the fear initially because their fight response is so quick. There is often anger or rage for what is not being done and a strong need to act to gain control. Bravery for you takes the form of acknowledging the real fear of what is out of control and not displacing it on others. Instead it comes by taking the emotional drive to take charge and focus on what you can control and making that happen. You can become the rock in a difficult situation, because people like others to take charge, just be sure you are in check and not overtly taking charge and running over those around you in the process.

If your initial fear feeling is driven because **you feel alone or a disconnect from others** or you feel a strong need to find someone to just talk about what is happening and figure out what you are thinking and feeling. You are having an extroverted people response often called **influence**. Some may not even acknowledge the fear at first, as they instantly move to help others who are in need. If this is you, you were born with a strong need to connect with others and fear comes when that connection is threatened. Your response to the fear initially is to talk out, but when that does not work shame might rear its head and you may withdraw from everyone, as the pain of rejection is too great. The best way

to be brave is to make the effort to connect with the people and create safe places to talk. While face-to-face may be preferred, there are still many ways to connect, by helping others, you will help yourself.

If your initial response is **no response or you find yourself avoiding** the news about the pandemic, or feel really out of sorts because you have had a complete disruption of your routine then you are having an introverted people response, often called **steadiness**. You may not show your fear to others as much as you internalize it as anxiety. Your fear is fueled by chaos and the people around you. When it gets too great you will want to withdraw. Your response comes from years of being able to have a well-structured and predictable world. You were never very emotional or were told to not display your emotions. Your best response is to create some order and routine in your world. To be brave for you will require you to speak up about what you know that can help. You may have solutions, but do not feel like sharing them, either because you will feel rejected, SHAME, or that it is just easier to stay in your world and let it all blow over.

If your fear is caused because there is **not enough information to understand how to predict the future**, too much information that isn't accurate, or worse, that **others are not complying to new government rules**, then you are having an introvert task response, often called the **compliant or conscientious**. Your attention to detail comes from a want to be right and accurate. You may have grown up in a strict household, where there was one way to do something, or were constantly corrected for everything that was not done correctly. To be brave for you is to breathe deep and let go of a few things. You may need to forgive yourself or others for not being perfect. Easier said than done. So maybe pick the things you can control and focus just on them or prioritize what is the most important. The world needs you now more than ever though, as it is the attention to detail that will help us find a way to keep our world running until a cure is found.

Regardless of your style here are few more things you can do to address your fear and anxiety today:

1. Be comfortable with yourself and who you are.
2. Face your fear and name it.
3. Realistically assess your situation and get support from others.
4. Be proactive and take care of the things you can.
5. Do not let the fear of being judged (shame) stop you from acting.
6. Take care of yourself, take time for mindfulness and exercise.
7. Be authentic with yourself and others.
8. Instead of judging. get curious and ask more questions.
9. Find a new passion or hobby to take on until you can go back to a normal routine.
10. Be grateful for something every morning and evening (and I mean truly grateful!)

For more information about the styles or to get an in-depth report on yourself or others

<https://bit.ly/DiscomfortArticle>