

# DEFUSE YOUR FEARS

When I was young, I would have the same dream repeatedly. I was asleep in my bed and huge plasticine balls would roll into my room until I was buried, the door was blocked, and I couldn't breathe. Are there any dark balls of fear squeezing the life out of you and blocking the doorway to freedom?

In his sports fable, *Victory Favors the Fearless*, Darrin Donnelly says that there are seven fears in which all others are rooted. To live a happy and successful life, you must defeat all seven.

The first step in overcoming any emotion is to identify it. This process is formalized in a mindfulness technique Dr. Dan Siegel, Professor of Psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine, labelled "Name it to Tame it".



Let's start you on your way to taming your fears by naming Donnelly's seven bases.

1. The fear of what other people think.
2. The fear of change.
3. The fear of making the wrong decision.
4. The fear of missing out on something better.
5. The fear of not being good enough.
6. The fear of failure being permanent.
7. The fear of being "due" for a setback.

Which of these bogeymen lay under your bed?

Emotions, especially negative ones, are housed in the right hemisphere. Language functions, in most people, are lateralized to the left. The act of naming your fear engages the left brain's language centres and provides a sense of control, taming the right brain's emotional beast.

Physiologically, when you name the emotion, research shows that soothing neurotransmitters are released effectively calming the overactive emotional reactivity occurring in the right brain.

When considered in this way, overcoming fear seems much less a fight and more like an embrace. You don't need to wrestle with your fears but rather give them your full attention.

Mindfulness master, Thich Nhat Hanh, writes in, *Fear*, that there are two energies: the energy of pain and the energy of mindfulness and concentration. "When we embrace our

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pain, particles of the energy of mindfulness and concentration begin to penetrate, like photons [of light] into the zone of pain.”

This permeation of light into the dark is not a struggle or a fight. It's a peaceful act of increasing concentration until a tipping point is reached where the concentration of mindful presence is greater than the suffering.

Which of Donnelly's fears jumps out at you? Use this as a foundation for mindfulness. Sit quietly. Feel the associated emotions that arise in relation to the larger underlying fear that you have identified. Make friends with the feelings. Reaffirm that it's alright to feel whatever you're feeling. Emotions are impermanent. They will pass if you allow them. Feel them to heal them.

Recurrently, I dreamed I was trapped by the plasticine balls of my fears. Mindfulness dissolved the balls, restored my breathing space, and opened the doorway to my future. Practice. You won't be disappointed.

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