

How to Cope with Agoraphobia

Agoraphobia = the fear of no escape

which can be:

- open spaces or crowded spaces
- places where it's difficult or socially awkward to escape
 - situations where help may not arrive quickly
 - leaving home

Coping mechanisms = conscious or unconscious choices which...

- increase control over our environment
 - provide comfort
 - allow us to cope with (and distract us from) stressful situations
- become habits (so it's best to ditch the ones that could harm us in the long-term, or won't allow us to grow and learn)

Sarah's Top Ten Tips for coping with agoraphobia

1. Keep a journal

Write in your thoughts, your fears, your successes and your hopes for the future. Getting things out your head and onto the page will help free your mind of negativity.

This needs to be kept private, so you can write what you are really feeling.

You can even try to uncover when and why your agoraphobia started.

2. Be honest with your friends

Most people will be kind when they understand how scary it can be. Help them to realise that you enjoy their company, but that you can't always go out with them. By being honest you might develop stronger bonds with one or more of them, and they will help to build your confidence.

If your friends tease you or aren't supportive, find some new friends!

3. Do things you enjoy

It's important to find moments to have fun – these will help you through the difficult days. What makes you smile, or feel excited, or relaxed?

4. Avoid known triggers when you don't feel able to cope

Don't be afraid to say 'no'. This is your journey, and you need to feel in control.

5. Challenge yourself

The only way to increase your comfort zone is to practise being afraid and still be able to cope; so sometimes you will need to push your boundaries.

Start small with something that's easily achievable. Remember to congratulate yourself when it goes well!

6. Find a hobby

It can be freeing to lose yourself in a task, and to have the distraction of learning something new. Be open to fresh adventures.

7. Seek professional help

Sometimes we need a listening ear, or help with a plan, or to find the cause of our issues.

Find someone who you trust and get on with.

8. Learn to breathe!

If you can learn to control your breath in times of stress, you will be able to control your fear (you could start by reading 'Breath' by James Nestor).

9. Mindfulness/ yoga/ spiritual matters

Sometimes it's good to know that life/ existence is 'bigger' than us – it helps to give us perspective to our problems. Find whatever works for you.

10. Go easy on yourself, and give yourself time

Be at peace with yourself.

Know that you will overcome the issues you face.

Feel the hope of a brighter tomorrow.

Although it might be a scary thing to deal with, we are all capable of change.

Practise self-care (eat well, get plenty of sleep, exercise, stay healthy etc).