Stage Fright Program

DP 034 - Developmental

By

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The stage fright/performance anxiety workshop is a program which consists of three one-hour meetings, that can be easily offered in a two-meeting format. Although it was originally designed for music majors with performance anxiety, the concepts are general enough to be easily adapted to students with dating, speech, or examination anxiety as well. The one-hour format was chosen to coincide with the class schedule times at James Madison University and held during a designated time each week when all music majors had an open hour reserved for department meetings and recitals.

An eclectic approach has been utilized in the treatment procedures. This follows the rationale that various techniques will work for different people with differing degrees of effectiveness, and each person will naturally select the techniques that he/she perceives work best for them. An outline of the procedures used in each meeting follows.

SESSION ONE

I. Introduction and Purpose

A. Basic format of the program and purposes and goals.

B. The "phenomenology" of "stage fright," or how anxiety contributes to it. Include distinction between debilitating and facilitating anxiety (some anxiety is OK) as conceptualized by Alpert and Haber (1960). This is also explained as an inverted U curve, which Hebb (1955) formulated and used to explain the relationship between arousal and performance. This helps to provide the participants with a conceptual framework for understanding their anxiety and establishes the credibility of the program.

C. Define the concept of Stress Innoculation (SI), including the three phases
of SI which are (1) education, (2), rehearsal, and (3) application, as proposed by Meichenbaum and his colleagues (1974).

II. Education Phase

A. A modified Schacterian model of stress/anxiety is diagramed (See Appendix A) and discussed so that each phase of the arousal cycle can be demonstrated and discussed Socratically with the participants (Jaremko, 1979).

B. The leader asks participants for their own instances of each phase, and/or provides overall examples, like dating or speech anxiety, to show the cyclic nature of the model.

C. Participants are told that the goals of Stress Innoculation (SI) are two-fold.

1. To provide a set of coping skills to break up the cycle at point A, B, and C.

2. To think a different set of thoughts so that the "automaticity" of the cycle is "slowed down" enough to enable the person to use the coping skills.

III. The Skills Phase

A. Relaxation training. Two methods are used to teach the participants to deal with Point A of the diagram.

1. The first is to identify with each participant where they are most likely to feel tension. It is best to start this section off by listing some major types of idiosyncratic physiological arousal, such as rapid or restricted breathing, tension in the neck, perspiration, a dryness of the mouth or nose, tension around the forehead, etc. Each participant is then asked where he/she feels their physical arousal the most. They are then taught the slow or deep breathing technique to counteract their own arousal or tension.
A second relaxation skill taught is the progressive mental relaxation process. The process takes between 15 and 20 minutes, if done properly from beginning to end. Participants are asked to practice it at home. They are also asked to utilize the deep breathing procedure immediately before a stressful situation, such as speaking or performing for a group. Jacobson's (1938) deep muscle relaxation could be substituted for the progressive mental relaxation or taught as a skill in addition to it.

SESSION TWO

I. Review the concepts and models presented in the first session. This is done Socratically by asking questions about stress and how to deal with it, such as:
How is a stress reaction cyclic? What are three reactions to a stressor?
How can anxiety facilitate performance? How do the relaxation procedures work?
(Takes about 15 minutes).

II. Appraisal and Self-Statements

This is the next step of the Stress Innoculation Model.

A. Since performance-anxiety people size up the situation as stressful and anxiety producing, this step tries to get them to look at stress in a coping way. This is a skill to use at Point B of the cycle. (See diagram - Appendix A) Meichenbaum and his colleagues (1974) have suggested the four phases as preparing for a stressor, confronting it, being overwhelmed by it, and rewarding one's self for having coped. Self-statements such as those provided in Appendix B are merely read to the students and their reactions are elicited.
(Takes about 10 minutes).

B. Reversal of Affect REV Procedure--identify the negative self-statements that underlie the anxiety and then replace them with positive coping statements.
Students are asked to generate their own examples from daily life. This section ends by the group generating a list of REV statements to use with stage fright. Such statements as: (1) "At least I learned something," (2) "It will help me later," (3) "By doing this, I'll feel better about myself," (4) "Other good musicians feel this way too," are common statements. Other techniques, such as Maultsby's Rational Self-Analysis Procedure which challenges irrational self-talk, have also been used effectively at this point (Maultsby, 1974).

III. Gestalt Exercises and Other Cognitive Coping Strategies

A. Discuss how expectations influence performance, anxiety and happiness, using the formula Happiness = \( \frac{\text{Performance}}{\text{Expectations}} \). Most high achievement oriented people set high expectations, and thus feel anxious or unhappy about their work much of the time.

B. Stage fright is often caused by "leaving the present" and (1) either thinking about negative past experiences or (2) thinking "what if's" or negative future things. Students are taught to direct their attention to the present by repeating the statement, "Right now I am aware of __________."  

C. The concept that your anxiety is more noticeable to you than your audience is discussed and the Gestalt notion that when focusing on and acknowledging a feeling and it usually disappears or changes is also discussed. Many people become more anxious trying to cover up the anxiety that is already there rather than acknowledging it to themselves and focusing on their task at hand.

D. How to use the audience for feedback is also discussed.

IV. Discussion of in vivo Desensitizing Exercises to Try for Homework.

A. Look directly at people outside and in class.

B. Practice voice escalation.
C. Talk or volunteer more in class.
D. Practice in front of friends or strangers.
E. Sing or play in public.

SESSION THREE

I. Review the concepts discussed in the first two sessions and make sure participants know the steps of Stress Innoculation. This is also done Socratically by asking them questions about stress and how to deal with it.

II. Application Phase—Performing for the Group

*Note: This aspect of the program may be optional and functions to limit the group to a manageable size of 20 or less people.

A. Here the idea is to use the skills taught in the first two sessions to cope with a real stressor. Participants are called on in random order to give a brief performance (either vocal or instrumental). The leader coaches the students by instructing them to do each of the steps described and applied earlier. Emphasis is not given to appraisal of the actual performance but to the process of using the previously learned strategies to reduce anxiety. Attention is then given to reinforcement for positive coping.

B. Discussion of how this procedure is generalizable to other stressful situations.

C. Feedback and program evaluation. (See Appendix C).
APPENDIX A
STRESS INOCULATION TRAINING
EDUCATIONAL RATIONALE
(FROM JAREMKO, 1979)

STRESSOR

POINT C
Cognitive Restructuring
(Replacement Stage)

PHYSIOLOGICAL AROUSAL
(Rapid Heart Rate, etc.)

NEGATIVE SELF STATEMENTS

“AUTOMATIC” APPRAISAL OF
SITUATION AS ANXIETY

POINT A
Physical Coping Skills
— deep breathing
— progressive relaxation
— “mental” relaxation

POINT B
1. Re-appraisal of Stressor
   — preparation
   — confrontation
   — being overwhelmed
   — self reinforcement
2. Cognitive Strategies Re-appraisal

1. Re-appraisal of Stressor
   — preparation
   — confrontation
   — being overwhelmed
   — self reinforcement

2. Cognitive Strategies Re-appraisal
Appendix B
Example of Self-Statements
Rehearsed in Stress-Inoculation-Training

1. **Preparing for a Stressor**

   Meichenbaum & Cameron (1973)

   What is it you have to do?  
   You can develop a plan to deal with it.  
   Just think about what you can do about it.  That's better than getting anxious.  
   No negative self-statements; just think rationally.  
   Don't worry; worry won't help anything.  
   Maybe what you think is anxiety is eagerness to confront it.

2. **Preparing for a Provocation**

   Novaco (1975)

   What is it that you have to do?  
   You can work out a plan to handle this.  
   You can manage this situation.  You know how to regulate your anger.  
   If you find yourself getting upset, you'll know what to do.  
   There won't be any need for an argument.  
   Time for a few deep breaths of relaxation.  Feel comfortable, relaxed and at ease.  
   This could be a testy situation, but you believe in yourself.
2. Confronting and Handling a Stressor

Meichenbaum & Cameron (1973)

Just "psych" yourself up -- you can meet this challenge. One step at a time; you can handle the situation. Don't think about fear; just think about what you have to do. Stay relevant. This anxiety is what you know you would feel. It's a reminder to use your coping exercises. This tenseness can be an ally, a cue to cope. Relax; you're in control. Take a slow deep breath. Ah, good.

Confronting the Provocation

Novaco (1975)

Stay calm. Just continue to relax. As long as you keep your cool, you're in control here. Don't take it personally. Don't get all bent out of shape; just think of what to do here. You don't need to prove yourself. There is no point in getting mad. You're not going to let him get to you. Don't assume the worst or jump to conclusions. Look for the positives. It's really a shame that this person is acting the way she is. For a person to be that irritable, he must be awfully unhappy. If you start to get mad, you'll just be banging your head against the wall. So you might as well just relax. There's no need to doubt yourself. What he says doesn't matter.
3. Coping with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed

Meichenbaum & Cameron (1973)

When fear comes, just pause. Keep the focus on the present; what is it you have to do? Label your fear from 0 to 10 and watch it change. You should expect your fear to rise. Don't try to eliminate fear totally; just keep it manageable. You can convince yourself to do it. You can reason your fear away. It will be over shortly. It's not the worst thing that can happen. Just think about something else. Do something that will prevent you from thinking about fear. Describe what is around you. That way you won't think about worrying.

Coping with Arousal and Agitation

Novaco (1975)

Your muscles are starting to feel tight. Time to relax and slow things down. Getting upset won't help. It's just not worth it to get so angry. You'll let him make a fool of himself. It's reasonable to get annoyed, but let's keep the lid on. Time to take a deep breath. Your anger is a signal of what you need to do. Time to talk to yourself. You're not going to get pushed around, but you're not going haywire either. Try a cooperative approach. Maybe you are both right. He'd probably like you to get really angry. Well, you're going to disappoint him. You can't expect people to act the way you want them to.
4. **Reinforcing Self-statements**

Meichenbaum & Cameron (1973)

It worked; you did it.
It wasn't as bad as you expected.
You made more out of the fear than it was worth.
Your damn ideas -- that's the problem. When you control them, you control your fear.
It's getting better each time you use the procedures.
You can be pleased with the progress you're making.
You did it!

**Self-Reward**

Novaco (1975)

It worked!
That wasn't as hard as you thought.
You could have gotten more upset than it was worth.
Your ego can sure get you in trouble, but when you watch that ego stuff you're better off.
You're doing better at this all the time.
You actually got through that without getting angry.
Guess you've been getting upset for too long when it wasn't even necessary.
APPENDIX C
PROGRAM EVALUATION FORM
PERFORMANCE ANXIETY REDUCTION

Circle the number which corresponds most closely to your feelings.

1. The content of the program was
   Dull and boring 1 2 3 4 5
   Interesting and Informative

2. In terms of organization, did you find the process
   Poorly organized and confusing 1 2 3 4 5
   Well organized and easy to follow

3. My learnings from this program
   Have increased my anxiety in performance situations 1 2 3 4 5
   Have decreased my anxiety in performance situations to date

4. My learnings from this program
   Have resulted in NO change in my actual music performance 1 2 3 4 5
   Have resulted in improvement in my actual music performance

5. To what extent did this program fulfill your expectations about what you personally might get out of it?
   Did not come up to my expectations 1 2 3 4 5
   Exceeded my expectations

6. Would you attend a program like this again? Yes____ No____ Not Sure____
7. If you attended all three sessions, please rank order the following aspects of the program in terms of their helpfulness/effectiveness for you (1 most help; 5 least):

Rank

A. Deep muscle relaxation exercises.
B. Discussion of role of anxiety in performance.
C. Looking at negative self-statements and what to say to yourself.
D. Practice performance in front of group.
E. Discussion of tension relief strategies before and after practice performance.

8. In your opinion, how could this program be improved?

Name ____________________________
(Requested but not required)
BIBLIOGRAPHY


