

Are Phobias Inherent or Inherited?

Phobias are extreme fears in specific situations lacking real danger or fears which are completely out of proportion. Most of the time, the person with the phobia realizes that its fear is irrational and illogical, but he still keeps feeling the pain and is hostages by fear. Only avoiding the painful situation can bring relief.

One of the most common phobias is Social Phobia. Social phobia is a very exaggerated shyness typified by persistent and strong feelings of anxiety and fear when facing certain social situations, interacting with others, or even when being observed, to such an extent that this feeling greatly interferes in the development of the normal life of those who suffer it.

One of the main characteristics of social phobia is the strong anxiety felt before the feared events take place, known as "anticipated anxiety." People start worrying and feeling terror before confronting the feared situation, so, once they actually face it, and due to their nervousness, it comes out worse. It leads to an increase in the level of "anticipated anxiety" next time they confront the same situation. A vicious cycle is created and which is self-generating and causes self-destruction.

Social phobia is much more widespread than we believe, for it is estimated that about 3 to 13% of the population suffers from it in some way. Unlike most phobias, it affects men and women equally, normally appears during adolescence or before the age of 25 and is frequently hereditary, or perhaps, culturally imbibed within the family or social setting. Social phobia generally develops in childhood or adolescence, specially following a humiliating experience. Approximately 40% of social phobia cases occur before the age of ten and 95% before the age of 20. Often the question that is frequently asked; are phobias hereditary? This is often queried in cases of social phobias where both male and female are susceptible to this disorder. Are phobias inherited or learned? There has been a continuous debate on whether a phobia is hereditary or not.

In most cases, the supposedly hereditary component of phobias or anxiety disorders remain unidentified for a substantial amount of time. People know they are afraid but, at the same time, are hard-put at explaining why they are afraid. They may be scared as this feeling of fear or terror is deeply entrenched in their blood down the generation and they simply do not know when and where this fear originated.

Hereditary component of phobias relate a series of phobic tendencies passed down from one generation to another. In 30% cases, social phobias develop due to hereditary or genetic influences and in 70% cases due to environmental factors like faulty upbringing by parents and learning from social behaviors of others.

If a person has inherited this feeling of fear primarily from forefathers or from some members of the family, or even from a close circle of friends --- he or she cannot get rid of this hereditary component of phobias, as the reason of his terror is unknown. With the gradual passage of time, the fear becomes a part of his character. Probably another reason is that children learn fears from adults. Tribal elders knew enough to be afraid when they encounter wild animals back in the Stone Ages, so it makes sense from an evolutionary standpoint that fear and anxiety and phobia may be inherited.

About the Author

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