

Personal Example: **Processing Fear in a Healthy Way** **HAND OUT**



A few weeks ago, I was invited to give a talk at a community mental health awareness event. On the surface, I was honored and excited—but inside, I was terrified. As the event drew closer, I found myself waking up with a tight chest, avoiding practicing my talk, and obsessively thinking, “*What if I freeze? What if I sound incompetent?*”

Step 1: Acknowledging and Naming the Fear

Rather than push the fear aside or pretend it wasn’t there, I made time to sit quietly with it. I wrote in my journal:

> “*I’m afraid of being judged. I’m afraid of failing publicly. I’m afraid I won’t be good enough.*”

Naming the fear gave me some distance from it. I began to see it not as a truth, but as a message my nervous system was sending—trying to protect me from emotional risk.

Step 2: Exploring the Source

I asked myself: “*Where is this fear coming from?*” I realized it wasn’t just about public speaking. It was tied to past experiences where I was criticized or dismissed when I tried to speak up. My fear was trying to guard me from reliving those moments.

This was a key insight: My current fear was disproportionate because it was echoing an old wound.

Step 3: Regulating the Body

I began practicing grounding and breathing techniques to calm my nervous system. My routine included:

- 4-7-8 breathing (inhale 4 seconds, hold 7, exhale 8)
- Standing barefoot and noticing physical sensations
- Repeating affirmations like: “*I am safe. I can speak and still be okay.*”

I also visualized myself speaking confidently and receiving warm, supportive feedback. This helped rewire my mental rehearsal away from fear-based imagery.

Step 4: Seeking Support

I reached out to a mentor who had seen me speak before. I shared my fears openly and vulnerably. She reminded me that fear means I care—and that my authenticity, not perfection, is what moves people.

That conversation gave me the courage to shift from “*I have to be perfect*” to “*I want to be real.*”

Step 5: Reframing and Taking Action

I reframed the fear as energy: “*This isn’t fear of failure—it’s the energy of purpose.*” On the day of the event, I still felt nervous, but I used the tools I’d practiced.

Before stepping on stage, I placed my hand on my heart and silently said, “*Let me be of service.*” That small moment transformed fear into connection.

Outcome

I spoke clearly and authentically. I didn’t deliver a flawless speech—but I connected with the audience. Several people thanked me afterward, saying it was exactly what they needed to hear.

Why It Was a Healthy Way to Process Fear:

- I *acknowledged* the fear instead of avoiding or suppressing it.
- I *explored* its deeper roots and meaning.
- I *regulated* my body with breath and grounding techniques.
- I *sought support*, reminding myself I wasn’t alone.
- I *reframed* the fear into purpose and took meaningful action despite discomfort.

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