

Psychiatrist Michael Yasinski M.D. discusses the triggers and treatments of commitment phobia.



Do you struggle with commitment? Trust me, you are not alone. In my experience as a psychiatrist, I deal with this often. Fortunately, psychodynamic therapy, which is a close cousin of classic Freudian therapy, is very effective at helping patients understand their maladaptive relationship patterns, interpret these patterns and help them implement positive lasting changes. The first goal in therapy is identifying the “why” behind the fear. A crucial tenet of dynamic therapy requires self-discovery into your underlying problem with guidance from your psychiatrist, rather than simply being told. Self-discovery is necessary to provide the proper insight needed to eliminate maladaptive patterns and make lasting changes.

Although there are many reasons people fear relationship commitment, one of the most common reasons results from an emotionally painful childhood experience. This memory often revolves around an emotionally or physically unavailable parent, as in the case of divorce or loss of a parent. Children with an intense loving attachment to their parents are ill-equipped to handle a blow of this magnitude. In order to cope and defend against further pain, they distance themselves from all meaningful relationships, both consciously (aware) and subconsciously (not aware).

After identifying the underlying problem, the next step is to conceptualize the painful emotions that were swept under the rug as a child and process them. This may take several emotionally draining therapy sessions but brings necessary closure. With closure of the past, a new emotional foundation can be constructed to more successfully approach a healthy relationship from a mature adult perspective. This is accomplished with guidance of a psychiatrist who helps you understand that, in this specific example, all of your previous fears were rooted in the emotions of an immature child and have little in common with your current ability to handle adversity. Is there anything else in your adult life you approach with the same mindset as a child? Probably not, so why approach relationships with this mindset?

The final step is utilizing your new knowledge and relationship skill-set with confidence. Reinforce this confidence by watching role models with healthy relationships, rather than remembering the failures of your parents or your own past failed relationships. Like every important skill in life, relationships take practice. Sure, you may get hurt, but that is an unavoidable part of life. It is how you handle the emotions that define the progress you have made. Learning from failed relationships allows you the opportunity to improve your emotional IQ and increase the odds of the next relationship being successful.

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