**UMW Speaking Center Presents**



Psych Services and Public Speaking

Public Speaking anxiety is the number one fear among adults. Almost everyone experiences some anxiety when speaking. This is completely normal and can even be helpful, to a degree. But too much anxiety can interfere with education, career choices, and even leisure activities if the response to anxiety symptoms is “avoidance.” Here are some facts about Public Speaking anxiety for those who wish to improve their fear or receive help.

* Anxiety symptoms occur when a person perceives a threat or a danger; it is the body’s signal to do something. Mobilizing oneself in the face of danger helps us survive, but if we have too many “false alarms” or if anxiety symptoms become too intense, we experience extreme discomfort and we may be less able to perform.
* Typical physical symptoms include: racing heart, rapid breathing, trembling, shaky voice, dizziness, feeling faint, nausea, and muscle tension.
* Anxiety also happens in your head. Negative predictions about one’s performance, negative assessment of one’s skills, or predicting disastrous consequences of a less-than-perfect presentation can occur in the form of thoughts and images. Many times these cognitions are distorted, unlikely, exaggerated, or all of the above.
* Public speaking anxiety is evoked by many different situations: class presentations, class discussions, speaking at meetings, talking in a group, asking questions in class, speaking with authority figures, etc.
* Identify situational triggers and thinking patterns that contribute to the anxiety spiral. This includes the nature/degree of all types of “consequences,” situational risk, and self-perceptions.
* Relaxation training is an important behavioral component of therapy. Focus on relaxation process also diverts attention from anxiety symptoms.
* Exposure to the feared situation is critical and can be planned in several ways. Avoidance reinforces itself and only leads to more avoidance. Practicing real-life situations with others, such as asking questions or giving mock presentations can help.
* An in-depth individual assessment of anxiety triggers and the severity of the anxiety response is the key to successful intervention. Therapy (cognitive-behavioral therapy) addresses both physical side-effects and unhelpful thinking patterns.

The Talley Center for Counseling Services is located on the first floor of **Lee Hall in Room 106**. Our office hours are **8 AM to 5 PM**, Monday through Friday. Students wishing to make an appointment may do so by calling us at **540-654-1053** or by stopping by Lee 106 during regular business hours and speaking directly with our administrative assistant. Calls made to the counseling center outside normal business hours will be forwarded to our voice mail. Please feel free to leave a confidential message, including your name and contact number and our administrative assistant will return your call on the next business day.