

## **TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION PHOBIAS**

Phobias are exaggerated fears of something. Those fears are generally illogical and reduce the quality of life for ourselves and those around us; nevertheless they are very real. Teachers need to be sensitive in this area take care NOT to publicly identify students who have debilitating phobias. Generally, people who suffer from phobias must be professionally treated to overcome them; therefore, the condition should not be treated lightly.

An example of this would be Frank, who had a fear of germs. He wore a surgical mask when he went outside because he was afraid he would catch a disease from someone. When he put gas in his car, the service station attendant would have to stay inside while Frank disinfected the nozzle and handle of the gas pump. He wore surgical gloves while he did this and held the pump with a cloth. After he was finished filling the tank, he would leave the money for the gas on top of the pump, get back into the car, and signal to the attendant that he could come out.

The quality of Frank's life was reduced because of his phobic behavior. His phobia made life much more difficult--certainly more than necessary. Critical thinking can help reduce the fears that are experienced in life. By taking the time to examine the early source of our fear and deciding whether it is fact or opinion, we can make logical decisions about what we experience.

These are the steps that doctors may take patients through to try to help them overcome phobias. Let's say that a person is ophidiophobic (fear of snakes). A doctor may bring pictures of snakes for one session and just talk about snakes and how beneficial they are (eat mice and other rodents) and discuss some of the misconceptions concerning snakes (they don't eat people whole or strike at people without being provoked, etc.). He may even persuade the patient to touch the picture. During the next phase of the therapy, a rubber snake may be shown to the patient and eventually, the patient would hold the rubber snake. Gradually a live snake in a cage might be brought in the room for the patient to observe. Ultimately the patient may touch the snake. This doesn't mean that the patient can be thrown into a nest of snakes and calmly enjoy life; however, the intense fear will have diminished to the point where the quality of life increases. The patient is no longer consumed by the fear. He/she now controls the fear, rather than the fear controlling them. This process is achieved through the critical thinking process by examining all the facts and misconceptions, and then forming a logical opinion.