



## Scary, Hairy Spider: Expressing Feelings Helps Alleviate Fears

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[Michael Harper](#) for redOrbit.com – Your Universe Online

A new study suggests that expressing your feelings and fears in times of anxiety and stress may actually help you through these times and confront your fears. In fact, according to this [UCLA](#) psychology study, the more negative and fearful words you use, the better chance you have of reducing your fear and stress.

In order to test this theory, the UCLA psychologists asked 88 participants to face a very common human fear: A freakishly large, hairy spider. Each participant was asked to gradually walk closer and approach the [tarantula](#), which was kept in an open container in the wide outdoors.

Next, the subjects were asked to step inside, where they were parted into four groups. The psychologists then brought in a second tarantula inside a container and set the spider in front of each group.

The first group was asked to describe their emotions and label the feelings they experienced when they saw the tarantula. These subjects were asked to say things like, "I'm anxious and frightened by the ugly, terrifying spider," according to the statement.

Michelle Craske, a professor of psychology at UCLA and the senior author of the study explained how this study is different from other studies that have gone before it.

"This is unique because it differs from typical procedures in which the goal is to have people think differently about the experience to change their emotional experience or change the way they think about it so that it doesn't make them anxious."

"Here, there was no attempt to change their experience, just to state what they were experiencing."

The second group was asked to use more neutral terms about their feelings towards the spider at the front of the room, avoiding any words that conveyed disgust or fear. These individuals were asked to say things which may have made the spider seem less threatening, like "That little spider can't hurt me; I'm not afraid of it."

This approach, according to Craske, is the common method chosen by humans to conquer their fears.

The third group were asked to avoid the subject altogether, saying things which were apropos of nothing.

The fourth and final group was asked to say nothing at all, and instead simply exposed to the arachnid.

Then, each group was taken back outside one week later to conduct the same test again, this time in the great, wide open air of outdoors.

As each of the 88 participants slowly made their way towards the spider, the psychologists studied how close they were able to get to the tarantula and whether they were able to reach out and actually touch the hairy arachnid with their fingers. The researchers also studied the psychological responses of each of the participants, paying close attention to how much sweat was emitted from their skin. According to Craske, this is a good measure of fear in a human.

In the end, Craske and team found that the first group of participants who honestly expressed their concerns and fears were able to get much closer to the spider in the last outdoor test than the third group who were asked to avoid the subject altogether.

Additionally, the study found that those individuals in the first group who used more words and more negative words to describe their feelings towards the spider were more able to approach the tarantula a week later, and with less sweat than other groups.

“They got closer and they were less emotionally aroused,” Craske said. “The differences were significant. The results are even more significant given the limited amount of time involved. With a fuller treatment, the effects may be even larger.”

When asked how they felt about being a part of a study on fear, the tarantulas said they were used to it by now, noting that they are still much more afraid of us than we are them.