

# A Performer's Nemesis: Stage Fright

Stage fright = performance anxiety, that sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach.

Going on stage turns some people into a nervous wreck, but performing in front of a group doesn't have to equal impending doom.

## Goal:

Let's come up with some strategies to overcome stage fright and get over performance anxiety so that you can give your best performance, no matter the situation.

## What does it feel like?

- 1) What does stage fright feel like? Be specific? Is it like ice water in your veins? Or butterflies in your stomach?
- 2) If you were going to personify stage fright and make it your nemesis, who would that person be?
- 3) What thoughts go through your mind?
- 4) What would be the worst thing that could happen onstage?
- 5) What strategies have you tried? What works....what doesn't?

## Get your Zen on. Take 3 deep breaths.

This is the most recommended cure for stage fright because it works. Set aside time before your performance where you will find a quiet space to just breathe. Don't talk to anyone, and find a place where you can close your eyes for this exercise.

These deep breaths should be diaphragm breaths, meaning you should feel your stomach go in and out while breathing. Chest breaths (the kind where you lift your shoulders) are too shallow and won't give you the full body release of tension and nervousness. Focus instead on breathing as low as possible. With your eyes closed, put your hand on your lower abdominal muscles below your belly button. Feel your stomach expand with the inhale, and apply slight pressure on the exhale. You're now breathing using your whole body. These whole body breaths are a great way to release anxiety and beat stage fright.

By breathing with the whole body and focusing on the exhales, you can reduce anxiety and prepare your whole body to perform.

**\*\*HAVE THEM FIND A SPACE IN THE ROOM ON THEIR OWN AND LEAD THEM THROUGH DEEP BREATHING EXERCISES\*\***

Your heart rate is tied directly to how quickly you breathe. When you inhale repeatedly, your heart rate increases. So, we want to focus on long exhales. Try inhaling for 4 beats and exhaling for 8. This will lower your heart rate and calm you down.

## Focus. Stretch. Shake out. Limber up.

Stretching is a great way to get rid of stage fright for two reasons. First, it prepares your body by increasing blood flow to your various muscle groups and brain. You won't have the typical "cold feet." Second, it gives you something deliberate to focus on and think about instead of the impending performance. Focusing on the stretches themselves and staying in the moment is a great way to overcome nerves.

When preparing for a performance, be sure to stretch out the major muscle groups: arms, chest, back, abdomen, and legs. For performers, stretch out your neck and shoulders, too.

Stage fright happens when your body detects a threat. Your body cuts off blood flow to your hands and feet, and stockpiles blood in the center of your body. By stretching, you tell your body that there is no threat, and you restore circulation to your whole body.

**\*\*LEAD THEM THROUGH A QUICK VOCAL AND PHYSICAL WARM UP EXERCISES THAT THEY CAN USE BEFORE A PERFORMANCE.\*\***



## Set a Stop Time. Worrying: done.

If you know you're the kind of person that gets performance anxiety, set a time when you will stop worrying. Many performers use this strategy to overcome nerves.

Say, for example, that the performance is at 7pm. Give yourself until 5pm to worry, whine, fret, and otherwise stress yourself out. However, after 5pm, all nervousness is off-limits. Switch into uber-confident mode, where you tell yourself that you're entirely capable of performing and that you'll kick butt.

Giving yourself time to worry allows you to acknowledge that getting butterflies in the stomach is a natural phenomenon. Give yourself time to process it, and then before performance time you'll be ready to put on a show.

Discuss that a good time to switch into the confident mode would be after the physical and vocal warm ups. You can be nervous before you start your routine...but after the warm ups, the time for shyness is over.

The old saying, "fake it til you make it" has a great deal of truth here. Feign confidence in your abilities and the upcoming performance. Act overly-confident. Make everyone jealous of how calm, cool, and collected you are.

**\*\*HAVE THEM TAKE ON THE ROLE OF A CONFIDENT PERSON. HOW WILL THEY STAND? HOW WILL THEY MOVE ABOUT THE SPACE? HOW WILL THEY TALK TO OTHER ACTORS?**

## Visualize Success....I'm Glad that's over.

Stage fright is a mental thing, so sometimes the best approach is to trick your brain into good behavior. One of the best ways to trick your brain is to pretend like the nerve-inducing event is already over.

Take a second to get into character. Pretend like you are you, only in the future. The thing that you were so anxious about has already happened, and it went awesome. You blew it out of the water. You rocked the performance. Everybody adores you. You can hardly go ten steps without people giving you compliments. You're floating on cloud nine, and on your way home you find a \$100 bill sitting on the side of the street. Your imagined future doesn't have to be the same as mine. Whatever you imagine, focus on how well the event went, and make sure you imagine concrete details.

**\*\* HAVE THEM SIT IN A CIRCLE. TELL THEM TO CLOSE THEIR EYES AND VISUALIZE WHAT THEY THINK COULD HAPPEN AT THE END OF THE PERFORMANCE AFTER IT GOES WELL.**

Imagine the place, time, people, smells, sights. Go around the circle and tap someone on their back. When they feel your tap, they have to tell you share a compliment that they think they will receive after the performance/speech.

## Smile and Laugh. Enjoy the time before the performance.

There's a strong line of research that indicates that smiling and laughing does good things for your brain. Even if you don't feel happy, the physical act of forming your face into a grin will make you feel better. Smiling releases neurotransmitters in the brain, chemicals that relieve stress, and promote happiness and pleasure. Take it to the next level by adding laughter. Laughing engages your whole body.

**\*\*HAVE VOLUNTEERS SHARE THEIR BEST JOKE. LET THEM LAUGH. EVEN IF IT ISN'T FUNNY. . LAUGH.**

**\*\*\*If there's time – go through their new pre-show entire routine.**

BREATH

VOCAL WARM UP

PHYSICAL WARM UP

CONFIDENT ACTORS WALKING IN THE SPACE

VISUALIZE SUCCESS

LAUGH