Dare It to Happen

A Practical Guide to Paradoxical Intention

What It Is

Blushing, sweating, trembling and a shaky voice are involuntary. They're run by your autonomic nervous system, not your willpower. When you fight them, you add more stress and keep your attention locked on the very thing you fear, so they usually get stronger.

Paradoxical intention, developed by psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, reverses that struggle. Instead of fighting the reaction, you deliberately *invite* it, with an exaggerated, slightly playful attitude. When you're no longer afraid of the symptom, the fear stops feeding it, and the reaction usually shrinks or never shows up.

Good Times to Use It

- Speaking in front of a group, a meeting or a briefing
- A radio call, a hard conversation, or testimony in court
- Moments when you dread blushing, sweating, shaking or your voice cracking
- Any situation where "I hope it doesn't happen again" has become part of the problem

The 6-Step Technique

1. **Name the reaction you dread.** Be specific: "My face will turn red," "My hands will shake," or "My voice will crack."
2. **Catch the early signal.** Notice the first sign, such as warmth in your cheeks, a flutter in your hands or tightness in your throat. That's your cue.
3. **Flip your intention.** Replace "Don't let it happen" with "I want it to happen, as much as possible."
4. **Exaggerate it until it's funny.** Push the image past realistic. If it makes you smile, you're doing it right.
5. **Carry on.** Keep talking, writing or working. Don't stop to check whether it's working; just hold the playful dare in the back of your mind.
6. **Notice the result.** Afterward, compare what you feared with what actually happened. Each time, the fear loses a little more ground.

Disclaimer: The above shares ideas in exploring personal progress as derived from various sources. It is intended as information only and is not intended as advice to engage in any specific physical or mental activity. Always consider whether these ideas, concepts, techniques & activities are right for you & always confer with your health professionals.

Sample “Dares” to Get You Started

Use these as they are, or write your own. The sillier, the better.

If you dread…	Try telling yourself…
Blushing	“Let’s see how red I can really get. Tomato red. They’ll need sunglasses.”
Sweating	“Time to show everyone what real sweating looks like. Buckets of it.”
Shaking hands	“I’m going to shake so hard this coffee turns into a milkshake.”
A shaky or cracking voice	“Let’s hear the wobbliest voice this room has ever heard.”
Mind going blank	“I’m going to go so blank they’ll think I’ve been unplugged.”
Stumbling over words	“I’ll trip over at least five words today. Let’s go for a record.”

Tips for Success

- **Your attitude matters more than the words.** Saying the dare through clenched teeth while still secretly fighting the symptom keeps the loop going. Genuinely drop the struggle.
- **Start small.** Practice in low-stakes moments, like ordering coffee or a casual conversation, before a big one arrives.
- **Keep it light.** Humor is part of the technique. Being able to smile at the reaction puts distance between you and it.
- **Expect it to get easier.** The first try may feel awkward. Like any skill, it gets stronger with repetition.
- **Don’t use it on real warning signs.** This technique is for fear-driven reactions. Chest pain, fainting, or symptoms that are new or unexplained call for a medical professional.

Want help going further? Hypnosis is an excellent place to rehearse stressful situations and teach your nervous system to stay calm when it counts.

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My Practice Log

Rate your fear before and after on a 0–10 scale. Watching the numbers change is one of the best motivators there is.

Situation	Reaction I dreaded	My dare	Fear before (0–10)	Fear after (0–10)

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