



TRAUMA THERAPIES

PARADOXICAL INTENTION

WHAT IT IS

Paradoxical Intention is a **therapeutic technique** developed by Viktor Frankl (founder of Logotherapy).

- It works by asking someone to **do, or even exaggerate, the very thing they fear.**
- The paradox is that by intentionally trying to make the feared symptom happen, the **anxiety about it decreases** — and often, the symptom goes away.

This approach is especially useful when fear of the symptom is what keeps it going (a cycle of “the harder I try *not* to do it, the worse it gets”).

HOW IT WORKS

1. Fear → Tension → Symptom:

- When people are afraid of something happening (e.g., not sleeping, blushing, stuttering), their anxiety makes the problem worse.

2. Intention → Reduced Fear:

- By deliberately *trying* to bring on the symptom, they remove the performance pressure.
- Humor and self-detachment often come in, which reduces anxiety.



EVERYDAY EXAMPLES

INSOMNIA

- Instead of trying hard to fall asleep, the therapist may suggest: *“Tonight, try as hard as you can to stay awake. Keep your eyes open and resist sleep.”*
- Often, this takes away the pressure and the person drifts off.

EVERYDAY EXAMPLES

PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY

- A person who fears blushing might be told: *"When you give your talk, try to blush as much as possible — really show it off."*
- By aiming for the feared reaction, the cycle of fear and embarrassment weakens.

STUTTERING

- Someone afraid of stammering might be encouraged to *intentionally stutter on purpose* during a conversation.
- This reduces the anticipatory anxiety that usually makes stuttering worse.

PERFORMANCE ANXIETY (e.g. sports or sexual performance)

- Instead of dreading failure, the person is guided to *actively invite the "mistake."*
- With the pressure gone, natural ability often returns.

WHY IT WORKS

- Breaks the **fear-symptom-fear loop**.
- Reduces performance anxiety by using **irony and humor**.
- Restores a sense of control — the person realizes, *"I can face this without being controlled by fear."*

KEY TAKEAWAY

Paradoxical Intention flips the script. By intentionally doing the thing you fear, you disarm it. Instead of fighting anxiety, you lean into it — and the anxiety often loses its power.