

Approaching avoidance and uncertainty

Practise moving toward life without waiting for complete certainty.



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Avoidance, checking and repeated thinking can bring short-term relief while making the next difficult moment harder. These resources help you understand that loop and plan gradual, thoughtful practice.

HOW TO USE IT

Begin with the topic that feels most relevant. Each topic includes a short guide and a fillable worksheet. Download the PDF before typing so your notes can be saved.

Avoidance and safety behaviours

Avoidance and safety behaviours make sense when something feels threatening. They often bring quick relief. The difficulty is that they can prevent new learning and keep the feared outcome feeling likely.



SPOT THE OBVIOUS AND SUBTLE FORMS

Avoidance is not always leaving the situation.

- Cancelling, delaying, distracting or keeping quiet.
- Checking, rehearsing, overpreparing or seeking reassurance.
- Using another person or object to feel safe.

NOTICE THE SHORT-TERM PAYOFF

These behaviours usually persist because they work briefly.

- What distress reduced?
- What uncertainty was escaped?
- What did the behaviour seem to prevent?

NOTICE THE LONGER-TERM COST

Relief can come at the cost of confidence and flexibility.

- What did you not get a chance to learn?
- Did life become narrower or more effortful?
- Did the feared situation feel more dangerous next time?

CHANGE ONE THING AT A TIME

A small reduction can create enough space for new learning.

- Choose one safety behaviour to delay, reduce or drop.
- Stay long enough to observe what happens.
- Record the result rather than judging your performance.

TRY THIS AT YOUR OWN PACE

Notice what brings relief now and what it teaches your mind to expect next time. You do not need to complete every prompt. If this becomes upsetting or starts to feel like repeated checking, pause and speak with your psychologist or another health professional.

Avoidance and safety behaviours



NAME (OPTIONAL)

DATE

1 TRIGGER

What situation, thought, feeling or sensation set this off?

2 FEARED OUTCOME

What did you think might happen?
Likelihood 0-100.

3 AVOIDANCE / SAFETY

What did you avoid, check, rehearse, hide or seek reassurance about?

4 SHORT-TERM EFFECT

What relief or sense of control did it provide?

5 LONGER-TERM COST

What learning was blocked? What became harder?

6 SMALL EXPERIMENT

What could you delay, reduce or do differently next time?

Use brief notes. There is no right way to complete this page. Download the PDF before typing so your entries can be saved.

Graded exposure

Exposure means approaching a safe but feared situation long enough to learn something new. A graded plan starts at a workable level and repeats practice. The aim is not to force distress away or to flood yourself.



BUILD A USEFUL LADDER

List different versions of the feared situation.

- Vary time, distance, difficulty, uncertainty or support.
- Rate expected distress from 0 to 100.
- Include steps that are challenging but realistically repeatable.

CHOOSE LEARNING, NOT COMFORT

A successful practice gives you information.

- State what you predict will happen.
- Notice urges to escape or neutralise.
- Reduce safety behaviours gradually where appropriate.

STAY AND OBSERVE

Distress may rise, fall, stay uneven or return. All can still allow learning.

- Stay for the planned task where it is safe to do so.
- Notice what actually happens.
- Avoid using distress reduction as the only measure of success.

REPEAT AND VARY

Learning strengthens across repetitions and contexts.

- Repeat a step before or while moving up.
- Practise in more than one setting when useful.
- Record what you learned, not only the distress score.

TRY THIS AT YOUR OWN PACE

Exposure is planned practice, not being pushed into the hardest situation without preparation. You do not need to complete every prompt. If this becomes upsetting or starts to feel like repeated checking, pause and speak with your psychologist or another health professional.

Graded exposure



NAME (OPTIONAL)

DATE

1 EASIEST STEP

Task; predicted outcome;
expected distress 0-100.

2 NEXT STEP

Task; predicted outcome;
expected distress 0-100.

3 NEXT STEP

Task; predicted outcome;
expected distress 0-100.

4 MIDDLE STEP

Task; predicted outcome;
expected distress 0-100.

5 NEXT STEP

Task; predicted outcome;
expected distress 0-100.

6 NEXT STEP

Task; predicted outcome;
expected distress 0-100.

7 HARDEST STEP

Task; predicted outcome;
expected distress 0-100.

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Worry and rumination

Worry tends to look forward; rumination tends to replay the past or ask why. Both can feel like problem-solving while going in circles. The first step is to notice the process and decide whether there is a useful action.



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NAME THE THINKING LOOP

Shift from the content to what your mind is doing.

- Is this predicting, replaying, reviewing or searching for certainty?
- Have you reached new information?
- What feeling or uncertainty are you trying to resolve?

ASK WHETHER IT IS SOLVABLE NOW

Some concerns have an action; others do not.

- Is there a current, specific problem?
- Can an action be taken today?
- If yes, use problem-solving and choose the next step.

POSTPONE RATHER THAN SUPPRESS

When no action is possible, set a deliberate boundary.

- Write a brief reminder and choose a worry period.
- Return attention to the present task.
- At worry time, decide again whether action is available.

REFOCUS WITH PURPOSE

Refocusing is not pretending the concern is unimportant.

- Name what deserves your attention now.
- Use sensory detail or a concrete task to return.
- Expect the thought to return and practise redirecting again.

TRY THIS AT YOUR OWN PACE

Ask whether action is available now. If it is not, practise returning attention to the life in front of you. You do not need to complete every prompt. If this becomes upsetting or starts to feel like repeated checking, pause and speak with your psychologist or another health professional.

Worry and rumination



NAME (OPTIONAL)

DATE

1 TRIGGER

What started the worry or replay?

2 THE LOOP

What is your mind predicting, replaying or trying to make certain?

3 SOLVABLE NOW?

Is there a current problem and an action available today?

4 USEFUL ACTION

If yes: what is the next specific step, and when?

5 POSTPONE / REFOCUS

If no: worry time, reminder note, and present task.

6 WHAT HAPPENED

How long did the loop last? What helped you redirect?

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