

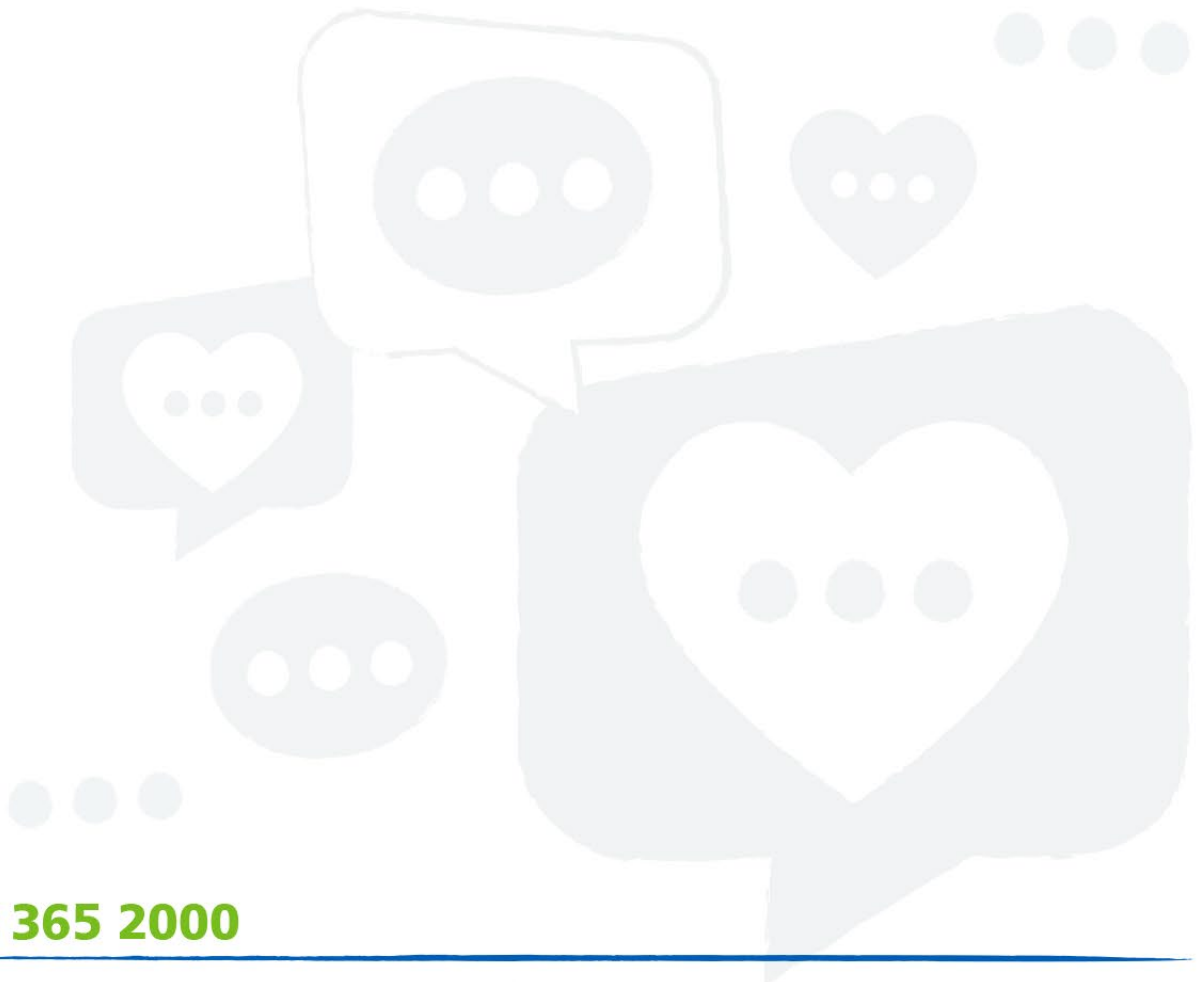


Talking Therapies
Workbook...

Workbook 2

Anxious behaviours

A self-help guide



 **0300 365 2000**

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As you work through the booklet, feel free to make notes on page 15.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety occurs when we perceive a situation or object as threatening and we don't feel we have the skills we need to cope with it.

The Anxiety Equation:

$$\text{Anxiety} = \frac{\text{High estimation of danger}}{\text{Low estimation of coping abilities}}$$

If something causes us to feel afraid or scared, then this can induce physical symptoms known as the **'fight or flight' response**.

This is a response that has evolved to protect us from danger and includes symptoms such as increased heart rate, feeling hot and feeling a surge of adrenaline, among others. These physical symptoms occur to help us either run away from danger or to prepare to fight it.

The **'fight or flight' response** is helpful if we are faced with real danger but for most of us our daily lives do not present us with life-threatening situations.

When we are faced with any situation that we don't feel prepared to deal with, the **'fight or flight' response** can become activated. If the situation is not physically threatening (e.g. giving a presentation to a large group of people) this response is not helpful for coping with the situation, and can actually be quite frightening.

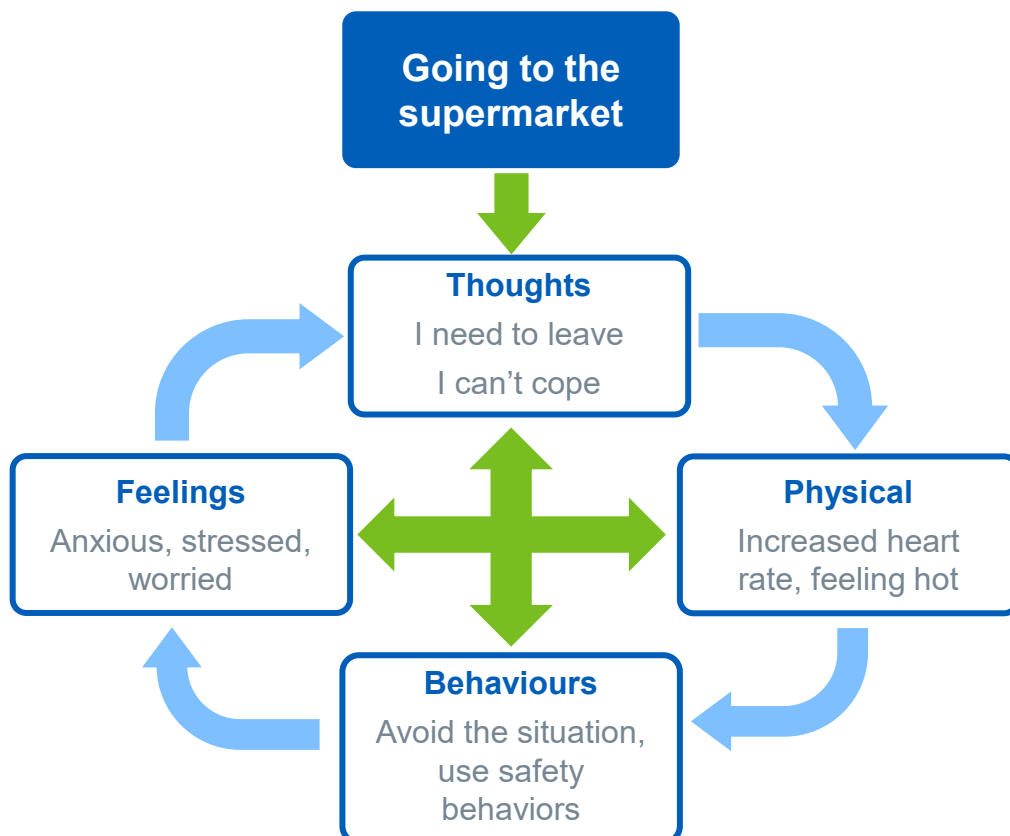


The vicious cycle of avoidance

If we find that a situation causes us to feel anxiety or fear, it's understandable that we will try to avoid it. In the short term, avoidance gives us relief from the unpleasant emotional and physical symptoms of anxiety. This is called **negative reinforcement**.

However, if we continue to avoid or leave situations that cause us to feel anxious, we will feel just as scared next time we are faced with the same situation, resulting in a vicious cycle of anxiety and avoidance.

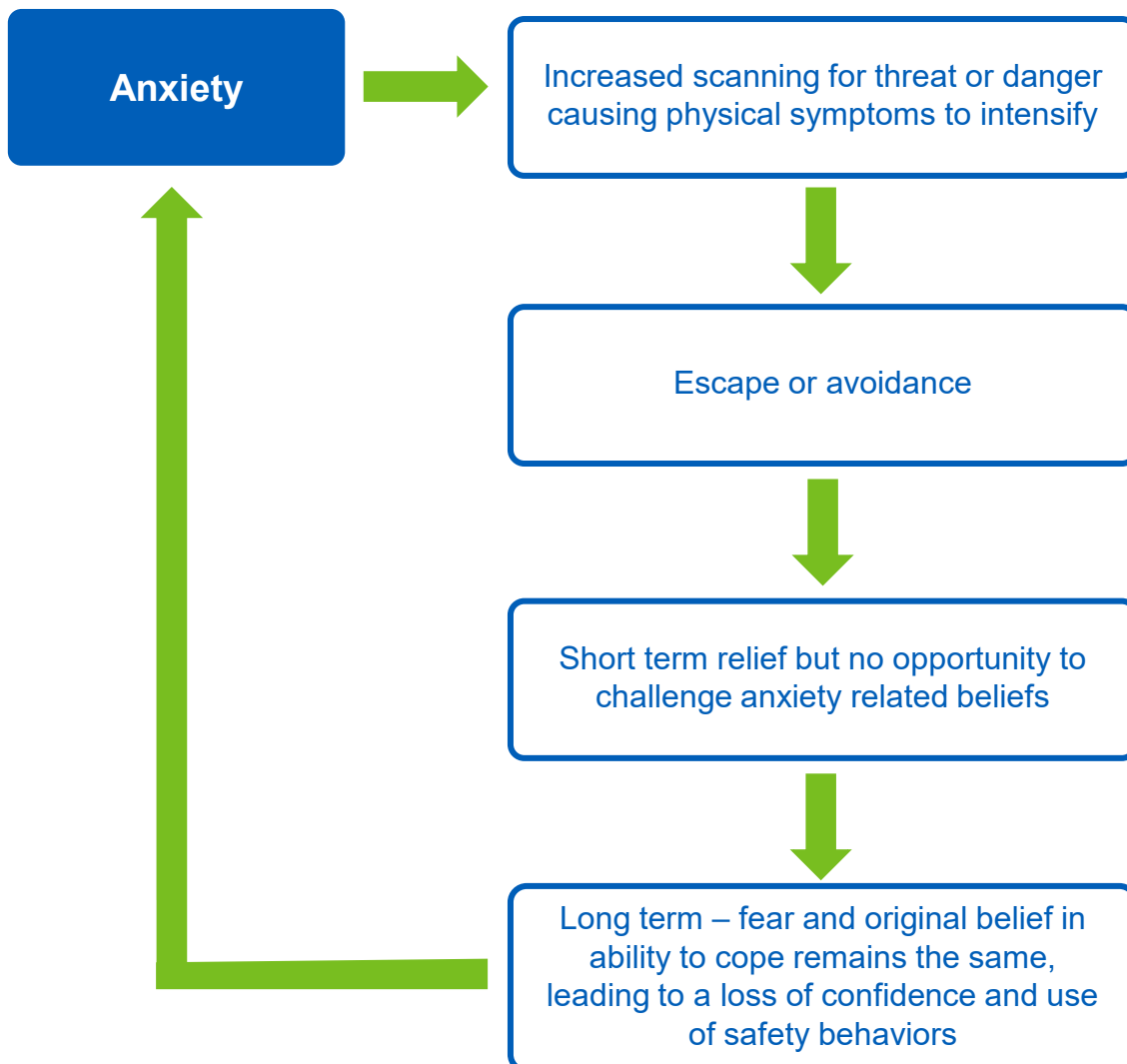
By leaving or avoiding a situation that causes anxiety, we never learn whether we can cope with it and whether our fears about what might actually happen really do come true.



The problem with avoidance

With the example on page 4, each time the person is faced with the same situation of going to the supermarket, the same cycle will occur. This leads to continued avoidance or continued use of safety behaviours (see page 6 for more information on safety behaviours).

The result is that their level of fear remains the same and their belief in their ability to cope doesn't improve. These behaviours maintain the anxiety as illustrated below:



What are safety behaviours?

Avoidance can come in many forms. Sometimes we do not escape or avoid the situation entirely but instead we start to adopt behaviours that help us to feel safer in that situation.

These are called safety behaviours.

Examples

- ❑ Only **going to certain places** with someone you feel comfortable with.
- ❑ **Over preparing** or over planning to try and make the situation more predictable.
- ❑ Carrying **anti-anxiety medication** just in case you become anxious.
- ❑ **Holding onto something** to prevent yourself from collapsing when you become anxious e.g. a chair.
- ❑ Opening windows to **make sure you get enough air**.
- ❑ Always **being close to an exit** e.g. sitting nearest the door on a train.
- ❑ **Smoking a cigarette** before entering an anxiety provoking situation.
- ❑ Seeking **reassurance** or asking others to make decisions for you.
- ❑ **Distracting yourself** e.g. listening to music or playing on your phone.

Like avoidance, **safety behaviours can appear helpful in the short term**. However they also maintain our anxiety. This is because we believe that the reason we are able to get by is because of the safety behaviour. We miss out on the opportunity to learn that there was no threat or that we are able to cope on our own if faced with a challenge.

We **start to depend on safety behaviours** and if for any reason we are unable to use them, this may pose a significant problem for us. This can lead to feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness and negative thoughts such as “I’m pathetic” or “I should be able to cope with this – what’s wrong with me?” This creates a vicious cycle that leads to us perceiving the world around us as being threatening and ourselves as being unable to cope, resulting in more avoidance or safety behaviours.

Activity

Write down a list of situations that you avoid and any safety behaviours that you use because of your anxiety.

Avoidance and safety behaviours	
What situations do you avoid because of your anxiety?	
What safety behaviours do you use?	

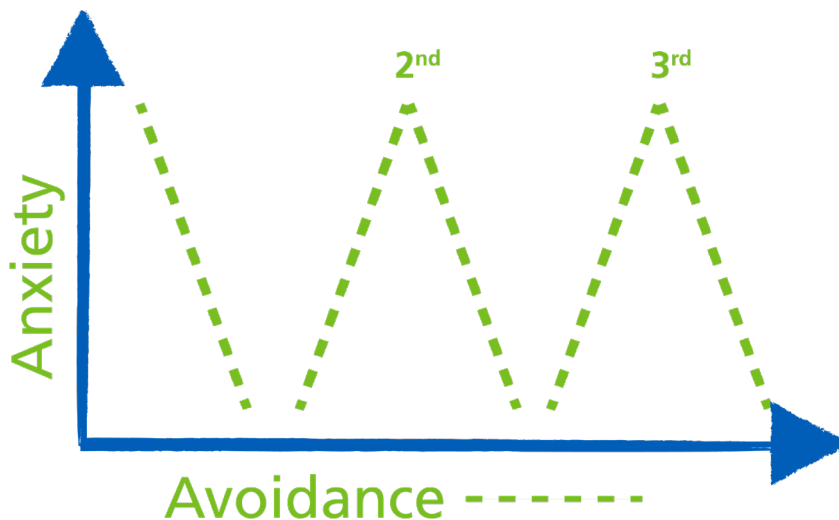
Facing your fears

What do you think would happen?

What would happen to your anxiety if you face a feared situation and stay in it without using any safety behaviours?

Most people would say that they wouldn't be able to cope. The anxiety would just keep rising until eventually something terrible happens such as passing out or having a heart attack. We know this is in fact not the case.

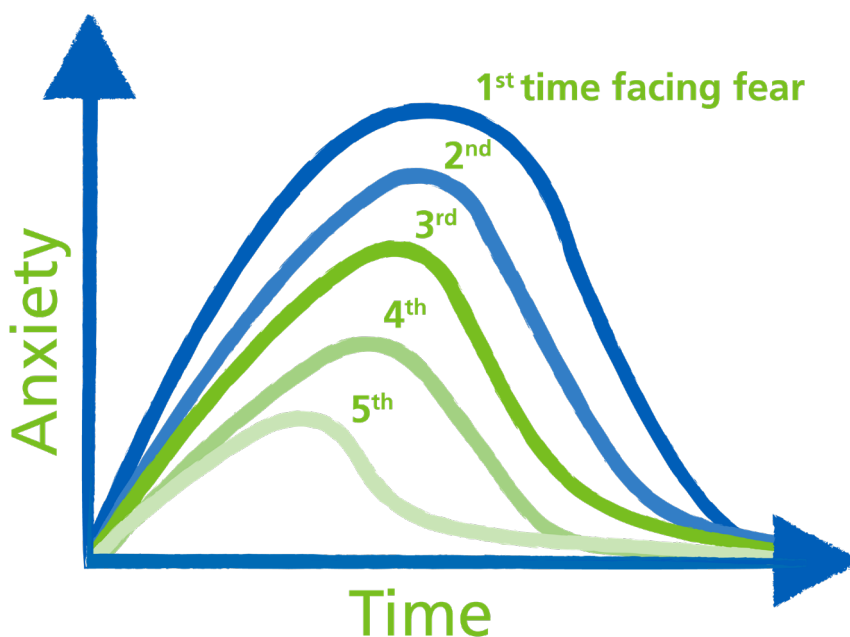
This graph shows what happens when we face an anxiety provoking situation and our response is to leave or use a safety behaviour. Each time we face that same situation our anxiety is equally high the next time round:



Facing your fears

What would actually happen?

This graph shows what would actually happen if we were to face an anxiety provoking situation without the support of safety behaviours.



As you can see, anxiety goes up quickly when entering a feared situation, but with time (usually after approximately twenty minutes) will go down again.

With repeated exposure to the same feared situations, your anxiety will become progressively less severe and more tolerable. This process is known as **'desensitisation'** or **'habituation'**, where the situation is so familiar that it no longer appears threatening.

Graded exposure

What is graded exposure?

Graded exposure is a technique that works by breaking down our feared situations and confronting them gradually.

Using a graded exposure hierarchy, we start with situations that are less anxiety provoking and work up to more difficult situations. This helps us learn that anxiety levels do come down if we stay in the situation and don't use safety behaviours.

See a graded hierarchy example on page 12.

The four rules of graded exposure

- **Rule 1 – Graded**

Exposure to anxiety provoking situations must be graded in order of 'least' to 'most' anxiety provoking.

- **Rule 2 – Prolonged**

You need to ensure that your exposure to the situation is prolonged. This means that you need to stay in that situation until your anxiety has reduced by at least 50%.

- **Rule 3 – Repeated**

Repeat each exposure activity until your anxiety rating from the start of the exercise has reduced by 50%. Once you have achieved this, you can then move up to the next exercise on your hierarchy.

- **Rule 4 – Without distraction**

It is important when using this technique to be aware of any safety behaviours that you are doing, or anything that could distract you from the anxiety. It's important to truly feel the anxiety in order to learn that your anxiety levels will reduce. If it feels too difficult to drop safety behaviours initially then you could start off by including them on the lower levels of your hierarchy and gradually removing them.

Graded exposure step by step

Step 1 – Plan your hierarchy

- Using your **list of avoided situations on page 7**, rate how anxious or uncomfortable those situations make you feel on a scale of 0-100 (with 100 being maximum anxiety).
- Add these to the **graded hierarchy template on page 13** to make your graded hierarchy.
- Start with the easiest or least anxiety provoking situations at the bottom, working up to the most anxiety provoking at the top.

Step 2 – Begin graded exposure

- The next step is to start deliberately exposing yourself to the situations that you are avoiding.
- Start with the easiest situation and keep repeating the same step until your anxiety has at least improved by 50%.
- Make sure you follow the **four rules of graded exposure from page 10**.

Step 3 – Complete an exposure diary

- While completing your graded exposure, use **the exposure diary on page 14** to record how you find it.

Step 4 – Review and continue

- Keep working up the graded hierarchy, recording your progress as you go.



Graded hierarchy example

See below an example of a graded hierarchy for anxiety when in crowded places.

Situations	Anxiety (0-100)
Going on a long train journey in rush hour	100
Going on a long train journey in the middle of the day	95
Going to a crowded train station	90
Going to a large supermarket at the busiest time of the day to do my shopping	80
Going to a small supermarket at the busiest time of day to do my shopping	75
Going to a large supermarket at a quiet time of day to do my shopping	65
Going to a small supermarket at a quiet time of the day to do my shopping	60
Going to a large café in my lunch hour and having lunch	55
Going to a small café in my lunch hour and sitting and having lunch	50

My graded hierarchy

Fill in the blank graded hierarchy below.

Situations	Anxiety (0-100)

My exposure diary

Fill in this exposure diary before and after you have placed yourself in an anxiety provoking situation. This can help you track your progress and notice improvements over time.

Date & Time	Duration (minutes)	Situation	Anxiety Rating (0-100)			Comments
			Before the exposure	At the start of the exposure	End of the exposure	

Notes

A series of 20 horizontal dotted lines for taking notes.

Further resources



Workbooks

Centre for Clinical Interventions (CCI) – <https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/>

A range of detailed resources and PDF workbooks available to download for free focusing on a range of depression and anxiety related difficulties.

Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS – <https://web.ntw.nhs.uk/selfhelp/>

Self-help guides free to download by PDF and print on a range of difficulties including anxiety and depression.

Smartphone apps (found on Apple and Google Play store)

WRAP – Wellness recovery action app

Mood Tools – Depression aid

Fear Tools – Anxiety kit

Insight Timer – Meditation app

Websites

Mind – <https://www.mind.org.uk/>

Mental Health Foundation – <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>

NHS – <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/>

Useful contacts...



Talking Therapies:

0300 365 2000

(Open 8am to 8pm Monday to Thursday
8am to 5pm Friday)

Email:

talkingtherapies@berkshire.nhs.uk

Other contacts:

Berkshire Crisis Team:

0800 129 9999

(24 hours, specialist service for
immediate mental health crisis)

Samaritans:

116 123

(24 hours, confidential listening service)

NHS Direct / out of hours:

111

(24 hours, physical and mental
health concerns)

In an emergency always call 999

