WORKSHEET 08 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

The map of my avoidances

Spotting avoidance and safety behaviours

AIM

Identify what the person avoids or does “to be safe” (checking, seeking reassurance, going with someone…) and understand how these strategies stop anxiety from going down in the long term.

WHO IT IS FOR

Generalised anxiety, social anxiety, panic, health anxiety. A step before the exposure worksheets (09 and 10).

DURATION

20 min in session

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Distinguish visible avoidance (not going) from subtle safety behaviours (going, but with protection: phone in hand, exit located, asking for reassurance, preparing every sentence…).
2. Make the list with the person from specific situations.
3. For each one: what do they fear would happen without that protection? What does it cost them (time, freedom, relationships)?
4. Explain the mechanism: the protection prevents them from discovering that what they fear doesn’t happen, or that they could cope with it.
5. Identify the behaviours that are easiest to reduce: they will be the first rungs (worksheet 09).

POINTS TO WATCH

> Don’t ask them to drop all safety behaviours at once. Some are legitimate (real caution): the ones that matter are those that are disproportionate and costly.

REFERENCES

Salkovskis, P. M. (1991). The importance of behaviour in the maintenance of anxiety and panic: A cognitive account. Behavioural Psychotherapy, 19(1), 6-19.

Clark, D. A. & Beck, A. T. (2010). Cognitive Therapy of Anxiety Disorders: Science and Practice. Guilford.

PSYCHOLOGIST’S NOTES

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WORKSHEET 08 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

What I do to avoid anxiety

Avoiding or protecting yourself brings relief in the moment. But in the long run it stops you from finding out that you can cope. Making the list is the first step to getting your freedom back.

1. The situations I avoid completely.
2. What I do to feel safe when I go anyway (checking, asking for reassurance, going with someone…).
3. What I fear would happen if I didn't.
4. What it costs me (time, freedom, relationships).

Situation	I avoid or protect myself by…	What I fear	What it costs me	Difficulty giving it up /10

Which of these behaviours could I reduce a little first?

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

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