WORKSHEET 09 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

The ladder of small steps

Building a gradual exposure plan

AIM

Organise a series of feared situations with the person, from the easiest to the hardest, so that they can face them gradually and repeatedly.

WHO IT IS FOR

Avoidance due to anxiety (social anxiety, panic, phobias, health anxiety). After worksheet 08.

DURATION

20-30 min in session; repeated practice between sessions

HOW TO RUN IT

1. From the avoidance map, list 8 to 10 situations, varying the contexts (place, duration, presence of other people, with or without protection).
2. Note the expected anxiety level for each from 0 to 10 and put them in order.
3. Choose a manageable first rung (around 3-4 out of 10) and plan when, where and how many times.
4. Clarify the aim: staying in the situation long enough to learn something new, without safety behaviours.
5. Move up a rung when the previous one has become manageable, without waiting for anxiety to disappear.

POINTS TO WATCH

> Exposure is decided with the person, never under pressure. Vary the situations and the order rather than following a rigid ladder: it strengthens learning. Adapt if there is a medical issue (panic with a heart condition, etc.).

REFERENCES

Craske, M. G., Treanor, M., Conway, C. C., Zbozinek, T. & Vervliet, B. (2014). Maximizing exposure therapy: An inhibitory learning approach. Behaviour Research and Therapy, 58, 10-23.

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

PSYCHOLOGIST'S NOTES

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WORKSHEET 09 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

My ladder of small steps

Best done with your psychologist

You don’t climb a ladder in one jump. Write down the situations that frighten you, from the easiest (at the bottom) to the hardest (at the top), and go up one rung at a time.

1. List the situations you avoid or that frighten you.
2. Give each one an expected anxiety rating from 0 to 10.
3. Put them in order from the easiest to the hardest.
4. Start with a manageable rung, repeat it several times, then move on to the next one.

Rung	Situation	Expected anxiety /10	Done on (dates)

My first rung, and when I will do it: _____

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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