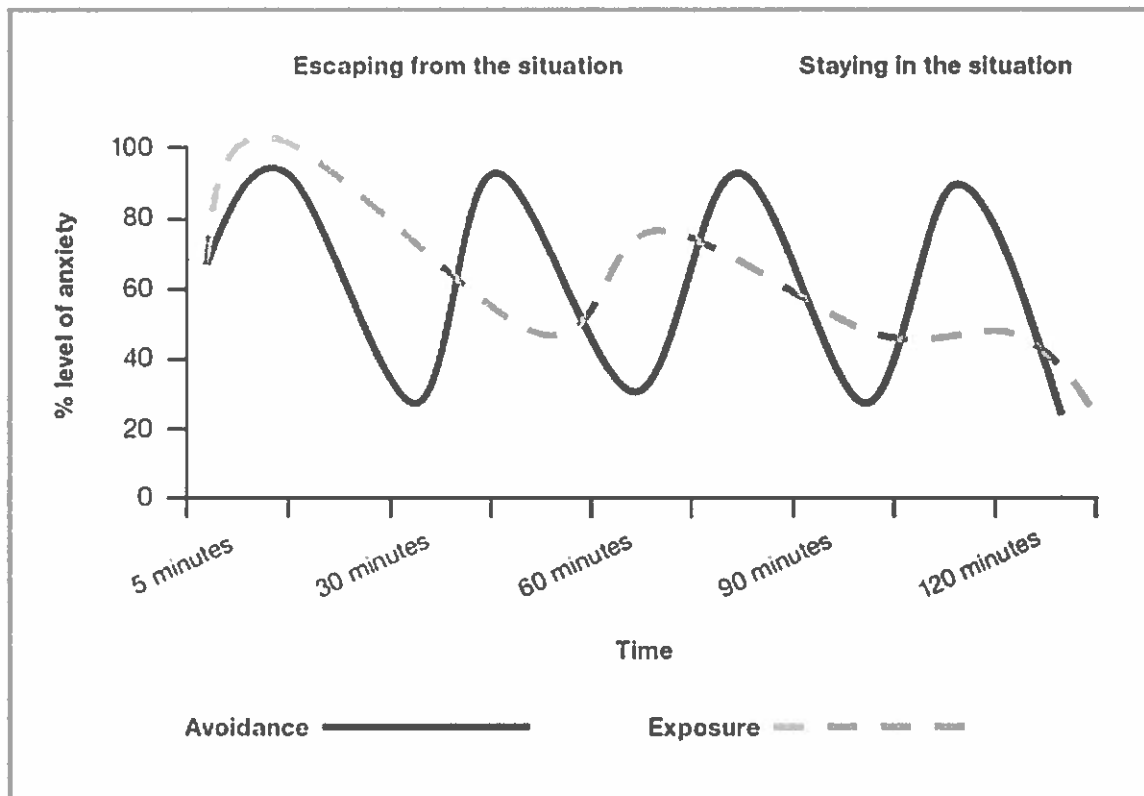


Tool 2 - Facing Your Fears

If you remember the information from the introduction, people are experiencing the fight versus flight response when feeling anxious. The flight refers to avoiding or escaping the situation that causes anxiety.

Avoiding or escaping the situation may make you feel better in the short term, but in the long term this avoidance is actually reinforcing your anxiety. That's because you are learning that avoiding or escaping the situation reduces your anxiety, which is encouraging you to be afraid of the situation.

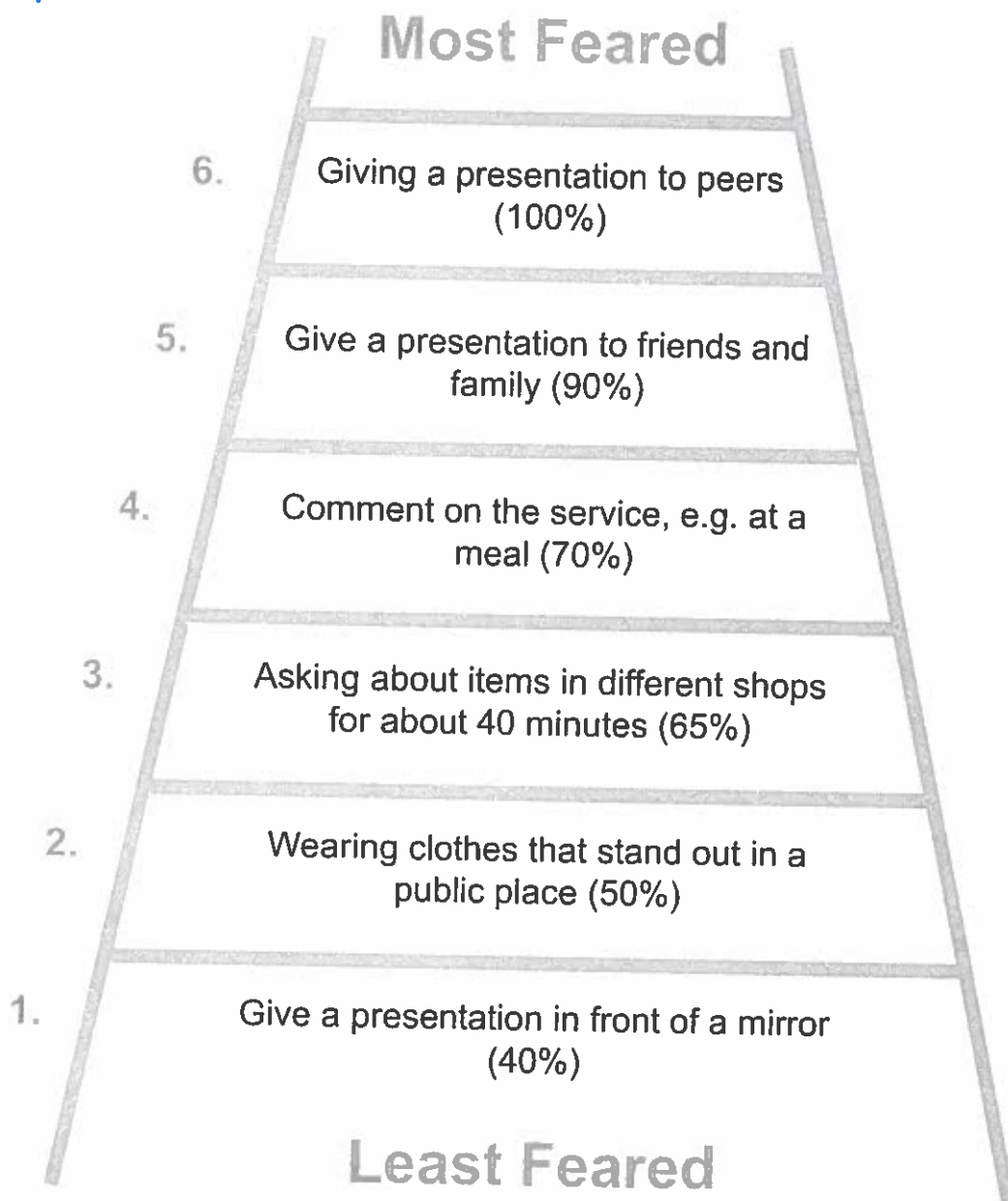


The graph shows that by avoiding or escaping the situation, anxiety levels drop significantly. However, the next time the individual is put in the same situation, their anxiety returns and will continue to do so if they continue to escape and avoid the situation. The solution is to actually stay in the situation which causes the anxiety.

In order to overcome this, CBT uses an approach called graded exposure. This involves staying in situations that cause some anxiety and gradually working your way up an anxiety ladder until you eventually stay in the situation that causes the most anxiety. Here is an example of a completed anxiety ladder for Jo who has a fear of being the centre of attention:

Fear of being the centre of attention

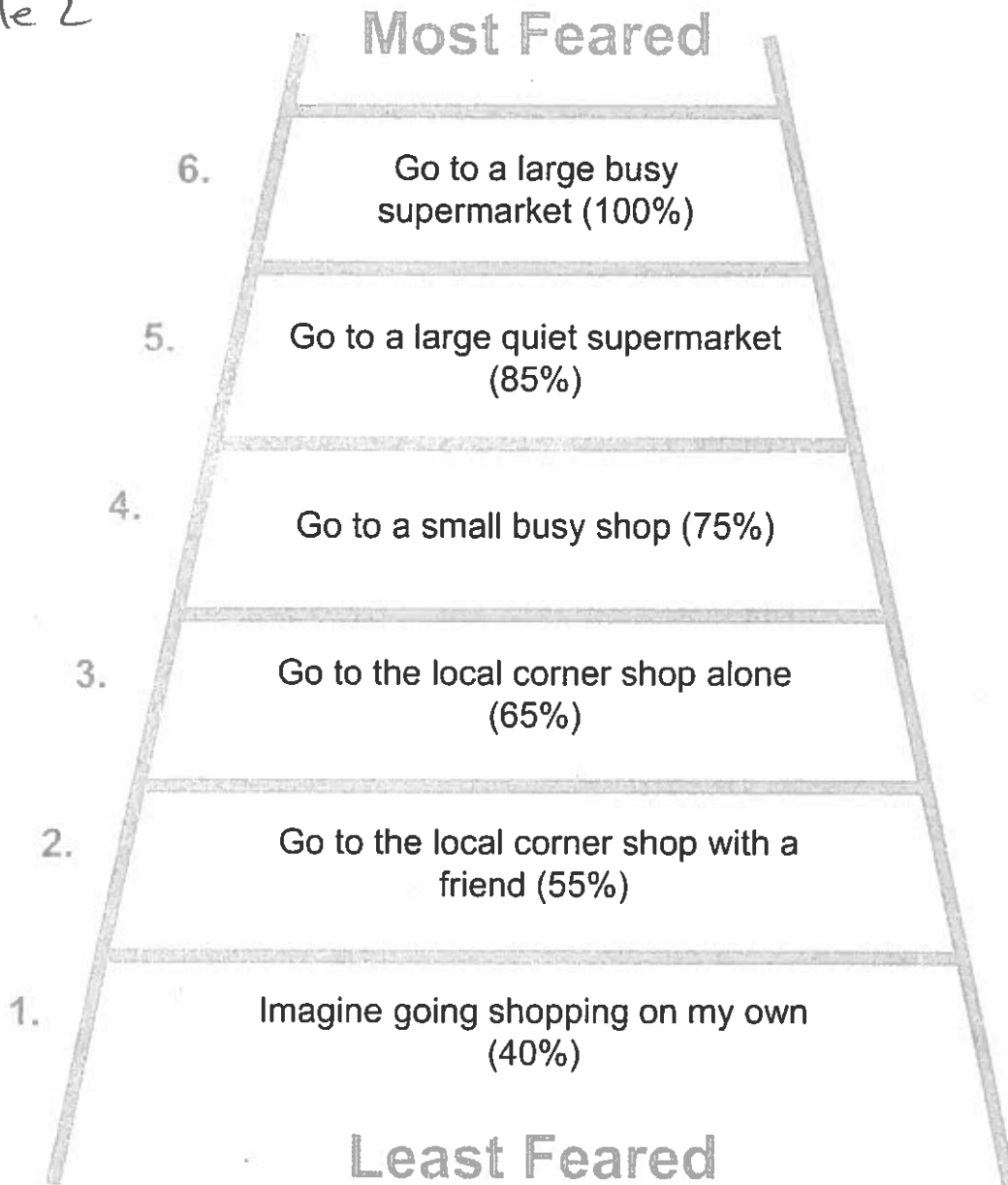
example 1



Here is an example with Lynda.

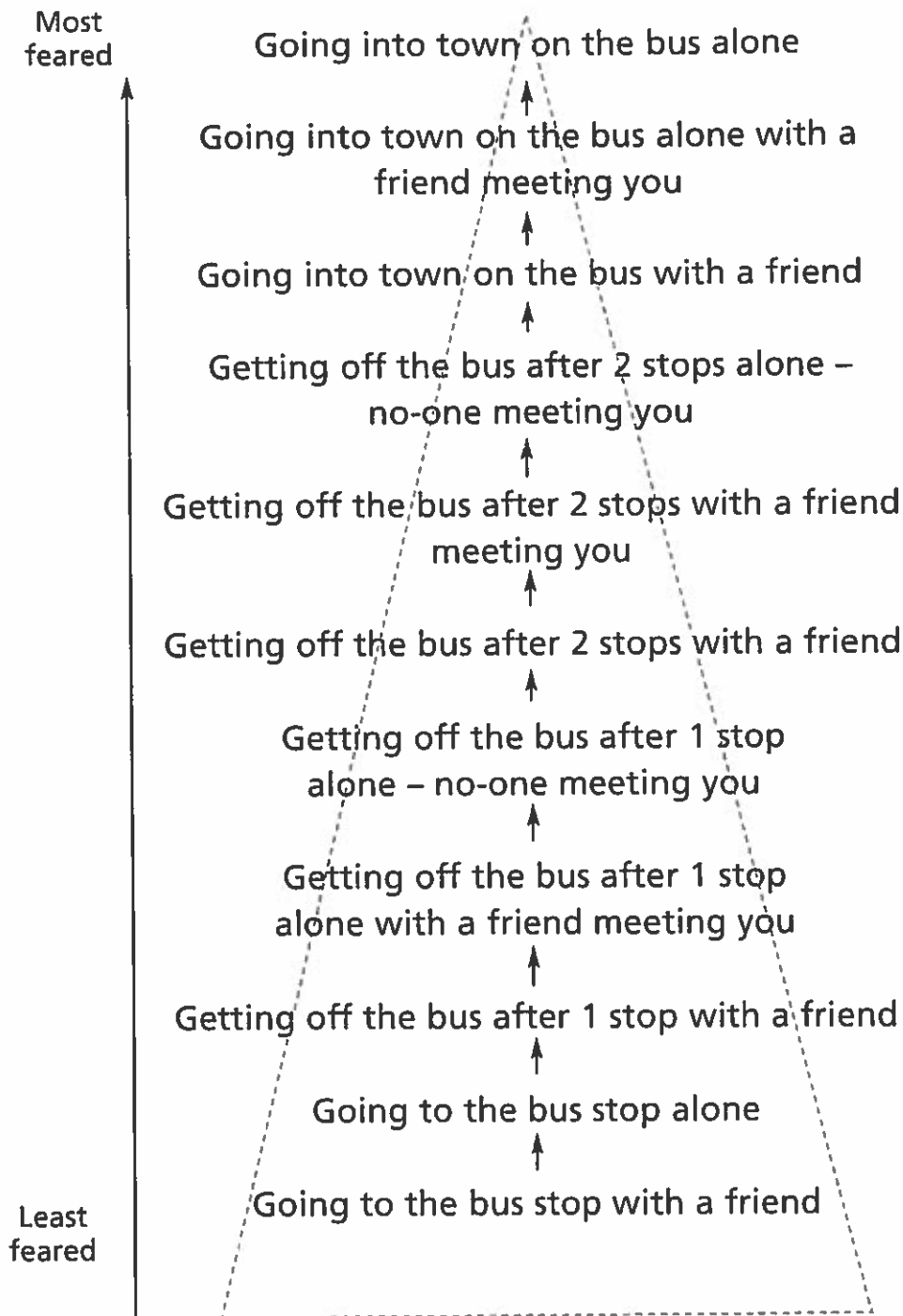
Lynda's Exposure Ladder

Example 2

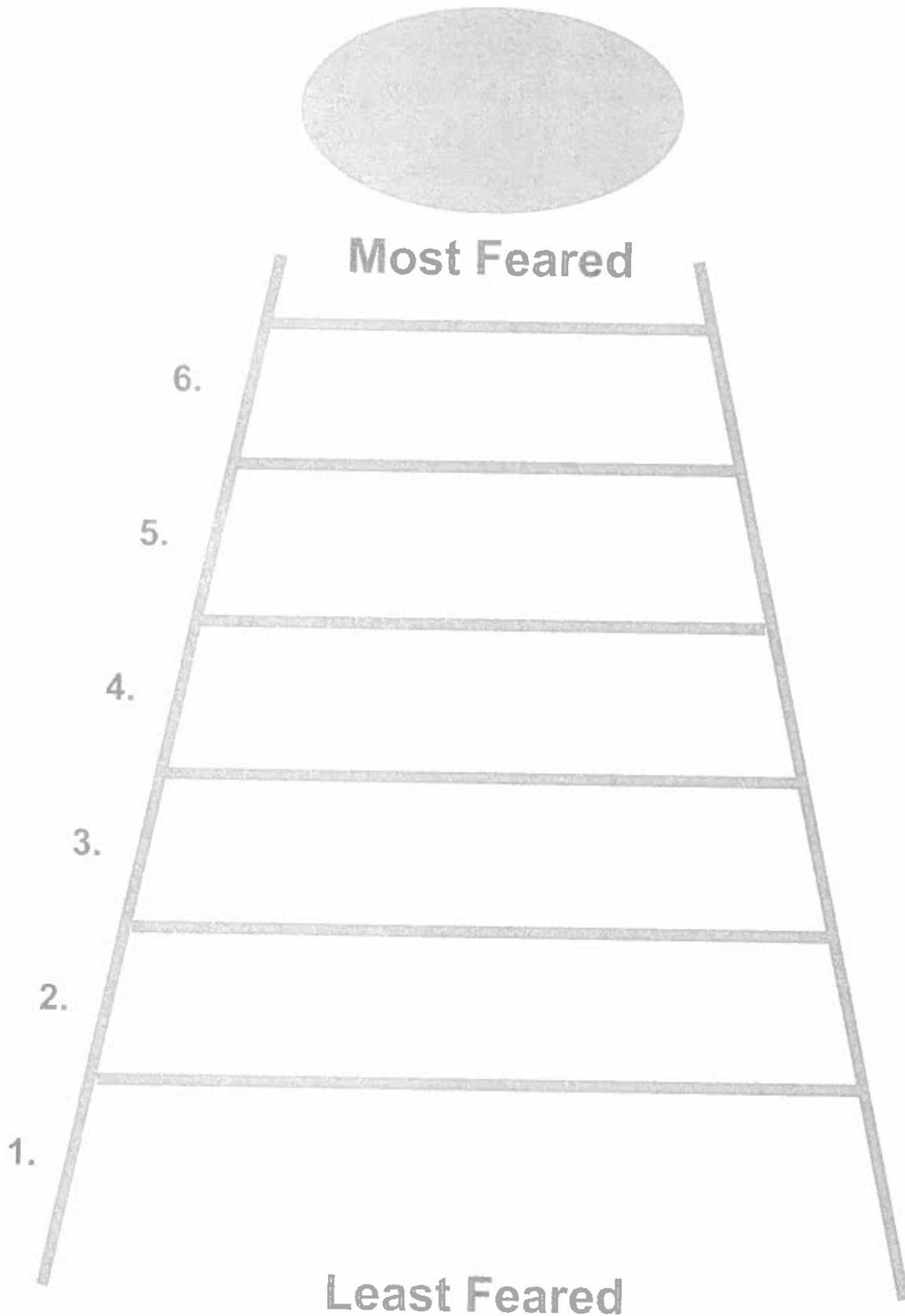


Example 3

Example of graded exposure:



Now it's your turn. If you are finding that you have a phobia of an object or activity or are avoiding something, then complete your own anxiety ladder:



Doing Graded Exposure

For graded exposure to be effective it needs to be graded, prolonged, repeated and done without distraction. Read below to see what this means:

Graded – overcoming a fear is best achieved by gradually confronting the fear

Prolonged – exposure must be for a long enough time to allow the levels of anxiety to reduce. Sessions need to last until the levels of anxiety have reduced by around 50%.

Repeated – an exposure task needs to be repeated around 4 or 5 times a week.

Without distraction – when doing exposure it is important that people can experience some anxiety and see that it can reduce. Therefore, it is important that people do not do other things when doing the exposure exercises, for instance distracting themselves with music, relaxation or breathing exercises etc.

Steps for Exposure

1. Take a step from you Anxiety Ladder
2. Face the situation until your fear reduces by at least 50%
3. Repeat 4 or 5 times in the week
4. Remember expose without using distraction, relaxation or breathing exercises so you can feel the anxiety peak and reduce
5. Once you have conquered the step and no longer feel anxious, move on to the next step
6. Repeat the Steps

How will graded exposure help me?

To gradually face situations that you are currently avoiding due to feelings of anxiety or fear.

Barriers or blocks and possible solutions

Barriers or Blocks	Solutions
I'm too anxious	Make your step easier
I couldn't stay in the situation	Make the step easier or use support for the first time
I didn't feel anxious at all	Is the step too easy? Are you using distraction techniques?
I'm too busy	Is this the right time

When completing any exposure tasks, it may be helpful to keep an anxiety diary. This can allow you to rate your levels of anxiety before, during and after your exposure exercise. You can also make notes or write down any of your thoughts at the time. Please use the blank anxiety diary on the next page.

Note that an anxiety ladder can also be used for worry. Worry is something that we all do which can help us plan for future dangers. It can also maintain our anxiety levels in some situations, which are usually when we worry about things which are uncertain (e.g. checking your health), unpredictable (e.g. checking my family's safety or driving) or uncontrollable (e.g. peoples reactions at work, at home, in pubs).

Activity

If you would like to try the exposure steps and to work on overcoming a particular fear, please use the blank anxiety diary on the next page to help you.

Remember, exposure needs lots of practice and can be difficult at first. However, it will get easier as you practice.

Remember that if at any point you feel the next step is your graded exposure is too big, it is OK to break it down further. Some people may also find it useful to begin by simply imaging their feared situation, using the next steps of their graded exposure to physically face it. Each practice should be graded (step by step), prolonged (stay in the situation long enough for anxiety levels to reduce) and repeated (more practice leads to less anxiety).

When trying to overcome anxiety (which has often been longstanding), remember that setbacks and blocks in progress are perfectly normal, and do not mean that you have failed. In addition, it is worth bearing in mind that progress can sometimes seem slow, but persevering will pay off in the end. Keeping Trying!

Anxiety Diary (Example 3)

Step of 'graded exposure'	Levels of anxiety			Thoughts or comments
	Before exercise	Start of exercise	End of exercise	
Going to the bus stop with a friend	80	95	70	I feel good that I achieved it but I'm not ready to move on yet
Going to the bus stop with a friend	60	75	55	It was easier than last time. I'm getting there but I need to keep practising
Going to the bus stop with a friend	75	80	60	It was more difficult than last time. It could be because I have had a stressful day but at least I still managed to do it
Going to the bus stop with a friend	20	30	10	I feel ready to move on to the next step
Going to the bus stop alone	90	95	85	I felt really anxious but I am glad I went to the bus stop alone. I need to keep practising

0

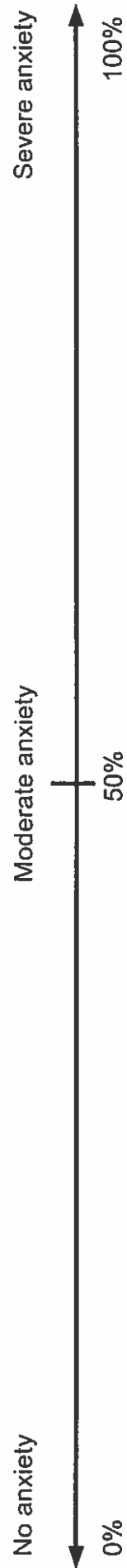
50

100

Calm	Worst it's ever been
------	----------------------

Anxiety Diary

		Anxiety Rating 0 - 100%				
Date and Time	Duration	Exercise	Before Exercise	Start of Exercise	End of Exercise	Thoughts or Comments



behavioural experiments

negative predictions

Negative Predictions

Many people who suffer from anxiety, depression or low self-esteem tend to make negative predictions about how certain situations will turn out. You may tend to:

- Overestimate the likelihood that bad things will happen or that something will go wrong
- Exaggerate how bad things will be
- Underestimate your ability to deal with things if they don't go well
- Ignore other factors in the situation which suggest that things will not be as bad as you are predicting

When you jump to such negative conclusions about the future, you will tend to engage in unhelpful behaviours. You may tend to:

- Avoid the situation totally
- Try the situation out but **escape** when things seem too difficult
- Be overly cautious and engage in **safety behaviours** (see worksheet Biology+Psychology of Panic)

The problem with these strategies is that they prevent you from actually testing out your predictions. This makes it very hard for you to ever have a different experience from what you expected, so you continue to expect the worst.



For example, let us imagine you have been invited to a BBQ and your negative prediction is: *"I will have a terrible time, no-one will speak to me, I will feel like a total fool."*

Your usual response may be to either avoid the BBQ altogether, or to attend but to leave as soon as you feel uncomfortable, or to stand in the corner and speak only to one person you already know. This may help you reduce your discomfort in the short term, but it also contributes to the continuation of your negative predictions, and this means continuation of anxieties.

Testing Our Predictions

What could have been an alternative way to handle the BBQ situation described above?

A different approach could be to go to the BBQ, try your best to have a nice time and speak to others, and use the resulting experience as evidence to test your original negative prediction. **Think of yourself as a scientist, putting your thoughts under the microscope to examine the evidence for and against your thoughts**, instead of assuming that all of your negative predictions are true. Behavioural experiments are a good way for testing these predictions. Next we will go through the steps, using the BBQ situation as an example.



all

Planning your Behavioural Experiment

- Be clear about the purpose of the experiment - the point is to test out your negative predictions and help you to develop more realistic and/or balanced predictions.
- What is the thought or belief that you are trying to test? Rate how strongly you believe this prediction (0-100)
I will have a terrible time at the BBQ. Even if I try to talk to people, no-one will talk to me. (90)
- What is an alternative prediction or belief? Rate how strongly you believe this alternative (0-100)
I will find at least one person to talk to and will have an ok time. (10)
- Design the actual experiment - what will you do to test your prediction, when will you do it, how long will it take, and with whom? Try to be as specific as possible. There are no boundaries to how creative you can be, and it is ok to ask for help.
I will go to the BBQ at 8pm, alone, and will stay for at least one hour. I will try to make conversation with at least three people, one that I did not know already. I will only drink one glass of wine.
- Make sure you set your experiment at an appropriate level. It is best to start simply and increase the challenge step-by-step. Identify likely problems and how to deal with them.
There might not be anyone I know at the BBQ. But I will at least know the host and I can ask to be introduced to some other people.



Evaluating your Behavioural Experiment

- Carry out the experiment as planned. Remember to take notice of your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.
- Write down what happened, what did you observe? Consider the evidence *for* and *against* your original prediction. What did this say about your negative prediction
I felt quite nervous at first and wanted to leave. I used breathing to calm myself. The host was friendly and seemed happy to talk to me, and I also spoke to Kelly, who I hadn't seen in some time. Kelly introduced me to her partner Jim and we had a good chat about travel. At one point I worried I had said something stupid, but Jim didn't seem to notice so my worry passed.
- What have you learned?
I am capable of making conversation and enjoying myself in a casual social situation.
- Rate how strongly you now believe in your original prediction and the alternative (0-100)
I will have a terrible time at the BBQ. Even if I try to talk to people, no-one will talk to me. (10)
I will find at least one person to talk to and will have an ok time. (80)

Behavioral Experiment

Prediction

What is your prediction?

What do you expect will happen?

How would you know if it came true?

Rate how strongly you believe
this will happen (0-100%)

Experiment

What experiment could test this prediction? (where & when)

What safety behaviors will need to be dropped?

How would you know your prediction had come true?

Outcome

What happened?

Was your prediction accurate?

Learning

What did you learn?

How likely is it that your predictions will happen in the future?

Rate how strongly you agree
with your original prediction
now (0-100%)

Resources available from the UOM Counselling Service Website

Go to : <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/counselling/>

Relaxation audio downloads from the Counselling Service Website:

<http://www.counsellingservice.manchester.ac.uk/self-help/>

Drop ins session and workshops available at the Counselling Service

<http://www.counsellingservice.manchester.ac.uk/workshops/>

NHS Self Help Guides - These self help booklets have been written by clinical psychologists with contributions from service users and healthcare staff, including topics such as anxiety, sleep and bereavement. <http://www.selfhelpguides.ntw.nhs.uk/manchester/>

Online Self-help Tool

Silvercloud is an online self help tool, free to students and staff of the University. Are you worried, feeling low, stressed out or finding it hard to sleep? If you've answered yes to any of these questions, then think about trying our new Silvercloud online, multimedia programme. It uses clinically proven tools to identify your key problems and offers programmes of activity to help you overcome them.

<http://www.counsellingservice.manchester.ac.uk/silvercloud/#d.en.391669>

Support Services - Here you can find out about the Support Services available to you during your time at University, including the Disability Advisory Support Service, Nightline, the Student Support team and more. <http://www.studentsupport.manchester.ac.uk/taking-care/support-services/>



UOMWellbeing (@ WellbeingUOM)

Follow our [WellbeingUoM](#) twitter account for daily tips to help you take charge of your wellbeing and useful links to interesting wellbeing resources.

Other resources

AnxietyBC <https://www.anxietybc.com/adults/introduction>

AnxietyUK <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/>

Useful Apps

You can learn technique to help with your anxiety with the following app, which is available for iPods, iPads and PCs.



- MindShift
- Self help for Anxiety Management
- Stop Panic and Anxiety Self Help
- The Worry Box
- Breathe2Relax
- Pacifica
- Headsapce
- Calm

HOW TO TOLERATE UNCERTAINTY

Dealing with uncertainty is an unavoidable part of daily life. Because we can't see the future, we can never be certain about what exactly is going to happen day to day. Research has found that people vary in their ability to tolerate uncertainty. That is, some people are okay with having a lot of uncertainty in their lives, and other people cannot stand even a small amount of uncertainty.

Anxious people, particularly those adults who worry excessively, are more likely to be very **intolerant of uncertainty**. They will often try to plan and prepare for everything as a way of avoiding or eliminating uncertainty.

What's wrong with being intolerant of uncertainty?

Obviously, it is normal, and even common, for most people to be a bit uncomfortable with uncertainty. We prefer to know that the restaurant we are going to serves food that we like, that at the party we were invited to there will be people we know, and that our boss tells us exactly what he thinks about our work performance. This knowledge feels more comfortable to us than not knowing anything about the restaurant we are going to, being unsure about who will be at the party, and not knowing whether our boss thinks we are doing a good or a bad job.

Uncertainty as an allergy...

Being intolerant of uncertainty is a lot like having an allergy: if you are allergic to pollen for example, what happens when you are exposed to even a small amount of it? You will sneeze and cough, and your eyes will probably get red and teary.

When people who are intolerant of uncertainty are exposed to a little bit of uncertainty, they also have a strong reaction: they worry, and do everything they can think of to get away from, avoid, or eliminate the uncertainty.

But being very intolerant of uncertainty can cause problems, since it leads to a lot of time-consuming and tiring behaviours, causes stress and anxiety, and is the major fuel for worry.

Another problem with intolerance of uncertainty...

If you can't stand uncertainty and do everything you can to get rid of it, you might have noticed a problem... it is **IMPOSSIBLE** to get rid of all uncertainty in your life

What this means for you is that all the work that you are doing to get rid of uncertainty is useless; IT JUST DOESN'T WORK! If it did, you would probably not be struggling with anxiety and worry.

So what is the solution?

Well, if you can't get rid of uncertainty in your life, then the only way to manage your intolerance of uncertainty is by learning to be more **TOLERANT** of uncertainty.

How Can I Learn to Become More Tolerant?

Obviously, even if you agree that being more tolerant of uncertainty would be helpful, it is not so easy to just change an attitude. However, in CBT we know that our thoughts, feelings, and actions are all inter-connected, and that if you change one, you can change the others. (See [What is CBT](#) for more details about this)

So the best way to learn to become more tolerant of uncertainty is to start acting "as if" you are tolerant of uncertainty. That is, you can change your behaviour around uncertainty, and this will eventually help you to change your thoughts and feelings around uncertainty.

Learning to Act "As If"

STEP 1: Make a List of Behaviours

Start by writing down all of the things that you do to try to feel more certain, or to get around or avoid uncertainty. You can use the sample of behaviours listed above as a guide. For example,

- Do you seek reassurance from others?
- Do you do a lot of double-checking?
- Do you look for a great deal of information before making a decision?
- Do you procrastinate a lot?
- Are there situations that you avoid?

STEP 4: Write It Down!

Keep a record of all the times you were acting “as if” you were tolerating uncertainty. Write down:

- What you did
- How you felt while doing it (was it harder or easier than you thought?)
- What happened (did everything turn out ok?)
- If it did not turn out as planned, what did you do?

If you write things down, you will be able to see all the work that you did in facing uncertainty, and as you keep practising, you will see how things that you once thought were difficult in the beginning are now much easier.

STEP 5: Record What Happened

If you are taking some risks and not being 100% certain in your life, there is the chance that things will not go perfectly. For example, if you tolerate uncertainty and go to a movie without reading a review, you might not like the movie. If you go grocery shopping without a list, you might come home and realize that you forgot something.



When you allow some uncertainty in your life, sometimes things go wrong!

For this reason, it is important to write down the outcome of your tolerating-uncertainty exercises, and what you did to cope. For example, if you forgot an item from the grocery store, what did you do? Did you pick it up the next day? Did you go back to the store? How horrible was the outcome?

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Did things turn out ok even though I was not 100% certain?
- If things did not turn out ok, what happened?
- What did I do to cope with the negative outcome?
- Was I able to handle the negative outcome?
- What does this tell me about my ability to cope with negative outcomes in the future?