

Anxiety hierarchy.

The anxiety hierarchy is based on “graded exposure” and is all about **gently challenging our safety behaviours** and **managing the avoidance** that keeps anxiety going.

The key is to identify a goal and then break it down into steps. The bottom of the hierarchy should be the least anxiety provoking step you could take and the top should be the most anxiety provoking step you could take. It does not matter how small the steps in between are, as long as they are helping you move in the right direction.

Your task is then to systematically carry out each step of the hierarchy. It is important you do not tackle the next step until you are feeling confident with the one you are currently working on, so feel free to repeat a stage as many times as you need. Remember, everyone takes this at their own pace.

Take a look at the following example hierarchy before creating your own.

Goal: Travel to the supermarket and complete the weekly food shop alone.

- ⑪ I will drive myself to the supermarket and complete the weekly shop alone.
- ⑩ I will drive myself to the supermarket. I will call my friend on handsfree during the journey before going into the supermarket alone.
- ⑨ I will drive me and my friend to the supermarket. They wait for me in the car.
- ⑧ My friend drives me to the supermarket. They wait for me in the car.
- ⑦ My friend drives me to the supermarket. They wait for me near the exit until I have got half way and then they wait in the car.
- ⑥ My friend drives me to the supermarket. They wait for me near the exit the whole time.
- ⑤ My friend drives me to the supermarket. They wait for me near the checkout the whole time.
- ④ My friend drives me to the supermarket. They remain one aisle behind me, out of sight until half way. They then wait for me near the checkout.
- ③ My friend drives me to the supermarket. They remain one aisle behind me, out of sight the whole time.
- ② My friend drives me to the supermarket. We walk separately through most of the shop but they stay nearby until we get half way. They then remain one aisle behind me, out of sight.
- ① My friend drives me to the supermarket. We walk around separately but they remain nearby.

Starting point: My friend always drives me to the supermarket and joins me for the weekly shop just in case I get anxious. If they are not available, I will not go.



Anxiety hierarchy (cont.)

Now it is your turn to put into practice everything we have learnt about graded exposure and anxiety hierarchies by creating a hierarchy of your own. We have provided you with a template in case it helps but you may need to draw out your own if you wish to add / remove steps.

Goal:

9

8

7

6

5

4

3

2

1

Starting point:

