

EXERCISE 26: GRADUAL STEPS TO COPE WITH PANIC AND AVOIDANCE

1. Keep a record of your panic attacks in your notebook. Rate them in terms of their strength (using a scale between 0 = none and 8 = absolutely overwhelming) and monitor them on a daily basis. Here's an example of what your panic diary might look like for a one-week period:

Panic Diary							
Time	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
a.m.		Panic = 7					
noon					Panic = 4		
p.m.				Panic = 3			
Notes: <i>Monday: Went shopping, felt anxious and nauseous, quite strong, therefore I came home.</i> <i>Wednesday: Had doctor's appointment, tried to go by bus, panicked and took taxi instead.</i> <i>Thursday: Upset because of an argument at home, panicked while doing the shopping.</i>							

2. Next, look at your notes in your panic diary and notice what caused the panic. Once you can identify the triggers, decide on an activity that you have been avoiding but would now like to try to master again. Choose an activity that won't be too easy but also not completely overwhelming.
3. State precisely what it is that you would be able to achieve if you were to master this target activity. For example, based on the panic diary:

Target activity: To go on the bus, by myself, when it is crowded, with a reasonable level of comfort.

4. As you are working through your target activities always ask yourself three core questions. The first is 'What do I think will happen?' Ask this always before you engage in a chosen practice. Write down what your answer is. Then you can engage in your chosen practice (using the guidelines below). During this, observe the second question, which is: 'What actually happens?' Write this down in your journal when you have completed your practice. Now is the time to ask yourself the third question, which is: 'What have I learned about what may be

helpful to do the next time when I practise and have an anxious thought?’

5. List the steps (from easiest to hardest) that you have to take to be able to achieve your target activity.

Example list of steps towards that goal:

- Decide which bus route is least threatening and most pleasant.*
- Walk to the bus stop at a time when it is not crowded, and just wait there for a while. If a bus comes by, don't get on. Leave to go back whenever ready.*
- On a day when feeling particularly well, ask a friend to come along for a short bus ride (one or two stops only). Pick a non-crowded time and route.
- Practise taking short rides alone. If the bus looks too crowded when it arrives, wait for the next one. If I become too uncomfortable, I'll get off at the next stop and wait a little while until I come back on another bus.
- Gradually I will begin to practise getting onto more and more crowded buses. If sometimes this is too hard for me, I have to just get off that time but try again another time, with a slightly less crowded bus.

- f. The most important aspect of all this is that I persevere and don't give up trying, even when at times I have to take a step backwards rather than forwards.
- g. The more often I practise the more likely I am to master the target activity!