Panic experiment

Make a specific prediction and a fair test. Plan any safeguards before practice; record observations afterwards.

Editable PDF: replace or delete the fictional examples. Blank PDF: print and write. Guidance follows.

BEFORE PRACTICE

Question / prediction / belief 0-100%

Agreed task / habit to change

Safety, support and review plan

AFTER PRACTICE - observations and learning

What happened / feelings / coping

Prediction and outcome / another explanation

Learning / belief now / next step

Plan with your therapist. Do not induce symptoms or change prescribed care on your own.

Copyright Calm Breathing Therapies

Using this resource

Panic experiment

What this helps with

Panic treatment can include experiments that test feared outcomes and help change the meanings attached to sensations. A good experiment has a specific question and a way to observe the answer. It is not a test of how much distress you can endure. This sheet supports planning and review after assessment; it does not prescribe a task. Keep the experiment relevant to the pattern you are working on and manageable enough to generate useful learning.

How to use it

1. Agree the question, a specific prediction and belief rating from 0-100%.
2. Choose the situation, one response to change and necessary safeguards. Confirm suitability with your therapist.
3. Decide what you will observe and when you will review it; avoid continuous body scanning.
4. Complete the agreed task, compare outcomes with the prediction and consider alternative explanations. Plan the next step.

A fictional worked example

With her therapist, Ella plans to wait in a familiar café queue rather than repeatedly checking her pulse. Her prediction is, "If my heart races and I do not check, I will collapse," at 85%. Medical considerations have already been reviewed. She agrees to notice what happens while choosing her drink and ordering, without using a new mental reassurance routine. She feels anxious and remains able to order; no collapse occurs. They review the remaining doubt that the task was too easy and decide what a useful next test would be. They do not treat one result as proof about all future physical symptoms.

Keep in mind

Use only a task individually agreed as appropriate. Exercises deliberately changing breathing, balance or bodily sensations need professional assessment and supervision; this sheet gives no induction instructions. Do not experiment in hazardous settings or change medication. Stop and seek help if a genuine medical or safety concern arises.

Sources and attribution

Clark, D. M. (1986). A cognitive approach to panic. Behaviour Research and Therapy, 24(4), 461-470.

NICE (2011, updated 2020). Generalised anxiety disorder and panic disorder in adults: management (CG113).

Original material informed by the sources above. No outside organisation endorses this worksheet.

Copyright Calm Breathing Therapies