Phobia preparation worksheet

Compare specific observations. A difference is useful information, not a demand to feel calm or certain.

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

Upcoming situation and feared prediction

e.g. A planned visit involving a feared situation.

Necessary practical preparation

What I usually do

e.g. Check the arrangements once.

What is useful / what keeps repeating

e.g. A plan covers travel and support.

What I will change or keep

e.g. Keep useful arrangements and the agreed practice plan.

Repeated attempts to feel certain

What I usually do

e.g. Repeatedly imagine every possible problem.

What is useful / what keeps repeating

e.g. Rehearsal takes time without settling the fear.

What I will change or keep

e.g. Leave out one repeated rehearsal and return to my day.

What I learned / what is still uncertain

e.g. Preparation can be useful; repeated attempts to feel certain may keep fear going.

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Using this resource

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What this helps with

Fear can occupy hours before you encounter the trigger. Replaying worst-case scenes, checking repeatedly or cancelling can make the event feel even more threatening. This worksheet separates useful preparation from attempts to obtain complete certainty. The aim is not to ban anxious thoughts. It is to choose what preparation is actually needed, then return to an ordinary activity while uncertainty and discomfort are allowed to be present.

How to use it

1. Name the upcoming situation and the main prediction.
2. List what you do beforehand and whether each action gives practical help or brief reassurance.
3. Choose necessary preparation, including health or access needs.
4. Set a realistic point to finish preparation and choose what to do next.
5. Afterwards, review what was useful and which habits increased the build-up.

A fictional worked example

Owen had agreed to visit a garden where insects might be present. He spent the evening researching every insect he could encounter and repeatedly checking the weather. His therapist helped him separate ordinary preparation from the search for certainty. He checked the travel plan once, packed what he normally needed and stopped searching for insect information. He then cooked dinner despite feeling unsettled. At the visit he still noticed insects, but the evening beforehand had been less dominated by preparation. He recorded that stopping the search did not remove uncertainty; it gave him time back and made attendance more manageable.

Keep in mind

Keep genuine preparation, accessibility arrangements and medical instructions. Do not stop appropriate checking of real hazards. If a planned event is unsafe, changing the plan is appropriate. This sheet does not require you to proceed regardless of your circumstances.

Sources and attribution

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.

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