Spider checking 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

Repeated check / prediction if I reduce it

e.g. If I skip a second room check, I will not cope. Belief 75%.

Agreed change / next activity

e.g. Reduce one repeated check and return to reading.

Precautions / consent / when to finish

e.g. Keep normal precautions; no handling unfamiliar animals or surprise exposure.

AFTER PRACTICE - observations and learning

What happened / any extra checking?

e.g. Read a chapter; noticed the urge to check again.

Learning / uncertainty that remains

e.g. I could continue while uncertain. No claim that a room is spider-free.

Next step

e.g. Review the next manageable step with my therapist.

Choose and consent to each step. No surprise exposure; do not handle unfamiliar animals.

Copyright Calm Breathing Therapies

Using this resource

Spider checking experiment

What this helps with

Checking a room may briefly reduce fear, then leave you needing another search before you can settle. The relevant question is whether the habit helps with an actual practical problem or mainly promises certainty that never lasts. This worksheet supports a small experiment with repeated checking, agreed where needed with your therapist. You are not being asked to ignore a real hazard or prove that a spider can never be present.

How to use it

1. Choose one repeated checking habit and note its immediate and later effects.
2. Write what you predict would happen if you reduced one unnecessary repeat.
3. Keep ordinary household precautions and agree a manageable change.
4. Return to a chosen activity rather than replacing the check with reassurance or scanning.
5. Review time reclaimed, coping and what remains uncertain.

A fictional worked example

Alex checked behind the sofa four times each evening and asked his flatmate to confirm the room was clear. The reassurance helped briefly, but he soon wanted another check. With his therapist he agreed to leave out one repeated search and spend that time listening to music. He predicted he would be unable to concentrate at all. He still noticed an urge to look and did not feel certain about the room, but followed several songs without asking his flatmate. His review focused on tolerating that uncertainty and reclaiming the evening, rather than proving the room could never contain a spider.

Keep in mind

Use this only for excessive anxiety-driven checking. Preserve ordinary precautions and any professional advice about genuine environmental hazards. Do not turn the exercise into covert scanning or a test involving an animal. If checking is extensive or disabling, seek therapist support.

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.

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

Copyright Calm Breathing Therapies