Spider phobia hierarchy

Choose a meaningful starting point. Difficulty estimates are optional: 0 = least difficult, 10 = most difficult.

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

My goal

Safety and support

Possible step	Prediction	Difficulty 0-10	Agreed conditions

First step / agreed materials / review date

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

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Plan and review one step

Spider phobia hierarchy - keep genuine safety precautions and choose a step you agree to.

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

Chosen step / prediction

What I will look for

Habit to change / support to keep

When, where and agreed endpoint

What actually happened

Learning / next agreed step

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

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Using this resource

Spider phobia hierarchy

What this helps with

Spider fear can concern being bitten, sudden movement, disgust or being unable to cope. Those predictions lead to different practice plans. Begin with a goal that matters in ordinary life and choose each step deliberately. You may start with talking about the fear or an illustration you have approved. This worksheet contains no spider pictures. It helps plan learning; it does not require contact with animals or surprises arranged by somebody else.

How to use it

1. Describe what fear stops you doing and the prediction behind it.
2. List graded options using distance, setting or chosen materials.
3. Agree exactly what will happen; no surprise images, animals or touching.
4. Plan one safe step and decide what would count as useful observation.
5. Record what happened and revise the next step around your own goal.

A fictional worked example

Nadia wanted to sit in her conservatory without asking her partner to search it first. Her main prediction was that she would be unable to remain there if she thought a spider might appear. She and her therapist began with discussing the room, then sitting near the doorway for an agreed activity without a repeated search. Later they considered a simple drawing that Nadia chose herself. Her goal did not include catching or holding a spider. She recorded that she could read a few pages while feeling uneasy. The next step was based on that experience rather than a fixed ladder from the internet.

Keep in mind

Keep ordinary environmental and animal safety precautions. Do not handle unknown spiders, use venomous species or arrange an animal encounter without suitable expertise. Nobody should place spiders or images in your space unexpectedly. Discuss severe reactions or fainting before practice.

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.

NHS. Phobias. Accessed 24 October 2026.

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

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