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

e.g. Use the garden more freely.

Safety and support

e.g. Choose each step; no surprise exposure or handling unfamiliar animals.

Possible step	Prediction	Difficulty 0-10	Agreed conditions
e.g. An agreed cartoon.	e.g. I cannot cope with looking.	e.g. 4	e.g. No surprise images.

First step / agreed materials / review date

e.g. Agree the first step, materials and review at my next session.

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.

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Chosen step / prediction

e.g. An agreed cartoon. I may struggle with discomfort.

What I will look for

e.g. Record what I actually do and what happens, once after the task.

Habit to change / support to keep

e.g. Vary only the agreed habit or ritual; keep necessary care and support.

When, where and agreed endpoint

e.g. Agree the time, setting and endpoint in therapy before practice.

What actually happened

e.g. Looked at the agreed cartoon while afraid.

Learning / next agreed step

e.g. Review what I learned and agree whether to repeat or adapt the 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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