Uncertainty 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

Situation / belief about uncertainty (0-100%)

e.g. I cannot cope unless I know the plan. Belief 80%.

Prediction / another possibility

e.g. If I leave a free hour, I will waste it. I may find something worthwhile.

My task / habit to change / safeguards

e.g. Leave one free hour on Sunday; keep essential commitments.

AFTER PRACTICE - observations and learning

What happened / how I coped

e.g. I felt unsure, then chose to call a friend.

Learning / belief now (0-100%)

e.g. I can make a choice later. Belief 55%.

Next step

e.g. Try another small unplanned period next week.

Plan this exercise with your therapist and keep necessary care, access support and real precautions.

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Using this resource

Uncertainty experiment

What this helps with

Trying to remove every doubt can gradually make uncertainty feel less manageable. A behavioural experiment offers a different kind of learning: testing a specific prediction in an ordinary situation. The target is your belief about what uncertainty means or what you can cope with, not a promise that nothing disappointing will ever happen. Begin with a safe, low-stakes choice that fits your circumstances and review the result with curiosity.

How to use it

1. Choose an everyday uncertainty and write exactly what you predict will happen; rate belief 0-100%.
2. Select one certainty-seeking habit to reduce, such as asking a second person to confirm an ordinary choice.
3. Plan a small, safe experiment and what you will observe. Keep necessary preparation.
4. Try it, record the outcome and your coping, then update the belief and choose a next step.

A fictional worked example

Imran usually asks three friends whether an everyday email sounds acceptable. His prediction is, "If I send it after one reasonable check, I will make a mistake I cannot handle," believed 80%. He chooses a low-stakes email asking about a hobby group and checks only the date and meaning once. He feels uncertain afterwards but attends to another task. The organiser replies with the information he needs. Imran notices that uncertainty did not prevent action. He also decides that a minor misunderstanding could be clarified. One email cannot establish a universal rule, so he plans another modest test.

Keep in mind

Use ordinary, low-stakes situations. Do not experiment with road safety, medication, medical advice, safeguarding, major financial decisions or necessary professional checks. If reducing reassurance feels unmanageable, plan the task with a therapist. Feeling some uncertainty is expected; severe deterioration calls for review and support.

Sources and attribution

Dugas, M. J., et al. (2022). Behavioral experiments for intolerance of uncertainty: A randomized clinical trial for adults with generalized anxiety disorder. Behavior Therapy, 53(6), 1147-1160.

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