

MATCH THE SAFETY BEHAVIOUR

Grant is 17 years old and gets anxious if he has to go into places where there are lots of people as he is worried that something bad will happen. See if you can match up Grant's use of safety behaviours with the categories of safety behaviours given.

SAFETY BEHAVIOUR CATEGORY

GRANT'S SAFETY BEHAVIOURS

AVOIDANCE

GRANT GETS HIS MUM TO GO INTO THE SUPERMARKET BEFORE HE DOES TO SEE HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE IN THERE. HE THEN ASKS HIS MUM LOTS OF QUESTIONS ABOUT WHETHER HE CAN COPE WITH THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE STORE.

REASSURANCE-SEEKING

BEFORE GRANT STARTS HIS SHOPPING, HE MENTALLY MAPS OUT THE QUICKEST ROUTE OUT OF THE SUPERMARKET.

OTHER COMFORT STRATEGIES

GRANT DOESN'T GO TO BIG SUPERMARKETS.

ESCAPE

GRANT HOLDS ONTO A TROLLEY EVEN IF HE ONLY NEEDS A FEW THINGS SO HE CAN FEEL LESS SHAKY. HE WILL ONLY GO INTO A SUPERMARKET IF HE HAS A BOTTLE OF WATER WITH HIM.

The answers to this activity can be found in the Appendix.

Safety behaviours are a short-term way of keeping our anxiety low. However, in the long term, they feed our Anxiety Gremlin.

For example, if we have a phobia about supermarkets and *avoid* visiting supermarkets, we don't have to experience the anxiety that visiting one might create. BUT, if Grant always *avoided* big supermarkets, he would never get to see that he could cope with being in one and that nothing bad happens.

Also, relying on certain *comfort* or *reassurance-seeking* safety behaviours can help in the initial stages of dealing with your anxiety as they can enable you to enter situations that you would normally avoid. BUT if Grant always relies on *comfort* behaviours like holding onto a trolley or on *reassurance-seeking* from his mum, he will believe that he can only cope with going into a supermarket because he used these safety behaviours. He won't get to see that he was strong enough to cope without them. He might also believe that nothing bad happened to him because of the safety behaviours and not because it was unlikely that anything bad would happen anyway.

And if Grant always *escapes* from a supermarket when his anxiety hits, he won't get to see that anxiety normally peaks and then calms down gradually if you make yourself stay in a situation. So it would be good for Grant to set himself targets to stay in the supermarket for longer periods of time each time he visits.

So to sum up, in the long run, safety behaviours keep the Anxiety Gremlin Cycle going as they feed our Anxiety Gremlins!

To help you get started with reducing your safety behaviours, fill in the Anxiety Box that follows listing:

- each safety behaviour you use
- their long-term negative effects
- whether they help you to feed or starve your Anxiety Gremlin
- what you can do to reduce the use of each safety behaviour.

ANXIETY BOX

MY SAFETY
BEHAVIOURS

LONG-TERM
NEGATIVE
EFFECTS

DO THEY
FEED OR
STARVE MY
GREMLIN?

HOW I CAN
REDUCE
THEM

MY SAFETY BEHAVIOURS	LONG-TERM NEGATIVE EFFECTS	DO THEY FEED OR STARVE MY GREMLIN?	HOW I CAN REDUCE THEM

Reducing compulsive behaviours

This section is particularly appropriate for someone who has OCD.

A compulsive behaviour is an action you feel you need to do in order to stop a bad thing from happening, such as checking doors are locked or putting your shoes in a certain order in your wardrobe. The problem with compulsive behaviours is that by doing them you:

- aren't allowing yourself to see that the behaviour and the bad thing you are worrying about aren't linked
- waste so much time and energy on them
- are feeding your Anxiety Gremlin.

Here's Cassie's story to help you see what I mean.

CASSIE'S SAYS CLEAR OFF TO HER COMPULSIONS!

Cassie is 13 years old. For as far back as she can remember she has been experiencing anxiety and compulsive behaviours. It started off with needing to put her toys in her room in a certain order, needing to have her clothes in a certain order in her wardrobe and wearing certain coloured socks on certain days. She was afraid that if she didn't do these things, bad things would happen.

As she got a bit older, every time she felt anxious she would pick something up that was around her, such as a leaf off the ground or a paperclip off the floor, and put it in her pocket. She would take that thing home and keep it in her room. Whenever her mum tried to throw these things out, Cassie would get extremely upset and anxious as she felt that keeping hold of these things was keeping her safe.

Now that she is 13 years old, the house is full of things that Cassie has hoarded and she won't let her family throw anything out. Cassie's compulsions now also include a belief that if she writes down or says certain numbers something bad will happen.

Eventually Cassie realised she needed help as the compulsions were taking over her life. Cassie needed a gradual plan to reduce her compulsions, as she couldn't just stop them overnight.

Cassie's plan

- Identify my compulsive behaviours.
- Wear a different colour of socks from what I believe it should be one day a week while reassuring myself that this is OK and that nothing bad will happen. Then gradually increase this step by step until I'm comfortable with wearing any colour of socks I want on any day.
- Change the order of one item of clothing in my wardrobe while reassuring myself that this is OK and that nothing bad will happen. Then gradually move more items around until eventually I can cope with my clothes being in a different order.
- Change the order of one toy in my room while reassuring myself that this is OK and that nothing bad will happen. Then gradually move more toys until I can cope with them being placed anywhere.
- Bin one item that I have hoarded each day while reassuring myself that this is OK and that nothing bad will happen.
- Challenge the link that I have made between certain numbers and bad things happening.
- Rate my anxiety each day on a scale of 1 to 10.
- Praise myself for achieving each target.

Cassie becomes a scientist!

Cassie found this process difficult, and it *is* difficult when you strongly believe that these compulsive acts will keep you and others safe from harm. But by reducing her compulsive behaviours bit by bit, Cassie became a scientist testing out the predictions that she had been making for years. In true scientific fashion, she managed to prove to herself that bad things don't happen just because you don't carry out one of these compulsive acts. She got to test out her predictions and develop new ones based on true evidence. Bit by bit, her anxiety reduced. Cassie is a fantastic example of someone

who starved her Anxiety Gremlin bit by bit, step by step, until she was happier, healthier and living life without compulsions! She starved her Anxiety Gremlin. Well done Cassie!

And you can starve your Anxiety Gremlin too just like Cassie did! To help you do this, if you have any compulsions that you feel you have to act upon, list them in the Anxiety Box below and then list how you think you can start to reduce those compulsions.

ANXIETY BOX		
MY COMPULSIONS	DO MY COMPULSIONS FEED OR STARVE MY GREMLIN?	HOW I CAN GRADUALLY REDUCE MY COMPULSIONS