
Anxiety Hierarchy

Developing a hierarchy of fears or anxiety is a helpful way for the therapist and client to prioritize what is impacting the person most. We recommend developing the hierarchy together in-session. The client and therapist should work together to identify situations that trigger anxiety, but also how the body feels and reacts at each stage. Level 1 should be something that causes little to no anxiety. Level 5 should be something that causes you the most anxiety.

The therapist can lead with providing situations that might be stressful if the client is not able to do so. Keep the Anxiety Hierarchy chart handy and refer to it during other exercises. As therapy progresses repeat this process to identify emerging sources of anxiety. In subsequent sessions, the client can begin filling it in themselves with fewer prompts.

Anxiety Hierarchy

Our bodies respond and react to worry in different ways and with varying intensities. It is important to understand what situations create worry and how does the body respond. Below is a pyramid that will represent your response to anxiety or worries. In the largest block (1) list everyday activities that cause little to no stress. Continue listing examples of situations that increase intensity through blocks 2-4. In the smallest block (5), list activities that cause or would cause the greatest among of worry.

