Step ladder

An Everyday Insight tool
behavioralexperiment.com

Side one, the ladder. Break a goal that feels out of reach into rungs you can climb, each one a small experiment.

Name _____ Date _____

The goal at the top

Specific enough that you would know when you got there.

The fear the ladder is testing

Written as a prediction. If I do these things, then this will happen.

The rungs

List situations that would bring on the fear, from fairly easy to the goal itself, and rate each for the distress you expect, 0 to 100. Hardest at the top. For each rung, say what you expect to happen on it, and name one safety behavior you will leave out.

DISTRESS	SITUATION. WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, FOR HOW LONG	WHAT I PREDICT WILL HAPPEN	SAFETY BEHAVIOR TO LEAVE OUT

Rating distress

0 to 24, calm to slightly uneasy. 25 to 49, mild, uncomfortable but you can cope. 50 to 64, moderate, distracting. 65 to 84, high, hard to concentrate and thinking about escape. 85 to 100, extreme, overwhelming. Your numbers only need to be consistent with each other.

Making a rung easier or harder

Change one thing at a time. Who is there, how many, how familiar the people and place are, what you do, when, where, and for how long. The same activity at a quiet time with a friend is a different rung from the same activity at a busy time alone.

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Side two, the practice log. One line each time you do a rung. What you learn comes from these lines, not from the number next to the rung.

Each attempt

Rate distress before you start and at its peak. Then answer the question that matters. Did what you predicted actually happen? Write what you saw, not how it felt.

DATE	RUNG	DISTRESS BEFORE AND PEAK	WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED	PREDICTION CAME TRUE?	WHAT IT TELLS ME

Climbing it

Start on a rung you are willing to do today. Repeat it, close together and with small variations, until the prediction has failed to come true more than once. That is what makes it solid, more than the distress number falling. Stay long enough on each attempt to test the prediction rather than leaving at the peak of the urge to escape. Then move up. If a rung keeps feeling too hard, add a bridging step between it and the last one, or go back one.

If distress does not drop

That is common and not a failure. Anxiety can stay high while the belief still changes, because the belief is about what happens, not about how it feels. Look at the last two columns. If the prediction keeps failing and you still believe it, look for a safety behavior you are still using, or a different prediction hiding underneath.

To turn a rung into a full experiment, write it into a behavioral experiment record as the situation. The record adds the prediction in detail, the attention plan, and the full review.

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