



Mind Strength Method Worksheet

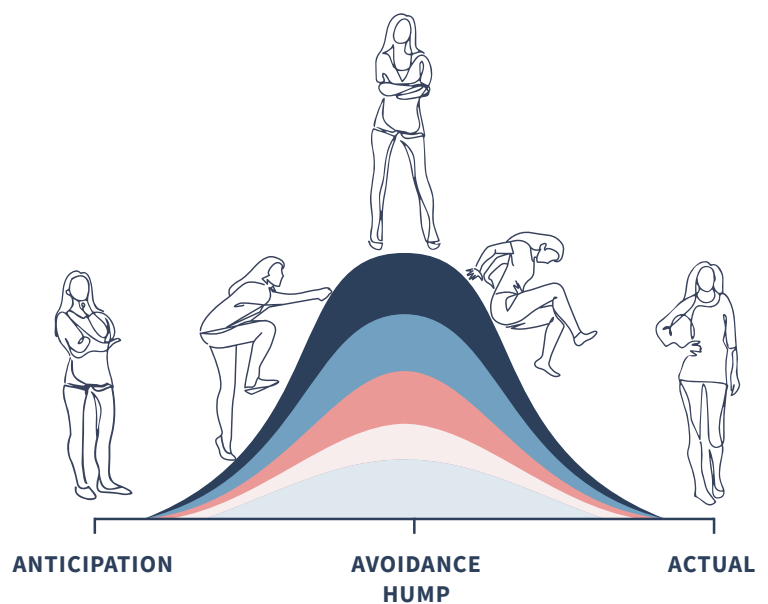
Embracing Behavioural Experiments

Moving from 'Anticipation' into 'Action'

When people go down the fear-driven pathway, one of the most common safety behaviours, or unhelpful coping strategies, they engage in is avoidance. This is the essence of the 'flight' in the fight or flight reaction. When you allow worry to boss you around, you will be more inclined to stay in your cosy little comfort zone and miss out on living the fulfilled life that you deserve.

A pivotal tool in the Mind Strength Toolkit is to ever so gradually approach avoided situations. The beauty of this is that when you approach feared situations gradually and take tiny steps out of your comfort zone, you allow yourself to learn that:

- 1. The bad thing
DIDN'T HAPPEN**
- 2. Even if things didn't
go perfectly to plan,
THE OUTCOME WASN'T
A CATASTROPHE**
- 3. You coped better than
you thought you would –
WORRY WAS TRICKING YOU**



Behavioural Experiments

Think of yourself as a scientist, doing an experiment on your own life. You are testing whether your worry thoughts are a reality or whether worry is wrong.

What you are learning is to sit with the discomfort of uncertainty. While we can never definitively say that nothing bad will happen, what you are likely to discover in your behavioural experiments is that the likelihood of something bad happening is far lower than worry tricks us into believing, the situation is much less awful than worry tricks us into believing, and we cope much better than worry has us believing we will. You can test this theory and prove that worry is wrong.

Approach avoided situations

Approaching avoided situations involves the following steps:

1. Brainstorm and write down a list of avoided situations – what situations are you avoiding that you would love to experience if you could leave fear at the door?
2. Brainstorm and write down a list of safety behaviours.

MY BEHAVIOURAL EXPERIMENT LIST

Level of discomfort

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3. Rate each avoided situation on the level of discomfort or distress, where 0 = no discomfort/distress and 100 = maximum discomfort/distress.
4. Engage in your behavioural experiments, approaching avoided situations while letting go of your safety behaviours, starting with the ones that trigger only mild discomfort or distress.
5. Reflect on whether the experiment supported:

Possibility A – that your worries were real (something bad will happen, it will be a catastrophe and you won't be able to cope).

Possibility B – that your anxiety just reflected a worry problem and you can stand up to worry and move forward down a values-driven path instead.

Keep a record of your behavioural experiments as an essential tool in building up a body of evidence that worry was wrong and that even if things don't go entirely according to plan, the outcome isn't a catastrophe and you are building resilience.

Here's an example of the Behavioural Experiment Checklist for someone who is afraid of dogs and avoidance is holding them back from living their life because they are avoiding any situation where a dog may be – the park, beach, a friend's house etc.

MY BEHAVIOURAL EXPERIMENT LIST	Level of discomfort
Writing the word 'dog'	10
Reading and saying the word 'dog' out loud	10
Reading a children's book about a dog	15
Watching a cartoon about a dog	15
Reading a factual book about dogs	25
Watching internet videos about dogs	25
Going to the pet store and watching the puppies	40
Going to the pet store and touching a small puppy	50
Going to the pet store and touching a large puppy	70
Going to the pet store and holding a small puppy	70
Going to the pet store and holding a large puppy	80
Walking around the block without a water bottle	50
Walking around the block and passing a small dog on a leash	40
Walking around the block and passing a large dog on a leash	50
Going to a park with dogs on leashes	50
Going to a park with dogs on leashes and patting a dog	60
Visiting a friend who owns a small dog	55
Going to a friend's house and patting a small dog	60
Visiting a friend who owns a large dog	55
Going to a friend's house and patting a large dog	70
Going to a park with dogs off leashes	90
Going to a park with dogs off leashes and patting a dog	95

Although there is no right or wrong in the approach you take with your behavioural experiments, keep the analogy of getting used to the water at the beach in mind. A stepwise approach is typically the best way to go, where you put your toe in the water first until you are ready to take another step in. The beautiful thing about this is that we get used to the water, and what feels cold and unpleasant initially starts to warm up. So if you are getting frustrated with yourself when you engage in the behavioural experience, recognise the following:

- 1.** If there is no anxiety, then you are still in your comfort zone.
- 2.** If there is anxiety, this means that you are stretching your comfort zone and on the right path.
- 3.** You need to approach avoided situations gradually - you are the boss of you and you know the pace that works best for you: it's all good.
- 4.** Be kind to yourself along the way. Standing up to worry and approaching avoided situations is hard. Focus on effort, and remember that every step you take is a learning opportunity and worthy of celebration.

Before you know it, you will find that you are living in much greater alignment with the life you want to live, not the life that worry, rumination and self-doubt are telling you to live.

You are now ready to apply the Mind Strength Toolkit to live your life with greater fulfilment personally and professionally in line with your values.

For more useful resources, visit **[Drjodie.com.au](https://drjodie.com.au)**

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