



# Managing your anxiety

## Session Four

### PLEASE REMEMBER

Changes take time, patience and hard work.

The more you put in whilst completing the course, the more you get out of it.

Do you have any questions from last week's session?



### Home Practice Review

How did your home practice go? Did you achieve your goals?

What did you learn from your home practice?

## **A body-focused practice for Mindfulness and Acceptance**

Sit comfortably in a chair like you did for the mindfulness and acceptance exercise we practiced last week. For this practice, close your eyes.

You can do this practice starting at your feet and working up your body, or starting at the crown of your head and working down. You may find it more helpful to start at the crown of your head and work down, as this follows the direction of gravity and may help encourage your muscles to relax and drop downwards.

Spend a few moments breathing deeply in your belly, gradually letting your breathing slow down to 10-15 seconds for a complete cycle of breathing in and out.

When you feel settled, take your attention to the crown of your head and just feel the sensations there. Gradually move your attention down your body, nice and slowly, moving down through the top part of your head, your eyes, your ears, your cheeks and your jaw, your mouth. Use your *attention* to notice any tension, clenching or holding on in any part of your body. Welcome the sensation, and if it helps name it, “tension in my forehead is present” and then say to yourself, “hello tension in my forehead you are welcome”. Use your *intention* to invite that tension or discomfort to release.

If it helps, imagine that you can breathe into any area of tension or discomfort and as you breathe out, invite that area to release and relax as much as it currently wants to.

Gradually work down your whole body – your neck, shoulders, torso, arms and hands, pelvic area, upper legs, knees, lower legs and feet. Pay particular attention to any area of tightness or discomfort.

Once you reach the soles of your feet, start at the top of your head and work your way down again for as many times as you find useful. After a while you may find it useful to stop using any of the phrases and just use your attention and intention to move downwards and release tension.

End the practice by following the sensations of your breathing in your belly for a few moments and then open your eyes.

**Question:** What should you do if a monster comes to your door and demands to be fed?

**Another question:** I had a thought that I might be bitten by a vampire when I was asleep. Everyone knows that vampires don't like garlic, so I hung garlic up all around my bedroom – by the doors and windows, the chimney and around the bed. This morning when I woke up, I hadn't been bitten by a vampire. Obviously this was because of the garlic. Do you agree?

**A thought experiment:** Imagine that you have had a major disagreement with your neighbour that has left you feeling anxious. What are all of the things that you might **do** to manage your anxiety?

In what ways might you avoid having contact with your neighbour?

If you can't avoid your neighbour altogether, what might you do to minimise your anxiety and the chance of anything going wrong when you do see your neighbour?

What would happen to your anxiety as time went by for days, weeks or months?

**Triggering Event**

*I think about seeing my neighbour.*



**Anxious Interpretation**

*What if we have an argument and she shouts at me?  
What if I burst into tears and look weak?*

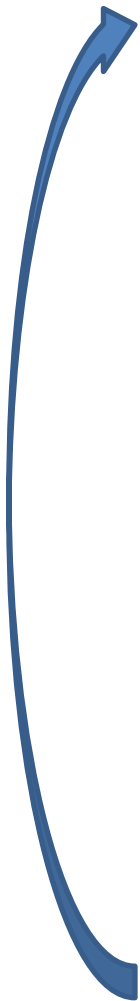


**Threat**



**Avoidance & Safety-Seeking Behaviours**

*Hide – avoid leaving my house or going into my garden when I think she may be around.  
Turn around and walk away when I hear or see her coming.  
Make excuses if I see her and rush off.  
Avoid mentioning the disagreement and be really nice.  
Send others out to do the shopping in the supermarket where I know that she shops.*



## Avoidance and Safety–Seeking Behaviours:

Anxiety aims to motivate us to return to a place of safety as soon as possible. The easiest way to return to a place of safety is to not leave a place in which you already feel safe. In other words, to avoid going to the situation in which we will feel anxious.

It is the absence of the feeling of anxiety that lets us know that we feel safe, so we generally want to do whatever will reduce our anxiety the quickest. If we are anxious about doing something, then the quickest way to reduce our anxiety may simply be to decide not to do it.

The table below lists some apparent advantages of avoidance, can you think of any others? What might be the disadvantages of avoidance? How might it lead to difficulties in the longer-term?

<b>Advantages of Avoidance</b>	<b>Disadvantages of avoidance</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Don't have to experience the anxiety</li><li>✓ Get a sense of relief</li><li>✓ Much easier</li><li>✓ Don't have to worry about it anymore</li><li>✓ No/fewer physical symptoms</li></ul>	

If we can't actually avoid a situation, the next best thing may seem to be to do whatever we can to minimise the chances of something going wrong. The things that we do to prevent things going wrong are called safety-seeking behaviours. The example given earlier of hanging up garlic to prevent being bitten by a vampire is a light-hearted example of a safety-seeking behaviour.

There are hundreds of possible safety-seeking behaviours. Here are a few of them:

- Place your glass or cup in the centre of the table, far enough away so that you can't knock it over by accident when out socialising in a café or bar.
- Read through an email multiple times before sending it to ensure that you haven't unintentionally written anything rude or foolish that will affect the recipient's view of you.
- Hold on to something or sit down if you feel dizzy so that you are less likely to fall over and hurt yourself or draw unwanted attention to yourself.
- Set out excessively early for an appointment to make sure that you are there in plenty of time and don't inconvenience anyone.
- Seek reassurance about decisions, or get others to make decisions so that you can't be blamed and won't be responsible if things go wrong.

Can you think of any others?

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In the table below, list some of the apparent advantages of safety-seeking behaviours. What might be the disadvantages of safety-seeking behaviours? List those. How might using them lead to difficulties in the longer-term?

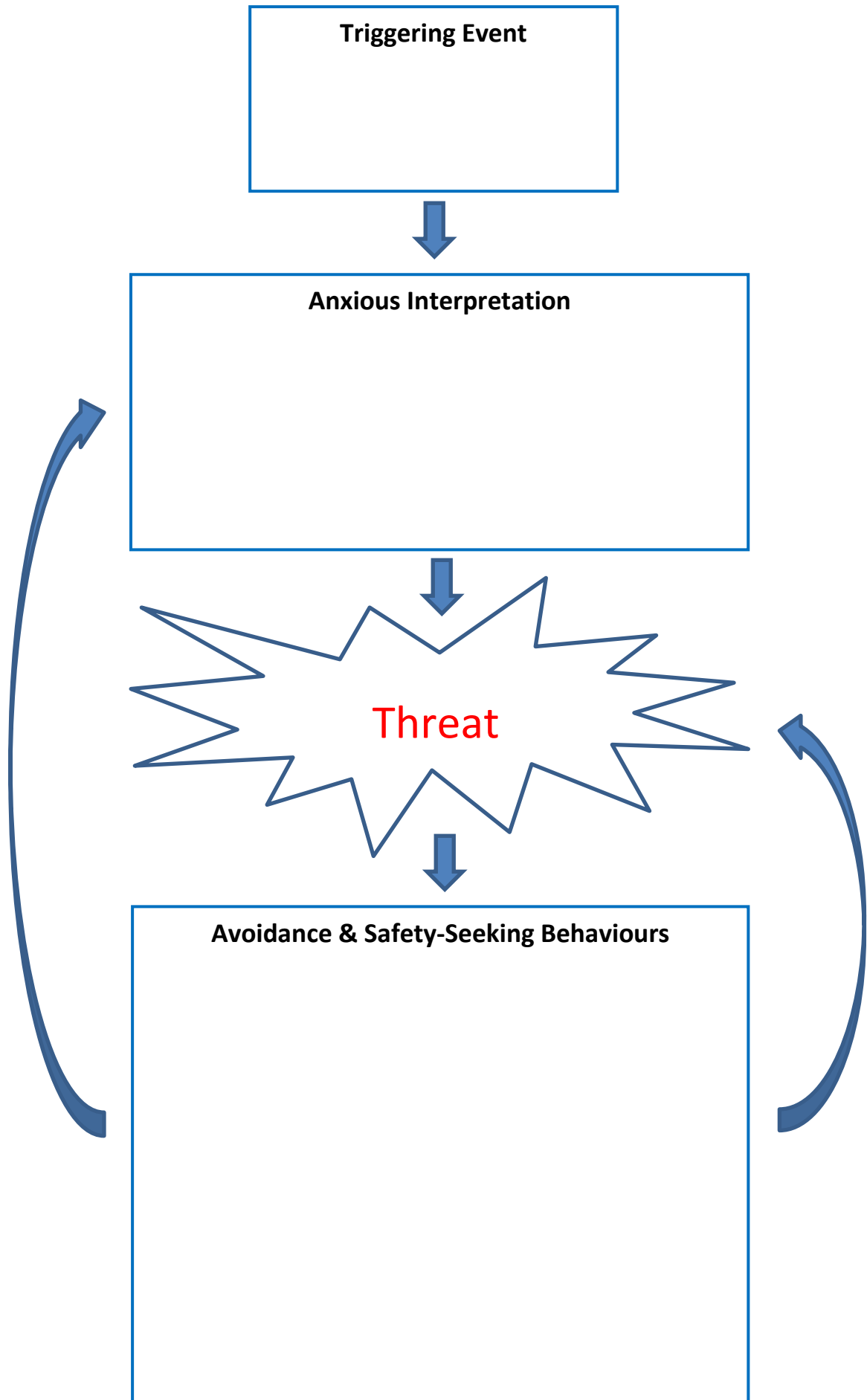
Advantages of using safety-seeking behaviours	Disadvantages of using safety-seeking behaviours

On the course so far, we have given an overview of what the fight, flight and freeze response is and the kinds of situations that may trigger it. We have looked at how anxiety motivates us to return to safety. We have looked at how the way in which we think about a situation influences how anxious we feel. We have looked at some of the different emotions linked to feeling threatened. In this session we looked at how avoidance and safety-seeking behaviours may make us feel safe in the short-term, yet are likely to make our anxiety worse and greatly restrict our lives in the longer-term. Now may be a good time for you to reflect on your own anxiety more closely so that you can understand it in as much detail as possible. The better we can understand our own particular experience of anxiety, the better chance we have of working out what to do to reduce it most effectively.

### **Formulation**

On the next page is a blank anxiety formulation diagram. Think of a typical example of a situation in which you feel anxious and see if you can fill in the formulation. Refer to the example for falling out with a neighbour for hints.





## Home Practice



In order to get the most from CBT it helps to practice at home.

### Summary of Session Four:

The main focus in this session was on understanding how what we do to try and return to feeling safe when we feel anxious often makes us feel better in the short-term, yet makes our anxiety worse in the longer-term.

We looked at how to formulate our own particular anxiety so that we can get the best possible understanding of it and have the greatest chance of reducing it.

Write down one or more key points that you have learnt today:

**Suggested home practice for Week Four:**

- Continue to practice mindfulness and acceptance. This is something that needs to be done regularly to gradually get results overtime. Use both of the practices taught in this and the previous session.
- Really get familiar with how your anxiety works – write out three examples using the format below, which is similar to the formulation diagram, but set out as a table.

Trigger	What if... Catastrophic thoughts	Avoidance and Safety-Seeking Behaviours

Are there any SMART goals that you want to set for yourself this week? If so, write them here:

1)

2)

3)