



FREE RESOURCE · ANXIETY AND AVOIDANCE · ABOUT 20 MINUTES TO PLAN

Fear ladder

When something makes us anxious, avoiding it brings quick relief, but over time the fear can grow and life can start to feel smaller. A fear ladder helps you face it gradually, one manageable step at a time, so you can learn that you can cope.

How to build your ladder

1

Choose one fear

Pick one thing you've been avoiding, and decide what you'd like to be able to do. Make it specific. This is the top of your ladder.

2

List smaller steps

Write down situations linked to that fear, from slightly uncomfortable to very hard. Change one thing at a time: how long, how busy, how close, or who is with you. Aim for 8 to 10.

3

Rate each step

How anxious would each step make you, from 0 (completely calm) to 10 (the most anxious you can imagine)?

4

Put them in order

Arrange the steps from lowest to highest. If there's a big jump between two, add a step in between.

5

Start near the bottom

Choose a step that feels uncomfortable but manageable, often around 3 or 4. Stay with it until you notice you're coping.

6

Repeat, then climb

Practise the same step several times until it feels noticeably easier, then move up to the next rung.

After each practice, ask yourself

- ✓ What did I expect would happen?
- ✓ What actually happened?
- ✓ How anxious was I at the start, at the highest point, and at the end?
- ✓ What have I learned about the fear, or about myself?

Need help right now? Call 999 if your life is at risk. For urgent mental health support, call 111 and choose the mental health option, or call Samaritans free on 116 123, any time.



An example ladder

For someone who has been avoiding busy shops. Start at the bottom; the numbers are how anxious each step feels, from 0 to 10. Yours will look different, and that's how it should be.

- 9 **GOAL**
Do the full weekly shop on a Saturday, on my own
- 8 Do the full shop at a busy time, with a friend nearby
- 7 Do a small shop at a busier time, on my own
- 6 Queue at a staffed till at a quiet time
- 5 Buy a few things at a quiet time, on my own
- 4 Buy a few things at a quiet time, with a friend
- 3 Walk in, pick up one item, pay and leave
- 2 Sit in the car park for 10 minutes

Helpful tips

- ✓ Expect to feel anxious. It isn't a sign that it's going wrong; it's part of how the fear loosens its grip.
- ✓ Small, regular practice helps more than one big leap.
- ✓ Notice the things you do to feel safer, like rushing or holding your phone, and let go of them a little at a time.
- ✓ Only include steps that are safe in themselves. The aim is to face things that feel dangerous but aren't.
- ✓ If your anxiety brings strong physical symptoms, or you have a health condition, check with your GP first.
- ✓ Some fears are easier to face with support, especially if they're linked to something traumatic.

Coming back down a rung for a while is fine. Fear rarely goes in a straight line, and every step you take counts.

A gentle note. These tools aren't a replacement for counselling or medical care. If something here brings up a lot for you, it's okay to stop. You don't have to work through things on your own. If you'd like to talk to someone, your first counselling session with me is free: 07826 774307 or therapycare.co.uk.



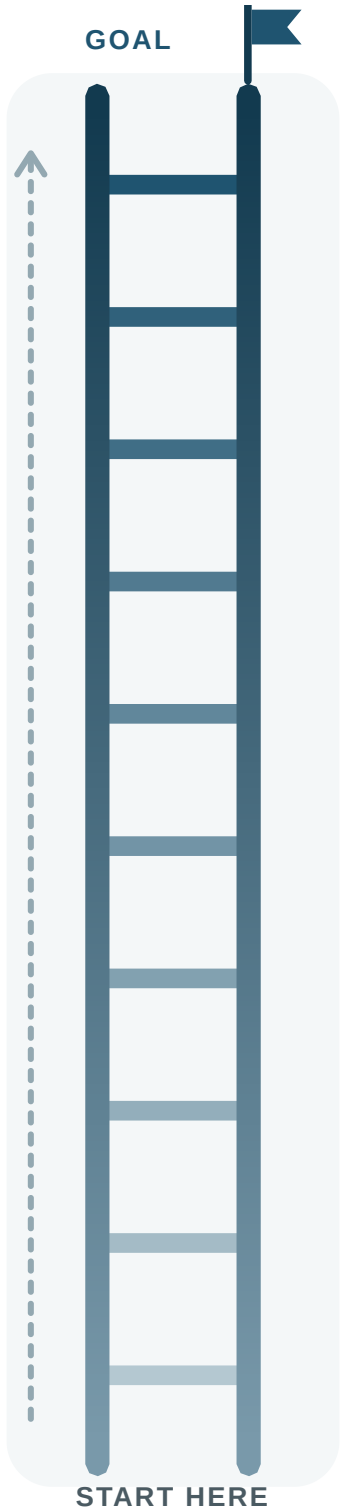
FEAR LADDER WORKSHEET

My fear ladder

My goal What would I like to be able to do?

Write your hardest step at the top and the easiest at the bottom. Rate how anxious each would make you, from 0 to 10.

GOAL



START HERE

10

0 to 10

9

0 to 10

8

0 to 10

7

0 to 10

6

0 to 10

5

0 to 10

4

0 to 10

3

0 to 10

2

0 to 10

1

0 to 10



FEAR LADDER WORKSHEET

Practice log

Use a row each time you practise a step. Print as many copies as you need.

Date	The step I practised	Anxiety 0 to 10	What I expected would happen	What actually happened, and what I learned
		Start Highest End		
		Start Highest End		
		Start Highest End		
		Start Highest End		
		Start Highest End		



EXAMPLE · FILLED IN

Example: my fear ladder

My goal What would I like to be able to do?

To do the weekly food shop on my own, at any time, without dreading it

Here's how the worksheet might look once it's filled in. Your steps, and your numbers, will be your own.

10	<i>Do the full weekly shop on a Saturday, on my own</i>	<i>9</i> 0 to 10
9	<i>Do the full shop at a busy time, with a friend nearby</i>	<i>8</i> 0 to 10
8	<i>Do a small shop at a busier time, on my own</i>	<i>7</i> 0 to 10
7	<i>Queue at a staffed till at a quiet time</i>	<i>6</i> 0 to 10
6	<i>Buy a few things at a quiet time, on my own</i>	<i>5</i> 0 to 10
5	<i>Buy a few things at a quiet time, with a friend</i>	<i>4</i> 0 to 10
4	<i>Walk in, pick up one item, pay and leave</i>	<i>3</i> 0 to 10
3	<i>Walk in with a friend and look round for 5 minutes</i>	<i>3</i> 0 to 10
2	<i>Sit in the shop car park for 10 minutes</i>	<i>2</i> 0 to 10
1	<i>Drive past the shop at a quiet time</i>	<i>1</i> 0 to 10



EXAMPLE · FILLED IN

Example: practice log

Notice how the same step gets easier with practice, and how each entry ends with what was learned.

Date	The step I practised	Anxiety 0 to 10	What I expected would happen	What actually happened, and what I learned
Mon 3rd	Sat in the car park for 10 minutes	Start 4 Highest 6 End 2	I'll panic and have to drive off.	Heart raced for the first few minutes, then it settled. I stayed the whole time. The feeling passes if I stay.
Wed 5th	Car park again, 10 minutes	Start 3 Highest 4 End 1	Easier than Monday, but I'm still dreading it.	Much calmer this time. I think I'm ready to try going in.
Fri 7th	Walked in with my sister and looked round for 5 minutes	Start 5 Highest 7 End 3	Everyone will notice how anxious I am.	Nobody looked at me. I wanted to leave at the door but I stayed. Proud of myself.
Sat 8th	Walked in on my own, bought milk, paid and left	Start 6 Highest 7 End 3	I'll freeze at the till.	Hands shook a bit at the checkout but I managed it. Still hard, so I'll repeat this one.
Mon 10th	Bought milk on my own again	Start 4 Highest 5 End 2	It'll be as bad as Saturday.	Easier than last time. The anxiety drops quicker each time I practise.