

Examples of Fear Ladders

Specific Phobia (dogs): *Cassandra's Story*

Cassandra is afraid of dogs. She refuses to walk around the neighborhood without her husband for fear of being attacked by a dog. She tends to avoid places where there are dogs, such as parks or hiking trails (even though she used to enjoy hiking). She will cross the street if she sees someone walking with a dog and will refuse to enter a store if a dog is tied up out front.

Goal: To be able to be near dogs without excessive fears.

Step	Situation	Fear Rating
12.	<i>Petting a larger dog off leash</i>	10
11.	<i>Petting a larger dog on a leash</i>	9
10.	<i>Holding a puppy</i>	9
9.	<i>Petting a puppy that someone is holding</i>	8
8.	<i>Standing beside, but not touching, a dog on a leash</i>	7
7.	<i>Standing 4 feet away from a dog on a leash</i>	6
6.	<i>Standing 8 feet away from a dog on a leash</i>	5
5.	<i>Standing across the street from a dog on a leash</i>	4
4.	<i>Looking at a dog across a park through binoculars</i>	3
3.	<i>Looking at a dog through a window</i>	3
2.	<i>Watching a film with dogs in it</i>	2
1.	<i>Looking at photos of dogs</i>	2

*Once Cassandra has completed the fear ladder and can tolerate being around dogs, she can start a new ladder tackling other fears she may have.

Specific Phobia (Needles): Cam's Story

Cam is VERY afraid of needles. He tends to avoid going to the doctor as he worries he'll have to get a needle. Cam's health has not always been good and he is worried that if he doesn't overcome his fear he is putting his health at risk.

Goal: To tolerate getting an injection (In this case, the goal is not to feel completely comfortable getting needles -- as most people aren't -- but to be able to tolerate them).

Step	Situation	Fear Rating
11.	<i>Having blood drawn from a vein</i>	10
10.	<i>Getting a shot in the upper arm or fleshy part of leg</i>	9
9.	<i>Slightly pricking one's skin with a needle</i>	8
8.	<i>Watching someone else get a needle</i>	7
7.	<i>Resting needle against vein</i>	7
6.	<i>Resting the needle against one's skin</i>	6
5.	<i>Rubbing an alcohol swab against one's skin</i>	5
4.	<i>Holding a needle</i>	4
3.	<i>Watching an apple being injected</i>	3
2.	<i>Watching video clips of someone getting a needle</i>	3
1.	<i>Looking at a picture of a needle</i>	2

*If Cam has a history of fainting when he gets needles, he should read the module on Applied Tension Technique, which can help him avoiding fainting.

Panic Disorder: Fin's Story

Fin is afraid of having a panic attack while driving over a bridge. As a result, he avoids crossing bridges whenever he can. When he does have to drive over a bridge, he insists on carrying his cell phone and prefers to be accompanied by a friend. This way, help will be available if he does have a panic attack.

Goal: To be able to cross bridges without excessive fears of panic attacks.

Step	Situation	Fear Rating
11.	<i>Driving over a long bridge in heavy traffic without friend or cell phone.</i>	10
10.	<i>Driving over a long bridge in heavy traffic without friend</i>	9
9.	<i>Driving over a long bridge in heavy traffic with cell phone and friend</i>	8
8.	<i>Driving over a short bridge in heavy traffic without cell phone or friend</i>	8
7.	<i>Driving over a short bridge in heavy traffic without friend</i>	7
6.	<i>Driving over a short bridge in heavy traffic with cell phone and friend</i>	6
5.	<i>Driving over a long bridge in light traffic without friend</i>	6
4.	<i>Driving over a long bridge in light traffic with cell phone and friend</i>	5
3.	<i>Driving over a short bridge in light traffic without friend and cell phone</i>	5
2.	<i>Driving over a short bridge in light traffic without friend</i>	4
1.	<i>Driving over a short bridge with cell phone and friend</i>	3

*Once Fin has completed the fear ladder and can tolerate driving over bridges, he can start a new ladder tackling other fears he may have due to panic (such as being in crowded places). It will be important for Fin to tackle his fear of the physical symptoms associated with panic attacks. See the module on Panic Disorder for more information about exposure to feared physical sensations.

Social Anxiety Disorder: Wen's Story

Wen is worried about giving a presentation at work. She is also worried about asking and answering questions during meetings. She is worried that if she doesn't get over her fears, she will be passed over for an upcoming promotion.

Goal: To be able to give presentations and participate in meetings at work.

Step	Situation	Fear Rating
10.	<i>Giving the prepared presentation during a staff meeting and answering questions</i>	10
9.	<i>Giving a short update of a project during a meeting</i>	9
8.	<i>Answering questions during meetings</i>	9
7.	<i>Asking questions during meetings</i>	8
6.	<i>Asking the supervisor a question after the meeting with other co-workers present</i>	7
5.	<i>Giving an abridged version of the presentation to a few co-workers and having them ask questions</i>	6
4.	<i>Making a comment during a meeting</i>	5
3.	<i>Giving the prepared presentation in the boardroom with a few close co-workers present</i>	5
2.	<i>Giving the prepared presentation in the boardroom with only a close colleague present</i>	4
1.	<i>Giving a prepared presentation in the boardroom after work with no one present</i>	2

*Wen is also afraid of meeting new people. After she completes this fear ladder, she can start developing a new ladder to help her overcome her fear of meeting new people (which may include: saying "hi" to strangers; asking a stranger a question; introducing herself to someone at a party; making small talk with an unfamiliar cashier; etc).

Social Anxiety Disorder: Sahl's Story

Sahl gets anxious around co-workers and has not been able to develop any friendships at work, even though he has been working for the same company for 3 years. He tends to avoid the staff room and will only discuss work-related things with co-workers. Sahl would like to be able to make new friends and feel comfortable interacting socially with co-workers.

Goal: To interact socially with co-workers.

Step	Situation	Fear Rating
11.	<i>Attend staff party</i>	10
10.	<i>Share personal information about self with co-workers</i>	10
9.	<i>Go out for lunch with a group of co-workers</i>	9
8.	<i>Ask a co-worker to go for coffee after work</i>	7
7.	<i>Eat lunch in the staff room and make small talk with co-workers</i>	7
6.	<i>Eat lunch in the staff room</i>	6
5.	<i>Sit in the staff room during coffee break and make small talk with a group of co-workers (e.g., talk about the weather, ask them what they did on the weekend, etc.)</i>	5
4.	<i>Sit in the staff room during coffee break</i>	4
3.	<i>Ask a co-worker what they did on the weekend</i>	4
2.	<i>Ask co-workers questions about how to complete tasks at work</i>	3
1.	<i>Say "hi" to co-workers</i>	2

*Once Sahl has made some new friendships at work, he can start tackling some of his other fears (for example, talking to persons in authority, such as his boss).

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: Sarah's Story

Sarah was in a serious car accident a year ago. She was rear-ended by a large truck while trying to make a left turn at an intersection. Since the accident, she has stopped driving and feels very anxious when she is a passenger in a vehicle. She tries to avoid walking near busy roads and avoids traveling by car whenever she can. She also feels scared when she hears loud noises, such as car horns, or hears about accidents.

Goal: To be able to ride in a car.

Step	Situation	Fear Rating
13.	<i>Drive by the scene of accident</i>	10
12.	<i>Make a left turn at a busy intersection alone</i>	9
11.	<i>Make a left turn at a busy intersection with husband present</i>	8
10.	<i>Drive down a major road alone in heavy traffic</i>	8
9.	<i>Drive down a major road alone in light traffic</i>	7
8.	<i>Drive down a major road with husband</i>	6
7.	<i>Ride as a passenger on major roads</i>	5
6.	<i>Drive around the block alone</i>	5
5.	<i>Ride as a passenger in a residential neighborhood</i>	4
4.	<i>Listen to news reports about accidents</i>	4
3.	<i>Cross the road at a pedestrian crosswalk</i>	4
2.	<i>Stand on the sidewalk by a busy road and listen to traffic</i>	3
1.	<i>Drive up and down the driveway</i>	3

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder: Chris' Story

Chris is worried about germs and tends to avoid touching things he thinks are "dirty." He is so concerned about coming into contact with germs that he tends to avoid going to public places, such as malls. He washes his hands whenever he thinks he has come into contact with germs, and does it so frequently that his hands are dry and red. He also changes his clothes whenever he returns home after being out, since he worries that they are contaminated.

Goal: Touch objects in public places (such as a mall), without worrying about germs.

Step	Situation	Fear Rating
13.	<i>Use toilet at mall</i>	10+
12.	<i>Use hands to open and close stall door</i>	10
11.	<i>Touch counter and taps in mall bathroom</i>	9
10.	<i>Touch knob on mall bathroom door</i>	9
9.	<i>Touch garbage can in the mall</i>	8
8.	<i>Use public phone at mall</i>	8
7.	<i>Use hands to push open doors to mall entrance</i>	7
6.	<i>Touch table in the food court</i>	7
5.	<i>Sit on bench at mall and touch bench with hands</i>	6
4.	<i>Touch railing at mall</i>	6
3.	<i>Touch items in a store</i>	5
2.	<i>Sit on bench at mall</i>	4
1.	<i>Walk around public places, such as the mall</i>	3

*If Chris normally washes his hands and changes his clothes after he comes into contact with "germs," it will be important for him to complete all the steps without washing his hands or changing his clothes. Chris should only wash his hands before meals and after using the bathroom, and should only change clothes before bed. Refer to Self-Help Strategies for Obsessive Compulsive Disorder for more information about response prevention.