BEHAVIOURAL EXPERIMENTS

NEGATIVE PREDICTIONS

Many people who suffer from anxiety, depression or unhelpful thought patterns tend to make negative predictions about how certain situations will turn out. For example, they may tend to overestimate the likelihood that bad things will happen or that something will go wrong, or exaggerate how bad things will be. It is also not unusual to underestimate your ability to deal with things if they don't go well.

When jumping to negative conclusions like these, it is more likely that you will tend to engage in unhelpful behaviours. Perhaps you avoid the situation completely, try the situation out but escape when things feel too difficult, or be overly cautious and engage in safety behaviours. The problem with these strategies is that they prevent you from actually testing out your predictions and proving your worry wrong. This makes it very hard for you to ever have a different experience from what you expected, so you continue to expect the worst. As mentioned earlier, when we experience worry one of the most common things that happens is that we simply avoid facing the anxiety or stress provoking situation all together. This may help you reduce your discomfort in the short term, but it also contributes to the continuation of your negative predictions and anxieties.

TESTING THE PREDICTIONS

What we can do instead of engaging in avoidance, is to test out our negative predictions. We would do this almost as if we are designing a scientific experiment. We would identify the situation, plan how we are going to approach it, prepare by engaging in positive coping

strategies such as through relaxation and thought balancing, and then finally try out the new behaviour. By testing our predictions and engaging in "behavioural experiments" we can help reinforce the balanced thoughts practiced, reinforce our strengths and capacities, as well as prove the brain 'wrong' when it comes to the unhelpful thoughts.

On the next page you can read further about how to plan and evaluate a behavioural experiment, and then jump in to designing and practicing one yourself.

BEHAVIOURAL EXPERIMENTS STEP BY STEP

- Be clear about the purpose of the experiment - the point is to test out your negative predictions and help you to develop more realistic and/or balanced predictions.
- Identify what the thought or belief is that you are trying to test. Rate how strongly you believe this prediction (0-100).
- What is an alternative prediction or belief? Rate how strongly you believe this alternative (0-100).
- Design the actual experiment. Decide what you will do to test your prediction, when you will do it, how long it will take, and with whom. Try to be as specific as possible.
- There are no boundaries to how creative you can be, and it is ok to ask for help.
- Make sure you set your experiment at an appropriate level. It is best to start with smaller and less anxiety or stress inducing behaviours and situations, and then increase the challenge step-by-step. Make sure to identify likely problems you may come up against and how to deal with them.
- Carry out the experiment as planned. Remember to take notice of your thoughts, feelings and behaviours.
- Write down what happened. What did you observe? Consider the evidence for and against your original prediction. What did this say about your negative prediction?
- Identify what you have learnt from the experiment.
- Rate how strongly you now believe in your original prediction and the alternative prediction (0-100).

BEHAVIOURAL EXPERIMENTS WORKSHEET

Using the steps listed above take a moment to complete the behavioural experiment worksheet. Pick a situation that feels achievable to test out, and leave the 'big ticket' items for later. Follow the steps you've outlined when ready, and then return to the worksheet to complete the last two boxes when you have tested out your prediction.

TASK STEPS	
Prediction Specifically what are you afraid will happen?	
Experiment How will you test your prediction?	
Evidence to Look For What will I/others observe if prediction is true?	
Actual Outcome (stick to facts)	
What Have I Learned?	