

The first step in facing your fears is to make a list of the situations, places, or things that you fear. Here's an example.

Lin has social anxiety and is afraid of a number of social situations. For example, she is scared to talk to other kids at school. She is afraid to answer questions in class and avoids doing class presentations at all costs. Lin tends to avoid going to parties unless she knows everyone who will be there. She also avoids going shopping, as she doesn't want to talk to the salespeople.

Lin's list of feared situations might include:

- talking to classmates
- asking her teacher a question
- answering a question in class
- doing a presentation
- going to a party or school dance
- going shopping and asking a salesperson to help her find a size

EXERCISE: Pull out a piece of paper and start listing the things that you fear.

Include lots of situations

Your list should include lots of situations, some that would be easier to face and some that would be harder.

Group similar fears together

Sometimes if we have lots of different fears, it can help to group similar fears together. For example, you may have a fear of heights and a fear of germs. Make a different list for each fear theme.

Common fears

Common fears include: being around other people, trying new things, talking to unfamiliar people, public speaking, animals, insects, needles, heights, touching things that may be covered in germs, doing things alone, making mistakes, things being out of place, driving, and being in crowded places.

Often, the things on your list of fears can be broken up into smaller steps. Some steps will be easier and some will be harder.

For example, Lin is afraid to talk to classmates.

This can be broken up into a number of steps:

1. Saying "hi" to a classmate in the hall.
2. Asking a classmate a quick question. (For example, "Is the math quiz on Friday?")
3. Sharing weekend plans with a classmate.

Lin is also afraid to do a presentation in class.

This can be broken up into a number of steps:

1. Doing a short presentation in front of a friend.
2. Doing a short presentation in front of the teacher.
3. Doing a short presentation in front of the teacher and a few friends.

Length of time:

- Talking to a classmate for 30 seconds is easier than talking to someone for 5 minutes.
- Doing a 2-minute speech is easier than doing a 5-minute speech.

Distance:

- Standing 20 feet from a dog is easier than standing next to one.
- Looking at a picture of a needle is easier than holding an actual needle.

Who is with you:

- Going to the mall with a friend may be easier than going alone.
- Letting yourself make a mistake when talking to your mom may be easier than making a mistake when talking to the sales assistant at a store, which may be easier than making a mistake when talking to your teacher.

Pick a specific goal: For example, if your goal is to get a needle, list all the steps you need to take in order to accomplish the goal. Steps might include:

1. looking at pictures of needles
2. watching videos of needles
3. holding a needle
4. holding the needle against your skin
5. watching someone else get a needle
6. getting a needle
7. Now that you have a long list of different situations it's time to make a fear ladder. A fear ladder is a list of the situations you fear, listed from the least scary to the scariest.
8. In order to do this, you need to rate each situation on the fear thermometer. A fear thermometer helps you identify how much fear you have of a specific situation or thing. Use the fear thermometer to rate situations from 0 –“no fear” to 10 – “tons of fear”.
9. For each item on your list, click a number between 0 and 10. If the description matches how you feel about that item, put that number next to it on your list
- 10.
11. Top of Form
- 12.
13. Bottom of Form
14. 0 piece of cake
15. freaking out 10
16. Now that you have a long list of situations, places, or things that scare you it's time to rank them from the least scary to the scariest. You can create different fear ladders with lots of different steps for each of your goals (like talking to a classmate or doing a presentation) or different fear themes (heights, spiders, etc.).
17. Here's an example of one of Lin's fear ladders.
- 18.
19. Fear Ladder
20. Goal: Make a new friend

Situation

Fear Rating

Tell a classmate about your weekend

8

Ask a classmate a quick question (for example, "Is the math quiz on Friday?")

6

Make a comment to a classmate (for example, "Have a good weekend.")

5

Say "hi" to classmate in the hall

Millie worries about having panic attacks and avoids situations where she might have one, like the mall. [Learn more about Millie's story!](#)

Goal: Go to the mall by myself

Situation

Fear Rating

Walk around the mall alone on a busy day (for example, Saturday afternoon)

10

Walk around the mall alone on a slow day (for example, Monday afternoon)

9

Walk around the mall with a friend on a busy day (for example, Saturday afternoon)

8

Walk around the mall with a friend on a slow day (for example, Monday afternoon)

7

Sit outside the mall entrance on a bench by myself

5

Sit outside the mall entrance on a bench with Mom or a friend

4

Walk around the mall parking lot

3

Now that you have your fear ladders, pick one to start working on. On that fear ladder, start with the least scary situation and repeatedly enter that situation or do that activity even if you feel anxious.

For example, if you're working on your fear of talking to unfamiliar people, you could make eye contact and say "hi" to the bus driver every day on the way to and from school. Do this for many days until it becomes no big deal. Or if you're working on your fear of touching things you think are dirty, you could touch a doorknob without washing your hands every day.

Expect to feel anxious! That's what happens when we face our fears.

If the situation is one you can stay in for a long time, remain there until your anxiety starts to come down.

For example, if you fear needles, try looking at a picture of needles until your anxiety comes down. If you stay in a situation long enough, your anxiety will start to come down.

This is because anxiety takes a lot of energy, and at some point it will "run out of gas" and you'll realize you are safe and nothing really bad has happened.

This can take a long time (up to 30 minutes or more). So make sure you give yourself enough time to do your exposure exercise.

Once you can face that thing or situation repeatedly without much anxiety, it's time to celebrate your victory and move onto the next thing on your list. If you're bored – you aren't scared! And you should feel some anxiety doing these steps or it's not working