

Safety Behaviors

↳ Safety behaviors are actions carried out with the intention of preventing a feared catastrophe, in the short term they often give a sense of relief, but in the long term they are unhelpful because they prevent the disconfirmation of the belief that are maintaining anxiety

What is a catastrophic belief?

Catastrophic beliefs are commonly, but not exclusively, held beliefs for about different kinds of threats to the individual, for example:

- Physical threat - "I'll be killed"/"I'll be hurt"
- Psychological threat - "I'll go mad"/"I can't cope"
- Social threat - "I'll embarrass myself and never be able to clean my face again"/"They will look for an idiot"

What types of safety behaviors are there?

There are three types of safety behaviors:

1. Avoidance - e.g. not going to a feared situation
2. Dodge - e.g. leaving a feared situation
3. Safety behaviors, which are subtle things we do to decrease anxiety e.g.
 - distraction - wanting to my head to keep panic to stop myself from going mad
 - clenching my breathing - otherwise I'll be overwhelmed by my fear and lose control
 - bracing my feet - in case someone picks on me and I'm humiliated

What are the effects of safety behavior?

- Don't seem to be doing less safety behavior leads to a reduction in anxiety - long term avoidance or avoidance is often accompanied by a powerful belief that is reinforced. Perhaps powerful negative beliefs are, and once an individual has learned that safety behaviors lead to relief they are likely to use them.
- Long term in the long term, safety behaviors act to maintain anxiety by preventing the disconfirmation of unhelpful beliefs. For example, if someone has the belief "I'll go mad if I panic" and bracing my feet and avoids going they don't get the opportunity to learn that most doctors if friends, or fail to learn the difference between socially and socially things.
- Catastrophic consequences safety behaviors often have with individuals who are afraid of panic disorder the original belief, make the anxiety worse, or lead to other problems.

Early experience	Belief	Safety behavior	Consequences		
			Short term	Long term	Unintended
Humiliated at school about appearance	"People always think they will think get disgusting and repulsive"	Keep away at my desk	Reduction anxiety because no-one noticed my anxiety	People eventually learn that most people don't give a damn about what you look like	Keeping away at my desk makes people think you're weird
Physically assaulted by a group of boys while walking home	"People are dangerous. If they ever contact I will be attacked"	Avoidance and braced my contact	Feel slightly safer when avoid contact	People learn that avoidance does not generally help to avoid contact	People learn that contact is not so bad
Wrote a letter to a friend about a problem they were experiencing at school	"The other kids will think it's just not important if I write that they won't get it at all"	Contact only but without being spontaneous	Feeling good to be talking to a friend about my problem - but a bit later at school	People eventually learn that others care about the problem, and that not all unhelpful thoughts are a problem to an other	People eventually learn that others care about the problem

What is the difference between a safety behavior and an adaptive behavior?

Just by feelings the belief or threat, there is no way of telling the difference between unhelpful safety behaviors and helpful adaptive behaviors. It is the intention that matters - safety behaviors are those which are intended to create a sense of relief or escape. For example, if the strategy of distraction is used to cope with a painful experience such as a visit to the dentist we say it's helpful. However, if distraction is used with the intention of preventing a catastrophe such as avoiding a feeling of panic the first will make us go mad then it can be regarded as unhelpful safety behavior.