

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 associated, but not confined, to 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 visible 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 longer 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 unintended consequences which can reinforce 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 table	Reduction anxiety because no-one noticed my anxiety	People eventually learn that most people don't judge others' feet	Keeping away at my table makes people think I'm 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	Feet slightly numb when someone touches	People learn that avoidance does not generally help to avoid contact	People learn that I'm weird
Wrote down a list of potential afflictions by which an illness experience if "normal" illness	"The doctor told me that, if I don't look immediately after this then I might get a dangerous illness"	Control my feet otherwise I might experience	Feet got numb when sitting in a chair with my feet flat - but a bit better at home	People eventually learn that anxiety prevented the feet, and that not all potential afflictions is a possibility to an illness	People eventually experience that I'm weird because I'm worried

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 feelings of panic the first will make us go mad then it can be regarded as unhelpful safety behavior.