

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 negatively

What is a catastrophic belief?

Catastrophic beliefs are commonly, but not exclusively, 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 me up or I'm assaulted

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 be overwhelmed by my fear" and avoids things they don't get the opportunity to learn that most doctors in hospitals, or fail to learn the difference between friendly and unfriendly dogs.
- 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 give a damn about what you think	Keeping away at my table 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 avoided (short)	People learn that avoidance does not generally help - being attacked	People learn that avoidance does not help
Wrote a letter to a friend about a problem, but the experience of writing it was awful	"The more I write my fear, the more I will eventually write that I can't deal with my fear"	Contact my friend to discuss my problem	Feeling good while writing a letter (short-term relief) - but a lot later it feels	People eventually learn that writing about the fear, and that act of avoided attention is a guarantee to an attack	People eventually learn that writing about the fear is a guarantee to an attack

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

↳ Not 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! The strategy of distraction used to cope with a painful experience (e.g. a visit to the dentist) may be helpful. However, if distraction is used with the intention of preventing a catastrophe (e.g. to avoid a feeling of panic) the relief will make us go back there; can be regarded as unhelpful safety behavior.