

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 one is in danger

What is a catastrophic belief?

Catastrophic beliefs are usually, but not always, 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. refusing to go back to a location
2. Dodge - e.g. leaving a feared situation
3. Safety behaviors, which are subtle things one does to decrease one's risk
 - distraction - wanting to go back to a safe place to stop myself from progressing
 - covering my breathing - otherwise I'll be overwhelmed by my fear and lose control
 - bracing my feet - in case someone picks me up and I'm hurt

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 in the probability. 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 "dogs will attack me and bite my feet" and avoids dogs they don't get the opportunity to learn that most dogs are friendly, or fail to learn the difference between friendly and unfriendly dogs.
- Catastrophic/unhelpful 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 risk	Reduction anxiety because no-one noticed my weight	People avoid me because I'm so shy	Keeping away at my risk makes people think I'm weird
Physically assaulted by a group of boys when walking home	"People are dangerous. If they see me, I will be attacked"	Avoidance and braced my feet	Feet didn't get whiplashed (pain)	People learn that avoidance doesn't generally help - being attacked	People learn that I'm weird
Wrote down list of potential afflictions by which an alien experience of mind could	"The alien think my feet, it will look incredibly stupid. They think they might get attacked"	Control my feet otherwise I will experience	Feet got better relief in a couple of weeks (relieved) - but a bit later it hurt	People got worse from that attack because they felt, and that led to increased attention to a possible brain attack	People got worse from that attack because they felt better because attention

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 fear of a catastrophe. For example, the strategy of distraction used to cope with a painful experience such as a visit to the dentist may be helpful. However, if distraction is used with the intention of preventing a catastrophe such as avoiding feelings of panic the first will make one go mad then it can be regarded as unhelpful safety behavior.