

Fear Ladder / Exposure Hierarchy

FACING FEARS STEP BY STEP

Avoidance can keep anxiety going. A fear ladder helps you gradually face what you avoid, in small and manageable steps — so you can build confidence, reduce anxiety, and learn that the situation is safer or more manageable than it feels.

WHY IT WORKS

- Faces fears in a structured, gradual way
- Builds confidence one step at a time
- Helps anxiety naturally decrease with practice
- Reduces avoidance over time

Courage grows one step at a time.

HOW TO BUILD YOUR FEAR LADDER

1

IDENTIFY YOUR FEAR

Choose a specific situation you avoid or find anxiety-provoking.

2

BRAINSTORM STEPS

List different ways to face this fear, from easiest to hardest.

3

RATE ANXIETY

Give each step a rating (0–100) for how anxious you expect to feel.

4

START & PRACTISE

Begin with a manageable step. Repeat until anxiety drops, then move up.

MORE CHALLENGING

MY EXPOSURE HIERARCHY



STEP	SITUATION / EXPOSURE	ANXIETY (0–100)	NOTES
10			
9			
8			
7			
6			
5			
4			
3			
2			
1			

ANXIETY RATING GUIDE

Rate 0–100 for how anxious you expect to feel (SUDS scale).

- 0No anxiety
- 10Very mild anxiety
- 20Mild anxiety
- 30Moderate anxiety
- 40Noticeable anxiety
- 50Strong anxiety
- 60High anxiety
- 70Very high anxiety
- 80Extreme anxiety
- 90Almost unbearable
- 100Worst imaginable

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- ✓ Start with a step that feels doable
- ✓ Stay in the situation until anxiety decreases
- ✓ Repeat each step until it feels easier
- ✓ Move up gradually — there's no rush
- ✓ Be kind to yourself; progress takes time
- ✓ Notice and celebrate your progress

It's not about being fearless — it's about doing it anyway.

SOURCE

Wolpe, J. (1969). The Practice of Behavior Therapy. Pergamon Press. (Origin of graded exposure and the Subjective Units of Distress Scale, SUDS.)