

Anxiety Scale

Anxiety is defined as a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome. (Oxford Languages) While overwhelming at times, viewing anxiety in the context of what you are responding to can help reframe it from being a force that takes over you to something you can make sense of. The Anxiety Scale is an exercise that focuses on the components of anxiety to break down what is happening and what helps to bring it to a more manageable level.

There are six steps to the Anxiety Scale, with each step repeated for each level of your anxiety.

NOTE: If you find any of these steps to be triggering, please work with a helping professional to complete this exercise.

To set up your own scale, first determine how many levels of anxiety you experience. For most clients, we use 10 levels. For some clients, the levels can be grouped into Low, Medium and High. Next you and your helping professional will go into how to break down your current level of anxiety and use that as the personal example of how to build your anxiety scale. You may wonder why this does not start from the lowest or highest level. In working with clients, starting with the current level of anxiety serves two purposes: 1. To show the client that they can work through their current anxiety as a solvable problem and not something they cannot handle. 2. To use the freshness of their current anxiety to help make the exercise easier to complete.

Now here comes the work. After using the current anxiety level to start, you will start from the lowest to the highest level and complete the scale. Keep in mind where your current level falls in the scale and apply the number or level name to it.

I like to provide examples. Here is one that shows a completed level:

Anxiety Scale Example:

- *Level of Anxiety: 3*
- *Trigger/Situation: Being in line at a department store.*
- *What do you experience physically?: Tenseness in my shoulders*
- *What thoughts do you have?: "Are people looking at what I'm buying?"*
- *What actions do you take?: Take deep breaths, tap my fingers on my hands*
- *How do these actions effect your anxiety?: They help me release some tension in my shoulders. I'm still anxious just less worried about others.*

The example above is simple to show the six steps in breaking down the anxiety level. I recognize that some levels will be more complicated to address. In those levels working with your helping professional can work with you to determine what coping skills can be appropriate to address the feelings and thoughts experienced in that level.

On the next page there will be space to practice the Anxiety Scale. The default used with Accedence Counseling is 10 levels of anxiety. Again, if there is another way to categorize or group the levels of anxiety experienced, feel free to change the names of the levels.

The Anxiety Scale should be completed in collaboration with your helping professional. If one is not available, the exercise can still be useful in showing how anxiety is realized at different levels. The goals will be to go through each level of anxiety you experience and create a plan that will help you address each level with coping skills and resources that will be most helpful to you. This exercise can be reviewed periodically to assess for it's usefulness.

Anxiety Scale: Breaking Down the Levels

Level of Anxiety _____:

- What are the situation(s) or trigger(s) for this level?:

- What is experienced physically?:

- What thought(s) are present?:

- What actions are taken to address the anxiety?:

- How do these actions effect the anxiety?:

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