Panic: Comparing Two Explanations

Who this is for: Adults reviewing an assessed panic pattern with a CBT therapist.

What this helps with: Make a prediction specific; evaluate observations without seeking absolute certainty.

Why this works: A frightening interpretation can feel convincing before it is examined. Comparing explanations helps you ask what each predicts and what the available observations show. One observation rarely settles every question.

How to use: 1. Choose a familiar, assessed episode. 2. Compare two explanations and their predictions. 3. Review once with your therapist; plan any experiment separately after checking suitability.

Guided example (fictional)

1. Familiar dizziness in a queue; feared fainting. Alternative: anxiety and focused attention.

2. Fainting prediction: lose consciousness. Alternative: feel unsteady while remaining aware.

3. Stayed aware and spoke to the cashier; also leaned on the counter.

4. No fainting observed; leaning complicates interpretation. Discuss a suitable next test.

Your turn - one example, brief notes

1. Sensation and two explanations

What is the feared meaning? What alternative fits the context?

2. Different predictions

What would you expect to observe if each explanation were accurate?

3. Observations and responses

What happened? What else did you do that affects interpretation?

4. Learning and remaining question

What does this support? What cannot be concluded? Agree the next question.

Reflection: Which observation was most useful? What remains uncertain? What would make a future test clearer?

Optional next step: Agree one suitable observation task; a separate plan is needed before trying it.

Support note: Do not use this sheet to dismiss new or unexplained symptoms or induce bodily sensations. Medical assessment and therapist suitability checks come first.

Model: Clark's cognitive model of panic. Original wording and layout; not a validated treatment programme.

Clark (1986), A cognitive approach to panic. Behaviour Research and Therapy, 24, 461-470. DOI: 10.1016/0005-7967(86)90011-2

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