Uncertainty: One Everyday Experiment

Who this is for: Adults practising uncertainty tolerance within a therapist-agreed GAD plan.

What this helps with: Test a belief about not knowing; practise acting while some uncertainty remains.

Why this works: Repeated checking may briefly settle doubt while preserving the belief that certainty is necessary. An ordinary, agreed experiment can help you learn what happens when you act with enough information for the task.

How to use: 1. Agree a low-stakes task, prediction and reasonable endpoint. 2. Keep necessary checks; leave out one extra certainty-seeking response. 3. Review once at the agreed time, including mixed or unwanted outcomes.

Guided example (fictional)

1. Send a routine email; prediction: 'Without another check, I will be unable to continue working.'

2. Use the agreed ordinary review; omit repeated rereading and reassurance. Keep confidentiality checks.

3. Felt an urge to reopen it; returned to another task. Still did not know the recipient's opinion.

4. Could continue with doubt present. Review once at the next session, rather than keep checking.

Your turn - one example, brief notes

1. Task and testable prediction

What ordinary uncertainty will you allow? What do you predict about acting with it?

2. Boundaries and response plan

Which extra response will you omit? What necessary checks, support and endpoint stay?

3. What happened?

What did you do? Include urges, extra checks, practical consequences and any difficulty.

4. Learning and agreed review

What did you learn about carrying on without certainty? When will you review or repeat?

Reflection: What uncertainty remained? What helped you carry on? What needs adapting next time?

Optional next step: Agree a repeat or a different low-stakes task with your therapist.

Support note: Avoid experiments involving real danger, significant financial or legal consequences, or changes to medical advice. Do not use completion as proof that nothing bad can happen.

Model: Dugas and colleagues' intolerance-of-uncertainty approach. Original wording and layout; not a validated treatment programme.

Dugas et al. (2010), A randomized clinical trial of CBT and applied relaxation for adults with GAD. Behaviour Therapy, 41, 46-58. DOI: 10.1016/j.beth.2008.12.004

Personal use and unmodified copies for your own therapy clients permitted. No resale, rebranding or public rehosting.