

## Therapist Guide: Behavioural Experiment Worksheet

### Purpose & Rationale

Behavioural experiments are a central intervention in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). They allow clients to *test the accuracy of unhelpful beliefs* through real-world experience, rather than relying solely on thought-based reasoning. By predicting outcomes and then comparing them to what actually happens, clients learn to gather disconfirming evidence, reduce reliance on safety behaviours, and build more adaptive beliefs.

### When to Use

- With clients holding rigid or distressing beliefs (e.g., *“If I speak up, everyone will laugh at me”*).
- In treatment of anxiety disorders, OCD, PTSD, depression, and low self-esteem.
- To challenge safety behaviours that prevent corrective learning.
- When thought records or cognitive restructuring alone have limited impact.

### How to Introduce It

1. **Explain the rationale:**
  - *“Sometimes our mind predicts the worst, but we don’t always test if it’s really true. This worksheet helps you design an experiment to check your belief in real life.”*
2. **Identify the target belief:**
  - The client writes down the belief they want to test and rates how strongly they believe it (0–100%).
  - Encourage specificity (e.g., *“If I make eye contact, people will think I’m weird”* rather than *“I’m unlikable”*).
3. **Plan the experiment:**
  - **Experiment:** Agree on a real-life or role-played test. (e.g., *Make eye contact with three people while walking into work*).
  - **Prediction:** The client writes their expected outcome (e.g., *“They will avoid me or look annoyed”*).
  - **Safety behaviours:** Identify things they might do to reduce anxiety, but which interfere with learning (e.g., looking at the ground, rehearsing excessively).
4. **Conduct the experiment:**
  - Encourage clients to pay close attention to what actually happens.
5. **Process the results:**
  - **What happened?** The client describes the actual outcome.
  - **What happened differently than I predicted?** Highlight discrepancies.
  - **Re-rate belief:** Compare belief strength before vs. after the experiment.
  - **What did I learn?** Help clients articulate new, more balanced conclusions.



**C**anadian  
**C**entre for  
**C**BT

## Therapeutic Goals

- Test and weaken unhelpful or distorted beliefs.
- Reduce reliance on avoidance or safety behaviours.
- Promote experiential learning (shifts often occur through experience rather than logic alone).
- Increase tolerance of uncertainty and corrective learning.
- Strengthen flexible, realistic beliefs about self, others, and the world.

**Tip for therapists:** This worksheet is most powerful when the experiment is *collaboratively designed*, achievable in the short term, and repeated across contexts. Reviewing both *what was learned* and *how belief strength changed* helps consolidate new learning and enhances motivation.