

# Information Handout

Professional Version | US English

# Safety Behaviors Example



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## Description

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Safety-seeking behaviors are responses to feared catastrophes. While safety behaviors lead to powerful feelings of relief in the short term they can often have unintended long term effects. For example, they often have the effect of reinforcing beliefs about threat, or mean that beliefs don't get challenged. This *Safety Behaviors Example* worksheet uses an example from the Simpsons to illustrate the kinds of thought processes which can lead to the development of safety behaviors.

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## Instructions

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This is a Psychology Tools information handout.

Suggested uses include:

- Client handout – a psychoeducation resource.
- Discussion point – to provoke a discussion and explore your client's beliefs.
- Therapist learning tool – to improve your familiarity with a psychological construct.
- Supervision tool – to develop formulations and knowledge.
- Teaching resource – a learning tool during training.

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## References

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Salkovskis, P. M. (1991). The importance of behaviour in the maintenance of anxiety and panic: a cognitive account. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 19(1), 6-19.

Rachman, S., Radomsky, A. S., Shafran, R. (2008). Safety behaviour: A reconsideration. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 46(2), 163-173.

## Safety Behaviors

Safety behaviors are things that we do to with the intention of keeping us safe. It is natural to want to keep ourselves safe, but sometimes the things we do can have the unintended consequence of prolonging a fear. Homer Simpson gives a great example of the beginnings of a safety behavior.

Homer: *Not a bear in sight. The Bear Patrol is working like a charm.*

Lisa: *That's specious reasoning Dad.*

Homer: (Misunderstands) *Thanks.*

Lisa: *By your logic I could claim that this rock keeps tigers away.*

Homer: *How does it work?*

Lisa: *It doesn't, it's just a stupid rock.*

Homer: *Uh-huh.*

Lisa: *... but you don't see any tigers around do you?*

Homer: *Lisa, I want to buy your rock.*



Now imagine that Homer starts to carry the rock around all the time, and that he is more worried about tigers when he doesn't have it with him.

**How could Homer learn that the rock doesn't keep him safe from tigers?**

**Do you think he would believe someone if they simply told him the rock was not actually keeping him safe?**

**How do you imagine he would feel, to begin with, if he experimented with leaving the rock behind? Would this feeling be likely to last forever? If not, why not?**

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