

What Are the Odds?

Examining Your Thoughts About Your Anxiety and Fears

Many times people avoid certain situations because of their fears and worries. Although they are “otherwise rational people, they view situations with “catastrophic thinking, meaning that they treat a common situation as if a catastrophe were going to occur, even though the odds of this happening are extremely low. Take a look at these examples who avoid common situations because of their catastrophic thinking:

Although Jonathon travelled every week for his job, he had a terrible fear of bridges and avoided them at all cost. He kept imagining that the bridge he was on would fall down, and he would plummet to his death, and he was terrified every time he had to drive over a bridge. *Jonathon had this fear, even though he had never heard of a bridge just falling down. In fact, he looked it up and found that there are 6 million bridges in the US and there have only been 111 collapses in 150 years.*

Sarah had a weekly meeting with her manager, who was very intimidating. On the night before her meeting, Sarah worried that she would tremble and sweat during her meeting or even pass out, even though everyone in the office thought of her as very calm and in control. *In fact, Sarah had never shown any of the physical signs of being anxious at the office or anywhere else.*

Tanya avoided going to the theater and always made excuses when her 8-year-old asked to be taken to the latest animated film. Tanya didn't like to feel “closed in” and felt that she might scream or do something crazy in front of her son. *She believed this even though she had never lost her cool before.*

Catastrophic thinking is a type of irrational thinking that is very common in people with anxiety disorders and particularly people who have panic attacks. This type of thinking makes people avoid situations out of fear, and avoiding the situations tends to reinforce this type of thinking. However, it is important to remember that the more you avoid the situations that make you fearful, the more power you give them. The best way to conquer your feelings of anxiety and panic are to face the situations you are currently avoiding. This worksheet is designed to help you think rationally about the situations you are avoiding and to see that the odds of something bad happening are extremely remote.

Write down the one situation you try hardest to avoid because you are afraid something terrible will happen.

What are you afraid will happen?

Has the situation that makes you anxious ever happened to you before?

What is the likelihood (odds) this will happen?

What are the reasons this probably won't happen?

What is the very worst thing that could *likely* happen?

List some things you think about that cause you to worry, even though you know that these things aren't true.

What magical rituals do you do when you can't avoid a feared situation?

What will happen if you stop doing these?

What positive thing might help you face your fears? For example, getting support from someone you trust to help you confront the situation you have been avoiding.
