# Tolerating Uncertainty

## Objective

To increase your tolerance of the uncertainty in your life.

## You Should Know

Uncertainty is an unavoidable part of life. No one can predict the future, so we must all learn to accept that there is some degree of uncertainty in everyday life - and in certain situations there is a great deal of uncertainty.

Most people simply accept uncertainty as a natural part of life, but people with anxiety disorders find it hard to accept uncertainty, particularly in certain situations. For people who worry too much, the uncertainty of certain situations can act as a magnifier for their worries, feelings of anxiety, and even physical problems associated with stress.

Most people with anxiety disorders try to avoid situations that will increase their awareness of the uncertainty in life. They may avoid travelling, avoid changing jobs, even avoid meeting new people. Some people avoid going to the doctor for a check-up because just making an appointment triggers their worry that something might be wrong with their health.

Avoiding situations that trigger your uncertainty will only diminish your life and narrow your choices. However, with practice, you can learn to accept aspects of life that are ambiguous and uncertain that cause you to worry unnecessarily. This worksheet is designed to teach you a simple process that can help you deal with uncertainty. The acronym, A-P-P-L-E-S, will help you remember the mindfulness skills you need when you are uncomfortable with uncertainty.

**Acknowledge -** Notice and simply observe uncertainty as it enters into your awareness.
**Pause -** Choose to respond, rather than react, to your experience. In fact, let go of the impulse to react altogether. Put your mind on "pause" and breathe calmly.
**Pull Back -** Remind yourself that in this moment, it is fear, anxiety, or worry doing the talking. Thoughts and emotions are not "facts." Notice that the need for certainty is not effective and is an impossible quest.
**Let Go -** Give yourself permission to release yourself of the illusory need for certainty. No matter how intensely or loudly your thoughts and emotions may insist that you need certainty, remember that the intensity of these thoughts and emotions are temporary and will pass.
**Explore -** Take a moment to explore your internal experience. Pay attention to your breathing and to all of your senses. Observe the sensations around you, the sights, the sounds, the smells, the taste, and what you are touching. The emotional intensity associated with your distress will likely lessen as you do this. Now, choose to actively redirect your attention toward something different than what you are worrying about. Be present in your life.

**Stand Alone** - Do not rely on other people to help you through uncertain situations. Do not ask anyone to go with you when you are facing an uncertain situation that triggers your anxiety, nor should you try to keep in touch with people through calls or texting.

The only way to learn to tolerate more uncertainty in your life is to put yourself into situations that would normally bother you and then see that being uncertain is not so bad. You can tolerate the thoughts and feelings that go with uncertainty and you can learn to live in the moment. You can use the APPLES technique to develop an attitude of acceptance, letting go, and paying attention to your thoughts and feelings rather than trying to avoid them.

## What to Do

On the chart below, describe situations that commonly trigger your uncertainty. Rate how uncomfortable you feel, where 1= just a little uncomfortable to 10 = extremely uncomfortable. Then choose at least one situation to practice the APPLES technique. See how many minutes you can spend each week tolerating uncertain situations. Each week see if you can spend *more* time tolerating uncertain situations.

| Situation | Date | Rate your discomfort | Minutes |
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## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 1 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

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