

# Hierarchy of Fears

When dealing with OCD, it's normal to feel overwhelmed by obsessions and the compulsions that follow. One way to begin managing this is by creating a hierarchy of fears. Think of it as a roadmap that helps you identify and rank your fears—from those that cause a little anxiety to those that feel really intense. This worksheet will guide you through the process of gradually working through each fear, starting with the least challenging. **By taking small steps, you can begin to weaken the grip of obsessions and compulsions and feel more in control over time.**

## STEP 1: What is your primary fear?

*Example: Fear of becoming contaminated.*

.....

## STEP 2: List smaller fears that are related to your primary fear.

1. *Touching a doorknob.*

.....

2. *Using a public restroom.*

.....

3. *Shaking hands with someone.*

.....

4. *Eating without washing hands.*

.....

5. *Sitting on a public bench.*

.....

## STEP 3: Rank these fears from 1 (low anxiety) to 10 (high anxiety).

| Situation That Triggers Your Fear       | Anxiety Level |
|---|---------------|
| 1. <i>Touching a doorknob.</i>          | 4             |
| 2. <i>Using a public restroom.</i>      | 9             |
| 3. <i>Shaking hands with someone.</i>   | 6             |
| 4. <i>Eating without washing hands.</i> | 10            |
| 5. <i>Sitting on a public bench.</i>    | 5             |



# Hierarchy of Fears

**STEP 4:** Plan your exposures, starting with the least anxiety-provoking step.

| Fear Being Conquered                 | Coping Skills I Will Use                              | Due Date                 | Anxiety Before | Anxiety After |
|--------------------------------------|---|--------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| <i>Touching a doorknob.</i>          | <i>Counting backwards</i>                             | <i>5/1 entering work</i> | <i>7</i>       | <i>5</i>      |
| <i>Sitting on a public bench.</i>    | <i>Listen to music, progressive muscle relaxation</i> | <i>5/7 walking home</i>  | <i>6</i>       | <i>4</i>      |
| <i>Shaking hands with someone.</i>   | <i>Focus on conversation, visualization</i>           | <i>5/11 at work</i>      | <i>8</i>       | <i>2</i>      |
| <i>Using a public restroom.</i>      | <i>Positive self-talk, listen to music</i>            | <i>5/17 @ the park</i>   | <i>10</i>      | <i>7</i>      |
| <i>Eating without washing hands.</i> | <i>54321 method, positive self-talk</i>               | <i>5/21 before lunch</i> | <i>10</i>      | <i>8</i>      |
| .....                                | .....   | .....                    | .....          | .....         |
| .....                                | .....   | .....                    | .....          | .....         |
| .....                                | .....   | .....                    | .....          | .....         |
| .....                                | .....   | .....                    | .....          | .....         |
| .....                                | .....   | .....                    | .....          | .....         |

**Journal:** Here are some questions to ask yourself throughout the exposure process.

**What was my experience with this step?**

.....

.....

.....

**Were the coping skills I used effective?**

.....

.....

.....

**Do I need to break down any steps further or add new steps?**

.....

.....

.....





# Hierarchy of Fears

**STEP 1:** What is your primary fear?

.....

**STEP 2:** List smaller fears that are related to your primary fear.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**STEP 3:** Rank these fears from 1 (low anxiety) to 10 (high anxiety).

| Situation That Triggers Your Fear | Anxiety Level |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| .....                             | .....         |
| .....                             | .....         |
| .....                             | .....         |
| .....                             | .....         |
| .....                             | .....         |
| .....                             | .....         |
| .....                             | .....         |
| .....                             | .....         |
| .....                             | .....         |
| .....                             | .....         |



# Hierarchy of Fears

**STEP 4:** Plan your exposures, starting with the least anxiety-provoking step.

| Fear Being Conquered | Coping Skills I Will Use | Due Date | Anxiety Before | Anxiety After |
|----------------------|--------------------------|----------|----------------|---------------|
| .....                | .....                    | .....    | .....          | .....         |
| .....                | .....                    | .....    | .....          | .....         |
| .....                | .....                    | .....    | .....          | .....         |
| .....                | .....                    | .....    | .....          | .....         |
| .....                | .....                    | .....    | .....          | .....         |
| .....                | .....                    | .....    | .....          | .....         |
| .....                | .....                    | .....    | .....          | .....         |
| .....                | .....                    | .....    | .....          | .....         |
| .....                | .....                    | .....    | .....          | .....         |
| .....                | .....                    | .....    | .....          | .....         |
| .....                | .....                    | .....    | .....          | .....         |

**Journal:** Here are some questions to ask yourself throughout the exposure process.

What was my experience with this step?

.....  
.....  
.....

Were the coping skills I used effective?

.....  
.....  
.....

Do I need to break down any steps further or add new steps?

.....  
.....  
.....

