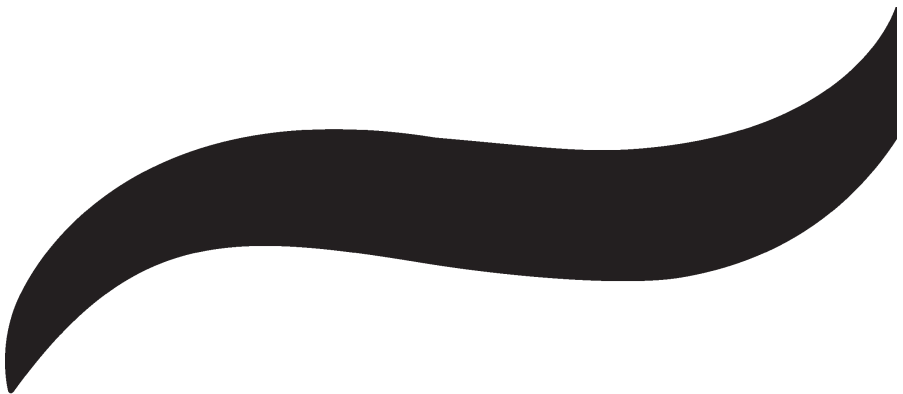




Agoraphobia

Information for clients



WHAT IS AGORAPHOBIA?

Agoraphobia is the fear of being in an enclosed place.

Examples of this could be:

- ❖ Crowds of people
- ❖ Confined spaces
- ❖ Public transport
- ❖ Being away from home
- ❖ Being home alone

People sometimes feel worried if they are far away from an exit. They might not be able to get out easily, for example if they are on a train and the doors are closed. They worry that they will lose control, faint or collapse if unable to escape.

People may be embarrassed to leave, for example, leaving friends in a busy restaurant, or pushing past people in the cinema or at a concert.

They feel trapped, and begin to imagine what might happen to them if they cannot escape the situation.

For example:

Mary has been asking her husband to get the shopping for the past three weeks. This has been since she collapsed at the supermarket on a busy Saturday. Recently she had been feeling poorly, and suddenly fainted. The experience had been so terrifying and embarrassed Mary so much that she felt great panic every time she thought about going to get the family groceries. Mary stays at home to avoid this happening, as it makes her feel better.

Sometimes people are able to put themselves in the feared situation but will do so with intense dread. They may find it easier to do these things when somebody is with them.

HOW THIS BOOKLET CAN HELP

If you think you may be suffering from agoraphobia, this booklet can:

1. Help you understand what keeps your fear and agoraphobia going
2. Show you how you can change this pattern and begin to tackle your fear

WHAT FEAR IS LIKE FOR YOU

Think about a time when you were very anxious

What I was anxious about

How did it make you feel? (Tick all that apply)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was shaking | <input type="checkbox"/> My hands were sweating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I felt faint | <input type="checkbox"/> I felt hot |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My heart was racing | <input type="checkbox"/> I felt sick |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My throat felt tight | |

WHAT DID YOU DO?

You may have stayed in the situation for as long as you could bear before leaving as quickly as possible. You probably experienced the horrible feelings the whole time as well, perhaps feeling they were getting worse as time went on. When you left this situation (reaching home for example) you probably felt great relief at reaching your 'safe' place.

What I did

.....

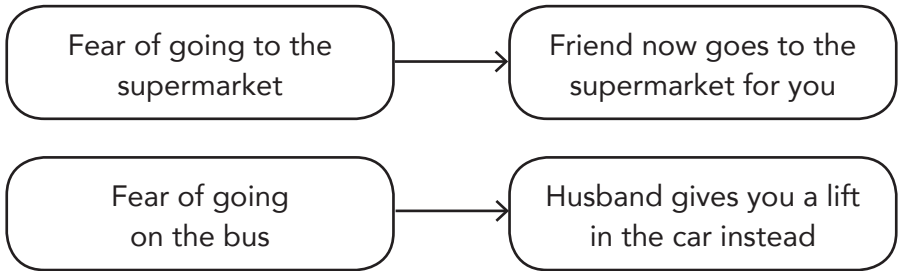
.....

.....

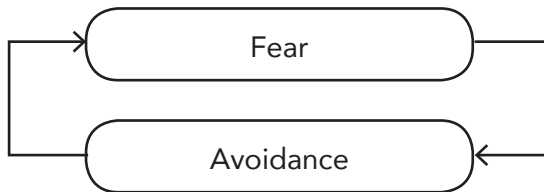
WHAT KEEPS YOUR FEAR AND AGORAPHOBIA GOING?

By leaving situations where you feel afraid you are showing yourself how much better it feels to get away. This leads to you wanting to avoid them altogether.

Whatever you are afraid of, you may have found yourself asking a partner, friend or relative to help you. For example:



The problem with this is that it becomes a comfort zone for you. It makes you feel better at the time but means you continue to avoid doing the thing(s) you are afraid of. The avoidance will keep on going and so the fear and avoidance become a vicious circle.



It is in this way that your fear keeps going.

HOW CAN YOU BREAK THE CYCLE?

If the avoidance is taken away, then gradually the fear will subside.

The aim is to break the vicious cycle

HOW TO BEGIN

Whether your agoraphobia is a specific fear of one thing (lifts, for example) or of many areas of life (for example supermarkets, buses and other confined spaces) your tackling of it should be exactly the same - **in small manageable steps**. It is important that you tackle one area at a time and at one stage at a time.

It will be most helpful to be honest with yourself about all areas of life that your agoraphobia is affecting. Think of the following examples and place a number next to them, showing how scary each situation would be for you (1 being the least scary and 10 the most).

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Going to the supermarket | <input type="checkbox"/> Sitting in a meeting or lecture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sitting in a cinema/theatre | <input type="checkbox"/> Walking alone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking a bus | <input type="checkbox"/> Going on a train journey |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eating in a café/restaurant | |

All that you have scored higher than one or two could probably do with being looked at. However, as mentioned before - **only deal with one at a time**.

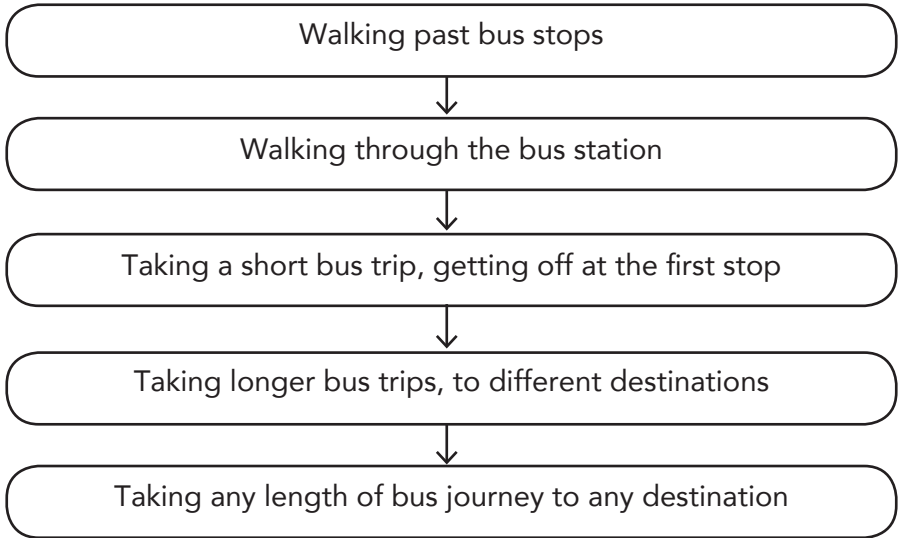
Example: Fear of travelling on a bus

The first step is to work out what you feel most scared of and what might not be so bad. For example, the thought of walking through the bus station might not be as terrifying as being on a bus on a long journey. Next, think about what you would like your goal to be. What would you like to be able to do, so that your agoraphobia was no longer affecting your life? In this example,

Goal: to be able to take a bus to Edinburgh without experiencing great anxiety.

Next, think of steps that could lead to your goal and put them in order. This means you can start by trying to achieve the less difficult task first, and in time you will be ready to move on to the next stage.

For example:



You might also want to try each step with a friend first before doing it on your own.

After each stage you should reward and praise yourself for what you have achieved.

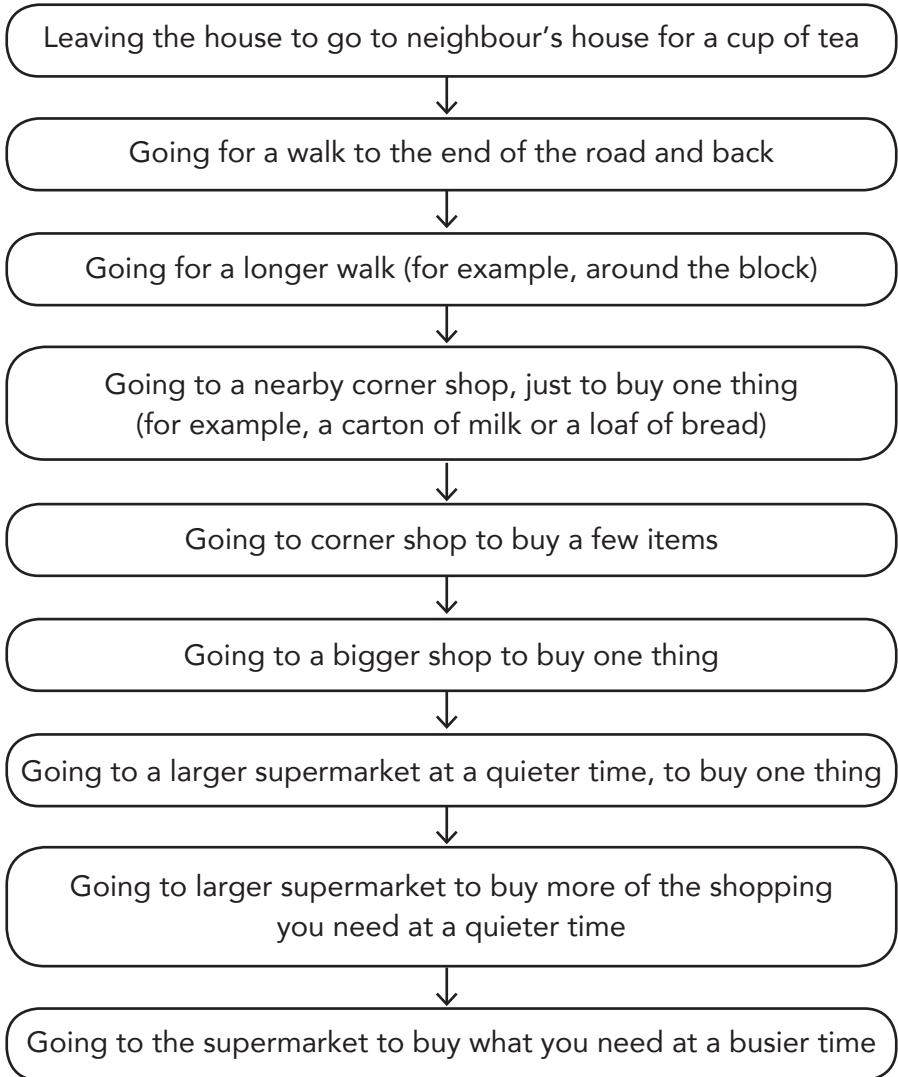
Example: Fear of leaving the house to go to the supermarket

Goal: To be able to do weekly shop in local supermarket

Felt most scared at the thought of: being in a large busy supermarket with really long queues

Might not be so bad to: Walk to the neighbour's house two doors down.

Suggested steps that could lead to goal:



It would be helpful to slow down as you walk around the shops. It can be tempting to rush, so that you can leave faster, but this only heightens the feelings of panic and tension. Again, you would probably find it helpful and supportive to try each of these stages with a friend first, before trying it on your own.

HOW TO CREATE YOUR OWN STEPS

Fear of:

My goal:

Feel most scared at the thought of:

Might not be so bad to:

Next, decide what your gradual steps to achieving this will be.
(Although there are five numbers here, you should split your goal up into as many steps as you can think of).

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.

You have now developed a plan for tackling your agoraphobia. Remember to treat yourself to a reward when you achieve each stage.

HOW FAMILY AND FRIENDS CAN HELP

The support of others in the treatment of agoraphobia is very helpful. Family and friends may know what can be difficult for you and so can help support you in doing day-to-day things. It might be helpful for friends/family to read this booklet also.

You may also find it helpful to keep a record of your practice, for example, listing the lengths of journeys you take and the specific destinations. This is both for you to see what progress you are making and to help in identifying any stumbling blocks.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

If you feel panicky

- ❖ Sit down somewhere/find somewhere to rest
- ❖ Use your three methods of coping – breathing, realistic thinking and distraction

The important part here is to try to **stay as near the place where these feelings started as possible.**

Practice is likely to be frightening, boring at times, and hard work. It is very important, however, to stick at it and praise and reward yourself for all your achievements. If this can be done then the

FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT:

Useful Contacts

For information on mental services, supports, opportunities or self-help information call:

- ❖ North Lanarkshire: Well Informed 0800 073 0918
- ❖ South Lanarkshire: Lanarkshire Association for Mental Health Information Line: 0330 3000 133

For further information on mental health and well-being, visit Lanarkshire's Element website: www.element.org.uk

Remember, should your problems persist or you feel you need help urgently please contact your GP. The following organisations can also prove useful in and out of hours.

- ❖ **Breathing Space** - 0800 83 85 87
(Mon - Thu, 6pm - 2am; Fri 6pm - Mon 6am)
www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk
- ❖ **Samaritans** - 116 123 (24hrs) www.samaritans.org
- ❖ **NHS24** - 111 (Out of hours) www.nhs24.com
- ❖ **Healthy Working Lives** - 08452 300 323 (Local),
0800 019 2211 (National),
www.healthyworkinglives.com
- ❖ **Childline** - 0800 11 11 (24hrs) www.childline.org.uk
- ❖ **NHS Inform** - 0800 22 44 88 www.nhsinform.co.uk
- ❖ **Parentline Scotland** - 0808 800 22 22
www.children1st.org.uk/parentline
- ❖ **National Debt Line Scotland** - 0808 808 4000
www.nationaldebtline.co.uk/scotland
- ❖ **National Domestic Abuse Helpline** - 0800 027 1234

WHAT IS WELL CONNECTED?

Well Connected is a programme in Lanarkshire, sometimes referred to as social prescribing or community referral. It makes it easier for us and people we know to take part in and benefit from activities and services that we know improve our well-being which means how we feel about ourselves and our lives. There are a number of Well Connected areas available to us and we can benefit from more than one:

- ❖ Physical activity and leisure opportunities
- ❖ Volunteering
- ❖ Employment
- ❖ Arts and culture
- ❖ Benefits, welfare and debt advice
- ❖ Learning opportunities
- ❖ Calm Distress online course
- ❖ Health Walks
- ❖ Mindfulness Classes.

For information on any of the above call:

- ❖ North Lanarkshire: Well Informed 0800 073 0918
- ❖ South Lanarkshire: Lanarkshire Association for Mental Health Information Line: 0330 3000 133
- ❖ Visit: www.elament.org.uk/self-help-resources/well-connected-programme.aspx

HEALTHY READING

All public libraries have a healthy reading section making it easier to access mental health and well-being leaflets, books, CDs, DVDs and web-based support. All libraries across Lanarkshire have resources to help us get the most from life such as living life to the full, sleeping better and becoming more confident or overcoming and coping with mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, stress, dementia and panic. There are also resources for all ages including supporting young people, adults and older people as well as items on positive parenting. Simply pop into your local library.

GUIDED SUPPORT:

Calm Distress

Calm Distress is a new online course from NHS Lanarkshire Psychological Services, designed for you to use in your own time and at your own pace. It is all about understanding emotions and wellbeing, during Covid-19 and beyond. It is open - and free - to all adults who have a Lanarkshire GP.

Over five friendly sessions, Calm Distress will help you learn new ways to cope with difficult thoughts and feelings. Each session lasts about 20 minutes, giving you lots of useful information in the time it takes to drink a cup of tea.

You can access Calm Distress through the NHS Lanarkshire Mind Matters website:

www.lanarkshiremindmatters.scot.nhs.uk

Living Life to the Full - Online Course

Living Life to The Full is a free web-based life skills course that aims to help us tackle and respond to issues/demands which we all meet in our everyday lives. It will explore issues such as understanding why we feel the way we do, problem solving, noticing and challenging unhelpful thoughts and behaviours and anxiety control. You can register for the course at **www.lltff.com** and complete as many or as few modules as you wish.

If you feel you need additional help, the Living Life to The Full course is also available with support from self help coaches (via Action on Depression Scotland). To find out more visit **www.aod.lltffionline.co.uk**

Living Life: Guided Self Help and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy - Telephone Support

Living Life is a free telephone support service for people suffering from low mood, mild to moderate depression, symptoms of anxiety or a combination of both. Trained Self-help coaches and therapists will guide us through a range of workbooks over a series of telephone sessions. For more information or to make a telephone appointment, call **0800 328 9655** (Mon–Fri 1–9pm).

CONFIDENTIALITY AND THE USE OF PATIENT INFORMATION

NHS Lanarkshire take care to ensure your personal information is only accessible to authorised people. Our staff have a legal and contractual duty to keep personal health information secure, and confidential. In order to find out more about current data protection legislation and how we process your information, please visit the Data Protection Notice on our website at www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk or ask a member of staff for a copy of our Data Protection Notice.

NHS Lanarkshire - for local services and the latest health news visit www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk
NHS Lanarkshire General Enquiry Line: 0300 30 30 243

NHS inform - The national health information service for Scotland. www.nhsinform.co.uk
Tel No: 0800 22 44 88

If you need this information in another language or format, please e-mail: Translation. Services@lanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk



www.careopinion.org.uk

Adapted with permission from information produced by NHS Borders

Pub. date:	December 2022
Review date:	December 2024
Issue No:	04
Produced by:	MMMHP
Clinical Lead:	

PIL.AGORAP.13447.P
22_27624