

LESSON 3

Safety Behaviours

Protection That Prevents New Learning

Use this companion after watching the video.

You will identify what your protective actions are trying to prevent, then reduce one of them in a manageable situation. The purpose is to let your brain observe what happens without relying fully on the protection.

Do not remove genuine legal, medical, professional or physical-safety measures. Choose anxiety-driven social protection only.

Predict. Test. Observe. Learn.

The short-term relief loop

The action may feel useful because relief arrives quickly. That does not tell us what would have happened without it.

1 THREAT PREDICTION

'I will go blank.' 'They will see me shake.' 'I will look incompetent.'

2 PROTECTION

Rehearse, hide, rush, grip, check, keep answers short, avoid or escape.

3 SHORT-TERM EFFECT

The demand or uncertainty reduces. Relief may follow.

4 ATTRIBUTION

'Nothing bad happened because I protected myself.'

5 MISSED TEST

The brain does not observe whether the feared outcome would happen without the protection.

6 NEXT PREDICTION

The situation still feels dangerous and the protection feels necessary next time.

Relief is real. Its explanation may be wrong.

A controlled experiment separates what the protection did from what you were already capable of handling.

What do you do to feel less exposed?

List actions by function. Include things done privately in your mind, not only what another person could see.

VISIBLE OR BEHAVIOURAL PROTECTIONS

Examples: phone use, gripping, rushing, staying at the edge, speaking quietly, leaving early.

INTERNAL PROTECTIONS

Examples: rehearsing, reviewing, monitoring your voice, suppressing thoughts, memorising sentences.

AVOIDANCE, DELAY OR ESCAPE

Examples: cancelling, not replying, arriving late, choosing only familiar people, ending quickly.

WHAT BECOMES HARDER BECAUSE OF THESE PROTECTIONS?

Attention, listening, spontaneity, memory, breathing, connection or learning.

Identify the job of one protection

Use a specific recent situation. The same action can be sensible in one context and a safety behaviour in another.

SITUATION

Where were you, who was present and what were you doing?

THE ACTION OR MENTAL STRATEGY

What did you do before, during or immediately afterwards?

FEARED OUTCOME

What exactly was the action meant to prevent, conceal or help you escape?

IF I DID NOT DO IT...

What did you predict would happen? Make this precise enough to observe.

SHORT-TERM EFFECT

What changed immediately: anxiety, uncertainty, visibility or the demand itself?

LIKELY LONG-TERM LESSON

What might your brain conclude about the danger and the need for protection?

Plan one controlled experiment

Choose one manageable situation and reduce one protection. Do not turn this into a test of bravery or perfect performance.

SITUATION

What will you do, where, and with whom?

PRECISE PREDICTION

If you reduce the protection, what do you predict will happen?

BELIEF BEFORE (0-100%)

How strongly do you believe this prediction?

PROTECTION TO REDUCE

Choose one only.

HOW I WILL REDUCE IT

Describe a specific change. Example: one natural pause rather than rehearsing every sentence.

OBSERVABLE EVIDENCE

What could a camera or microphone capture if the feared outcome occurred?

HOW I WILL AVOID COMPENSATING

What new protection might appear, and what will I do instead?

SUCCESS TARGET

Enter, reduce the selected protection, observe and record. Anxiety may rise or fall; neither result decides whether the experiment was useful.

Record two tests

Complete the first record even if the event felt awkward. Accurate evidence is more useful than reassurance.

EXPERIMENT 1

WHAT I DID AND WHICH PROTECTION I REDUCED

WHAT WAS OBSERVABLE

What actually happened, including any awkward moment?

BELIEF AFTERWARDS (0-100%)

WHAT THE BRAIN CAN LEARN

Compare prediction with evidence without promising certainty.

EXPERIMENT 2

WHAT I DID AND WHICH PROTECTION I REDUCED

WHAT WAS OBSERVABLE

What actually happened, including any awkward moment?

BELIEF AFTERWARDS (0-100%)

WHAT THE BRAIN CAN LEARN

Compare prediction with evidence without promising certainty.

How to use the result

The experiment is not a performance review. It is a way of updating a prediction.

IF ANXIETY STAYED HIGH

Ask whether the feared outcome occurred as predicted and what you managed while anxiety was present.

IF ANXIETY FELL

Do not assume the protection caused the relief. Ask what happened after you reduced it.

IF SOMETHING AWKWARD HAPPENED

Describe it accurately. Did it have the predicted consequence? Could you cope or recover without the usual protection?

IF YOU ADDED ANOTHER PROTECTION

That is useful information. Repeat with the compensating action named in advance.

IF THE TASK WAS TOO DIFFICULT

Reduce the difficulty or the size of the change. Keep the prediction testable.

READY TO CONTINUE

- ☐ I watched the full lesson.
- ☐ I identified visible, internal and avoidant protection.
- ☐ I completed at least one experiment record.

Check your understanding

Choose one answer for each question. This is a learning check, not a diagnostic or symptom test.

1. What makes an action a safety behaviour?

- ☐ A. Other people can see it.
- ☐ B. It always reduces anxiety immediately.
- ☐ C. Its function is to prevent, conceal or escape a feared social outcome.
- ☐ D. It is an unusual or irrational action.

2. Why can short-term relief keep social anxiety going?

- ☐ A. Relief proves that the situation was harmless.
- ☐ B. The brain may conclude that the protection prevented danger.
- ☐ C. Relief makes people pay more attention to you.
- ☐ D. Anxiety should never fall during an experiment.

3. Which is an internal safety behaviour?

- ☐ A. Mentally rehearsing each sentence while another person is speaking.
- ☐ B. Leaving a building during a fire alarm.
- ☐ C. Reading the agenda before a meeting.
- ☐ D. Following a clinician's medical advice.

4. What is the strongest first experiment?

- ☐ A. Remove every protection in the hardest situation available.
- ☐ B. Wait until anxiety is low and then perform perfectly.
- ☐ C. Reduce one selected protection in a manageable situation and observe what happens.
- ☐ D. Ask several people afterwards whether you appeared anxious.

5. Which outcome would count as useful learning?

- ☐ A. Anxiety remained, but the precise feared outcome did not occur as predicted.
- ☐ B. Anxiety reached zero before the interaction ended.
- ☐ C. Everyone clearly approved of the learner.
- ☐ D. The learner performed without any pause or awkward moment.

6. Which protection should not be dropped for this exercise?

- ☐ A. Keeping answers short so nobody notices anxiety.
- ☐ B. Holding a cup tightly to hide a tremor.
- ☐ C. Rehearsing a greeting repeatedly to avoid a pause.
- ☐ D. A genuine legal, medical, professional or physical-safety measure.

Answers and explanations

Use the explanation, not merely the letter, to check what you understood.

1. C The same action can be ordinary or protective. Its psychological job, and the feared consequence attached to not doing it, determine whether it is functioning as a safety behaviour.

2. B If safety is attributed to the protective action, the original prediction is not properly tested and the protection feels necessary next time.

3. A Mental rehearsal can be used to prevent pauses or mistakes. Internal protections are easy to miss because they happen privately, but they can still divide attention and block learning.

4. C Changing one carefully chosen variable in a manageable situation produces interpretable evidence without turning the exercise into a test of endurance.

5. A The target is updated prediction, not perfect performance or complete calm. Anxiety can be present while new evidence is gathered.

6. D The lesson concerns anxiety-driven social protection. It does not ask learners to ignore genuine safety requirements, professional standards or medical advice.

KEEP YOUR EXPERIMENT RECORD

Lesson 4 will help you turn anticipatory worry into precise, testable predictions before the next social situation.