

Identifying Your Safety Crutches

You Should Know

Using safety crutches to deal with your anxiety or other psychological problem may provide temporary relief, but in the long run it does not help. When you use physical crutches for a broken ankle or leg, the crutches take the weight off your leg and keep you from experiencing the physical pain, allowing your leg to heal. However, psychological pain is different. Avoiding your psychological pain rather than facing it and accepting it, will likely prolong your problems.

Does This Sound Like You?

Do you use any of these common safety crutches?

- **Disassociation:** When Trevor was feeling anxious before a meeting, he would pretend that he was someone who was confident and assertive. However, as soon as the meeting started or someone mentioned his name he found it hard to even breathe.
- **Denial:** Damian worried constantly about his health and would always think he had the worst disease possible. Even if he had a slight headache he would think that he had a brain tumor. But if someone asked him if something was wrong, he would just say “no, I feel great,” and so he kept his worries to himself.
- **Excessive information seeking:** Sharon was worried about her daughter being bullied in school, so she scoured the internet on a daily basis for information and called her daughter’s teacher for an update several times a week.
- **Obsessive checking:** After Craig was robbed he couldn’t leave the house without checking that it was locked at least three or four times. Then he started checking to see if he locked his car, if he shut off his computer, and if he locked his office desk. He always needed to check things at least three times.
- **Rituals:** Carrie was always worried about taking a test. She felt that she had to wear the same clothes every time she took a test or she would fail. If she couldn’t find the exact outfit she needed to wear, she would start to feel like she was having a panic attack.
- **Procrastination:** David was worried about getting his term paper done on time, but instead of just working on it, he would watch Netflix all evening and plan on doing it the next day. Whenever there was something he worried about, David just put off doing it.
- **List making:** Marcus made a list of everything he had to do each day and would check it constantly throughout the day. His list had every detail of his day even brushing his teeth and taking a shower.
- **Excessive reassurance:** Elizabeth was planning her first trip abroad and kept thinking about all the things that could go wrong. She called her parents several times a day to talk about her fears and worries.

- Impulsiveness: David had a difficult time asking women out for a date. However, if he met someone new at the office or at a bar, he would immediately ask her if she were available. None of the women he talked to seemed at all interested in him.
- Doing everything yourself: Every time that Nora had people coming over to the house she had to clean it completely. Her husband and her teenage children asked if they could help, but Nora was worried that they might not do a good job.
- Doing everything for others: Sharon was worried that her middle school daughter was not going to get good grades, so she did many of her daughter's school assignments herself.
- Self-Medication: Vanessa carried a small bottle of vodka in her purse and took a "shot" every time she had to ride in an elevator.
- Bad habits: Tara worried that her boyfriend was seeing another woman, and the only thing that kept her from thinking about this was shopping.

Write down the two or three safety crutches you use most. You can choose from the list or write in other psychological safety crutches that you use.

Describe a recent situation where you used a safety crutch to deal with your anxiety or other problems.

Describe what you think might have happened if you didn't use a safety crutch.

Did you ever try to stop using one of these safety crutches? What happened?

Think About It

What would it take to give up your safety crutches?

What is the worst thing that would happen if you didn't use a safety crutch?

Think of a time that you will try facing your problems without using a safety crutch. Mark down a date and time you will try this on your calendar.

Write down anything that might get in the way of trying this "experiment."

After you try it, write down what happened.
