Identifying Your Safety Crutches

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.

Do you use any of these common safety crutches?

*Disassociation*
When Trevor was feeling anxious before a meeting, he would pretend 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. If he had even a slight headache, he would think 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 had locked his car, if he had shut off his computer, and if he had 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*
Seth 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, Seth 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
Jordan 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
Nora had to clean her house completely every time she had people coming over. 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
Alice 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.

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

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Describe what you think might have happened if you had not used a safety crutch.

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

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For one week, write down each time you use a psychological safety crutch and what happened as a result of using the safety crutch.

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Type of safety crutch</th>
<th>What happened?</th>
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What would it take to give up your safety crutches?

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

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Think of a situation when 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.”

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After you try it, write down what happened.

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How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in this area of your psychological growth?
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