

Panic Cycle Worksheet

Map the loop between body sensations, interpretations, fear and the responses that follow. The goal is to understand the cycle - not force every sensation to disappear.

Safety note: New, severe, unfamiliar or unexplained physical symptoms should not automatically be assumed to be panic. Seek appropriate medical care when needed.

1 Notice -> 2 Map the cycle -> 3 Choose a response

COMPLETED EXAMPLE

Trigger or first change

What was happening when the episode began? What did you first notice?

I was waiting to present in a quarterly team meeting. Two minutes before my turn, my heart suddenly started pounding.

Body sensations

What did you notice physically? Describe sensations before interpreting them.

Heart pounding; shallow-feeling breathing; tingling in my fingers; light-headed; hot face.

Meaning / interpretation

What did your mind say the sensations meant?

"I am going to faint in front of everyone. If this gets worse, I will lose control and embarrass myself."

Fear / attention shift

How intense did fear become? What did your attention lock onto?

Fear rose to about 90/100. I started monitoring every heartbeat and checking whether the room looked blurry.

What I did in response

Escape, avoidance, checking, reassurance, coping, or another action.

I stepped into the hallway, checked my pulse several times, drank water, and asked a colleague to present before me.

Short-term effect

What happened to anxiety immediately after your response?

Relief was immediate. Anxiety dropped from about 90/100 to 55/100 after I left the room.

What might this teach me?

What message could my brain learn from what happened next?

"A fast heartbeat means I am in danger, and I need to escape or check my pulse before I can cope."

A different response to test next time

Choose something proportionate and safe. The aim is learning, not forcing maximum distress or perfect calm.

Because I have previously had similar episodes medically assessed, I could stay seated for two minutes, keep my feet on the floor, let my breathing stay comfortable, and describe the sensations without adding the prediction that I will faint. If symptoms are unfamiliar or concerning, I would seek medical help instead.