

# Fear Hierarchy for Kids

This worksheet is designed to help you and your child overcome their fears, one small step at a time. Start by helping them identify their primary fear, then break the fear down in to smaller examples and have your child rate each from least to most anxiety-provoking. Next, you and your child will tackle each example together, starting with the least anxiety-provoking. As you work through each example, your child's nervous system will begin to break the connection between the fear and their anxiety symptoms.

## STEP 1: What is your primary fear?

*Example: Fear of thunderstorms*

## STEP 2: List smaller challenges that are related to your primary fear

*Looking at the weather app on Mom's phone*

*Standing outside in the rain (with no thunderstorm present)*

*Seeing a thunderstorm in a movie or TV show*

*Seeing and hearing a thunderstorm through a window*

*Hearing loud noises that are like thunder (construction noise)*

*Watching the weather forecast*

*Opening the front door and looking outside during a thunderstorm*

## STEP 3: Rate these challenges with the Anxiety Scale

Challenges That Trigger Your Fear	Anxiety Level
<i>Looking at the weather app on Mom's phone</i>	2
<i>Standing outside in the rain (with no thunderstorm present)</i>	6
<i>Seeing a thunderstorm in a movie or TV show</i>	4
<i>Seeing and hearing a thunderstorm through a window</i>	7
<i>Hearing loud noises that are like thunder (construction noise)</i>	5
<i>Watching the weather forecast</i>	3
<i>Opening the front door and looking outside during a thunderstorm</i>	8

### Anxiety Scale

10 panic

9 

8 fearful

7 

6 afraid

5 

4 worried

3 

2 okay

1 

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# Fear Hierarchy for Kids

## STEP 4: Prepare for challenges

What makes this technique effective is **staying in the situation until your child's anxiety naturally comes down on its own**. This process is what helps your child's nervous system to learn that the feared situation is tolerable (and teaches your child's mind that situations are not as scary as they may think!).

As you can imagine, facing your fears and waiting for your anxiety to come down is difficult! So here are two ways to prepare for the challenge.

### List effective coping skills in case they're needed

If a situation is far more challenging than anticipated, you and your child may need to use coping skills like taking a break, deep breathing, listening to music, hugs, or taking a walk. List effective coping skills for your child to the right.

*deep breaths, favorite song, hugs*

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### Plan some appropriate rewards

Facing fears takes practice and motivation! Use the space to the right to consider small, appropriate rewards you are willing to give like stickers, tokens towards a larger reward, small treats, or similar.

*tokens for new stuffed animal, LEGO*

.....

*stickers, hot chocolate*

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.....

## STEP 5: Plan your challenges and rewards, starting with the least scary

Challenges That Trigger Your Fear	Anxiety Level	Reward Per Try
<i>Looking at the weather app on Mom's phone</i>	2	<i>sticker</i>
<i>Watching the weather forecast</i>	3	<i>sticker</i>
<i>Seeing a thunderstorm in a movie or TV show</i>	4	<i>token towards toy</i>
<i>Hearing loud noises that are like thunder (construction noise)</i>	5	<i>token towards toy</i>
<i>Standing outside in the rain (with no thunderstorm present)</i>	6	<i>token towards toy</i>
<i>Seeing and hearing a thunderstorm through a window</i>	7	<i>treat</i>
<i>Opening the front door and looking outside during a thunderstorm</i>	8	<i>treat</i>






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# Fear Hierarchy for Kids

## STEP 3: Do challenges together and record your progress

At the beginning of each challenge, use the Anxiety Scale to help your child rate their anxiety. Your goal together is to **stay in the scary situation until your child's anxiety naturally comes down on its own**. Every so often through the challenge, ask your child to re-rate their anxiety. You can stop the challenge when their anxiety has come down significantly (at least halfway). Unless a challenge is much too difficult or your child gets really stuck, try not to use coping skills. When the same challenge causes less *starting* anxiety, you'll know your child is ready to move on to the next.

Date	Challenges That Trigger Your Fear	Anxiety At:		Anxiety Scale
		Start	End	
May 3	Looking at the weather app on Mom's phone	2	1	10 panic
May 4	Looking at the weather app on Mom's phone	1	1	9 
May 5	Watching the weather forecast	1	1	8 fearful
May 6	Seeing a thunderstorm in a movie or TV show	5	2	7 
May 7	Seeing a thunderstorm in a movie or TV show	4	1	6 afraid
May 8	Seeing a thunderstorm in a movie or TV show	2	1	5 
May 9	Hearing loud noises that are like thunder (construction noise)	7	6	4 worried
May 10	Hearing loud noises that are like thunder (construction noise)	5	2	3 
May 11	Hearing loud noises that are like thunder (construction noise)	3	1	2 okay
May 12	Hearing loud noises that are like thunder (construction noise)	2	1	1 
May 13	Standing outside in the rain (with no thunderstorm present)	6	2	

As you work through the challenges, use these spaces to reflect and adjust if needed.

How does it feel to "wait out" anxiety with my child?	Do any of the challenges need to be adjusted?	Are rewards and coping skills (if necessary) working?
<p><i>It was initially hard for me to see my child experiencing anxiety.</i></p> <p><i>After a few challenges, it became slightly easier for me to tolerate.</i></p>	<p><i>May 9: construction noise downtown was way too scary.</i></p> <p><i>May 10: construction noise at the park worked better.</i></p>	<p><i>May 6: Tokens towards a stuffed animal seem to be working well.</i></p> <p><i>May 9: needed to use coping skills for downtown construction noise.</i></p> <p><i>Deep breathing worked okay, but listening to music worked better.</i></p>

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# Fear Hierarchy for Kids

## OPTIONAL: Create a Worry Monster or Progress Bar

If they would like, help your child draw a “Worry Monster” that represents their fear. As they complete each challenge, cover the Worry Monster with a sticker. As the challenges add up, the Worry Monster will be slowly covered up and defeated.

### My Worry Monster



Kids may also enjoy creating a progress chart similar to an Experience Points (XP) bar in a videogame. For each challenge, they can color in a section and watch their progress grow.

### Challenge Progress Bar



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## STEP 1: What is your primary fear?

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## STEP 2: List smaller challenges that are related to your primary fear

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## STEP 3: Rate these challenges with the Anxiety Scale

Challenges That Trigger Your Fear	Anxiety Level
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### Anxiety Scale

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### Plan some appropriate rewards

Facing fears takes practice and motivation! Use the space to the right to consider small, appropriate rewards you are willing to give like stickers, tokens towards a larger reward, small treats, or similar.

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## STEP 5: Plan your challenges and rewards, starting with the least scary

Challenges That Trigger Your Fear	Anxiety Level	Reward Per Try
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At the beginning of each challenge, use the Anxiety Scale to help your child rate their anxiety. Your goal together is to **stay in the scary situation until your child's anxiety naturally comes down on its own**. Every so often through the challenge, ask your child to re-rate their anxiety. You can stop the challenge when their anxiety has come down significantly (at least halfway). Unless a challenge is much too difficult or your child gets really stuck, try not to use coping skills. When the same challenge causes less *starting* anxiety, you'll know your child is ready to move on to the next.

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		Start	End
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**Anxiety Scale**

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As you work through the challenges, use these spaces to reflect and adjust if needed.

<p><b>How does it feel to “wait out” anxiety with my child?</b></p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>	<p><b>Do any of the challenges need to be adjusted?</b></p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>	<p><b>Are rewards and coping skills (if necessary) working?</b></p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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### Challenge Progress Bar

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# Additional Resources to Support Your Mental Health Journey

It can be hard to know where to begin looking for support in your mental health journey. Getting a referral from a primary care physician is a reliable first step. Also, sometimes family and friends have experienced similar issues and have professionals they would recommend. The experts at ChoosingTherapy.com are here to help as well, with resources we have reviewed and recommend. Our [strict editorial standards](#) ensure our reviews are fair, honest, thorough, and based on firsthand experience.

## You Can Trust ChoosingTherapy.com



**325+**  
Companies Reviewed



**3,625+**  
Hours of Firsthand Experience



**1,545+**  
Data Points Analyzed



### [Best Online Therapy](#)

Online therapy is a convenient way to connect with a licensed therapist to address mental health issues, reduce unhealthy behaviors, develop effective coping skills, and get more satisfaction out of life. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.

### [Best Online Psychiatry](#)

Online psychiatry providers enable patients to consult with licensed psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. They can evaluate, diagnose, and prescribe medication to help manage mental health issues. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.



### [Best Mental Health Apps](#)

Apps can be great way to monitor mood, track sleep, journal, and practice healthy coping skills like mindfulness and meditation. There are apps specifically designed to help people reduce the symptoms of depression, anxiety, ADHD, chronic stress, and burnout.

### [Therapist Directory](#)

When you're looking for a mental health provider with a very particular skill set, level of experience, or personality type, a therapist directory can be very helpful. Using the filters, you can refine your search until you find a therapist who feels like a perfect fit.

