

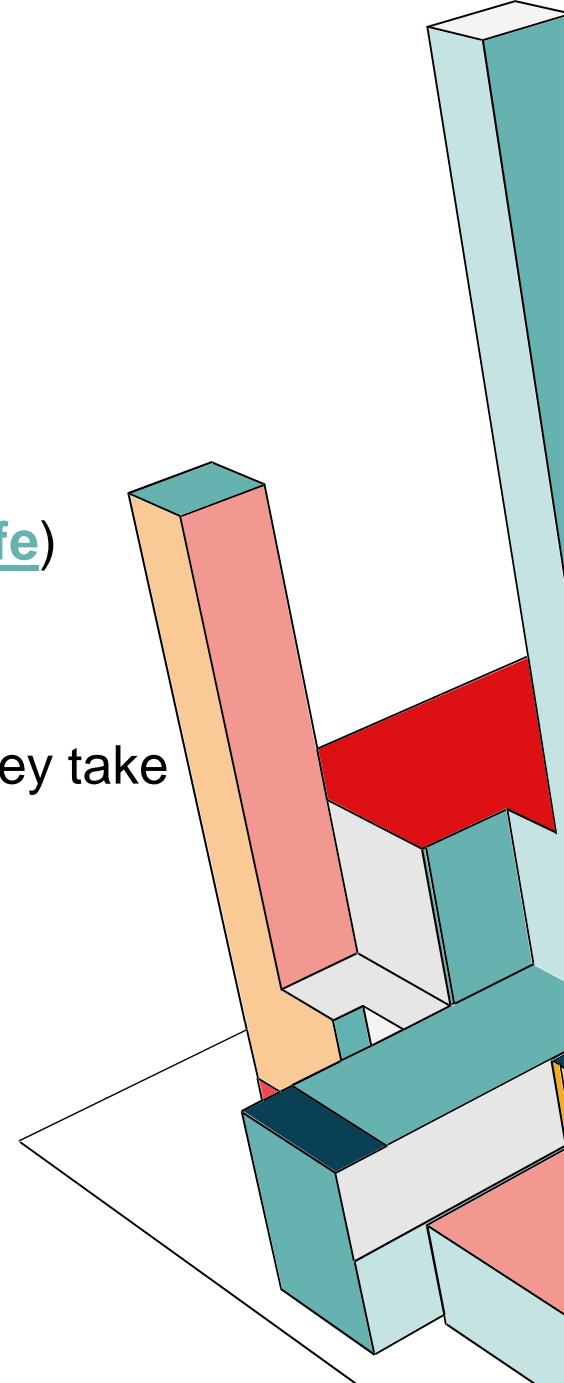
# **SAFETY BEHAVIORS**

# WHAT ARE SAFETY BEHAVIORS?

- Things we do or say to **temporarily reduce uncomfortable feelings**
- After experiencing trauma, safety behaviors can develop as an attempt to **control our emotions or reduce perceived threat** in distressing (**but safe**) situations where immediate escape or avoidance is not possible
- Like avoidance, safety behaviors reduce distress in the **short-term**, but they take away your control in the long-term

## Importantly...

- Safety behaviors **reduce the effectiveness of exposures!**

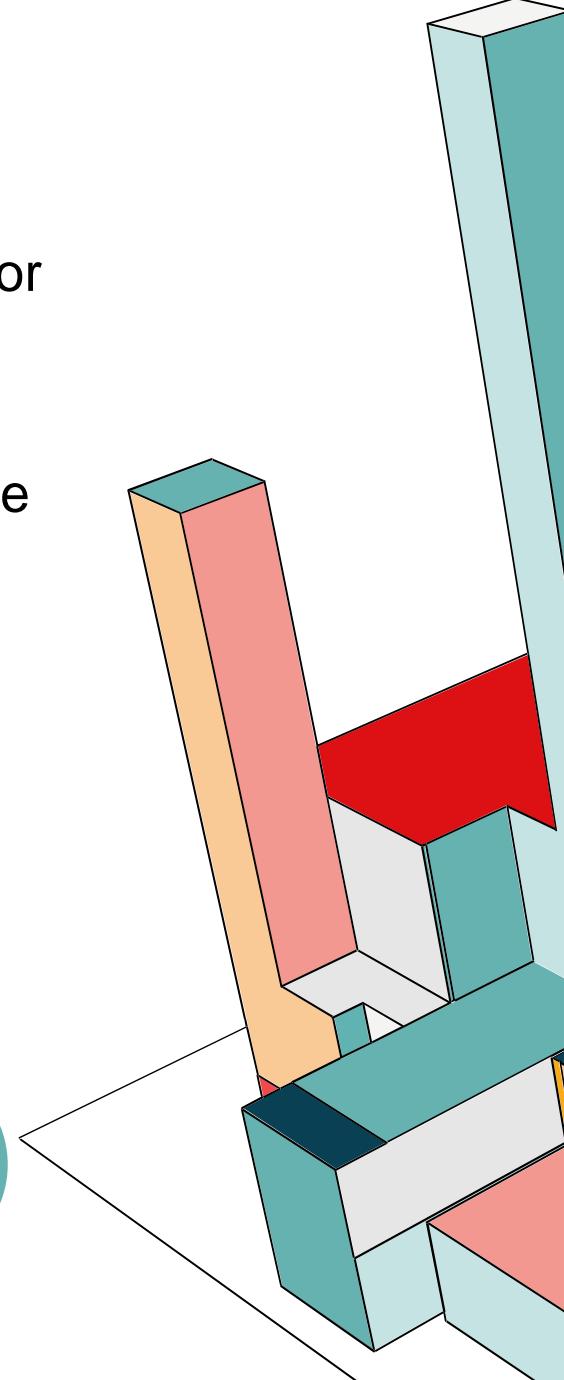
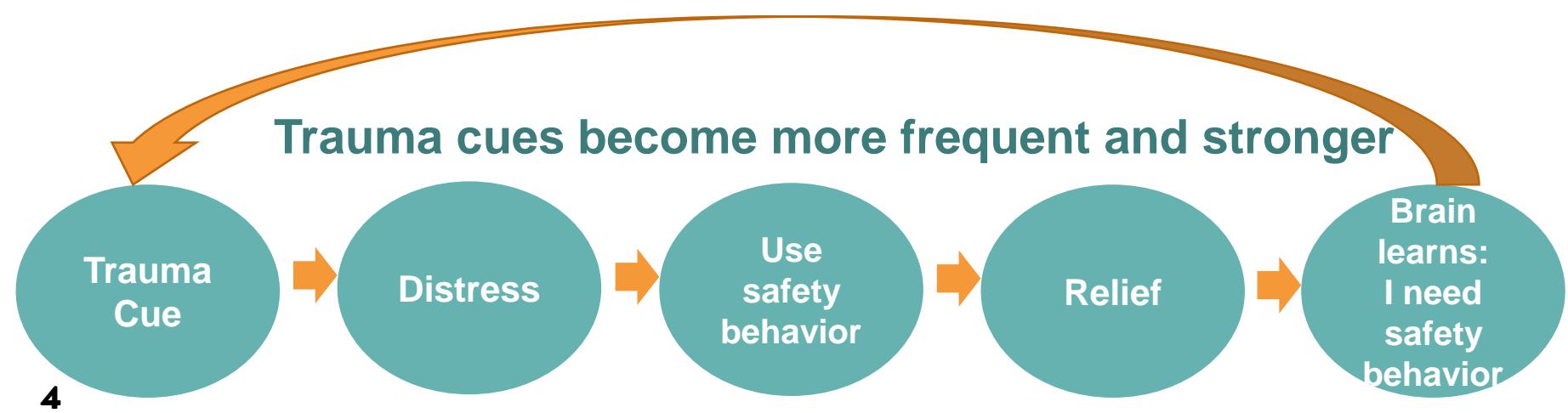


# EXAMPLES OF SAFETY BEHAVIORS

<b>Behavior(s)</b>	<b>Fear this safety behavior is trying to control</b>
Not sharing my own opinions in group	That I might say something embarrassing and feel ashamed
Scanning the environment for potential threats, checking for exits (ex. in stores or restaurants), and making mental escape plans	That something bad could happen and I would have no way of escaping
Carrying pepper spray when I go out	That I could be attacked or raped again
Checking repeatedly that doors and windows are locked	That someone could break in in the middle of the night and harm me
Wearing headphones/listening to music in store	That I can't handle my emotions/thoughts
Bring support person/animal out with me	That I can't keep myself safe or handle my emotions
<u>Others?</u>	

## HOW DO SAFETY BEHAVIORS MAINTAIN PTSD?

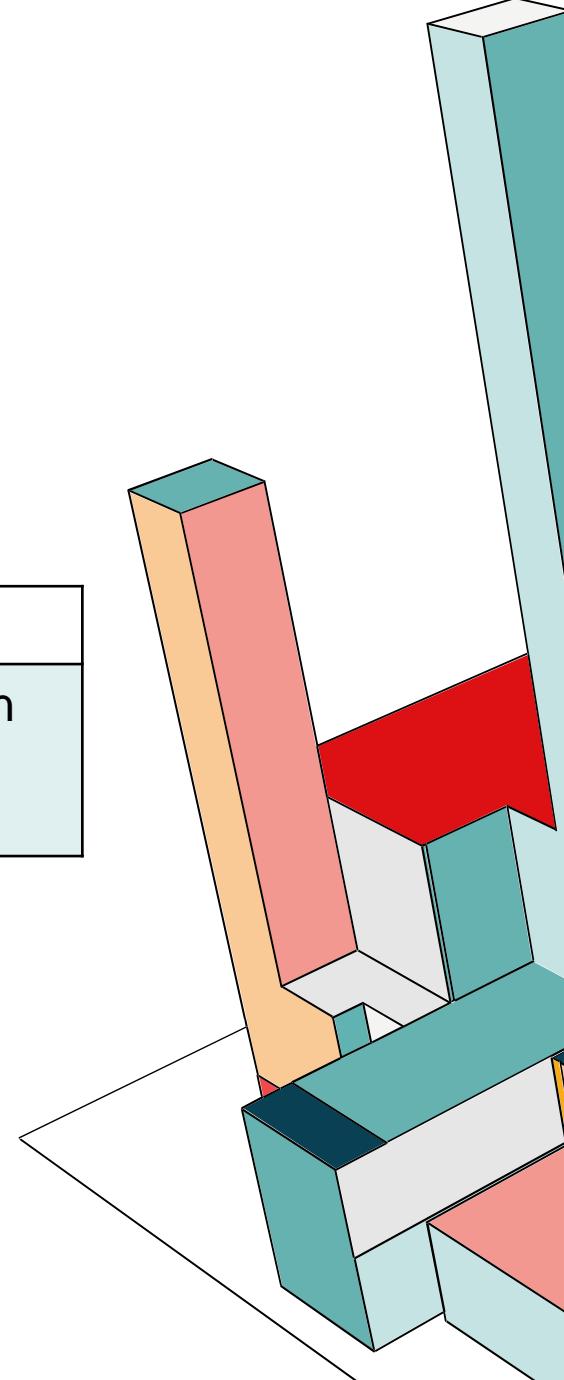
- Safety behaviors reinforce the idea that a relatively safe situation, activity, or person is dangerous unless you use the safety behavior
- We often feel that we *need* the safety behavior more and more because the sense of threat never really disappears, and we don't learn that **we can handle difficult situations on our own** or that the situation itself is safe.

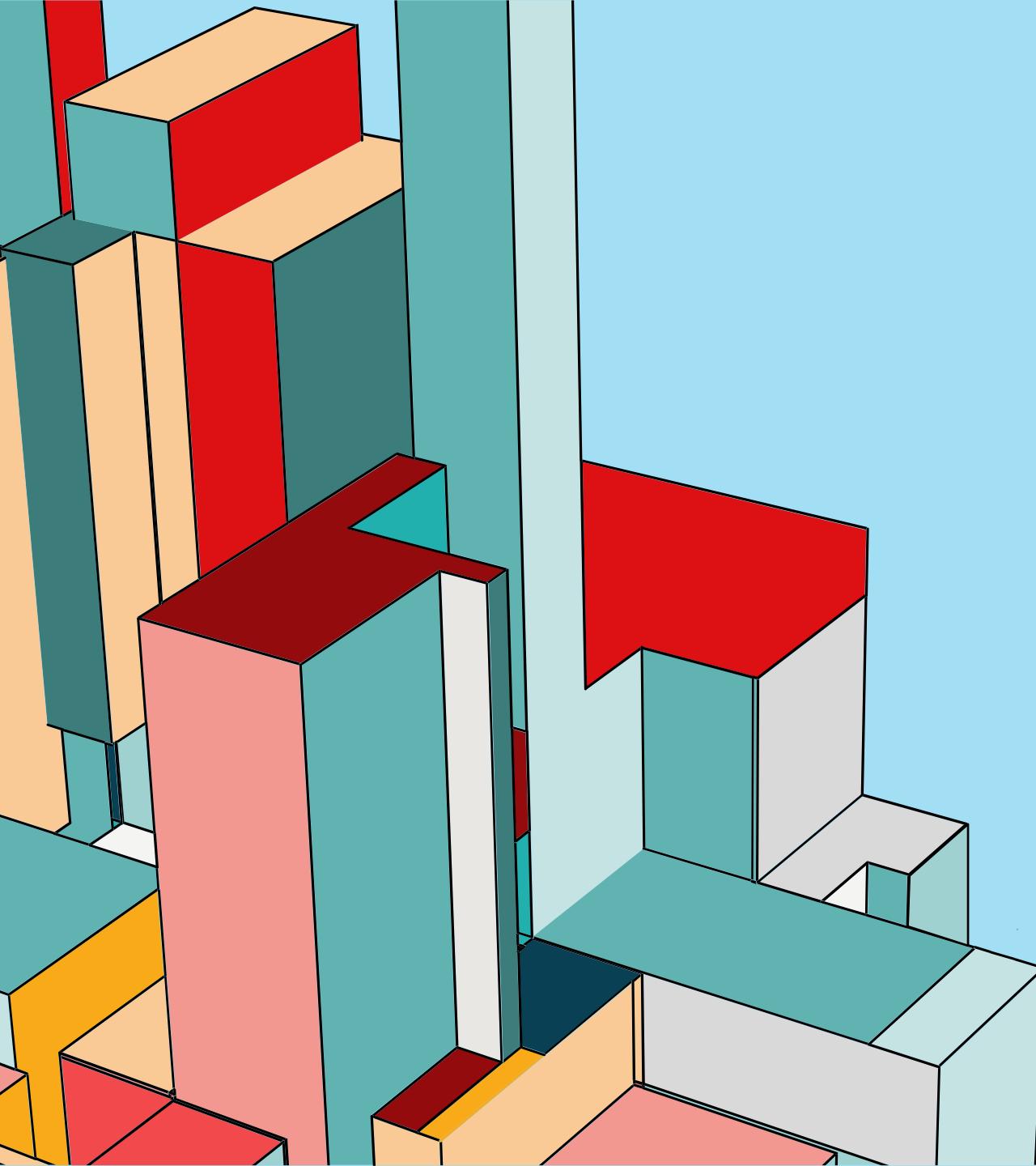


## **WHEN IS A BEHAVIOR A SAFETY BEHAVIOR?**

- A safety behavior in one situation isn't necessarily a safety behavior in another:
- For example:

<b>Safety Behavior</b>	<b>Helpful behavior</b>
Using alcohol, drugs, or medications to “take the edge off” when you’re anxious	Taking a daily mental health medication as prescribed for anxiety or depressed mood

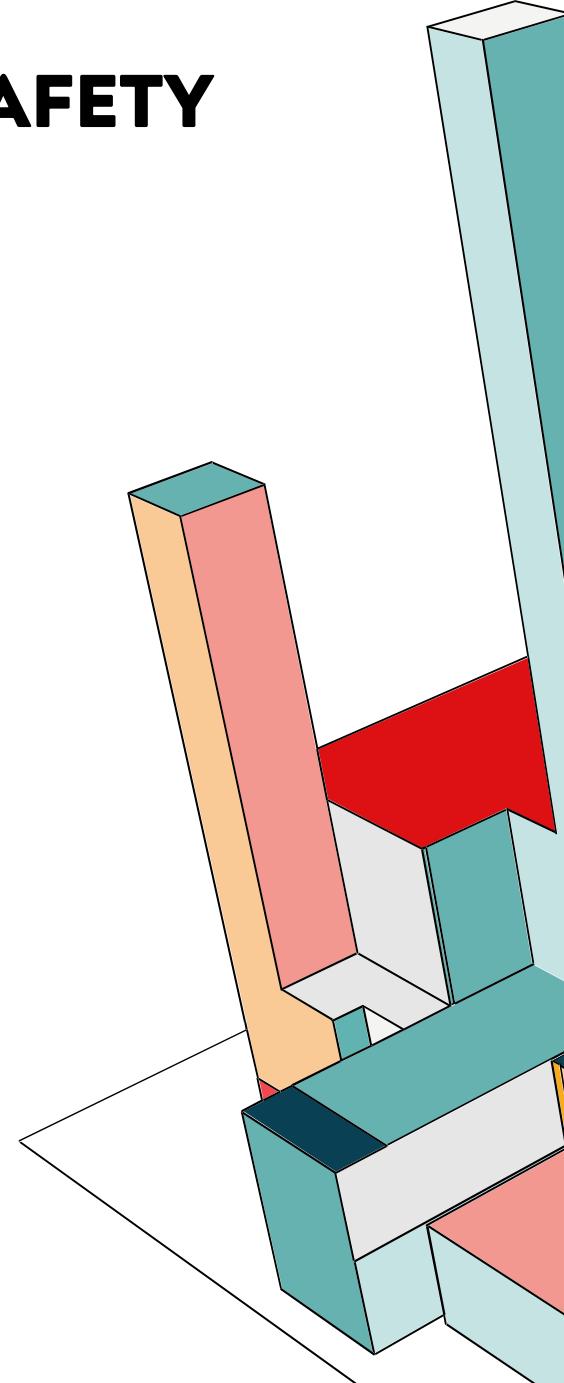




# **REDUCING SAFETY BEHAVIORS**

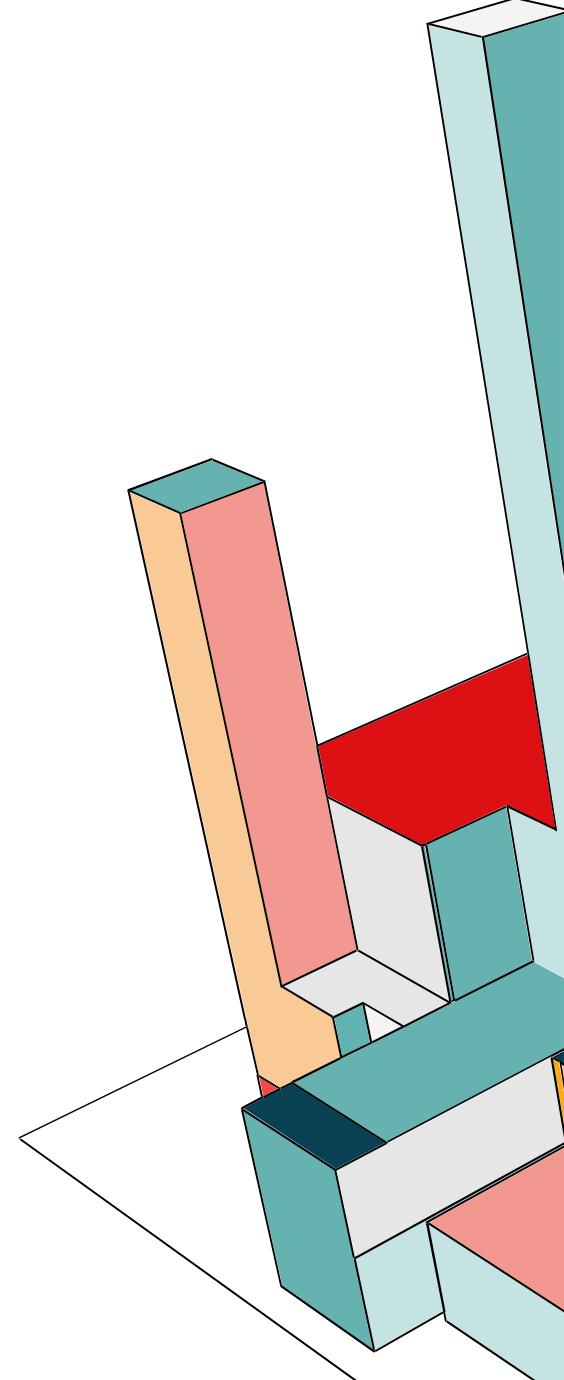
# QUESTIONS TO DETERMINE IF WE'RE USING A SAFETY BEHAVIOR

1. Is this behavior reducing my anxiety only in the short-term?
2. Do I need to use this behavior again or more frequently because the feeling of threat isn't changing?
3. Does this behavior *actually* increase my safety or just my feeling of safety?
4. Would my emotions be more intense if I was not engaging in this behavior right now?
5. Could this behavior prevent me from learning that I can handle difficult situations?
6. Would I feel less flexible about doing this difficult thing if I couldn't use this safety behavior?



## HOW TO REDUCE OUR SAFETY BEHAVIORS

- 1) Identify the behaviors we're using to reduce emotional discomfort
- 2) Gradually **fade out** those behaviors



## 2. HOW TO “FADE OUT” OUR SAFETY BEHAVIORS

Safety behavior I am trying to fade out:

Fading strategy	How to do it	Example
1. Delay	Increase the amount of time you wait before using a safety behavior	
2. Decrease	Limit the number of times you use a safety behavior	
	OR	
	Limit the degree to which you use a safety behavior	

## 2. HOW TO “FADE OUT” OUR SAFETY BEHAVIORS

Fading strategy	How to do it	Example
1. Delay	Increase the amount of time you wait before using a safety behavior	<i>If you usually rush in and out of the grocery store, delay your exit by an additional 5 minutes</i>
2. Decrease	Limit the number of times you use a safety behavior	<i>If you use curbside pick-up for groceries twice per week, use it once per week and go into the store once per week</i>
<b>OR</b>		
	Limit the degree to which you use a safety behavior	<i>If you go shopping at 11:00 pm to avoid crowds, go one hour earlier each week so there are more people each time.</i>

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# **WHEN YOU BEGIN TO EXPERIENCE DISTRESS IN A REALISTICALLY SAFE SITUATION:**

