

# Reducing Reassurance-Seeking

## What is reassurance-seeking?

Reassurance-seeking involves asking others for their thoughts on a topic, often to gain understanding or feel more sure about something. Everybody seeks reassurance at times, when we feel anxious or are dealing with situations where we are uncertain. We may ask loved ones (e.g., partner, family, friends) for their opinions, or seek reassurance from others (e.g., co-workers, healthcare professionals, salespeople, etc.).

## Why do people seek reassurance?

There are many reasons people look for reassurance, including:

**Anxiety:** Fear about possible negative outcomes, making a mistake, or being wrong (e.g. “Did I say the wrong thing?”).

**Fear of judgement:** Concerns about what others think (e.g. “Do I look weird in this?”, “Are you/they upset with me?”).

**Uncertainty:** Wanting to feel in control when things are uncertain (e.g. “What if I fail the exam?”).

## When is reassurance-seeking unhelpful?



Seeking reassurance can become a problem when it happens too often or starts to negatively impact your life.

### Signs that it may be a problem include:

**Anxiety and distress:** You may feel anxious or distressed if you can't seek reassurance. You rely on others to calm you down and may lose the ability to soothe yourself.

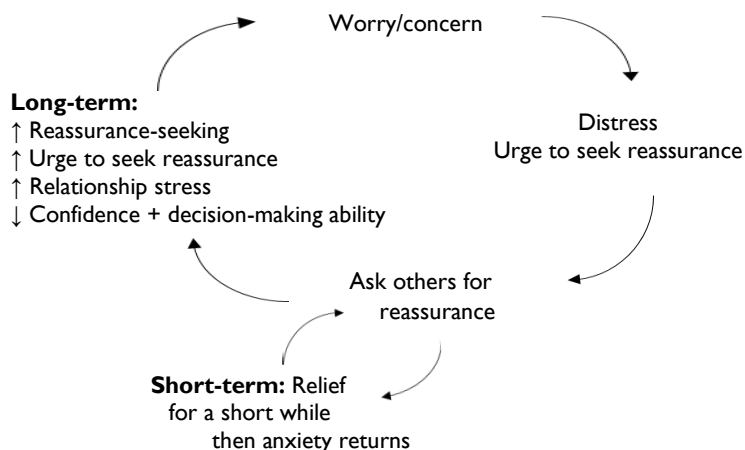
**Overdoing it:** Your reassurance-seeking becomes a regular part of communication. You may find you have started to seek reassurance for smaller everyday issues (e.g. what to wear, buy, say etc).

**Relief is short-lived:** Reassurance may make you feel better, but only for a little while. The worry or urge keeps coming back, so you keep asking for reassurance even when it has already been given many times.

**Indecision/inaction:** You may find it hard to make decisions or take action without reassurance from someone else.

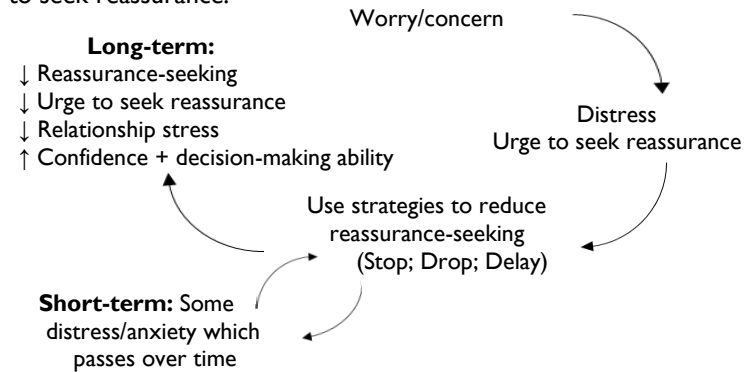
**Relationship conflict:** Relationships can be affected as others don't know how to respond or help.

## The Vicious Cycle of Reassurance-Seeking



## Breaking the Cycle of Reassurance-Seeking

To break the cycle, we can learn to respond differently to the **urge** to seek reassurance.



## Urge Surfing - Stop; Drop or Delay (SDD)

If you notice a reassurance-seeking behaviour that you would like to change, there are a few ways you can do this:

- 1) **STOP:** If you feel willing and able, **stop** the behaviour completely. This method works best for reassurance-seeking behaviours that occur less often or only in specific situations, so can be dropped quickly. For example, you may decide to stop asking your partner about whether you have said the “wrong thing” at social events.
- 2) **DROP:** Alternatively, you can gradually **reduce** the behaviour. You might create a stepladder breaking down your goal into smaller steps. For example, you may start reducing the number of people you seek reassurance from, or the number of times a week you seek reassurance.
- 3) **DELAY:** Another helpful strategy is to try **postponing** or **delaying** the urge to seek reassurance to a later time (e.g., first wait for a few hours, then increasing to days or weeks).

**Helpful tip:** When dropping reassurance-seeking, it can be useful to practice tolerating the uncertainty this may bring. Be aware when the urge to seek reassurance arises. Instead of responding, practice letting go of the urge, and training your attention to return to the present moment. The urge may come again (that's normal) and you can practice acknowledging the urge and repeating the steps. (See [“Accepting Uncertainty”](#) for more information).

## Helpful tips for responding differently.

**Be kind to yourself:** Your brain and body have learned that reassurance-seeking helps in the short-term and gives relief, so of course you want to do it. You are not doing this on purpose, you have been trying to cope. Be kind in your words and tone when trying to make these changes, e.g. “Of course I want to seek reassurance, but I am choosing not to at this time”.



**Remember the long-term benefit:** Breaking old habits isn't easy. Remind yourself that in the long term, you will benefit from reducing reassurance-seeking. Your confidence will improve as your anxiety and reliance on others reduces.

**Use your supports:** If you have people around who can help, it can be useful to talk to friends, family, and health professionals about making changes. When both sides know what to expect, it's easier to stay on track. (The handout “Responding to Reassurance-Seeking” can be shared with loved ones for more information).