



A four-session behavioral experiment group

An Everyday Insight tool
behavioralexperiment.com



A facilitator guide for four sessions on predictions and behavioral experiments, of 50 or 90 minutes each. Each session has its own handout.

What the series is for

Over four sessions, members learn to notice predictions, test small ones in the room, test beliefs about what other people think, run experiments in their own lives, and build a step ladder toward something they've been avoiding.

How the sessions fit together

SESSION	FOCUS	WHAT HAPPENS
Session 1	Predictions	What a prediction is, a test in the room, and noticing predictions at home.
Session 2	Testing it out there	The group survey and a first real-world experiment.
Session 3	Results and the ladder	What happened, and a step ladder toward a goal.
Session 4	The next rung	How the first rung went, the next one, and a look back.

Each session stands on its own. Open every one with a two-minute recap of what a prediction is and how a test works, so anyone who missed a session can take part.

What you'll need

- That session's handout for each member. Session 2's is three pages, and the others are two pages each.
- Small slips of paper for the survey in session 2.
- Each session builds on the last, so ask members to keep their handouts, or collect them and hand them back.
- A whiteboard or flip chart.

Norms, every session

Set them out loud at the start of each session, in full the first time and briefly after that.

- **Nobody has to share or try anything.** Passing counts as full participation. Every experiment is the member's choice.
- **No dares.** Nobody pushes anyone to go bigger. The group's job is to help a member find a test they're willing to try.
- **No reassurance.** When someone shares a worry, the urge is to tell them it'll be fine. Hold it. Reassurance can do the work an experiment should do, and then nothing is learned.
- **What's said here stays here.** Say it anyway. Be clear about the limits, too. You can't promise what other members will repeat, and you'll need to act if someone's safety is at risk.

Two ways in. Nobody has to show their page. In discussion, members can talk about the process, like what it was like to write the prediction down, without saying what it was. A made-up example works too.





Session 1: Predictions

50 MIN	90 MIN	STAGE	WHAT HAPPENS
5	10	Welcome and norms	A check-in, then the norms in full.
10	15	Predictions	What a prediction is, and the example.
20	30	A test in the room	A small prediction, tested and compared.
Skip	15	Pairs	Four minutes each on a prediction from their own week.
10	13	Discussion	What it was like to test one.
5	7	Noticing and close	A log of predictions before next time.

Pairs are optional. Members can work alone.

SAY “A prediction is a thought about what will happen if you do something. ‘If I speak up, people will think it’s a dumb question.’ ‘If I go, I won’t be able to handle it.’ They feel like facts, so we steer around them. Some predictions turn out right and some don’t, and the only way to know is to find out. A behavioral experiment is a small, planned way of finding out.”

SAY “Let’s try one right here. Think of something small you could do in the next few minutes, like asking the group a question or saying one thing you noticed today. Write what you expect to happen and how sure you are, from 0 to 100. Then, if you’re willing, do it. Afterward we’ll compare. Nobody has to take part.”

Debriefing. Compare what was predicted with what happened, then ask what it means for the belief, and have members rate it again. If the prediction came true, that’s useful too. Ask how bad it actually was and how long it mattered. The feared outcome is often smaller in real life than in the prediction.

Noticing at home. Members log a few predictions during the week on page 2, with the situation, the prediction, and what happened. They don’t have to test anything yet. Just noticing how often predictions come up, and how often they come true, is a first step.

Session 2: Testing it out there

50 MIN	90 MIN	STAGE	WHAT HAPPENS
8	10	Recap and check-in	What members noticed in their logs.
Skip	20	The group survey	A belief about what people think, tested anonymously.
25	30	This week’s experiment	Each member plans a real-world test.
10	20	Pairs or discussion	Plans checked for what we’d see and what’s left out.
7	10	Close	Plans said out loud.

Recap and check-in. Ask what members noticed in their logs. How often did the prediction come true?





The group survey. Members who want to write a belief about what most people think on a slip, like “Most people would think less of someone who cries at work,” and hand it in folded. The facilitator picks one and reads it aloud as a question about each member’s own view, like “Would you think less of someone who cries at work?” Nobody says whose it is. Each member answers on a slip of paper, yes, no, or not sure, and the facilitator tallies the slips out loud. Whoever wrote it compares the tally with what they expected, silently or out loud. Keep beliefs about people in general, never about anyone in the room. In 50 minutes, skip the survey and give the time to planning. Members skip page 1.

Make the prediction specific. “It’ll go badly” can’t be tested. Ask, “What would we see? What would someone do or say?” A prediction like “I’ll stumble and two people will look at each other” can be checked against what actually happens.

Another possibility. Ask what else might happen, and have members rate that too. A test that can support either prediction teaches more than one that can only knock down the fear.

Safety behaviors. These are the things people do to keep the feared outcome from happening, like rehearsing, keeping it short, avoiding eye contact, or bringing someone along. They feel helpful, but they keep the test from telling the member anything. If it goes well, the member credits the safety behavior. Ask, “What would you normally do to make sure it goes okay?” and plan to leave one out.

QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 2

- Which prediction from your log stops you most often?
- What would you expect to see if it came true?
- What would you normally do to make sure it goes okay?

Session 3: Results and the ladder

50 MIN	90 MIN	STAGE	WHAT HAPPENS
10	15	Results	What happened in the experiments.
20	30	The step ladder	A goal at the top and smaller steps below.
Skip	15	Pairs	Checking each other’s ladders.
12	20	The first rung	A plan for the lowest rung.
8	10	Close	Rungs said out loud.

Debriefing. Compare what was predicted with what happened, then ask what it means for the belief, and have members rate it again. If the prediction came true, that’s useful too. Ask how bad it actually was and how long it mattered. The feared outcome is often smaller in real life than in the prediction. If an experiment didn’t happen, ask what got in the way. That’s often another prediction. Pairs are optional. Members can work alone.

The step ladder. Members write the goal at the top, the thing they’d do if the prediction weren’t in the way. Then they fill in smaller steps below it, each a little harder than the one before, and rate the distress each would bring from 0 to 100. A good ladder has small gaps between rungs. If a jump looks too big, add a rung in between. Steps can get harder by changing who’s there, how long it lasts, where it happens, or what’s left out.

QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 3

- What did the experiment tell you?
- What’s at the top of your ladder?





- Where's the biggest jump, and what could go in between?

Session 4: The next rung

50 MIN	90 MIN	STAGE	WHAT HAPPENS
12	20	The rung I tried	What happened, and distress expected versus felt.
14	25	The next rung	A plan for the next step up.
14	25	Looking back	What members learned about their predictions.
10	20	Closing round	One thing each person is taking with them.

The rung I tried. Members compare the distress they expected with the distress they had. It's often lower, and it often drops further with practice.

Looking back. Members write what they've learned about their predictions, one they believe less than they did, and what they'll do the next time a prediction stops them.

SAY “One last thing. The group ends today, but the ladder doesn't. Keep climbing a rung at a time, at your own pace. When a prediction stops you, write it down, rate it, and find a small way to test it. That's the whole method.”

Facilitator moves

How you respond matters more than which questions you pick. These four moves cover most of it.

1. Ask what you would see

Turn every vague prediction into something observable. “What would someone do or say if it went the way you fear?”

2. Ask about the safety behavior

“What would you normally do to make sure it goes okay?” Then help the member decide which one to leave out this time.

3. Debrief with curiosity

Ask what happened before asking what it means. Then ask what it means for the belief, and how much they believe it now. Let the member draw the conclusion.

4. Keep it small and voluntary

If a plan sounds too big, ask for the smallest version that would still tell them something. A small test that happens beats a big one that doesn't.

What to watch for

- **Experiments turning into dares.** Pressure from the group, or from the facilitator, turns an experiment into a performance. Keep every test voluntary and small.
- **Reassurance seeking.** Members may ask the group whether their plan will go fine. Turn it back to the experiment: “That's what the test is for.”





- **Discounting the result.** “It only went well because they were being nice.” Ask what result would count, and plan the next test to check it.
- **Beliefs that don’t belong here.** Steer away from predictions about a traumatic memory, a real medical risk, harming oneself, or real danger, like confronting someone who has hurt them. Those belong in individual work with a clinician.
- **Safety concerns.** If a member mentions suicide or self-harm, or it shows up on a page, respond calmly, don’t explore the details in the group, check in with them privately right after, and follow your setting’s risk procedures. In the US, 988 is available by call or text at any time.

Notes by setting

- **Inpatient units.** Keep experiments to the unit, like asking staff a question or joining a group activity. The in-room test and the survey work well. Don’t depend on homework, and expect members to come and go.
- **Intensive outpatient and partial hospital programs.** When sessions are a day apart, keep each experiment small enough to try before the next session.
- **Substance use treatment.** Predictions about getting through a hard moment without using are common and worth testing, but keep experiments away from places, people, and situations with a risk of use.
- **Outpatient groups.** Members have time to run experiments between sessions, so the debrief carries more weight here.

Sources

The experiments follow the Oxford Guide to Behavioural Experiments in Cognitive Therapy by J. Bennett-Levy and colleagues, Oxford University Press, 2004. The step ladder follows the graded approach in the Centre for Clinical Interventions’ anxiety modules. If-then plans draw on P. M. Gollwitzer and P. Sheeran, *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 2006. The forms in these handouts were written for Everyday Insight.

