

Recommended Skills for Exposure Therapy for Anxiety Disorders

An exposure therapist will demonstrate the ability to skillfully:

- Work collaboratively with clients
- Be Socratic
- Provide psychoeducation about anxiety, its causes, and its treatment
- Present a behavioral formulation of anxiety to emphasize the role of avoidance or neutralization in maintaining fears
- Develop a client-specific case-conceptualization and present the behavioral formulation that is relevant to the particular client.
- Develop a Fear Hierarchy rank ordering specific feared stimuli or situations
- Identify strategies (avoidance, rituals, etc.) the client uses to control anxiety or minimize perceived threat
- Identify optimal format for exposures depending on the feared stimuli or situations (*in vivo* for external stimuli or situations, interoceptive for bodily sensations, imaginal for worries, intrusive thoughts, or traumatic memories).
- Work collaboratively with clients to develop specific exposures that will likely induce moderately high levels of activation (e.g., 7 out of 10)
- Work with client to minimize or eliminate the use of safety behaviors during exposures
- Maintain exposure until anxiety begins to decrease (or plateau, if necessary)
- Debrief after the exposure to highlight the incongruence between expected and actual outcomes from the exposure
- Develop and reinforce a schedule of “homework” exposures to help generalize the treatment effects
- Develop strategies with the client to minimize relapse or return-of-fear