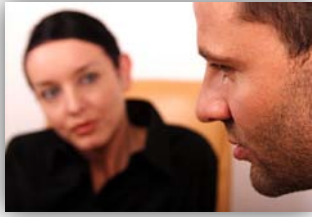


# Exposure Therapy



in Low Intensity CBT

Marie Chellingsworth, Dr Paul Farrand &  
Gemma Wilson



# CONTENTS

## **Part 1**

What is Exposure Therapy?  
Exposure Therapy Stages

## **Part 2**

Doing Exposure Therapy  
The Four Rules

## **Part 3**

Exposure Therapy Worksheet A

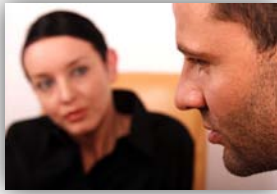
## **Part 4**

Exposure Therapy Worksheet B

## **Part 5**

Recovery Story of Clare

©The right of Marie Chellingsworth, Dr Paul Farrand and Gemma Wilson to be identified as the authors of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act, 1998. All rights reserved. It must not be copied or circulated in any other binding or cover other than which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed upon the subsequent reader



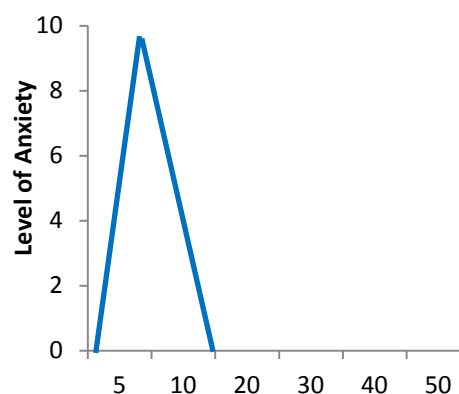
## Part 1

# How Does Exposure Therapy Work?

Exposure therapy is an evidence based treatment commonly used when you are avoiding something that causes fear. It works by putting you in charge and creating a plan to help you confront the feared object, situation or memory in a manner and at a rate you find acceptable. Exposure therapy has two stages and can be supported by your Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner.

### The Vicious Circle of Avoidance and Anxiety

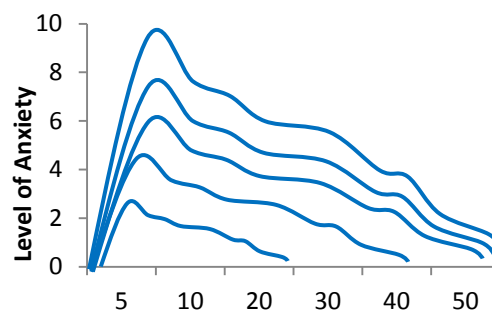
When we feel afraid we may avoid the situation, memory or specific object that makes us fearful. When you do this your anxiety comes down quite quickly. In the short term this provides some relief from the unpleasant symptoms experienced and may encourage you to avoid the fearful event again in the future.



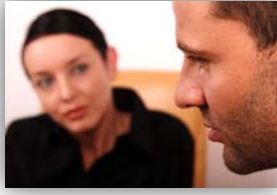
However as you continue to avoid the fearful event a pattern of avoidance is created and you will feel just as anxious the next time you are faced with the fearful event. This will lead to a vicious circle of avoidance and anxiety.

### Breaking the Vicious Circle through Habituation

Exposure therapy works by breaking into this vicious cycle. This is done by gradually exposing yourself to the fearful event without avoiding or escaping from. You will do this for as long as it takes until your anxiety symptoms naturally reduce on its own. This is called 'habituation'.



As your anxiety symptoms naturally reduce on its own you will learn that the fearful event is not what is causing you anxiety. This will help to break the vicious cycle of avoidance and anxiety.



## Part 2

# Doing Exposure Therapy: The Four Rules

Although exposure therapy is personally challenging the good thing is that it is done by following four simple rules.

And remember your Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner is there to help and support you.

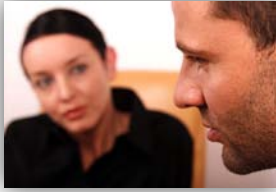
### Rule 1: Graded

Use worksheet A to help you identify all the specific steps making up your fear towards the specific object or situation. Put the step you find most fearful at the top and work down including steps of less anxiety until you are left with the step of least anxiety at the bottom. You should not grade your fear however by length you will expose yourself to the fear. Rather during the early steps in your hierarchy you may think about grading by using things such as photographs of the fearful event rather than real objects, or by distance to the fear etc. Once you have created your hierarchy select the step that causes you some fear but one you feel you could manage. Note that this may not be the first step on your hierarchy but the step you feel you can manage but also the one you feel you will notice when your anxiety drops.

### Rule 2: Prolonged

Once you have created your hierarchy select your first step and write this in the exercise section on worksheet B. Then plan a suitable time to undertake the exposure exercise. Remember to plan to stay exposed to the fearful event for as long as it takes for your anxiety to drop by 50% which can be as long as two hours. Unfortunately no one knows how long it will take. Once you have made a plan as to when to undertake the exposure exercise, fill in the date and time on worksheet B. Then when you are beginning to prepare to undertake the exposure exercise fill in the 'Before Exercise' rating on worksheet B to indicate how much anxiety you are experiencing. Use the rating scale at the bottom where 0 = no anxiety and 100 = where you are experiencing the worst panic ever.

When you are just about to start your exposure then rate your anxiety again using the 'Start of the Exercise' rating. This is the figure you will use to know when to stop the exposure exercise. Specifically you will stop exposure when your current anxiety rating is half of this figure. Once it is half, or at the time you end your exposure session, fill in your anxiety rating using the 'End of Exercise' rating. Then go back and complete the 'Duration' box indicating how long that exposure session was.



Remember the four rules:

1. **Graded:** List things in your hierarchy from least anxious to most anxious.
2. **Prolonged:** Keep exposure going until your anxiety has dropped by at least 50%
3. **Repeated:** Exposure yourself to each step until you feel comfortable stepping up.
4. **Without distraction:** Try to remove things in your hierarchy that artificially reduce your anxiety.

### **Rule 3: Repeated**

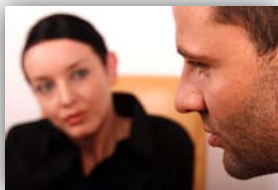
You should seek to continue exposing yourself to each step of the hierarchy until you notice that your anxiety score 'Before Exercise' is no longer going up quickly and that your anxiety score at the 'Start of Exercise' is now at a manageable level for you to consider moving to the next step. Try to repeat exposure at each step as many times as you can within each week to get the full benefit. The number of times you can do it however can be affected by the type and demands of the exposure exercise. So as always do the best you can. Also remember ask your Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner if you are uncertain as to when to move to the next step.

### **Rule 4: Without Distraction**

When we feel fearful sometimes we do things differently or enlist support from others and this helps to reduce our anxiety. Whilst this may be helpful in the short term, relying on these things can be unhelpful in the longer term. As such you should try to drop these things as part of your hierarchy so that you are able to habituate naturally to the fearful event without things around you that are distracting. Sometimes people need to rely on these things to get started with exposure. This is OK, however at some step in your hierarchy they should be dropped. At times this is a good way to construct the steps within your hierarchy. Your Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner will be keeping an eye out for any behaviours like this you have and will be able to advise you how to drop them.

### **Remember**


Keeping records are essential to schedule activities and for you and your Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner to review your progress and help you problem solve any difficulties.

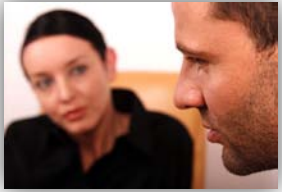


## Part 3

# Exposure Hierarchy

## Worksheet A

Below Write Each Step in Your Hierarchy	Anxiety Rating (0-100%)
<p><i>Most difficult...</i></p>  <p><i>Medium difficulty...</i></p> <p><i>Easiest..</i></p>	



## Part 4

# Exposure Exercise Rating Sheet

## Worksheet B

Date and Time	Duration	Exercise	Rating of Anxiety Level			Comments
			Before Exercise	Start of Exercise	End of Exercise	

No Anxiety  
0

Mild Anxiety  
25

Moderate Anxiety  
50

Severe Anxiety  
75

Panic  
100





## Part 5

# Clare's Recovery Story

Clare's story is about someone who used exposure therapy to treat her agoraphobia.

Exposure therapy is a technique that breaks the cycle of avoidance and anxiety by slowly confronting the feared object in a graded way until anxiety falls.

Clare was 19 years old and had worked within the local village shop since leaving school. However this was not her ideal job and she dreamt of working in a high fashion retailer in the local town. The only difficulty was that Clare suffered from agoraphobia. Although she was just about able to endure leaving the house to work in the small shop next door, the thought of going any further, and especially using a bus to travel into the town really scared her. As such she felt trapped and alone. Having her difficulties since leaving school she had lost all her friends, had few interests and was isolated.

One day Clare, fed up whilst working in the village shop, was reading the local newspaper and came across an advertisement for her dream job. It was for a sales assistant within one of the most fashionable retail outlets in the local town. Clare suddenly realised that enough was enough and needed to sort herself out to overcome her difficulties.

She remembered seeing on a previous page of the newspaper an advertisement for 'ACCESS; an Improving Access to Psychological Therapies service offering specialist support for patients with depression and anxiety' which welcomed self-referrals. Whilst still having many concerns and fear about how she would get to the appointments she made a call anyhow.

Following the call she felt a little more relieved, what they offered, guided self-help, sounded ideal for her and they could even provide support over the telephone. However she would still need to make it into the service in town initially. Talking this through with Bill, the shop manager, it was agreed that he would drive her to the appointment and wait with her. Although Clare knew this would cause her some anxiety, she trusted Bill and knowing he would be there she found helpful.



With Bill Clare attended her appointment the following week. Her PWP undertook an assessment of her difficulties and indicated that what she presented with was consistent with agoraphobia. After discussing this they collaboratively decided to use exposure therapy and set some goals to start to take treatment forward. The PWP and Clare talked about exposure and habituation and her PWP explained the four necessary conditions. Although Clare was highly anxious about the thought of facing her agoraphobia like this, she knew it had to be done and was reassured when the PWP discussed that Exposure Therapy had a good evidence base and that she was in control of the treatment with the support of her PWP.

**With the aid of her Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner Clare decided on the following goals:**

CLARE'S GOALS						
Goal number 1						
<i>To travel on a bus on my own</i>				Today's date: <i>24<sup>th</sup> November</i>		
I can do this now (circle a number):						
<input checked="" type="radio"/> 0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all		Occasionally		Often		Anytime
Goal number 2						
<i>To be able to apply for my dream job</i>				Today's date: <i>24<sup>th</sup> November</i>		
I can do this now (circle a number):						
<input checked="" type="radio"/> 0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all		Occasionally		Often		Anytime

To ensure that the treatment was **graded**, the PWP used the **Exposure Hierarchy (Worksheet A)** to start to help Clare create a graded list of anxiety provoking situations arising from her agoraphobia. Initially Clare found this difficult to do, but found it helpful when her PWP suggested that she may want to try to think about what causes her the most and least fear first and then to think about something in the middle. Once she started in this way she began to find the task of grading her fear much easier and began moving steps up and down the hierarchy as she thought about them. She also found the PWP's advice that she could consider varying specific tasks by things such as time of day, or initially being supported by someone else helpful.

# Worksheet A

## Clare's Exposure Hierarchy

Below Write Each Step in Your Hierarchy	Anxiety Rating (0-100%)
<p><b>Most difficult...</b></p> <p><i>To travel on the bus to a job interview in town when busy</i></p>	100%
<p><i>To travel on the bus at a quiet time alone</i></p>	65%
<p><b>Medium difficulty...</b></p>	
<p><i>To travel on the bus at a quiet time with Bill</i></p>	60%
<p><i>To walk to the street alone when quiet</i></p>	45%
<p><i>To walk the street with Bill</i></p>	35%
<p><b>Easiest..</b></p>	

## Graded

Once Clare understood how to grade the steps in her hierarchy she was encouraged by her PWP to complete the hierarchy in her own time. Within the session they moved onto planning some exposure tasks on the **Exposure Rating Sheet (Worksheet B)**. To make sure that the exposure was **graded** she was encouraged to select a task on her hierarchy that caused her some fear but one that did not feel it was so overwhelming that she could not manage it. With her PWP Clare was confident that although not at the bottom of her hierarchy she would be able to '*To walk the street alone when quiet*' as her first exposure task. She liked the idea of being able to grade this task by how quiet she knew the task would be, and thought about how her next steps could vary this. Clare was then encouraged to consider when she would be best able to commit the time to undertake this task and wrote this in the Date and Time column of the **Exposure Rating Sheet (Worksheet B)**.

## Repeated

To make sure that the exposure was **repeated** Clare planned to complete the first step several times that week and discussed with her PWP about how many times to repeat this step before moving up the hierarchy. Obviously how quiet the street would be would vary across days, so Clare identified a range of times to repeat this activity for each day she felt the street was usually at its quietest,

## Prolonged

Clare did not put in the duration of the exposure exercise **until afterwards** as she did not know how long it would take for her **anxiety to reduce by 50%** from the level recorded at the start of doing each feared task. So she agreed to complete this part of the worksheet after each exercise to ensure it was **prolonged**. Clare's PWP was also keen to make her aware that although it was OK to have steps in which she was doing things with Bill, who made her feel better and enable her to engage with the task, these would need to be dropped within further steps so that she was doing each exposure session **without distraction**.

## Without Distraction

Using the scale on the worksheet Clare was then asked to rate her anxiety level before, during and after each exercise session and to make any comments she felt necessary. Once again she was encouraged to do each task until her **anxiety reduced by 50%** from the level at the start of the exercise. She would use her worksheet also to monitor

how the exposure was going so that this could be discussed in her next session with her PWP.

After some obvious fear about undertaking the exposure exercises Clare found that the first week actually went quite well. So well in fact that by the following Sunday she had decided to move to the next step herself which she had written as *'To walk to the park alone when quiet'*. Doing this she noticed a lot of the fear that had gone had returned, but she was well prepared for this and keen to get on with it.

At her next telephone appointment Clare discussed how she was getting on with her PWP. He was very supportive and motivated Clare to keep going as she had been. Over the next few weeks Clare carried on doing the exercises and made good progress. It wasn't always easy, but once she had moved up a few steps she noticed that, although each step brought its own fear, in a weird sort of way it seemed to get easier. She was very pleased that she was able to go places alone on the bus and actually to start doing things again and meeting up with friends.

Later that year Clare felt able to start to apply for jobs. Although she had not yet got one, she was really pleased that she was at applying and really enjoyed being able to get out and about again.

## Worksheet B

### Clare's Exposure Exercise Rating Sheet

Date and Time	Duration	Exercise	Rating of Anxiety Level			Comments
			Before Exercise	Start of Exercise	End of Exercise	
Sun 9.30am	85 mins	To walk the street alone early Sunday morning	55%	85%	40%	Terrifying but I did it!
Mon 6.30pm	75 mins	To walk the street alone when quiet	45%	85%	30%	Still horrible but I did it!
Wed 6.00am	40 mins	To walk the street alone when quiet	40%	40%	20%	Not as bad this time 😊
Sat 2.45pm	25 mins	To walk the street alone when quiet	15%	15%	5%	Felt fine, and want to do it all but will do one last time to check all well before moving to next step
Sun 9.30am	70 mins	To walk to the park alone when quiet.	65%	85%	40%	Felt horrible again, to begin with but I was expecting this and it got better

No Anxiety

0

Mild Anxiety

25

Moderate Anxiety

50

Severe Anxiety

75

Panic

100



