

Graded Exposure

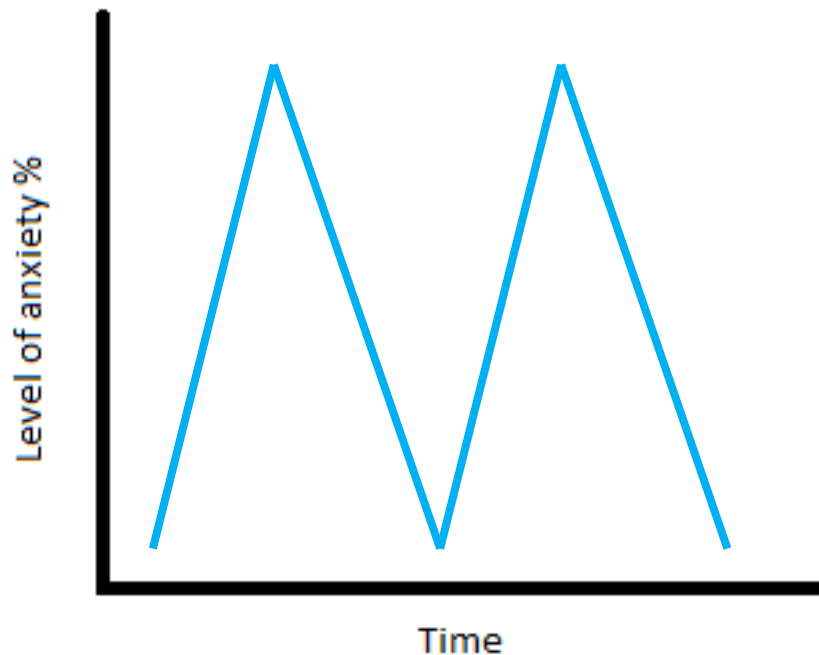
A technique to help you overcome your fears and tackle avoidance

Why Graded Exposure?

- Graded Exposure is an evidence based treatment
- When we fear certain situations, objects or activities we tend to avoid or leave the situation in order to reduce our anxiety
- Avoidance keeps the problem going
- Graded exposure allows you to control your fear at each step

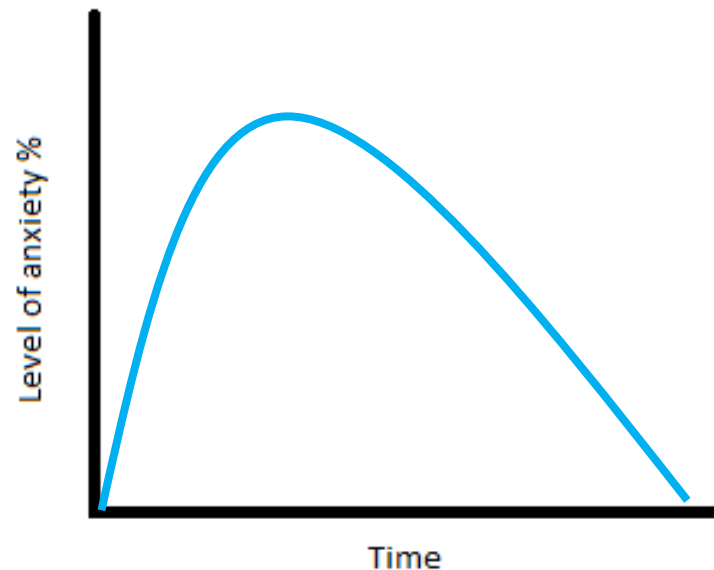
Avoidance

- When we avoid or leave a situation we may feel relieved in the short term.
- However the next time we are faced with the situation our anxiety is still as high
- So avoidance doesn't solve anything in the long term



Graded Exposure and Habituation

- With Graded Exposure, anxiety may increase initially. In time our fear becomes much lower. This process is called *habituation*.
- Graded exposure enables us to become habituated to what we fear.
- Our anxiety becomes much lower in the long term



Types of avoidance

- Avoiding the situation
- Fleeing the situation
- Distraction
- Safety behaviours



Steps of Graded Exposure

1. List anxiety provoking situations
2. Order the situations into a hierarchy
3. Plan an exposure exercise which relates to a specific situation



Anxiety Provoking Situations

WORKSHEET ONE

Identifying anxiety-provoking situations



Anxiety-Provoking Situations

Corner shop

London Trafalgar Square

Asda

Cinema

Tesco

Cafe

Steps of Graded Exposure

1. List anxiety provoking situations
2. Order the situations into a hierarchy
3. Plan an exposure exercise which relates to a specific situation



Anxiety Hierarchy

EXAMPLE: WORKSHEET TWO

Developing a hierarchy

Fear of crowded places



Most anxiety-provoking	% Rating
London Trafalgar Square	100%
ASDA alone	80%
ASDA with my partner	75%
Farnborough shopping centre	70%
Cinema	60%
Tesco Express	55%
Local Café at a busy time (Saturday morning)	50%
Local Café at a less busy time	40%
Corner shop	35%
Least anxiety-provoking	

Steps of Graded Exposure

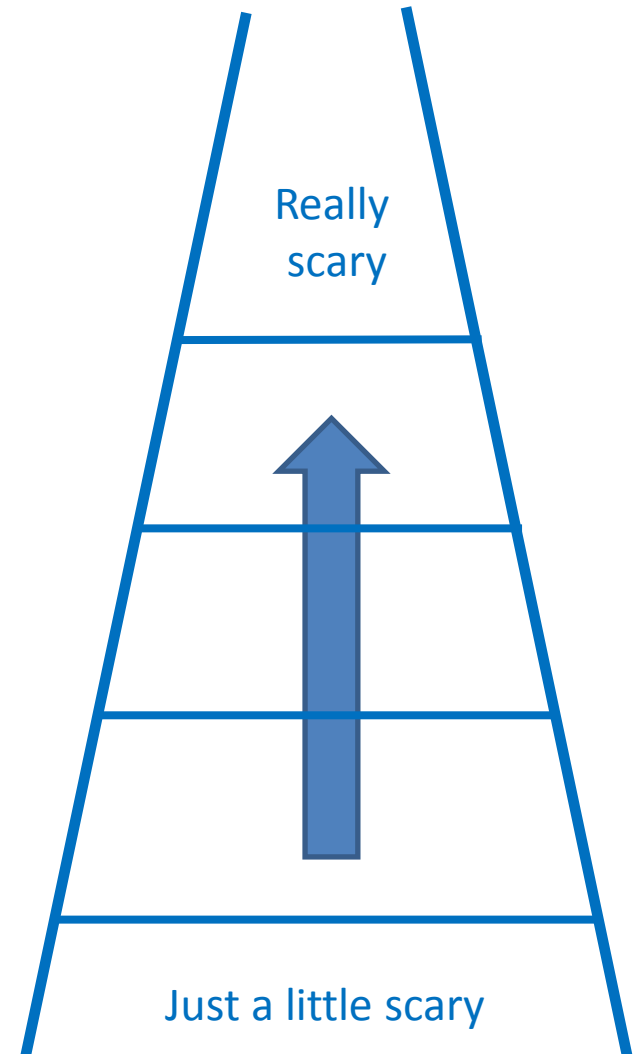
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Conditions to consider

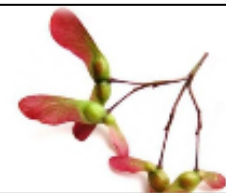
Use these four conditions:

1. Graded
2. Without distraction
3. Prolonged
4. Repeated



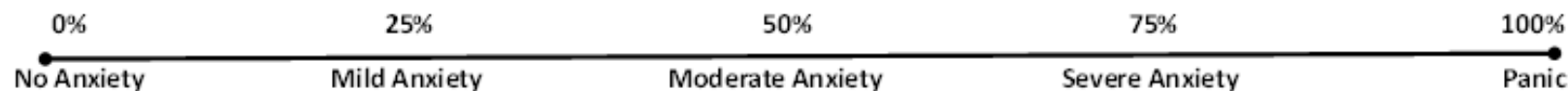
Rating Sheet

EXAMPLE: WORKSHEET THREE



Planning exposure

	Date & Time	Duration	Exposure	Anxiety Rating			Comments
				Before	During	After	
1	Wednesday 3pm	45 minutes	ASDA	60%	75%	40%	This was a bit scarier than I thought
2	Friday 11am	55 minutes	ASDA	55%	60%	30%	Better than the last time
3	Saturday 10am	30 minutes	ASDA	50%	65%	90%	Got very busy in the shop and somebody hit me with their trolley so I left- wish I hadn't
4	Sunday 2pm	65 minutes	ASDA	55%	50%	30%	I'm starting to feel the anxiety really going down now
5	Tuesday 4pm	70 minutes	ASDA	40%	30%	15%	Found it really easy- got a coffee in the café after my shopping



Troubleshooting

- Anxiety too high, want to leave the situation →
Make sure it is graded and focus on one fear.
- Anxiety not reducing → Review all 4 conditions
- Next step is too difficult → slot in another step in between (e.g. go to the café at a quieter time)
- Consider using photos or videos for specific phobias such as spiders

Troubleshooting

- Suffer a set back → Go back to the last step and do it again
- Too expensive → be creative (e.g. use youtube, use simulators (flying), ask friends and family to help, volunteer at a vets etc.)
- Not feasible to stay in the situation that long → Explain to the person there what you are doing, repeat more often.

Troubleshooting continued

- Can't expose self often enough → Is it having that much impact?
- Flying phobia → BA and Virgin run courses
- Driving phobia → AA run courses



Take Home Message

- When we fear certain situations, objects or activities we tend to avoid or leave the situation in order to reduce our anxiety.
- The steps you can take with Graded Exposure can help take control of your fear and help you to gradually expose yourself to the feared situation.
- This will help you to overcome your fear through the process of habituation.

Next Steps

- Practice
- It can be helpful to tell someone else about this technique
- All worksheets and a PDF are freely available at <https://www.talkplus.org.uk>