

Exposure/Facing Up Skills

What: Teach skills to face up to fears and learn they can handle untrue or unhelpful fears or worries.

Why? Avoidance of feared activities lessens anxiety temporarily, but is not effective long-term and keeps anxiety going. Avoiding feared activities can get in the way of living life and accomplishing goals.

How to teach these skills...

Tell about it: Give an analogy to explain (overly sensitive fear/worry alarm).

Do: Create a Fear Ladder. Activity steps toward overcoming unrealistic

fears. Choose 1 unrealistic fear to start (separating from parent, social situations, going to school). Face one low-level activity (but not TOO low) in session and/or for first weekly practice. Stay in the situation (activity or thought) until the anxiety comes down (take ratings). If anxiety is low/comes down, keep taking steps UP the ladder right away!

Client Practices It!

(In Session Experiment: show exposure works)

PRAISE EFFORT. FEEDBACK/ENCOURAGEMENT TO REALLY DO IT.

CHILD RATES FEELINGS OF FEAR BEFORE AND AFTER (0-10, OTHER METHOD)

Discuss and Assign Weekly Practice. *What step will you/your child practice this week? When would be a good time to try it? What might get in the way (problem solve!) If you feel less afraid on this activity, what would be the next step? What can you do if it is harder than you thought it would be? Rate your feelings before and after and report back.*

Points to Remember:

- Make sure that the situation is really safe; if necessary have a back-up safety plan.
- Parents/caregivers have to know about the fear ladder and scaffold for children. Children can't do hard activities solo. Even many school-age & adolescents need caregiver prompting and support.
- If the activity is too hard, take a step BACK (move to easier activity). Do not back down from exposure entirely.
- Need help getting more rungs on the ladder (easier OR harder?): Ask: "What would make this activity easier?" "What would make this activity harder?"

Special Cases:

- **WORRIES:** Worries that can be solved: set a time for worrying and plan not to worry at other times. Worries that cannot be solved: Describe worry to worst end (what's the worst that could happen?); use result for Socratic questioning about how likely that is; come up with alternative.
- **RITUALS/COMPULSIONS:** Response prevention-planning. In addition to exposure, STOP using rituals that make the client feel better (hand washing, checking, ordering).