

Setting Up an Exposure

- **Be Consistent** Do exposures every day. This works best if parents and kids work together. It is great for kids to be independent. However, it is parents' responsibility to make sure exposures are being done every day. It is the child's job to cooperate with exposures and become independent over time. If you work with a therapist, she or he needs to help you do exposures in the session.
- **Exposures As Experiments** When setting up exposures, children and teens should try to be clear what they are afraid will happen so that the exposures are experiments testing whether fears come true. Before starting, children and teens rate how afraid they are that their fear will come true. They should set up the exposure to learn that what they were afraid of didn't happen and that they can handle feeling nervous.

Doing an Exposure

- **Be Positive** Exposures are most successful when kids and parents have a positive attitude. Even though exposures are hard, kids should try to be open to learning something new. Parents need to remember this is hard work and should praise and warmly support kids' cooperation and brave behavior. Parents should stay calm and ignore complaining or other anxious behavior.
- **Focus and Pay Attention** To learn something new, kids need to notice that their anxiety decreases simply because the exposure activity was not as dangerous as they thought. Parents can help kids focus by asking kids to rate their anxiety every few minutes during exposures. If anxiety stays high, recognize success in managing emotions. Remember, do not avoid through distraction, ritualizing, or giving reassurance. Instead give anxiety the opportunity to come down from facing fears and realizing nothing bad is happening.

Ending an Exposure

- **Show the Fear That It Was Wrong** Kids need to keep doing each exposure until they believe that it is very unlikely that their fears will come true or turn out as badly as anxiety or OCD says it will be. It is important for kids to pay attention to what happens during the exposure. When parents ask "Did your fear come true?", the answer should be "No" or "Yes, but it wasn't bad." In other words, through exposures, kids learn that anxiety lies or exaggerates.
- **Stick With It!** Exposures are also important for teaching kids they can handle anxious feelings. Kids need to keep doing each exposure until they believe they can handle their anxiety. Waiting until anxiety comes down by 50%, is a good sign that they stuck with it long enough to learn that it gets easier with practice. However, sometimes anxiety stays high, especially with new or challenging exposures. In that case, the goal is for kids to notice they can handle feeling uncomfortable. When parents ask "What happened to your anxiety?", the answer should be "It went down" or "I handled it."

Every Day Exposures

- **Handle Daily Life** The goal of "Planned Exposures" is to build confidence to handle similar activities in everyday life. Learning that takes practice. So after you have completed one or two "Planned Exposures" to something, start pushing yourself to do those things every chance you get during the day. Parents can help by finding opportunities for Everyday Exposures.
- **Plan and Record** If you don't have time to plan and record the exposure, follow the same steps:
 - 1) set up the exposure as an experiment,
 - 2) stay positive, warm, and supportive, and
 - 3) pay attention to whether the fear came true and if the situation and feelings about it were manageable.