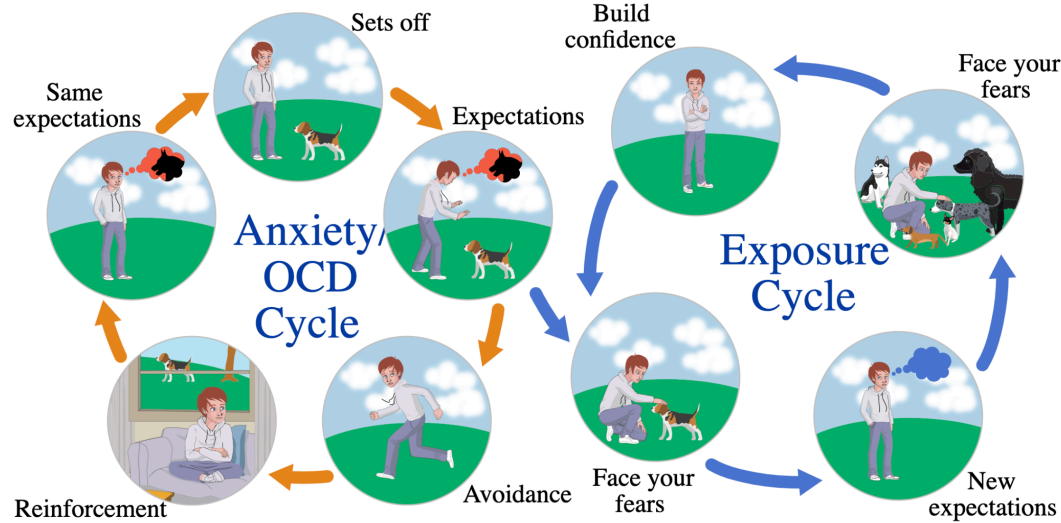


# Child Anxiety Treatment Orientation

2020

## Anxiety OCD/Cycle



Before we can make a plan to replace anxiety with confidence we have to understand how anxiety works and why it doesn't go away on its own. It turns out that all fears and worries work in the same way, something we call the Anxiety/OCD Cycle. We can use the example of a Fear of Dogs to learn about the Anxiety/OCD Cycle and begin to understand your fears.

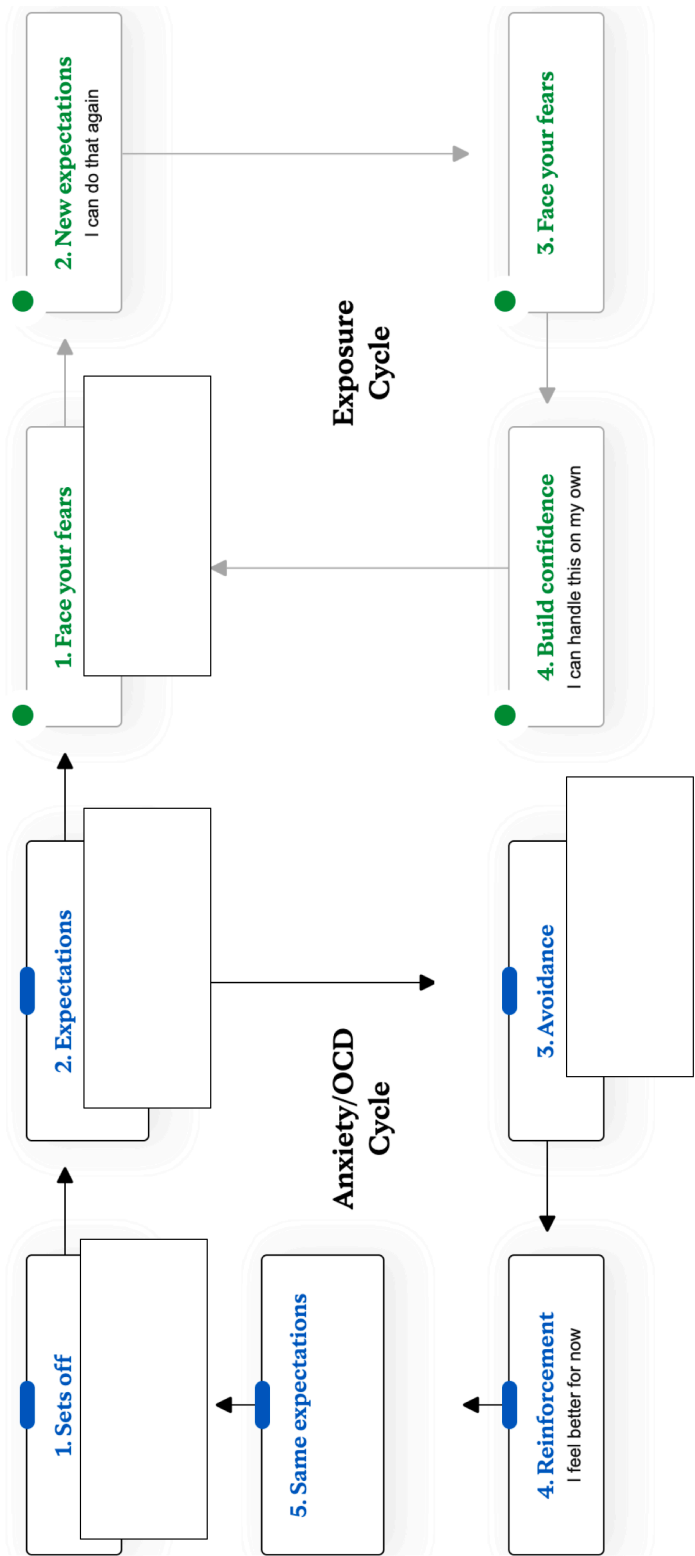
A fear of dogs works like this:

1. *Sets Off*: First the boy sees the dog.
2. *Expectations and Feelings*: He thinks the dog is going to bite him and feels scared.
3. *Avoidance*: Because he is scared he runs away.
4. *Reinforcement*: Running away makes him feel better.
5. *Same Expectations*: Unfortunately, he is still scared of dogs and the next time he sees a dog, he does the same thing again.

There are three key points that we need to understand about the Anxiety Cycle.

1. *Expectations*: It is important for us to know that it is not the dog that makes us afraid, but our thoughts. There are actually two main thoughts: "Something bad will happen" and "I can't handle these feelings." If we could change our thoughts we would feel better. However, changing our thoughts is hard to do because our thoughts are based on our experiences. This brings us to the second point.
2. *Avoidance*: If we always avoid dogs, we will never have any experience to learn that dogs are safe. So we keep believing they are dangerous and remain scared.
3. *Reinforcement*: Since nobody likes to feel scared, anything we do that makes us feel better is automatically rewarded. This means we will probably do it again and again.

# My Cycle



## How To Do Exposures

### Help the boy who is afraid of dogs and his mother set-up an exposure.

Pick the best exposure activity for the boy and his mother to do\*

- Go inside and take deep breathes when he sees a dog
- Ask the neighbor if he can pet her dog
- Put his hand through a fence to pet a barking dog the family doesn't know

Pick the thoughts to be tested that set the boy's exposure up as a good experiment\* **Multiple Answers**

#### Required

- I will be okay if I stay with my mom
- The dog will bite me
- I will stay scared until I get away from the dog
- The dog will be mean

How nervous, from 0 (Relaxed, no anxiety) to 10 (Most anxiety ever), do you think the boy will be to do this exposure?\*

- 2 - A little anxiety
- 5 - Some anxiety
- 10 - Most anxiety ever

### Help the boy and his mother do an exposure to petting his neighbor's dog.

Right after he starts petting the dog, his mother asks him to rate his anxiety and he says his anxiety has gone up. What should his mom do?\*

- Tell him he will be okay
- Make the exposure easier by holding the dog for him
- Tell him he is doing a great job handling his anxiety

In the middle of the exposure, the boy starts complaining and says he feels scared, what should his mother do?\*

- Make the exposure easier
- Tell him to take deep breathes
- Ignore the complaints and compliment him for continuing to pet the dog.

During the exposure, the boy's anxiety comes down, what should his mother do?\*

- Ask "That's great, what is bringing it down?"
- Say "I told you nothing would happen"
- Immediately make the exposure harder

Which of these answers to the mother's question above would suggest that the boy is learning something helpful from the exposure?\*

- "I am facing my fears and nothing bad is happening"
- "This is a small dog"
- "I am pretending it is a stuffed animal dog"

### Help the boy and his mother end the exposure and learn from it.

The boy has been petting the dog for 20 minutes, his anxiety rating is a 2, what should his mother do?

- End because time is up
- Ask if he thinks he can do it again sometime
- Require him to continue until his anxiety is 0

To learn from the exposure, the boy's mother asks him if his fear that the dog would bite him came true.

Which of the following answers suggests the boy learned something helpful from the exposure?\*

- "No, because I pet him too lightly for him to feel it"
- "No, because I stopped before he had the chance"
- "No, but I don't know if another dog will"

To end the exposure, the boy's mother asks him what happened to his anxiety, what is the boy likely to say if he has done a helpful exposure?\*

- "It went down"
- "It went down, because I was taking deep, relaxing breaths"
- "I don't know"

## How to Do Parent-Coached Exposures

### 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 the exposure up 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.

## Motivation Plan

Following these four steps will help us stay motivated to do exposures regularly:

- **Take Small Steps.** We will use our fear ladder to break fears into small steps. Using the fear ladder will help us plan and agree what the next step should be. It will help us agree on expectations for what to do, so we don't move too fast or too slowly. We will do Everyday Exposures to situations that are similar to what we have already practiced with Planned Exposures.
- **Praise and Warm Support.** We will be patient with each other. Parents should pay attention and praise when kids are cooperating with exposures and trying hard. When kids are letting anxiety win, acting angry, or refusing to cooperate, parents should walk away.
- **Set Goals and Reward Progress.**
  - Each week we plan to do \_\_\_\_\_ number of exposures.
  - After we complete \_\_\_\_\_ number of exposures we celebrate by \_\_\_\_\_
- **Remove Privileges for Lack of Cooperation.** These activities cannot be done until after the exposures for the day are done: \_\_\_\_\_

## Building a Fear Ladder

Now that you have an Anxiety Plan to decide when to face your fears, we need to break those fears into small steps. That way you are more likely to be successful. We call the list of fears that we are planning to face your Fear Ladder. Fill in the Fear Ladder on the next page with as many things that make you feel scared or nervous as you can think of. Put the easier things toward the bottom and the harder things on top. Use a pencil and some scratch paper so you can move things into the right order.

When you make your Fear Ladder keep these key points in mind:

1. Make the bottom thing on the list easy enough to do tomorrow.
2. Make the top thing on the list your biggest fear. We want you to know that if you could face that fear, you could face anything. It is helpful for the top things to be harder than what you will need to do in everyday life. If you can do those super hard things, daily things will seem easy.
3. Make sure that you have enough things on your ladder to cover all your fears and to get from the bottom to the top without having to take any big leaps.

## My Fear Ladder

This is the list of all the fears that I plan to face. The first time I do an exposure I put an “X” in the “Faced 1<sup>st</sup> time” column. After I have done enough exposures that something does not bother me anymore I put an “X” in the “Mastered” Column.

Area #1:		Completed: ____
Item #	Item	Mastered
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

8		
9		
10		

Area #2: Completed: \_\_\_\_

Item #	Item	Mastered
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		

Area #3: Completed: \_\_\_\_

Item #	Item	Mastered
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		



6		
7		
8		
9		
10		

## Planned Exposure Record Form

### *Setting up your Exposure:*

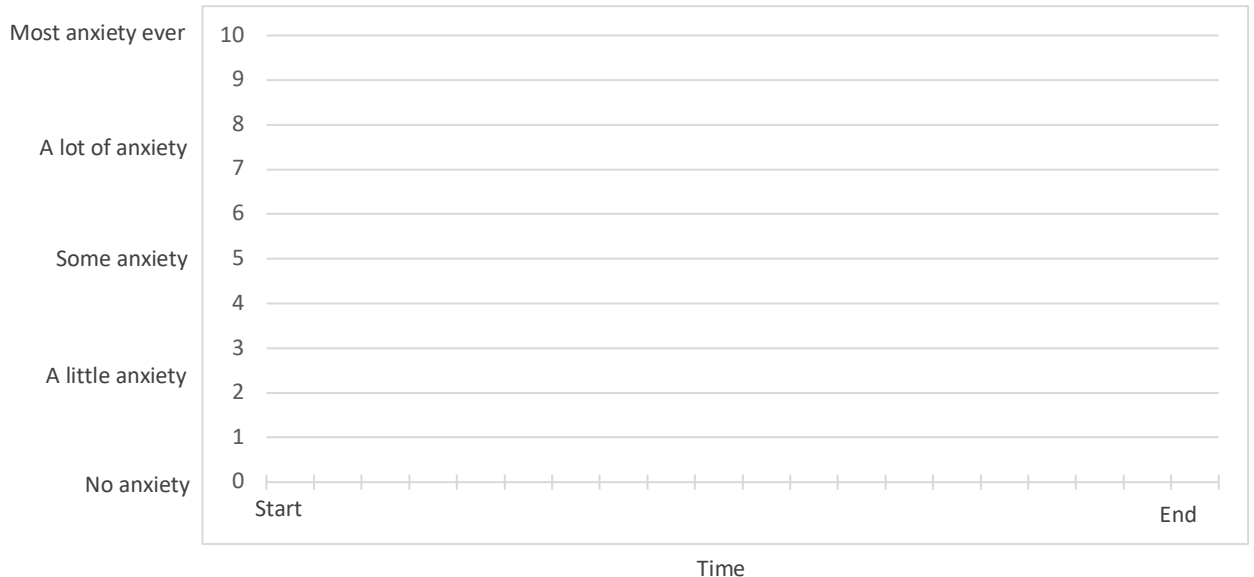
What are you going to do for an exposure? \_\_\_\_\_  
(activity-use fear ladder for ideas)

What are you afraid will happen? \_\_\_\_\_  
(use expectations in My Cycle for ideas)

How afraid are you that this will happen? \_\_\_\_\_  
(use the 0 to 10 scale below)

### *During your exposure.*

Record your fear rating every few minutes using the graph below. Focus on whether your fear is coming true and whether you can handle the situation. Do not avoid anxiety by doing rituals, distraction, asking for reassurance, or anything else. Stay positive and open to learning something new!



### *Learning from your exposure.*

Stick with it until you believe you could do it again. Staying in the exposure until anxiety goes down by half suggests that you have been successful.

Did your fear come true?

- No
- Yes, but it wasn't bad
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_ (if other, review your exposure to see what happened)

What happened to your anxiety?

- It went down
- It stayed high, but I handled it
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_ (if other, review the exposure to see what happened)

## Everyday Exposure Record Form

### *Setting up your Exposure:*

What did you do for your everyday exposure? \_\_\_\_\_  
(activity)

What were you afraid would happen? \_\_\_\_\_  
(use expectations in My Cycle for ideas)

How afraid were you that this would happen? \_\_\_\_\_  
(use the 0 to 10 scale)

### *Learning from your exposure.*

Did your fear come true?

- No
- Yes, but it wasn't bad
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_ (if other, review your exposure to see what happened)

What happened to your anxiety?

- It went down
- It stayed high, but I handled it
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_ (if other, review the exposure to see what happened)