

In-vivo and Imaginal Exposure Instructions:

The purpose of Exposure is to reduce the anxiety-provoking power of your disturbing triggers. Triggers are anything that remind you of or cause the obsessional idea/fear and can include objects, places, thoughts, people, emotions, sensations, etc. Your job is to sit in the presence of the trigger(s) until the anxiety decreases of its own accord. This decrease or "habituation" happens with duration and repetition. Be aware that your emotional reaction is likely to increase before it decreases but hang in there! The more and longer you allow it to wash over you the sooner it will lose its power.

In-vivo Exposure:

This when there is a tangible object, place, person you can choose to touch or be around, For example, a person's might be very provoked by children so walking through a toy store might be an Exposure exercise. Other examples are touching dirty objects or putting things in disarray.

Imaginal Exposure:

This is when the anxiety-provoking trigger is intangible like a concept or idea or when it's unrealistic, improper, or too challenging to accomplish. You can expose to something intangible through language - making a script or text.

(Gail Martz, PsyD)

Making an Exposure Script:The scene:

"I have to take some books back to the public library or I want to lend books or magazines to family or friends. I am about to hand them over."

The Thought:

"I feel a powerful obligation come over me, to check from cover to cover in case there are unused matches that might have got in there either deliberately or inadvertently."

What might happen:

"When this idea invades me the terrifying idea comes into my mind that the match, by being rubbed in some way that I can't imagine catches fire. The match sets fire to the book and then spreads to the rest of the room, the house, causing finally the death of several people."

The emotional reaction:

"I feel locked in fear, close to panic, because I am responsible for the death of these people. It is as if I have been the simple executor or some divine sentence."

What it says about me:

"I wonder if this obsession means that I am not the person that I would like to be. In these terms, it may show the ambivalence I feel toward others. Do I really love those who I am supposed to love?"

The ultimate consequence:

"If I can't control the obsession, I fear that I can never borrow books or at least never return them or lend them. I will become more and more isolated through fear of being in contact with other and causing them harm."

(Mark H. Freeston, 1998. Centre de recherche Fernand-Seguin, Montreal, Quebec. Copies may be made for use in therapy.)