

Exposure Therapy

Behavioral Health Tips

Exposure Therapy is a psychological treatment designed to help people confront their fears and worries. Exposure therapy educates and teaches people about how to manage fears and worries to reduce their distress. The logic behind the therapy is straight-forward. When people are fearful of something, they usually avoid the feared objects, activities, or situations, either actively or without knowing it. Although this avoidance is useful in the short term, over the long term it can reinforce these fears and worries, and make them more powerful. Exposure therapy helps individuals confront extreme fears and worrisome situations, thoughts, or memories instead of avoiding them.

How it Works:

In exposure therapy, the therapist gently, persistently, actively and gradually exposes the individual to uncomfortable situations and the things about which they worry, fear and avoid. During this time, the therapist talks with the individual about his or her fear and anxiety, and provides therapeutic support. In exposure therapy, the therapist offers the individual replacement strategies to reduce anxiety and fear (such as deep breathing, exercise, and talking) with the expectation that the fear will be reduced and ultimately eliminated. By doing so, the very objects, activities or situations that caused the fear are made less anxiety provoking.

Warning Signs:

Exposure Therapy is highly effective for a wide variety of psychological issues, including specific fears (i.e. flying, taking the subway, using public restrooms, and school phobia), panic disorder, social anxiety, obsessive-compulsive Disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, and generalized anxiety disorder. If parents notice symptoms of these above disorders in their child or adolescent, they should discuss these concerns with their pediatrician or a mental health professional.

For more information

Cohen Children's Medical Center

Pediatric Behavioral Health Emergency Service
Ground Floor, CCMC Emergency Room
718-470-3768

Pediatric Behavioral Health Urgent Care
269-01 76th Avenue, Suite 161
New Hyde Park, NY 11040

718-470-3148

Pediatric Behavioral Health- Rockville Centre
100 Merrick Road
Rockville Centre, NY 11570

516-927-1630

Pediatric Behavioral Health- Mineola
156 First Street
Mineola, NY 11501

516-321-5770

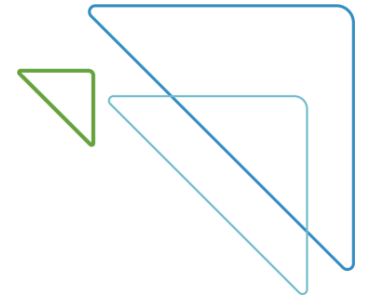
Pediatric Behavioral Health- Commack
2171 Jericho Tpke, Suite 345
Commack, NY 11725

631-775-3280

How Parents Can Help:

Parents can actively help their child or adolescent throughout exposure therapy. Therapists are specifically trained to help children and adolescents confront their fears. Therapists will explain the rationale and the evidence behind the therapy and will work with your child or adolescent and you to create an individually

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tailored program to work through fears and worries. Typically the therapist selects exposures that are challenging yet doable for your child and adolescent. These exposures will get more challenging as your child or adolescent develops the confidence that he or she can be successful in therapy. Your child or adolescent may do some of their exposures during the therapy session and parents are sometimes asked to get involved. Listen to the therapist and attempt to participate as much as you can. You can set a strong example for your child or adolescent. Some of the exposures may be set aside as “homework”; for your child or adolescent to attempt between therapy sessions. Some of these might be having your child directly face a feared object, situation or activity or do thought experiments when they think about facing it. Calmly yet persistently reminding and encouraging your child or adolescent to complete his or her “homework” will increase the likelihood that the therapy will be successful.

Treatments:

Exposure is directly facing or vividly imagining a feared object, situation or activity in real life. In some cases, virtual reality technology and deliberately bringing on physical sensations techniques can be used.

Exposure can help weaken previously learned associations between feared objects, activities or situations and bad outcomes. Exposure can help show the client that he/she is capable of confronting his/her fears and can manage the feelings of anxiety. During exposure, the client can learn to attach new, more realistic beliefs about feared objects, activities or situations, and can become more comfortable with the experience of fear. Over time, people find that their reactions to feared objects or situations decrease.

Exposure therapy can sometimes completely treat your child's or adolescent's condition. Other times a psychiatrist may suggest medication that can decrease your child's or adolescent's anxiety as they go through exposure therapy.

Additional Information:

1) APA resources for Exposure Therapy: <http://www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/patients-and-families/exposure-therapy.aspx>

Books:

1) Treatments that Work: Mastering your Anxiety and Panic Workbook