

# Graded Exposure

Information for parents and carers

## **What is graded exposure?**

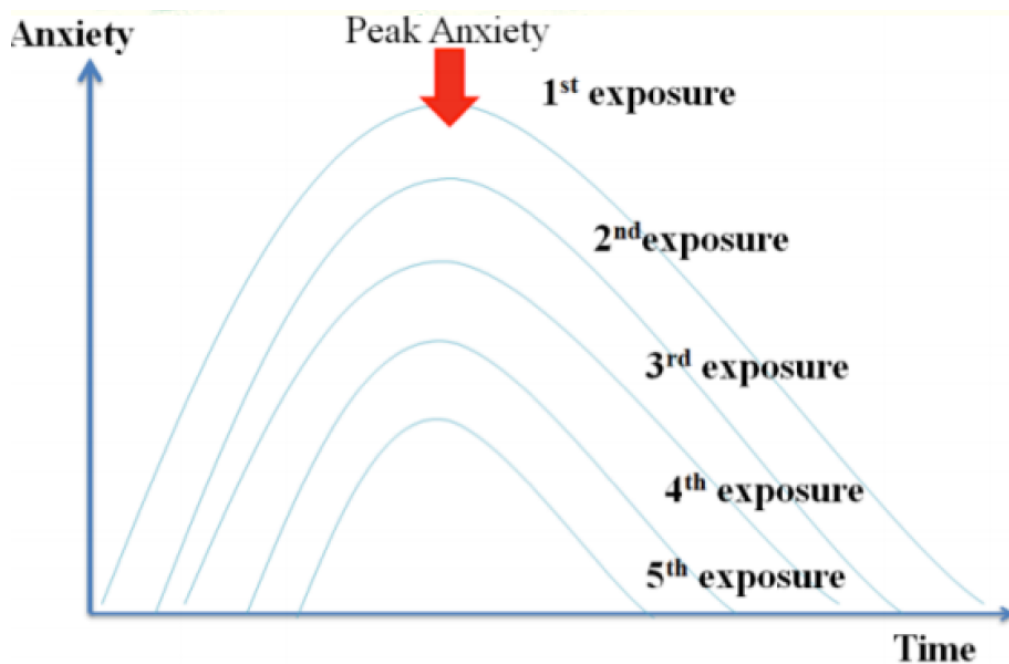
Graded exposure is an intervention in cognitive behavioural therapy that helps us to stop avoiding things that we fear. It works through something called habituation.

## **Habituation**

When we fear certain situations, objects or activities, we either avoid or leave the situation to help ourselves feel better. This may be helpful in lowering our worries in the moment, but avoidance can help to maintain this pattern of fear and anxiety. Therefore each time we go into a feared situation we experience the same high level of anxiety time after time.

When we're in those situations, our bodies start to feel the 'fight, flight or freeze' symptoms such as sweaty palms and a fast heartbeat but our bodies can't keep these feelings going for very long, so by exposing ourselves to the situation, and remaining in it, our anxiety naturally reduces. This is the process of habituation.

# Fight, flight, freeze



The fight, flight or freeze system is like our internal alarm system that detects threat and responds quickly with lots of physiological changes in the body.

These changes happen automatically and are outside of our control.

# How we can help your child

We work with your child to develop a ladder of exposure. This ladder will be the steps they gradually take to reach their end goal.

They may require your support to achieve these goals, which may simply be just listening.

It is important for them to take time when exposing themselves to stressful situations and objects. The whole idea of habituation and graded exposure is that it is gradual and at a steady, achievable pace.

Your child should write down how they felt before, during and after the exposure using the rating scales they will discuss with their EMHP.

It is important they continue this work, even after the intervention is completed, to ensure they continue to progress through their ladder. If you feel they need additional support in doing this, please speak to a member of staff at your child's school or college.



**Hull Mental Health  
Support Teams**

[howareyoufeeling.org.uk](https://howareyoufeeling.org.uk)