

Graded Exposure

What is graded exposure?

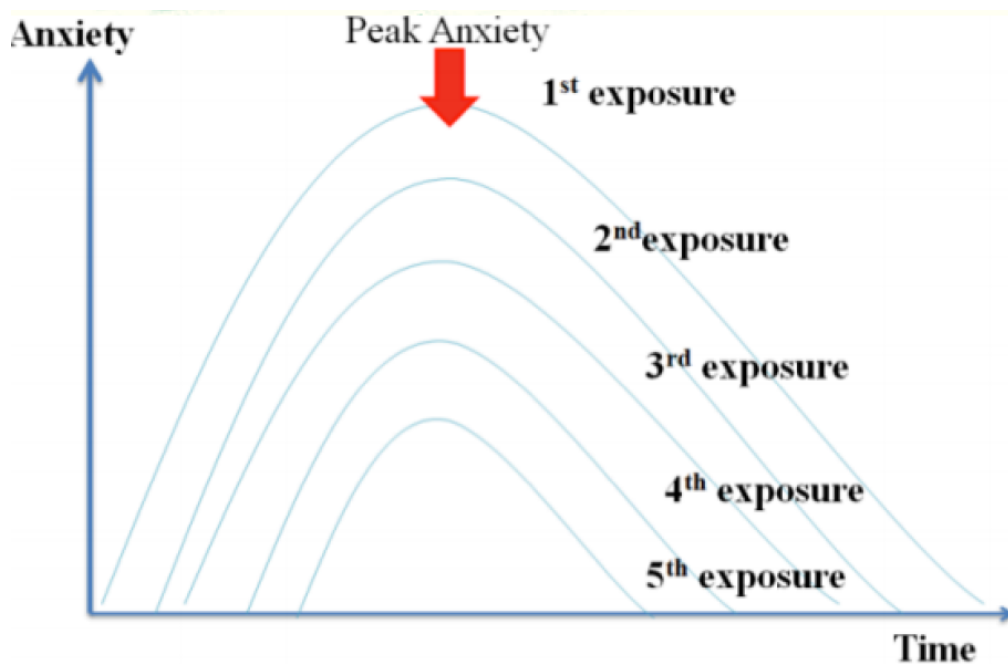
Graded exposure is an intervention in cognitive behavioural therapy that helps us to stop avoiding things that we fear. It works through something called habituation.

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

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

You may want your parent or carer's support to achieve these goals, even if that is just talking to them about it.

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

You should write down how you felt before, during and after the exposure using the rating scales you will discuss with your EMHP.

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



**Hull Mental Health
Support Teams**

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