



Healthy Minds Lincolnshire

Graded Exposure

An information and education pack for young people

The more you do it, the easier it gets, and if it's too hard do it in steps!

What is Graded Exposure?

Graded exposure is a way of helping people to gradually face, and stay with, whatever is making them feel anxious.

Graded exposure works by deciding on and taking small steps to facing up to situations or things that make you feel anxious. When we stay in a situation, our anxiety naturally reduces over time. This is because our body learns that the situation is not a threat and we do not need to feel anxious.

This means that the next time we go into the feared situation, our anxiety will not be as high as it was the previous time.

Remember, the more we go into the feared situation, the more our anxiety will reduce!



Safety Behaviours

Anxiety can be such an overwhelming feeling that it terrifies you. Your focus stays on the bad feelings, and you can begin to dread having them again.



In situations where you feel threatened or anxious, you often do things that you think will keep you safe and/or stop something bad from happening. **This is a safety behaviour!** This may help you to feel better for a bit **BUT** you never know whether something bad would have happened and think the only reason you are safe is because of the safety behaviour, so next time you are in this situation the same thing will happen again.



Safety behaviours actually maintain panic and anxiety, they do not stop it.

It's very useful to be aware of your own safety behaviours and to try to reduce them. This can give you the confidence that you can manage your anxiety on your own, and can help your anxieties to reduce!

Some Examples are; *avoiding a situation completely, making sure a certain person is with you, having something you carry around with you to reduce anxiety e.g. phone, toy, bottle of water.*

Write a list of the safety behaviours you use...



Creating Manageable Steps

If going straight into the feared situation just feels too scary, we can break it down into more manageable steps. For example, you might want to travel into town alone on the bus to see your friends but this causes you to feel anxious so you break down your goal (travel into town on the bus on my own) into more manageable steps as follows:

Step 1: Travel to one stop at a quiet time of day

Step 2: Travel two stops at a quiet time of day

Step 3: Travel two stops during rush hour

Step 4: Travel five stops at a quiet time of day

Step 5: Travel all the way at a quiet time of day

Step 6: Travel all the way during rush hour

When we are using graded exposure, it is important to follow the four golden rules:

Graded:

Once you have identified your goal, break it down into a hierarchy of steps, starting with the step that makes you feel least anxious all the way up to the final goal. Rate how anxious you feel about each step out of 100% (0% being not anxious at all, 100% being extremely anxious).



Continued:

Stay in the situation until the anxiety has reduced by at least 50%.

Repeated:


Repeat exposure at each step until you feel comfortable to move on to the next step.

Without Distraction:

Try to complete each step without using safety behaviours.

My Ladder

Now identify your goal and add it to top of the ladder below. Make a separate note of all the different steps you could take to reach your goal using graded exposure and rate how anxious each one would make you feel. You can then add each step to your ladder, starting with the one that would cause you least anxiety at the bottom of the ladder and gradually building up to your final goal.

	Situation	Anxiety (0-100%)
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Working Through Your Steps

Now you have figured out what steps you will take to reach your goal, you can start working through them remembering to use the four golden rules. For each step you can use the template below to plan and review your progress!

Name of Step:



Develop a plan:

What, where and how will you complete the step? Do you need any support to complete it?



Review:

How did it go? Were you successful in completing the step? Remember to be kind to yourself – if it didn't go well, that's okay just try again!



Anxiety Rating:

Rate how anxious you feel about the step after each time you do it on a scale of 0-100%. Is the anxiety reducing? Once it has reduced to a comfortable level, move on to your next step.

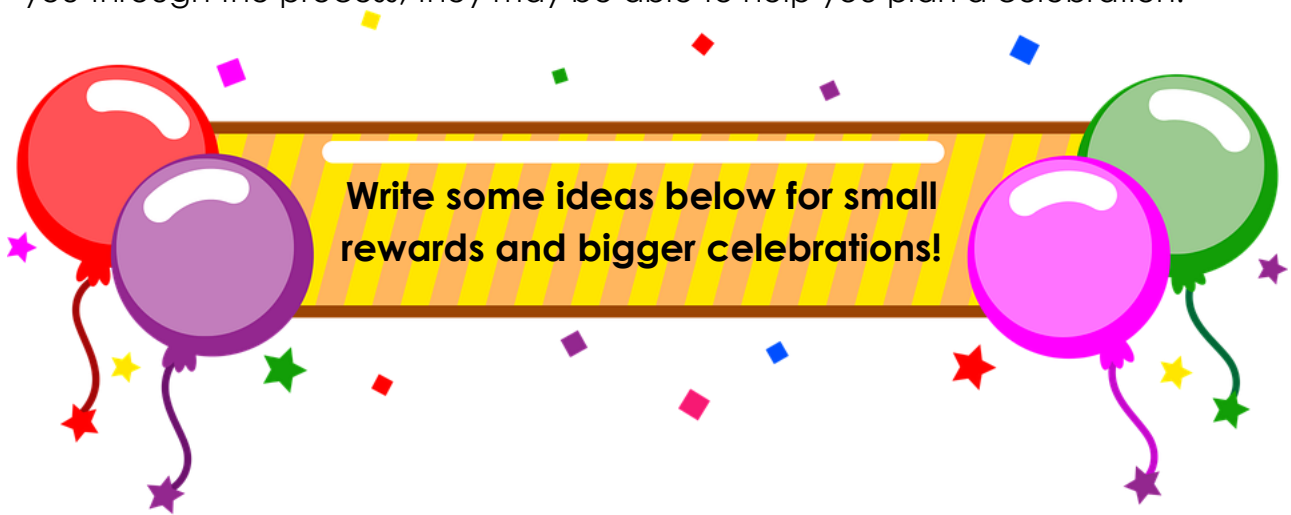


Celebrate



After each step remember to celebrate your success. Do something nice for yourself, give yourself a treat or just a proverbial pat on the back. Rewards don't have to be very big just something that is meaningful to you!

You could plan a bigger celebration with others ready for when you have reached your final goal, such as a nice meal with friends and/or family or a day out. This may help motivate you to keep moving through your steps to your final goal. Why not speak to your family/carers to discuss how they could support you through the process, they may be able to help you plan a celebration!



Useful Websites & Numbers

Websites:

- **Get self-help**—www.getselfhelp.co.uk
- **Young Minds**—www.youngminds.org.uk
- **KOOTH** - www.kooth.com
- **LCC Emotional Wellbeing Pathway**—www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/emotionalwellbeing
- **Mood Juice**—<http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/>

Numbers:

- **Here4You Advice Line:** 0800 234 63 42
(Healthy Minds & CAMHS)
- **ChildLine:** 0800 1111
- **Samaritans:** 116 123
- **Young Minds Crisis Messenger**
(Shout);

SHOUT to 85258



Don't forget to check out our website, for lots of other useful information; such as our relaxation videos and our useful apps booklet!

<https://www.lpft.nhs.uk/young-people>

