

Exposure Therapy Case Vignette

We are interested in studying how therapists use exposure therapy to treat clients with anxiety disorders.

Instructions: Imagine that you are conducting the **first session of exposure and response prevention** with a 39-year-old woman who has been diagnosed with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. She experiences frequent obsessions of being contaminated by coming into contact with objects or surfaces that many other people have touched, and she fears contracting a serious illness as a result.

1. Select Exposure Item

Below is an exposure hierarchy that you and the client have created together. The hierarchy items are rated on a 0 to 100 scale of subjective distress (0 = no distress, 100 = extreme distress). Please select an item you think would be challenging yet feasible for her to conduct exposure with. Circle your response.

- 100 Place hands on the base of a toilet plunger
- 90 Hold a bandage with dried blood on it
- 80 Hold a pair of used underwear from a second-hand store
- 70 Hold a pair of unwashed socks
- 60 Place hands on an old, worn bathmat
- 50 Place hands inside of another person's hat
- 40 Hold several sheets of unused toilet paper taken from a public restroom
- 30 Hold a "dirty" dollar bill
- 20 Hold someone else's pen

2. Begin Exposure Session

When the task is about to begin, the client expresses reservations about coming into contact with the item you have selected. She says, “This seems very difficult. Do I really have to do this?”

0 Very unlikely	1	2	3	4 Very likely
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How likely are you to engage in the following behaviors? (write a number using the scale above)

- _____ Instruct the client to use arousal reduction techniques (e.g. diaphragmatic breathing, muscle relaxation)
- _____ Reassure the client that she will not get sick from the object.
- _____ Remind the client of the treatment rationale and benefits of exposure.
- _____ Encourage the client to contact the exposure item.
- _____ Allow the client to select an easier item.

How likely are you to grant the following client requests? (write a number using the scale above)

- _____ Allow the client to only touch the object with his/her finger tips.
- _____ Allow the client to use hand sanitizer during the exposure.
- _____ Allow the client to wipe their hands on their pants.

3. Ten Minutes into the Exposure Task

The client reports that her distress rating is at 60, and you notice that she is breathing much faster than when the exposure task began. The client says, “This is getting *really* hard. I swear germs are getting on my hands. Do I have to keep going?”

0 Very unlikely	1	2	3	4 Very likely
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How likely are you to engage in the following behaviors? (write a number using the scale above)

- _____ Instruct the client to use arousal reduction techniques (e.g. diaphragmatic breathing, muscle relaxation)
- _____ Encourage the client to remain in contact with the object.
- _____ Reassure the client that she will not get sick from the object.
- _____ Remind the client of the treatment rationale and benefits of exposure.
- _____ Increase the intensity of the exposure by making the client come into more contact with the object.
- _____ Allow the client to terminate the exposure.

How likely are you to grant the following client requests? (write a number using the scale above)

- _____ Allow the client to only touch the object with her fingertips.
- _____ Allow the client to use hand sanitizer during the exposure.
- _____ Allow the client to wipe her hands on her pants.

4. Twenty-Five Minutes into the Exposure Task

You notice that the client continues to breathe rapidly, and is now sweating and shaking slightly. The client reports a distress rating of 85 and says, “This is awful. I just know I’m going to get sick. I’m feeling lightheaded and I don’t know if I should keep going.”

0 Very unlikely	1	2	3	4 Very likely
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How likely are you to engage in the following behaviors? (write a number using the scale above)

- _____ Instruct the client to use arousal reduction techniques (e.g. diaphragmatic breathing, muscle relaxation)
- _____ Encourage the client to remain in contact with the object.
- _____ Reassure the client that she will not get sick from the object.
- _____ Remind the client of the treatment rationale and benefits of exposure.
- _____ Increase the intensity of the exposure by making the client come into more contact with the object.
- _____ Allow the client to terminate the exposure.

How likely are you to grant the following client requests? (write a number using the scale above)

- _____ Allow the client to only touch the object with her fingertips.
- _____ Allow the client to use hand sanitizer during the exposure.
- _____ Allow the client to wipe her hands on her pants.

5. Thirty-Five Minutes into the Exposure Task

You notice that the client’s breathing has slowed, and she has stopped sweating and shaking. The client reports a distress rating of 55, and says, “This is getting easier. Is it okay if I stop now?”

0 Very unlikely	1	2	3	4 Very likely
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How likely are you to engage in the following behaviors? (write a number using the scale above)

- _____ Instruct the client to use arousal reduction techniques (e.g. diaphragmatic breathing, muscle relaxation)
- _____ Encourage the client to remain in contact with the object.
- _____ Reassure the client that she will not get sick from the object.
- _____ Remind the client of the treatment rationale and benefits of exposure.
- _____ Increase the intensity of the exposure by making the client come into more contact with the object.
- _____ Allow the client to terminate the exposure.

How likely are you to grant the following client requests? (write a number using the scale above)

- _____ Allow the client to only touch the object with her fingertips.
- _____ Allow the client to use hand sanitizer during the exposure.
- _____ Allow the client to wipe her hands on her pants.

Source: Deacon, B. J., Farrell, N., Kemp, J., Dixon, L., Sy, J., Zhang, A., & McGrath, P. (2013). Assessing therapist reservations about exposure therapy for anxiety: The Therapist Beliefs about Exposure Scale. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders, 27*, 772-780.